

**THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH IN GERMANY**  
**Living the Faith Together**

**One World Theology**  
**(Volume 6)**



# THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH IN GERMANY

## Living the Faith Together



Edited by

Klaus Krämer and Klaus Vellguth



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**(One World Theology, Volume 6)**

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# Preface

The Catholic Church in Germany is characterised by the abundance of the universal Church and a commendable open-mindedness in universal Church matters. Evidence of this is provided not least by the work of the various Church aid organisations, the innumerable universal Church activities in the parishes, the work of the Commission for International Church Affairs of the German Bishops' Conference, the research and teaching carried out at chairs and institutes of missiology and the wide-ranging commitment of players active in the universal Church. Bearing witness to this universal Church abundance are the articles in the five chapters of this volume, which deal with the Universal Church as Partnership, the Universal Church as a Community of Faith, the Universal Church as a Learning Community, the Universal Church as a Community of Solidarity and the Universal Church as a Community of Prayer.

In the opening chapter on "The Universal Church in Germany" the authors begin by examining the universal Church as partnership.

In her contribution on "The Church Which 'Goes Forth' and the Rediscovery of Partnership" Margit Eckholt points out that a model of partnership emerged relatively soon in the early Christian churches as a result of the lively exchange that took place between the five Patriarchates in Jerusalem, Antioch, Alexandria, Constantinople and Rome. In the wake of the breach caused by the Reformation, Roman centralism left its mark on the structure of the Church, its ministries and the liturgy, culminating in the definition of papal supremacy at the First Vatican Council. The Second Vatican Council gave rise to a rediscovery of partnership between the regional churches which continues up to the present day. In Eckholt's words, the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium* "can be read as a stimulus to discover the universal Church in its manifestation of partnership."

The article by Klaus Krämer on "Partnership as a Paradigm for

Working with the Universal Church” shows that partnership work is an important and fundamental feature of Church activities enabling the communion of the universal Church to be experienced in a tangible manner. The author stresses that “the term partnership is now associated with the idea of communicating “on an equal footing” – a form of communication which is marked by supportive assistance for developments within churches and also by an exchange of experience at all levels of Church life.” He underlines that respect for partners as independent protagonists and as responsible organisers of developments in regional churches as well as the self-determination of the partners are axiomatic in Church partnership work, in which the Church can manifest itself as a worldwide communion in an increasingly globalised world. Partnership of this kind requires the continuous support of theological reflection in its work so that it can remain true to the Great Commission and to the character of the Church as a Spirit-led reality.

In the following article on “Stimuli for Partnership in the Universal Church” Ludwig Schick says that the election of Pope Francis has overcome Eurocentrism in the Church and put the spotlight on the regional churches in the southern hemisphere. In learning through partnership the Church in Germany can take a fresh look at the option for the poor and experience anew the missionary power of the Gospel. Schick points out that in future we can expect the South to deliver important stimuli for a mutual international learning process within the universal Church. “We Europeans will increasingly play the role of learners, with other regional churches – of the South, in particular – as our teachers. Understanding and commitment will grow within the universal Church; we will be working together more as partners and, in this way, become more catholic.” In this universal Church as a community of learning, human fellowship can pave the way to a conciliatory encounter with the poor and care for them becomes an encounter with God.

Looking at the diocese of Limburg’s experience of the universal Church as partnership, Winfried Montz says that the experience of partnership implies a community of prayer, a community of learning and a community of solidarity. If one of these dimensions is missing, it is not possible to talk of a genuine partnership. The diocese of Limburg has partnerships with the local churches in Kumbo/Cameroon, Ndola/Zambia, Alaminos/Philippines, Sarajevo/Bosnia-Herzegovina, Košice/Slovakia, and Olomouc/Czech Republic. These

diocesan partnerships are the outcome of vibrant processes and offer Christians in the diocese of Limburg an intercultural journey to their inner selves, giving them the chance of personal enrichment: “partnership which, as the universal Church learning community, exists in the three dimensions of prayer, communication and solidarity, is not a programme or a procedure; it is an attitude in the Christian fellowship that brings together people, their faith-based communities, and their local churches.”

In the second chapter on “The Universal Church as a Community of Faith” Michael Sievernich shows how Christianity spread during the various periods of Church history and how different missionary approaches were developed in different contexts. Looking at the Church in Germany, he notes that global networking has helped to enrich regional churches. He points to the fact that the cultural translation processes of Christianity, which are “now grouped together under the neologism of inculturation and are swiftly moving towards interculturality”, are gaining in significance and thus making “the world a translation space for Christianity, which is, in turn, transformed into an interpretative space for the world.”

In the following article on “Religious Missionaries and the Universal Church in Germany” Martin Üffing refers to the fact that the growth of Christianity in the countries of the South has led to a reversal of the Christian missionary movement. Whereas less and less missionaries from Europe are active in the regional churches of the South, the number of missionaries from Africa, Asia and Latin America who work in Germany is steadily increasing. To prevent these Christians from being misused as “stopgaps” to compensate for the lack of priests in Germany they must not be pressurised to fully assimilate with the German (Church and) culture. Instead, their otherness should be seen as a potential benefit for the Church and Christians in Germany. “Today, missionaries from the South bring with them great gifts, from which Europe’s churches can benefit. Their enthusiasm and specific ways of expressing their faith can help to inspire the Church in Germany. These missionaries are our partners in mission and we must learn to accept their origins and cultures.” Üffing sees missionaries as bridge-builders and partnership promoters, since they have learned to cross borders and operate in various cultural settings in such a way that they constitute a living link between the strange the familiar.

In her contribution “On the Wholeness of Faith” Vera Krause says that the election of a man from Latin America as Pope has helped to broaden the perspective of the universal Church. For the Church in Germany it represents an opportunity to rediscover the universal Church and, with regard to their brothers and sisters in faith, to learn “not just from the rhythms of their liturgical celebrations and their tenderness, but, more importantly, from their innovative pastoral care, welfare and social work, spiritual radicalism and challenging lifestyles.”

In his article on “Evangelising Ministry in a Secular Context” Paul B. Steffen shows that contact with other regional churches can provide an incentive to rethink the relationship between religion and secularism in Germany. There is a need to arrive at a definition of the religious that is in keeping developments in a pluralistic society. Steffen is convinced that “rediscovering God’s presence in a secular context without succumbing to the temptation to ignore, or even deny, the secular world with its own specific rules, provides the Church with new momentum.”

In the third chapter on “The Universal Church as a Community of Learning” Hildegard Wustmans begins with the observation that the universal Church is a “niche topic in parishes and dioceses.” She recommends that the Church should become a learning environment with the universal Church, which requires of parishes, in particular, that they should address and come to terms with interculturality. Wustmans sees the beginnings of intercultural learning both in volunteer programmes, in which young Christians deliberately opt in favour of a universal Church learning experience in Africa, Asia or Latin America, and in the realm of university theology. She points out that the chairs and institutes of missiology in the German-speaking countries have undergone a process of re-identification in the past few years and have now renamed themselves the *Institute of Missiology and Non-European Theologies* (Münster), the *Foundation Chair in Missiology and Dialogue between Religions* (Würzburg) and *Centre for Intercultural Theology and the Study of Religions* (Salzburg).

Michael Huhn recalls the missionary exhibition held at the Gruga Exhibition Centre in Essen in 1956, which he sees as an indication that a discussion of new approaches to missionary work had begun even before the Second Vatican Council. The closer contacts between local churches in Germany and local churches in the southern hemisphere

paved the way for a paradigm shift and the ushering in of a universal Church learning community, in which the local churches in the South were “like a shot in the arm” for the local churches in Germany, which ran the risk of forfeiting their own vitality as a result of their intellectually detached style of Christianity.

In his contribution on “Learning Laboratories of the Universal Church – an Invitation and a Challenge” Stephan Ackermann describes participants’ experiences in international voluntary services, exposure programmes and the pastoral exchange between the diocese of Trier and its partners in Bolivia. These learning environments provide an opportunity “to step out of one’s own Church context and reference system, to put this system into perspective and thus to see it in proportion to the wider global Church of Jesus Christ – as manifested in a different regional church which is then explored as a specific instance.” Learning experiences of this kind were turned to good effect in the diocese of Trier, for instance, when Christians from Germany discovered for themselves in unfamiliar local churches abroad that the laity there bear witness to their faith and support the local church, that spirituality is the source of a stimulating vitality that can change the Church and society, and that a pastoral ministry can be maintained by breaking a large parish down into vibrant and self-confident groups. Stephan Ackermann’s experience of the universal Church is as a community of learning in which people are encouraged to “go forth from themselves”. He argues in favour of a “global educational offensive in the universal Church” that will help “more than ever before to discover the opportunities which lie hidden in the worldwide community of the Church.”

His contribution is followed by that of Harald Suermann, who looks into the question of whether the German Institute of Missiology (MWI) *missio* in Aachen is a support organisation for the learning process the Church undergoes or whether it is an active protagonist within a learning community. He notes that the direct contacts MWI staff have with representatives of the local churches, in particular, broaden perspectives and promote a learning experience. Conversely, the MWI provides useful input for the representatives of the local churches. There is a lively exchange with the scholarship holders supervised by the MWI, from which both sides learn a lot. This exchange often continues beyond the end of the scholarship holders’ studies after they have returned home.

In the chapter on “The Universal Church as a Community of Solidarity” Pirmin Spiegel looks at the question of how we in Germany wish to lead our lives in the future. Among the key challenges we face are a redefinition of the tasks and goals of development policy; the war on poverty and social inequality; the building of active and independent civil societies around the world; respect for human rights as the basis and target of development cooperation; the financing of sustainable development and climate protection; and the promotion of rural development, the alleviation of hunger and food security. In particular the need to develop a climate protection policy and make sustainable use of the limited resources shows that the challenges we face in the age of globalisation can only be mastered through common action.

Werner Thissen takes up these thoughts in his article on “Universal Church Development Cooperation in Germany, In support of the globalisation of charity.” He analyses the problems and challenges of the era of globalisation, and, taking the provision of global nourishment, the promotion of smallholder agriculture and fair trade, and responses to flight and migration as examples, he shows how local answers to urgent global questions can help to develop a sustainable global society.

In “Networks of Solidarity” Klaus Vellguth examines the concept of solidarity and its possible limitation to the provision of (financial) assistance. He states that solidarity originally revolved not around support but community. This extended concept of solidarity in the theological thinking of the Apostle Paul is illustrated by reference to his collection, the aim being to point up ways to overcome a notion of solidarity in the work of the universal Church which is reduced to the provision of assistance. Pastoral networks which have sprung up in Asia and Africa with support from Germany are used to demonstrate that an extended notion of solidarity contributes to a universal Church exchange on an equal footing and to the development of a global pastoral learning community.

Oliver Müller’s article focuses on solidarity in crises and disasters and looks at whether Christian charity work requires quality management in disaster relief. This begins well before a response is needed to the consequences of a disaster. Müller urges that disaster relief should be seen from the point of view of prevention. He considers

that precautions against catastrophes constitute a major challenge in disaster relief.

Chapter Five is devoted to “The Universal Church as a Community of Prayer”. Petra Heilig’s article on “The World Day of Prayer: Global Prayer – Global Player” highlights the influence the interaction between information and meditation has exerted on the World Day of Prayer movement in recent years. It has proved possible, for example, to develop the World Day of Prayer into a focus for action and contemplation, captured in the concept of ‘prayerful action’. “Prayerful action means allowing God’s promise of compassion and justice to take effect in this world.” Of crucial importance for the World Day of Prayer movement is that it is ecumenical in character and thus gives ecumenism a face at more than just the local level.

In his paper Stefan Dartmann begins by examining the characteristics of and recent developments in the community of prayer before going on to outline the forms taken by communities of prayer today. They range from the celebration of the Eucharist via the Liturgy of the Hours, universal Church prayers and partnerships, international prayer meetings and days of prayer to expressions of popular piety. The experience of global prayer expresses the essence of the Catholic Church: “The universal Church’s community of prayer signifies transnational, common worship of God, which may be expressed in thanks and praise, intercession, supplication or lamentation as well as in wordless “elevation of the soul to God”. It is about “prayer with and for all peoples, but also for this world’.”

In his article on “A Tangible and Effective Universal Church Community” Claudius Groß looks at the biblical foundations of the Christian understanding of a community of prayer, which he categorizes as a specifically Catholic characteristic counteracting “the self-sufficiency of the regional church”. With a view to the practice of prayer within the universal Church he emphasises that Christians live in a community that is marked by a life of action and contemplation. “Christians can and must trust, without arrogance, that their personal solidarity with the worldwide Christian community will open up a deeper dimension and will produce positive benefits for mankind.”

In the final contribution on “The Miracle of the Universal Church” Simon Neubert first examines the terms “universal Church” and “miracle” before going on to explain how far the universal Church

can be regarded as a miracle: "Wherever the universal Church cares for and identifies with refugees, the poor, the oppressed and the sick, wherever it humbly accepts its own powerlessness and displays kenotic altruism, wherever Christians are united in prayer and wherever the Church communicates its message with an attitude of openness and willingness to listen, meetings between individuals can become existential encounters with God and, therefore, occasions for amazement."

The different articles in this volume shed light on various facets of the work of the universal Church in Germany. For this we owe a debt of gratitude to the authors but also to many others. Our special thanks go to the staff at *missio* who helped us to compile this volume: Monika Kling, Michael Meyer and Dr. Marco Moerschbacher. We should also like to thank Andrea Biermanns, Elke Gerards and Dr. Elisabeth Steffens for the careful preparation of the manuscripts as well as Christine Baur for her attentive proofreading.

*Klaus Krämer*

*Klaus Vellguth*

# Foreword

Ludwig Schick

Many people tend to associate the term “universal Church” only with distant regions and continents. They think of the churches of the southern hemisphere and the tremendous challenges they face, but also of their vitality and religious enthusiasm, which make us here in Europe literally “look old”. In a nutshell, the universal Church appears to reside in distant climes far away from our everyday life in Germany. We are fascinated and occasionally shocked by developments in other regional churches and on other continents, but we rarely appreciate that we are seated in one boat together and have no choice but to take joint action with them. For that reason I am grateful to the editors and authors of this volume for putting the focus on “The Universal Church in Germany”. The fact of the matter is that the universal Church does not begin beyond the borders of Germany and Europe, but on our own doorstep and often even in our own house. We cannot be a global Catholic Church if we do not see, live out and develop the universal Church here in Germany.

That the universal Church already has a presence in our country is all too obvious when we consider the numerous immigrants among us. Almost two million people without a German passport (“foreigners”) are Roman Catholics or belong to a church that is united with Rome. An additional three million or so Catholics have a migrant background. Many of them feel at home in what are called native-language communities, of which there are more than four hundred in our country encompassing thirty-one different languages. The largest groups are formed by Catholics who speak Polish, Croatian, Italian, Spanish and Portuguese. There are also increasing numbers of brothers and sisters in the faith from Africa (e.g. from Nigeria), the Middle East (e.g. from Syria and Egypt) and South-East Asia (e.g. from the Philippines, Vietnam and Sri Lanka).

In addition, over 1,700 priests and religious from Poland, India,

the Congo and other parts of the world perform their duties in German parishes and religious orders. Without this support from the universal Church, for which we as the Catholic Church in Germany have every reason to be grateful, it would not be possible in many places to convey the message of the Gospel in pastoral care and charitable work. Frequent reference is now made to a “reverse mission”. Whereas in the past missionaries from Europe travelled to all corners of the earth, our continent has itself now become the target of missionary work.

The native-language communities and the foreign clergy in Germany make it clear just how strong the presence of the universal Church in our midst already is. The tremendous potential it harbours must be tapped to a greater extent. This does not take the form of the exploitation of some by others, but requires the networking of all. That will only prove possible if we adopt an open-minded attitude to inter-cultural learning processes. If we enrich each other by exchanging the assets we have, we will discover the deeper meaning of the Church and the life-serving gift of the faith for all humanity. Anyone who has become involved in such processes knows how strenuous and time-consuming they can be. However, they also know that the effort made pays off, because they get a better grasp of others as well as of themselves and of the richness of the Gospel. These processes make everyone more Catholic, more apostolic, more united and more holy. Communication lays the ground for coexistence and thus cooperation. Instead of living alongside each other, people live with each other. This bolsters the conviction referred to in the Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium* that “though there are many nations there is but one people of God.”<sup>1</sup>

It is a hopeful and forward-looking sign that numerous universal Church partnerships and learning communities have been established at very different levels of Church life in Germany. Parishes maintain intensive contacts with their partner parishes overseas. Dioceses have close ties with local churches all over the world. Volunteer services offer young people – temporary missionaries, for example – an opportunity to experience the Church in new ways. Catholic associations are exercising their responsibility within the universal Church. Religious

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<sup>1</sup> The Second Vatican Council, The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, at [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19641121\\_lumen-gentium\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html), no. 13.

orders are contributing their extensive missionary experience and expertise. Church aid organisations, such as *adveniat*, *caritas international*, the Pontifical Missionary Work for Children, MISEREOR, *missio* and *Renovabis*, make the universal Church tangible as a community of solidarity and facilitate mutual exchange.

The variety of different players in this field is a tremendous asset for the Catholic Church in Germany. Together, the many services constitute the one redemptive mission of the Church.<sup>2</sup> “Without the dedication of religious orders, works and innumerable initiatives in the dioceses and parishes, which transcend all boundaries, the world would be less blessed with the love which constantly transforms it like leaven, and we Christians as a whole would be less credible in the fulfilment of our mission to bear witness to all people in word and deed to the joyful, liberating, reconciling and hope-bringing message of the Good News.”<sup>3</sup>

It is important to note that all these activities benefit not only people in the southern hemisphere, but also our Church here in Germany. They are a breath of fresh air and give it added vitality. Ultimately they render tangible the power of the Holy Spirit, which is the “soul of the Church”<sup>4</sup> and the “principal agent of evangelization”.<sup>5</sup> It brings people together, overcomes the language barriers between them and enables them to grow together and form a community. We should be attentive to this working of the Holy Spirit. To perceive the universal Church in Germany and to take it seriously means constantly overcoming distances and seeking closeness to our brothers and sisters in the faith both near and far. This closeness lets us understand that we are all a part of the one, global, Catholic people of God and it makes the “dialogue of salvation”<sup>6</sup> possible on a global scale.

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<sup>2</sup> For more on this cf.: Die deutschen Bischöfe, *Die eine Sendung und die vielen Dienste. Zum Selbstverständnis weltkirchlich orientierter Einrichtungen und Initiativen heute*, Bonn 2000.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, no. 19.

<sup>4</sup> Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* - Apostolic Exhortation of His Holiness Pope Paul to the Episcopate, to the Clergy and to All the Faithful of the Entire World on Evangelisation in the Modern World, [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/paul\\_vi/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_exh\\_19751208\\_evangelii-nuntiandi\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19751208_evangelii-nuntiandi_en.html), no. 75.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> Paul VI, *Ecclesiam Suam*. Encyclical of Pope Paul on the Church, [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/paul\\_vi/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_pvi\\_enc\\_06081964\\_ecclesiam\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/encyclicals/documents/hf_pvi_enc_06081964_ecclesiam_en.html), nos. 70-77.



# **The Universal Church as Partnership**



# The Church “Which Goes Forth” and the Rediscovery of Partnership – Partnership as a Basic Manifestation of the Universal Church

Margit Eckholt

## Introduction: The universal Church as a learning community – rediscovering partnership

In 2010/11, in conjunction with its fiftieth anniversary, the Episcopal action group for Latin America adveniat conducted an empirical study on its work within the universal Church. The aim was to improve communication with local churches in the German dioceses in the light of changes in development work and activities within the universal Church. The survey covered full-time workers and volunteers in local Catholic churches as well as teachers at Catholic schools. With regard to “Latin America’s position within the universal Church today” and “the future of work within the universal Church”, the general summary had the following to say:

“Volunteers would like to see adveniat conveying not only the misery that is so rampant in Latin America, but more of its *joyful attitude to life, amazing cheerfulness, warm-heartedness and the Latin American cultures*. Some volunteers felt that adveniat should put greater emphasis on promoting the spirituality of the universal Church within local churches (e.g. through lively, joyful worship services and vibrant faith in everyday life). Moreover, they expect adveniat to focus on exploring further ways in which we can learn from one another. Another point they regard as important is that adveniat should seek not only to obtain donations and financial support, but should also *encourage us – i.e. Christians in Germany and Latin America – to uphold one another in prayer, to exchange requests for intercession and to ensure that the work which is done takes place at precisely this spiritual level*. A greater focus also needs to be placed on the fact that *giving always enriches the giver*. After all, *‘no one is so poor that they*

*can't give us anything, and no one is too rich to receive something'.* These two perspectives – mutually invigorating spirituality and mutual give-and-take – were given greater prominence by newly surveyed volunteers than at the first stage of the research. Other areas considered by volunteers and teachers to be vital for the survival of the universal Church beyond 2020 were global political issues, such as the environment, migration and unemployment related to international corporations [...] Universal Church activists believe that the universal Church thrives on personal contacts. They also said, however, that the religious and theological foundations of worldwide care for the poor should not be overlooked. Like other Catholic aid organisations, *adveniat* must help to ensure – through ongoing, effective PR work and by stepping up political lobbying – that universal Church issues extend beyond the narrow confines of work within the Church and are promoted on a broad, society-wide scale.”<sup>7</sup>

This fairly long quotation shows that there has been a major transformation in the work of the universal Church affecting not just *adveniat*, but also other aid organisations in Germany as well as the work of missionary orders and universal Church liaison officers in the German dioceses. It is a transformation which has gradually emerged in international political, social, cultural and ecclesial cooperation over the past twenty years in the wake of the paradigm shift known as globalisation. In Germany, work within the universal Church was initiated in the 1950s and 1960s in connection with the Second Vatican Council and unfolded at various levels of pastoral, missionary, charitable and development practice. Until well into the 1970s this work took its cue from the paradigm of development versus underdevelopment and from the formation of sociological theories which questioned the balance of power between North and South. Such theories either had their starting point in the so-called *desarrollismo* or in criticism of it. The work of Church aid organisations was seen as a contribution to “development” in the churches of the South – in both pastoral and socio-economic terms. Above all, it was seen as helping to “raise awareness” and “liberate” those who belonged to the poorest of the poor. Over the past few decades globalisation theories have revealed new and sometimes more subtle dependencies in all

<sup>7</sup> Kiessling, Klaus; Cho, Chunhee; Wagener, Hermann-Josef, *Blickpunkt Lateinamerika – Empirische Studie zur weltkirchlichen Arbeit der Bischöflichen Aktion Adveniat*, Münster 2012, 120-121.

global contexts. Global integration is fostered in a new way by information technologies, communication media and financial markets as well as by migration flows, on the one hand, and tourist flows, on the other. At the same time there also has been an increase in exclusion mechanisms, potential violence and the poverty gap, with a polarisation which is no longer manifest just in specific regions but can be observed also in the metropolitan areas and megacities of the North as they keep growing through migration.

Against this backdrop, universal Church work in Germany is concentrating more and more on education within the regional churches. The North, too, is now impacted by the need to "raise awareness" and by the "option for the poor" – concepts which, in the 1970s, were formulated primarily with a view to the South, where they had been kindled by liberation theology and liberation theory in education. The big shift towards the universal Church, resulting from the Second Vatican Council, will stop halfway if this "option for the poor" does not also mean "conversion" – a turnaround in the sense of repentance and being set free – for Christian believers and for Church practice in the various contexts of the "North". Development theories based on post-colonial critiques have unveiled the subtle discourses on power which are sometimes even inherent in development paradigms such as "helping people to help themselves". As a result voices from the "South" are meeting with fresh recognition. The new process of becoming the universal Church, which was triggered by the ecclesiological paradigm shift at the Second Vatican Council, means not only that the churches of the South are now perceived differently by the churches of the North, but also that the churches of the North are impacted themselves. The process affects their own "liberation" and "option for the poor", since their encounter with the "poor" in the South is freeing them to adopt new practices focused on the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

It is in precisely this context that the term "partnership" becomes a keyword for work within the universal Church and for a new self-image of the same. "Partners" – as the origin of the word suggests – are those who "partake" and who "contribute their part" when it comes to experience, knowledge and wealth as well as to poverty and the concerns of others. Understanding the universal Church as partnership means that we form part of a wider whole and that the Christian faith and Church practice only manifest themselves in a constant process of participation and contribution. As Pope Francis pointed out in his Apostolic

Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, we discover the Gospel, Jesus Christ and God's vital energy as we "go forth", again and again, dynamically alternating between encounters, change and growth with and through others who – even across distances – become our fellow travellers. This is how the Church becomes universal, and this is how it grows and meets its original commission to testify to the Gospel of Life.<sup>8</sup>

As we move forward and take the next steps, we will need to re-discover this "partnership" as a basic manifestation of Church. Founded in the biblical and patristic traditions, it faded into the background in the early modern era right up until the Second Vatican Council. However, it is now coming to the fore again, re-emerging from and through a new dialogue with the churches of the South, the former mission churches. Partnership reminds us that, as we follow Jesus Christ, we are part of a larger whole and that by participating and contributing in mutual processes of recognition, we grow in our relationship with Christ. Indeed, we grow into Him who is the gift and who is Life – unbreakable life and hope in the face of all brokenness. "Partnership" as a central theme of the universal Church means that global work within the dioceses, local churches and aid organisations is re-integrated into the basic manifestation of the Christian life, so that it is revealed to us as a "mysticism with our eyes open" (Johann Baptist Metz). In *Evangelii Gaudium* Francis outlines Christian practice and the Great Commission as follows: "Better yet, it means learning to find Jesus in the faces of others, in their voices, in their pleas. And learning to suffer in the embrace of the crucified Jesus whenever we are unjustly attacked or met with ingratitude, never tiring of our decision to live in fraternity. There indeed we find true healing, since the way to relate to others which truly heals instead of debilitating us is a *mystical* fraternity. It is a fraternal love capable of seeing the sacred grandeur of our neighbour [...] Here and now [...] the Lord's disciples are called to live as a community which is the salt

<sup>8</sup> Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* of the Holy Father Francis to the Bishops, Clergy, Consecrated Persons and the Lay Faithful on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World, 26. November 2013, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20131124\\_evangelii-gaudium.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html), e.g. no. 88: "Meanwhile, the Gospel tells us constantly to run the risk of a face-to-face encounter with others, with their physical presence which challenges us, with their pain and their pleas, with their joy which infects us in our close and continuous interaction. True faith in the incarnate Son of God is inseparable from self-giving, from membership in the community, from service, from reconciliation with others. The Son of God, by becoming flesh, summoned us to the revolution of tenderness."

of the earth and the light of the world (cf. Mt. 5:13-16). We are called to bear witness to a constantly new way of living together in fidelity to the Gospel.<sup>9</sup>

### **Partnership as a basic manifestation of Church: lost and found – brief overview of the history of Christian mission**

It is always fascinating to remind ourselves of the Early Church's process of evangelisation and mission. The rapid spread of the Gospel through its proclamation by Paul and his companions, Peter, James, Mary Magdalene, the many other men and women and also the missionaries and theologians was the work of the Holy Spirit. Proclaiming Christ meant a new form of fellowship and edification within the churches: "We shall grow completely into Christ, who is the head by whom the whole Body is fitted and joined together, every joint adding its own strength, for each individual part to work according to its function. So the body grows until it has built itself up in love."<sup>10</sup> The letters of Paul and the other apostles, which are read whenever a local church meets for worship, mean sharing in and contributing to the experiences, joys, hopes, anxieties and concerns of others. This is the basic experience of being within the Body of Christ where missionary Church practice serves to build up the "Body of Christ", as Jesus Christ is the one who "offered himself as a ransom for all"<sup>11</sup>, so that we can have life and be set free from guilt and sin. This is a mystery and also the very origin of the Christian faith, of which local churches remind themselves when they celebrate the Eucharist – a mystery which comes to them again and again, as a gift and by grace. Partnership between the first Christian churches was firmly grounded in this proclamation of Christ. It is fruitful in word and deed, and it causes the Christian faith to "come to the fore" – a key phrase which has been used frequently by the French Church in recent years when talking about its new pastoral and missionary practice<sup>12</sup>. It also means lively participation in the concerns of other

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*, nos. 91-92.

<sup>10</sup> Eph. 4:16.

<sup>11</sup> 1 Tim 2:6.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. also: Theobald, Christoph, *Le christianisme comme style – une manière de faire de la théologie en postmodernité*, 2 volumes, Paris 2007. *Ibid.*, Evangelium und Kirche, in: Feiter, Reinhard; Müller, Hadwig, *Frei geben – Pastoraltheologische Impulse aus Frankreich*, Ostfildern 2013, 110-138. – Cf. also: Eckholt, Margit, 'Der unterbrochene Frühling' – Erinnerung an das Weltkirche-Werden auf dem 2. Vatikanischen Konzil, in: Thull, Philipp,

local churches. This is what made Paul call for a collection for the church in Jerusalem.<sup>13</sup> Proclamation of the Word and care for the vulnerable are closely connected. What we can see here is a partnership model reflected in the local church, in the structure of its offices and also in the connections between the various regional churches. The five Patriarchates which developed in the Early Church, in Jerusalem, Antioch, Alexandria, Constantinople and Rome, enjoyed a lively exchange, with Rome holding the primacy in the ministry of unity and in the proclamation of Jesus Christ. There was recognition of regional and cultural differences, which was not surprising in the light of the religious pluralism at the time, i.e. the “ecumenism” of the Roman Empire and the minority status of Christianity. Recognition and partnership were based on a shared witness to Christ, remembering the mystery of the incarnation, the cross and the resurrection. It was the deeper dimension behind the missionary witness of the Church. In this respect the first Christian centuries were a time of spiritual fruitfulness, when the Church turned into a universal Church which expressed itself through partnership and was essentially mission-focused. This was a basic manifestation which in subsequent centuries gradually receded into the background as the Church continued to develop but also experienced various forms of fragmentation.

During the early modern period – and undoubtedly also partly in the wake of the breach caused by the Reformation – the Catholic Church began to define itself and its boundaries in such a way that the partnership model took a back seat. The Catholic Church now saw itself as a *societas perfecta*, in possession of the “means of grace”, self-sufficient and as a hierarchical entity culminating in the primacy of the Pope, as defined at the First Vatican Council. The structure of the Church, its offices, its liturgical patterns and its educational system took their cue from the “centre”. The Church of Rome saw itself as universal, and the Roman Catechism initiated by the Council of Trent became binding for the entire Church. The 1622 *Sacra Congregatio de Propaganda Fide* (since 1967: Congregation for the Evangelisation of Peoples) defined the basic principles of mission and came to supervise the newly created mission churches. During the early modern age, when the European powers expanded into other

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*Ermutigung zum Aufbruch – Eine kritische Bilanz des Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzils*, Darmstadt 2013, 120-128.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. 2 Cor. 8.

parts of the world, missionaries followed in the footsteps of the conquerors. The “aliens” they encountered were “inferior beings” who had to be “vanquished”; they were not viewed as “partners” but as beings in need of education, prosperity, culture and religion. The 19th century saw a renewed interest in non-European history, religion and culture, leading to the first Latin American Plenary Council in Rome in 1899. Centralisation was on the agenda, and mission was understood as “converting” the others, who were in need of salvation. This was coupled with the predominance of a Western model of education, administration, law and theology. Indigenous clergy were eventually admitted and trained in mission countries in the 20th century, but their native cultural and religious traditions still went unrecognised. The Church advocated a “self-focused” model until well into the 20th century and this is what Francis criticised in *Evangelii Gaudium*, contrasting it with “a Church which goes forth”.<sup>14</sup> The rediscovery of partnership forms part of the major paradigm shift which took place at the Second Vatican Council – a process of discovery which still has a long way to go and involves recognising the autonomy of cultural and religious traditions, the need for dialogue and personal encounters, the need to be converted to Jesus Christ by the others and the need for a new missionary dynamic, to which Paul VI gave such fascinating expression in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975) and which, in turn, stimulated Pope Francis.

### **The rediscovery of partnership – the materialisation of the universal Church at the Second Vatican Council**

As the Italian Church historian, Giuseppe Alberigo, has demonstrated in his studies, the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) was definitively an “event of the Spirit”, an expression of a new understanding of Church. It was also a necessary move forward at a time when the reconfiguration of the “religious landscape” was already under way on a global scale. Regions which have traditionally been moulded by Christianity and, indeed, by Catholicism, such as those in France, are now witness to massive “de-Christianisation processes”. In the countries of the South, particularly since the Second World War and in the wake of the resulting geopolitical changes and liberation movements in the colonies, missionary endeavours and evangelisation have been increasingly called into question, and the

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Francis, *op.cit.*, chapter 1: The Church’s Missionary Transformation, nos. 19-49.

growing criticism of Western cultural dominance has also included religion and the Church. As early as the mid-1950s a group of African priests from Congo-Zaire asked how it was possible to be both an African and a Christian. They were seeking to find inculturated ways of expressing the Christian faith through liturgy, pastoral ministry and theology. It was a quest for a new independence of regional churches and for a rediscovery of *communio* – and thus “partnership” – of those churches.

It is remarkable that one of the most discerning and influential Council theologians, the French Dominican Yves M.-J. Congar, should have chronicled the Council as an “event” in his Council diary, describing it as a strenuous endeavour to engineer a paradigm shift within the Church. To attempt to re-design a Church model and ecclesiological paradigm which, in the course of the second millennium, had gradually moulded the hierarchical structure of the Church into a *societas perfecta* was, indeed, an “event of the Spirit”. A process bursting with tension, it marked a major move forward for the Church as it “went forth” and saw the emergence of a new “style” of Christianity. Having observed that the churches of the North had become “missionary terrain”, Congar noted as early as the 1950s that the Church “now needs to find a new style of manifesting its presence in the world”. “The Church should be more *in* the world and not so much *of* the world. It should simply be the Church of Jesus Christ – people’s conscience, shaped by the Gospel. I do wish it were so!”<sup>15</sup> This is a Church “which not only forms the framework for people to ‘practice’ their ‘religion’, but also acts as a beacon which inspires faith and offers an environment in which people develop and nourish a mature faith.”<sup>16</sup> The central documents of the Second Vatican Council reflect this paradigm shift away from a “self-focused” Church towards a mission-focused Church in the original sense of the word, a Church whose practice – i.e. its liturgy, catechesis and welfare work – must be understood primarily and fundamentally as coming from Jesus Christ and which manifests its true character with every new conversion. In the 1940s and 1950s Congar and other representatives of the *nouvelle théologie*, such as Jean Daniélou and Henri de Lubac, carried out studies on a new understanding of the role of bishops as

<sup>15</sup> Congar, Yves, *Für eine dienende und arme Kirche*, Mainz 1965, 94-95.

<sup>16</sup> Congar, Yves, *Christus in Frankreich*, in: *ibid*, *Priester und Laien – Im Dienst am Evangelium*, Freiburg, Basel, Vienna 1965, 221-233, 229.

well as on the laity, mission and dialogue with non-Christian religions. These ideas were later picked up by the Council. Taking due account of a new "global horizon" with changes in the religious landscape and recognition of religious and cultural pluralism, the Church eventually arrived at a new definition of itself. It discovered its own "particularity", realising that it is "part" of a larger whole and that the Church, too, needs to be on the move – "to go forth" – towards this greater whole in its endeavour to impact "God's people". The Council defined this new understanding of being Church primarily by reference to the regional churches. "The individual bishops, however," it says in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, "are the visible principle and foundation of unity in their particular churches, fashioned after the model of the universal Church, in and from which churches come into being the one and only Catholic Church. For this reason the individual bishops [...] with the Pope represent the entire Church in the bond of peace, love and unity."<sup>17</sup> The focus is on the collegiate character of the Episcopal bodies, on stimulating the foundation of bishops' conferences and on convening regional synods.<sup>18</sup> The first and foremost task is to proclaim "the Gospel everywhere on earth."<sup>19</sup> This is the function of a bishop, and the ministry of the Pope must be understood within this responsibility for the Gospel as a service to ensure the unity of the Church. These are the ecclesiological foundations for the rediscovery of partnership and a new understanding of the universal Church as partnership, as it derives its vibrancy from and within the dynamics associated with every new "central focus" on Jesus Christ, enabling the Church to go forth and enter new territories. The Church is mission-focused in its very essence. This means that the Christian faith can "emerge anew" and that new ways of living the faith can develop whenever there is a conversion to Jesus Christ through an encounter with Him, both in everyday life and in worship, and whenever we learn from and are challenged by others, along all the paths in this world and in the many communities which form along the way, seeking to serve others. Michel de Certeau, a French

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<sup>17</sup> *Lumen Gentium*: [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19641121\\_lumen-gentium\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html), no. 23.

<sup>18</sup> Das Zweite Vatikanische Konzil, Das Dekret über die Hirtenaufgabe der Bischöfe in der Kirche 'Christus Dominus', in: Rahner, Karl; Vorgrimler, Herbert, *Kleines Konzilskompendium – Sämtliche Texte des Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzils*, Freiburg im Breisgau 2008, 274, no. 38.

<sup>19</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, no. 23.

Jesuit, philosopher and religious scholar, put it like this: “Not without you as an individual”, but “with all of you” – the new “style” of being a Christian manifests itself in a unremitting quest for Jesus Christ, the one who was resurrected to life by God, and in our bond with our brothers and sisters. The key to this new paradigm of “mission” is summed up in the word “partnership”.<sup>20</sup>

### **The Christological basis of partnership: contributing and participating**

Pope Francis’s Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* can be read as a stimulus to discover the universal Church in its manifestation of partnership. The Gospel “unfolds”, faith “emerges anew” when life stories are shared, when Jesus Christ is discovered in every new encounter and bond with our neighbour, when we allow ourselves to be discovered by Jesus, when the challenge of His friendship pulls us out of all bondage, especially from self-imposed bonds that imprison us. By “being centred” upon Jesus Christ we allow ourselves to be “moved off-centre” and we rediscover the meaning of partnership: that we are part of a whole that is greater than we can imagine. Jesus Christ is the “stranger” who is always ahead of us, whom we can discover wherever there is both life and growth through and within the fellowships of so many communities along the way. That is where the Gospel is preached and where bread and wine are shared. The partnership of the universal Church grows wherever we count on God as our partner and where Jesus Christ is our companion, like the “stranger” on all the roads to Emmaus.

As the Second Vatican Council reminds us in its documents, particularly in its Dogmatic Constitutions on the Church and on Divine Revelation, it is through Jesus Christ that God made Himself a gift to humanity, sharing His very self with us. In his wisdom and goodness God chose “to raise men to a participation of the divine life.”<sup>21</sup> In Jesus

<sup>20</sup> Certeau, Michel de, De la participation au discernement – Tâche chrétienne après Vatican II, in: *Christus* 13 (1966), 518-537, 523: “[...] In the world the Church must continually discern that to which she testifies; moving along with people, she must always seek what she teaches; she can never acquire the truth nor can she have ultimate possession of it; such possession is continually removed from her in the name of that in which she believes and on which she lives. God never ceases to send her beyond her confines into exile, through encounters and through acts of care for the poor which initially throw her off balance but which then remind her of what she has always done ‘in remembrance’ and as a sign of the eternal covenant.”

<sup>21</sup> Dogmatic Constitution of the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vatii\\_const\\_19641121\\_lumen-gentium\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vatii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html), no. 2.

Christ he gives us his friendship and addresses us as "friends",<sup>22</sup> "This is my commandment: love one other, as I have loved you. No one can have greater love than to lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I shall no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know the master's business. I call you my friends, because I have made known to you everything I have learnt from my Father."<sup>23</sup> Jesus fulfilled this message when he gave his life for us on the cross. God's friendship breaks through all boundaries and overcomes every abyss of hatred and exclusion – this is the experience of resurrection, of life "in spite of it all", of life in abundance and of overcoming evil. This friendship challenges us to convert, i.e. to turn around, so that we go forth, contribute and participate. In the various communities along the way it means being committed to others, sharing our lives with them and in precisely this way – especially by sharing with those who hunger for love and for life – discovering and proclaiming Jesus Christ.

Regardless of whether partnership is practised at the different levels of Christian life, between local churches, religious communities and lay communities, among particular churches or in church aid organisations, it is always rooted in this process of discovery, in the love and friendship of God Himself, in the experience of the Spirit that we are "part" of God's greater whole and members of the people of God who are formed in this way. As the French Dominican, Marie-Dominique Chenu, once put it<sup>24</sup>, the Church manifests its essence along many paths in the world, and that is precisely why partnership is the key word and the central element of this universal Church. It is challenging, but it is also comforting: Jesus Christ communicates himself to us through the experience of partnership, making us partakers of Himself and strengthening us in our faith, so that we experience ourselves as being "part" of the Body of Christ. It is only together, along all the paths of the world, that we grow into this Body. Whatever forms of partnership we create, they will remain fragments,

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<sup>22</sup> Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19651118\\_dei-verbum\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651118_dei-verbum_en.html), no. 2.

<sup>23</sup> John 15:12-15.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. the definition of universal Church given by Chenu, Marie-Dominique, *Volk Gottes in der Welt*, Paderborn 1968, 13: "In its search for itself, during which it employs its characteristic logic of an examination of conscience, the Church enquires about the world so that it can be itself."

i.e. partial. Just as Jesus Himself was broken for us along all the paths of His life, our own active “partaking” – or sharing – strengthens us as we proclaim the message of the Gospel in all broken, volatile and non-committed relationships, however fragmentary they may be.

Despite all the professionalism with which partnerships are handled in the universal Church and no matter how much they may be “success stories” – and we are pleased to say that there are many such stories in local churches and within Church aid organisations – they always carry the stigma of being no more than fragmentary. Yet when we expect God to act, when we open the door to the “stranger”, the Gospel breaks through and we can hear Jesus Christ’s cry of love as he heals wounds and opens up space for peace. By understanding the universal Church in terms of partnership, we gain a new understanding of mission where faith can come to the fore, where people can find their way into faith through their bond with others – however fragile this bond may be – and where, along the way, communities emerge that leave space for the “stranger”.

### **Practising partnership – the universal Church as a learning community that seeks to form a new “style” of Christian identity**

Practising such partnership today is essentially *provocative*. In a globalised world where every nook and cranny is covered by electronic media and GPS, a large number of new communication spaces have emerged. People move between a variety of spaces; “foreign lands” are no longer far away, and native roots have become fluid even if one’s radius is limited to one’s own “city”. The social, cultural and economic realities of our urban conglomerations and megacities in this world have multiplied, and the city has become a space in motion for urban nomads. Everything is connected and networked, yet this situation is precisely what causes individualism and loneliness, where relationships between passers-by are fleeting, fragile, weak and marked by continuous detachment and new formation. If, therefore, Christians live in partnership, in the footsteps of Jesus Christ, not going with the flow of volatility and fluidity; if commitment is combined with responsibility and reliability; if viable networks are thus created along the many paths in this world, networks which are sustainable and conducive to the creation of communities; and if those networks question the manifold forms of economic, social and cultural exclusion and exclusiveness, then that is *provocative*: it is a visible sign that

the Kingdom of God is upon us and that the City of God is growing within the city of man. "It must reach the places where new narratives and paradigms are being formed, bringing the word of Jesus to the inmost soul of our cities."<sup>25</sup> Such partnership means "to live out our human life to the fullest and to meet every challenge as a leaven of Gospel witness in every culture and every city"<sup>26</sup>. This is precisely what "will make us better Christians and bear fruit in our cities."<sup>27</sup> And this is also where the Church becomes truly universal, manifesting itself as partnership, and where it serves in a new "style" of Christian identity, a new presence of Christians in our – one – globalised world. When local churches, regional churches and the universal Church rediscover partnership, they become a "sign for the nations" in a new way – a "city on the hilltop".

This is provocative and challenging and, indeed, the reason why the partnership of the universal Church needs a diversity of expertise, professional support and, above all, the example of genuine partnership that has been lived out and practised over many years in the various networks at the levels of local churches, dioceses, religious communities and Church aid organisations in Germany. The universal Church in its partnership role assumes a variety of forms, as it is a community of prayer, learning and mutual care. The universal Church as partnership needs skilled theological support. It needs a theology which is an "essay" in itself, an exploratory movement that supports people who have their homes in different spaces in our – one – globalised world. Such a theology must embrace the intercultural hermeneutics model<sup>28</sup> presented by Paul Ricoeur. It must move along new paths of cultural translation, trusting in Jesus Christ's logic that is specific to this journey – a logic which supports a variety of ways in which we can allow others to help us abandon the focus on ourselves, to be challenged by them and thus to find our own identities in new ways.

Such a theology must unmask any lack of reconciliation and must know how to rekindle the ashes below the deep layers of culture.

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<sup>25</sup> Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 74.

<sup>26</sup> *ibid*, no. 75.

<sup>27</sup> *ibid*.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. also: Eckholt, Margit, *Poetik der Kultur – Bausteine einer interkulturellen dogmatischen Methodenlehre*, Freiburg im Breisgau 2002. *Ibid*, *Hermeneutik und Theologie bei Paul Ricoeur – Denkanstöße für eine Theologie im Pluralismus der Kulturen*, Munich 2002.

It must help us discover that pure spark of life which enables us to go forth. A “Church which goes forth”, as Francis calls it in *Evangelii Gaudium*, is a mission-focused Church which accepts the challenge of partnership, because God Himself has partnered with man through Jesus Christ – a Church which accepts in trust that by going forth and continually bonding with others it will discover the face of Jesus Christ. This process of going forth is where mission has its starting point. In our unconditional commitment to others it means primarily “conversion”, i.e. a turnaround, being set free from bonds which remove life, and going forth means entering into partnerships in which the “stranger” – Jesus Christ – joins us and our space of fellowship becomes the “sign” of the “city on the hilltop”.

# Partnership as a Paradigm for Working within the Universal Church

Klaus Krämer

During the decades following the Second Vatican Council the term partnership came to be established in Germany as a basic concept for all work within the universal Church. Many German dioceses, parishes and organisations have since then entered into an impressive number of partnership schemes which are now very much part of Church life in Germany. The partnership principle can be seen at all levels of the universal Church – particularly those of international aid agencies. It expresses a new perception of the worldwide Church – a perception which has changed fundamentally since the Second Vatican Council and since the end of colonialism in the mid-20th century. Whereas missionary churches in the southern hemisphere were once dominated mainly by Europe, they are now independent regional churches with their own structures, contextual theologies and pastoral models, geared towards the specific requirements of each local environment. The term partnership is, therefore, now associated with the idea of communicating “on an equal footing” – a form of communication which is marked by supportive assistance for developments within churches and also by an exchange of experience at all levels of Church life.

Yet although the concept of partnership has come to form a natural part of relationships within the universal Church, the term is by no means used exclusively in a Church context. Rather, the word is also applied in connection with development and collaboration between states and their economic relations. Here, too, the term describes relationships that are designed to be long-term, while also being mainly geared towards realising large-scale projects and marked by the principle of equality between those involved. The question therefore arises whether there is anything specific about partnerships within the universal Church, so that they can be distinguished from

“secular” partnerships, and whether we can establish a specifically theological basis for this concept.

### Aspects of a theological understanding of partnership

Semantically, the concept of partnership includes the idea of participating in something that is wider than its constituent parts (*pars* in Latin). Partners are participants, partakers of a larger whole, and are thus characteristically defined by the entity of which they form part. Looking at the New Testament, we can remind ourselves above all of Paul’s image of a body with many members: The human body forms an entity that consists of numerous constituent parts, with each member having its own qualities and being indispensable for the body as a whole.<sup>29</sup> Paul relates this image to the reality of the Church where a variety of spiritual gifts exist alongside one another. In their diversity all these charisms work together, making each individual indispensable and valuable to the Body as a whole. It has repeatedly been pointed out that Paul’s metaphor of the body is based on an image that was common and indeed popular in antiquity, comparing a social community of people with a well-functioning, living organism. Menenius Agrippa used this image to justify class differences between the plebians and the aristocracy in ancient Rome.<sup>30</sup> But whereas Livius’ metaphor was used as a way to legitimise differences in social ranks, as if they were a natural and therefore divine order, Paul places a completely different emphasis. For him Christ Himself is the unifying principle within the Body, given to each member *a priori*. It is by the Spirit, through baptism, that each member is, as it were, incorporated into the one Body and thus into Christ.<sup>31</sup> He sees unity and the togetherness of the individual members as being rooted within their Spirit-led status of belonging to Jesus Christ. For him this spiritual reality is the basis for a fundamental equality between all members of the Body, despite their differences. In Christ all differences between people have been removed: “There can be neither Jew nor Greek, there can be neither slave nor freeman, there can be neither male nor female, for you are

<sup>29</sup> Cf. 1 Cor. 12:12-31.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Livius, Titus, *Ab Urbe Condita*, Book 2, No. 32, in: <http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/livy/liv.2.shtml#32>, 30.6.2014; cf. also Schrage, Wolfgang, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther, Evangelisch-Katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament*, vol. VII/3, Zurich 1999, 219f.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 216.

all one in Christ Jesus.”<sup>32</sup> This new perspective which we can observe in Paul’s letters is clearly reflected particularly in the importance he attaches to weaker and seemingly less honourable members. They are given special attention and esteem, and deserve to be treated with greater consideration and caring support.<sup>33</sup> In this context Paul exhorts his readers to maintain the unity of the Body, despite its plurality and the different characteristics of each individual, so that the Body is able to act. “When the Body acts as a whole, not every limb is used in the same way, but all limbs continue to be part of it at all times.”<sup>34</sup> However, this does not mean that individual parts should withdraw into passivity. As everyone shares in God’s grace and in the work of His Spirit, they are called upon to serve one another within this organic body and in the world, using their gifts and their skills.<sup>35</sup> Paul paints the picture of the Church as a community of mutual care where participation in the wider, Spirit-led Body is founded in Christ, marked by mutual responsibility, with everyone helping to realise the Kingdom of God. Paul elevates the “question about spiritual gifts or charisms to a new level. The question is no longer: What gift do I have, for myself? Rather, it is: How does it relate to the Church as a whole?” says Walter Klaiber, as he summarises his commentary on 1 Corinthians.<sup>36</sup>

This community of mutual care showed itself in the offerings collected for Jerusalem.<sup>37</sup> The background was a specific emergency, as part of the Early Church in Jerusalem had apparently fallen into material poverty which it was no longer able to alleviate by dint of its own efforts.<sup>38</sup> To support those believers, Paul asked the Greek churches to collect offerings for “the poor among the saints”, as

<sup>32</sup> Gal. 3:28; cf. also 1 Cor. 12:13.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. 1 Cor. 12:22-26.

<sup>34</sup> Baumert, *Norbert, Sorgen des Seelsorgers – Übersetzung und Auslegung des ersten Korintherbriefes*, Würzburg 2007, 206.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Klaiber, Walter, *Der erste Korintherbrief, Die Botschaft des Neuen Testaments*, Neukirchen-Vluyn 2011, 209. Baumert points out in this context that not every member “looks after each of the other members”, but acts in its own interest and in that of the others “by contributing to one and the same activity. [...] This focus on the same vital activity is thus the point of comparison.” (Baumert, *Norbert, Sorgen des Seelsorgers*, 206).

<sup>36</sup> Klaiber, Walter, *Der erste Korintherbrief*.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. also Rom. 15:25-28, 1 Cor. 16:1-4, 2 Cor. 8:19f., 9:1-15, Acts 11:29f. and 24:17.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Becker, Jürgen, *Paulus, der Apostel der Völker*, Tübingen 1998, 271-276.

he respectfully calls the Early Church in Jerusalem.<sup>39</sup> For him this was clearly far more than social or charitable action. Caring for the Early Church in Jerusalem was deeply symbolical for him: just as the Gentiles were partakers of the spiritual gifts given to the Early Church in Jerusalem, the Gentiles were now called upon, in return, to serve the Jewish Church with their material goods.<sup>40</sup> In this way the offerings were to express the spiritual bond between Jewish and Gentile Christians, shown through practical, hands-on identification with the vulnerable in an hour of need. Such help is not charity, but a spiritual duty towards those from whom one has received the gift of faith.<sup>41</sup>

This aid project of the Early Church formed part of intensive communication between the Apostle Paul and the young Greek churches. Paul visited these churches regularly. He kept in touch with them through his letters, which eventually became a core component of the New Testament. This is how he strengthened his relationships with the various local churches. But he also fostered contact between them – a mutual exchange that continued in post-Apostolic times. It was an entire culture of communication, and it was later reflected in the letters of the Apostolic Fathers (St. Clement, St. Ignatius of Antioch and St. Polycarp of Smyrna). Its first climax came with the Early Church Councils. In particular, it can be seen in the early practice of “communion letters” (*litterae communicatoriae*) – fourteen letters issued to Christians by their local bishops whenever a person went on a journey or moved to a new place. The purpose of such a letter was to ensure that the person received hospitality from the relevant regional church, that they could participate in the Eucharist and that they were given assistance.

Kehl points out that such letters formed part of that “community of communication” through which the bishops kept each other informed about any special occurrences and events within their churches, such as elections of new bishops and also any exclusions of heretics from the Church.<sup>42</sup> This regular contact within the Early Church meant that there was already a lively exchange about the life of each regional

<sup>39</sup> Rom. 15:26 and elsewhere.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> On the difference between these offerings, on the one hand, and the temple tax and alms, on the other, cf. Becker, Jürgen, *Paulus, der Apostel der Völker*, 273.

<sup>42</sup> *ibid.*, 325.

church and much sharing of both sorrowful and joyful developments. The mutual sharing culture helped to strengthen the *communio* of the apostolically founded regional churches and filled them with life.

Moreover, it also led to a practice in the early life of the Church that eventually acquired fundamental significance for our understanding of the universal Church as a worldwide communion of regional churches. This is where we can see the first essential elements of a theological understanding of universal Church partnerships. The communion of regional churches is based on their joint membership of the Body of Christ and finds its clearest expression in the Eucharistic community. It shows that this communion is not just an abstract theological dimension, based on a hierarchical connection between bishops and the successor of the Apostle Peter, but a reality which is very much alive and can be experienced in a tangible form. It is, therefore, paramount that regional churches should also be connected to each other, forming a lively network of genuine relationships as members of the universal Church.

This network manifests itself, for instance, in a large number of international partnerships at the levels of dioceses and Bishops' Conferences and through a whole network of partnerships between local churches and Church organisations. Such relationships cover all areas of Church life, forming communities that learn together, pray together and give each other mutual care and support.<sup>43</sup> International religious communities play particularly vital roles in this context. They form a network of their own which strengthens the worldwide communion of the Church, particularly in places where religious communities actively support the pastoral ministry of a regional church.

Each partnership is an important learning venue where the communion of the universal Church can be experienced. However, such a partnership must not become independent and thus exclusive and self-sufficient. To ensure that each partnership serves the wider communion as a whole, it is important to follow some general rules and agreements. There needs to be a sufficient level of coordination and control as well as the necessary structures, both nationally and internationally.

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<sup>43</sup> Cf. the declaration of the German Bishops: *Allen Völkern sein Heil – Die Mission der Weltkirche*, published by the Sekretariat der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz (Secretariat of the German Bishops' Conference), Bonn 2004, 55-60.

## Partnership and professionalism

If, therefore, we largely understand the concept of partnership in theological terms, it follows that we must first determine its place within an ecclesiological context. Different forms of partnership-based activities can be understood as instances in which we can experience the one universal Church in all its catholicity.

At the same time the specific forms and manifestations of action within the universal Church – particularly different aspects of specific projects – have their own inherent logic. This logic does not differ substantially from the criteria applied in a secular environment and is commonly referred to as “professionalism”. International Church projects must of course meet internationally recognised standards in developmental cooperation and in the use of donated funds. This includes, for instance, legal provisions concerning the appropriate use of funds, criteria for the sustainable success of projects (impact focus), transparency requirements and anti-corruption measures. Nevertheless, there is the danger that use of the term professionalism might lead to the undiscerning acceptance of criteria and procedures within a Church context that are incompatible with the ecclesiological specifics of the partnership concept. In particular, any unilateral definition of standards and procedures “through the back door” can lead to a new imbalance between the partners involved. In such a case “professionalism” would be purchased rather painfully at the expense of the quality that should characterise the relationship between the two partners (falling prey to “neo-colonialist temptation”). It is, therefore, important to ask what criteria should be developed for the specific professionalism of a universal Church partnership.

One indispensable and defining element of such a partnership is respect for one another as independent protagonists and as responsible organisers of developments within their regional churches. The self-determination of each partner is a direct result of the fundamental equality of all independent regional churches. This can be seen, above all, in the planning authority and autonomy of regional churches over their pastoral activities, the way they define priorities and their development of strategies. At the same time, however, the planning processes of the regional churches do not occur in isolation. They form part of the pastoral planning conducted by a national Bishops’ Conference and the strategic targets which are

set by regional and continent-wide associations of national Bishops' Conferences and the universal Church as a whole (with specifications given by the Council, by the Bishops' Synods and in other foundational documents).

To support and implement such planning through effective and specific measures, it is vital to enter into dialogue with one's partners. It would be unthinkable for any dialogue-based interaction to make one's support for specific projects unilaterally dependent on certain conditions. Instead, there needs to be an open exchange on one's experiences and assessments of a given situation as well as binding agreements and arrangements. This includes developing a culture of dealing responsibly with the donations that are given on a basis of trust. Reliable planning, accountability in the use of funds and a professional review of such use are not expressions of mistrust, but of respect towards those providing the funds and a responsibility towards those who are intended to benefit.

One question that is gaining in significance in this context is whether specific activities are sufficiently impact-focused and how the relevant projects are to be evaluated.<sup>44</sup> It raises the fundamental issue of whether and how the success of pastoral work can actually be measured. Are we perhaps seeing the questionable advent of a purely economic approach to pastoral ministry and the attempt to express everything in figures without doing justice to the specifics of pastoral work?

When enquiring about the impact of pastoral work and its possible evaluation, it is helpful to distinguish between certain levels. On a purely operational level it is possible to talk about the success and impact of implementing a specific project. These are parameters which can be measured and analysed in a given instance. Generally speaking, however, such projects form part of a wider plan, and this plan is intended to implement a certain pastoral strategy. To arrive at a proper evaluation at this level, attention must be focused primarily on the aims that are pursued through the various activities under the wider plan. Is it a matter of achieving economic success, widening one's political influence or ensuring sustainable development?

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<sup>44</sup> The International Catholic Mission Society *missio* recently set up guidelines for the monitoring and evaluation of impact. Available on the web at [http://www.missiohilft.de/media/ueber\\_uns/Wirkungsbeobachtung\\_und\\_Evaluation.pdf](http://www.missiohilft.de/media/ueber_uns/Wirkungsbeobachtung_und_Evaluation.pdf), 25 June 2014.

This is not the place for a detailed outline of the different goals that might be pursued through pastoral work and the complex interaction between them. Suffice it here to draw attention to the fundamental perspective to which all pastoral goals must be subject. After all, there is an ultimate and comprehensive sense in which all pastoral work must take its cue from the Kingdom of God and its values, as expressed in the Gospel. This is what Paul had in mind when he combined three important concepts: “saving justice, peace and joy brought by the Holy Spirit”.<sup>45</sup> It is one of the basic tenets of the Christian faith that the Kingdom of God cannot be ushered in through human efforts, but that it is a gift of God, given to us by grace. This reality cannot, therefore, be measured and indexed in the same way, through empirical parameters as, for instance, the prosperity or educational level of a society. Nevertheless, it is possible to highlight changes that can be interpreted as progress in Kingdom terms and which can be analysed in terms of the issues to which they give rise. This would necessitate the development of a suitable procedure and a dedicated set of criteria, based on Ignatius’ method of spiritual discernment.

Any professionalism specific to the universal Church must of course also include the question of how and under what criteria care for the vulnerable should be organised and focused. Matters become more specific through the development of policies, different emphases of funding in different countries and regions and different orientations in each area of funding. Any Gospel-based funding policy must primarily focus on one major criterion: an option for the poor (focus on the poor) with care for the vulnerable and marginalised.<sup>46</sup> When it comes to the actual procedure, it is vital that the relevant partners should have a hand in this. In fact, they must be involved at every single stage: from the development of the policy through the planning and implementation of a project on to its evaluation and analysis.

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<sup>45</sup> Romans 14:17.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* of the Holy Father Francis to the Bishops, Clergy, Consecrated Persons and the Lay Faithful on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today’s World, 24. November 2013, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20131124\\_evangelii-gaudium.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html). This idea is a thread that runs through the entire Exhortation. We can see this particularly clearly whenever Pope Francis talks about the preferential option for the poor among God’s people (cf. *ibid*, nos. 197-201).

The aspects we have outlined here are particularly important for any partnership within the universal Church as a giver of aid. Yet the professional standards of the universal Church's project work are, in principle, equally applicable to projects within dioceses, local churches and organisations. Working under the subsidiarity principle, any entities within the universal Church which act as specialist units for universal Church projects have the task of supporting and assisting other sponsors of partnership work within the Church, helping them plan, implement and evaluate their projects. This makes it particularly necessary to be transparent, to exchange information with one another and to coordinate one's planned activities wherever this is reasonable. In the long term, this is the only way to ensure a minimum of fair distribution and thus to prevent any one-sided privileges for a small number of partners.

### **Dialogue and partnership**

When we speak about an exchange of gifts in connection with universal Church partnerships, this does not primarily refer to care for the vulnerable through financial support for partnership projects. Rather, this is about an exchange of experience, praying together and joining together in celebrating the Eucharist. This specifically ecclesial dimension is realised by a given partnership whenever it becomes a Spirit-led event, with a joint quest for the direction in which the Spirit wishes to take the Church – both as a whole and in its diversity as different particular churches.

What we have said so far shows that partnership work is an important and fundamental feature of Church activities which enables us to experience the communion of the universal Church in a tangible manner. This is where the universal Church can make itself felt in a special way as a global community which manifests both communication and care for the vulnerable. The form of communication which is especially suitable to this end – and is, indeed, an important requirement – is that of dialogue at all the different levels of worldwide Church activity. This global dialogue within the universal Church comprises numerous forms of mutual contact and exchange. Such forms enable us to get to know one another, to perceive each other's similarities and differences and to gain a sympathetic understanding of the situations of our partners. They increase our sensitivity, so that we can comprehend the challenges faced by our partners and grasp

the responses to their situations. It also means that we can understand those responses as specific manifestations of their Christian witness within a given context. One sign of the fruitfulness of such dialogue is the specific inspiration and ideas we receive for our own Church life.

Take, for instance, the recent discussion on Small Christian Communities as a pastoral model. Pastoral experience in Africa and Asia can stimulate us to reflect on how we can ensure that our local church networks – which cover increasingly larger geographical areas – can continue as vibrant places of faith or can be revived as such. It will be important for our future development not to stop after the first hopeful steps but gradually to broaden this dialogue, so that it eventually covers all areas of pastoral work and includes all the various social challenges which Christians face in other parts of the world. This will reveal unexpected similarities and also major, far-reaching differences.

Any partnership-based dialogue in the universal Church thrives on direct personal contact. In Germany it received its decisive stimulus from the Second Vatican Council. After the Council a large number of concrete partnerships developed throughout Germany's dioceses and parishes. They were often initiated by members of the many different missionary orders who had maintained contact with their German home parishes and were supported by them in their missionary work. Other important bridge builders were numerous diocesan priests who had worked pastorally in the churches of the South (as *Fidei Donum* priests) and set up Church partnerships after their return. Today it is mainly the large number of young volunteers who inject life into these partnerships and use their experience of the universal Church as living testimonies of faith, thus enriching Church life in Germany. To keep expanding the dialogue on pastoral experience and to add stability to it, it is important to develop a network in which such discourse can take place and be sustained and where the results are fed into a discourse on pastoral theology within one's own context.

In our endeavour to determine the distinctive features of the partnership concept in the universal Church, these sketchy observations show that such a global partnership must be a specific and important place where the Church can manifest itself as a worldwide communion in an increasingly globalised world. As an ecclesial

reality, a partnership of this kind requires the continuous support of theological reflection in its work, so that it can remain true to the Great Commission and to the character of the Church as a Spirit-led reality. Theological reflection also ensures that the experience gained through partnership bears fruit for a deeper understanding of the Church as an entity that manifests communion. Although such partnerships genuinely show the Church in action, their impact goes far beyond the Church itself. This is because they give rise to a unity which can generate considerable momentum in the quest for a fairer and more brotherly coexistence between different nations and cultures.



# Stimuli for Partnership in the Universal Church

Ludwig Schick

The election of Francis on March 2013 emphatically underlined that the Catholic Church is truly universal in character. Just a few years ago it would have been hard to imagine that a cardinal from a southern continent would be given the office of Pontifex Maximus. Yet, as the name suggests, this office is intended to build bridges between the regional churches of all continents and thus to foster mutual understanding and worldwide unity within the Church. For centuries, however, it seemed as if this task could be undertaken most easily from Europe – geographically from the Vatican, and mentally, theologically and culturally by a European Pontifex. But the time had finally come to entrust the Petrine ministry to a non-European, as Europe had in fact ceased to be the centre of the Catholic Church for quite a while. Francis comes from Latin America, a continent which is now inhabited by about 42% of all Catholics in the world. He is focusing the Church's attention on the southern hemisphere and using his in-depth understanding to give us insights into the reality of Latin America where he had become known as the "Cardinal of the Poor". He has also brought along with him the lifestyle, spirituality, liturgies and theology of the South. With this background he will re-formulate and provide answers to quite a few globally relevant questions. The universal Church – and thus Africa, America and Asia – is now set to play a more prominent role, and we can expect the South to deliver important stimuli for a mutual international learning process within the universal Church. We Europeans will increasingly play the role of learners, with other regional churches – of the South, in particular – as our teachers. Understanding and commitment will grow within the universal Church; we will be working together more as partners and, in this way, become more catholic.

In the 1980s Walbert Bühlmann, a Swiss Capuchin priest, missionary and theologian, created a model of the Church with an emphasis on its universality, seeing and living Church unity not merely in dogmatic terms, but above all on the pastoral level. The model he presents to be emulated by today's universal Church is that of Francis of Assisi.<sup>47</sup> Based on the life of the saint, he describes a prophetic and apostolic pastoral ministry that is entrusted not just to office bearers but is the mission of all Christians. Bühlmann argues that if the Church were to let itself be inspired by Francis of Assisi, it would have a more powerful message for its secular environment and would also cultivate a more brotherly tone within its own house. Bühlmann shows that, when it comes to our powers of imagination and everyday Church practice, we are still confined within our narrow European borders. Just as Europe's capital cities still have their monuments to heroes who "served their country" by subduing, conquering or colonising other nations, our Church, too, is still filled with the relics of national or Eurocentric mindsets and structures. Such thought patterns make it difficult for us, in our globalised day and age, to be more universally oriented and partnership-focused in the way we relate to individual messages, issues and traditions.

At the moment everything seems to indicate that Francis from Argentina – by taking his cue from Francis of Assisi – will indeed provide stimuli for a new partnership-focused universal Church. This is an important and necessary service for the sake of our identity as a "Catholic" Church within a globalised world.

### **The universal Church on our doorstep**

As we begin to look at the universal Church in partnership terms, it is good to start on our own doorstep. Germany currently has about three million Christians with foreign passports, of whom nearly two million are Catholics. In addition, there are almost three million naturalised immigrants with their children as well as an indeterminable number of Catholics without any valid residential status.<sup>48</sup> We can, therefore, assume that almost one in five Catholics in Germany have

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Bühlmann, Walbert, *Weltkirche: Neue Dimensionen – Modell für das Jahr 2001*, Graz 1984, 123-134.

<sup>48</sup> The statistical details can be found in *Katholische Kirche in Deutschland – Zahlen und Fakten 2011/12*, Arbeitshilfen, No. 257, published by the Secretariat of the German Bishops' Conference, Bonn 2012, 17f.

their roots in other countries. As all of them have been baptised and confirmed, they are by no means guests in our local churches, but members with equal rights.

To help non-German Catholics cultivate their own religious traditions but at the same time find a home under the umbrella of German local churches, Germany's dioceses have set up over 400 non-German churches for over 30 national and language groups, with most of their church meetings held at a variety of venues. These native-language churches are intended to have a "bridge-building function" connecting them with regional churches. In the past, non-German churches in Germany were wrongly seen as a temporary development, and it was believed that the increasing integration of second, third and fourth generation "guest workers" would eventually lead to the dissolution of such churches. Instead, there has been a steady influx of additional "first generations", and this tendency has gathered new momentum as a result of two factors: the freedom to travel and take residence within the European Union, and – more recently – the economic crisis in southern Europe. Moreover, the number of non-German Catholics with foreign passports is steadily growing, while the social structures of foreign Catholics in Germany are becoming increasingly complex. "Alongside simple workers without recognised qualifications there are now growing numbers of highly qualified professionals who are in Germany on a temporary basis. Many come here as students, while, conversely, young people who were born in Germany are gradually discovering the labour markets of their parents' countries where they can now go and use their intercultural skills. Bi-national marriages and families are no longer rare."<sup>49</sup> In recent years there has also been a significant rise in the number of Catholics from non-European countries, i.e. from Africa, Asia and Latin America. Many of them find homes in English, French, Portuguese and Spanish-speaking churches or with missionary orders or in university fellowships in Germany. What we can observe among immigrants from non-European countries is, above all, a good level of care for one another and, indeed, for those who have stayed behind in their home countries. From time to time, however, coexistence in Germany is hampered by national and

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<sup>49</sup> Voss, Josef, Seelsorge für Katholiken anderer Muttersprache – Erfahrungsaustausch und Entwicklungsperspektiven, in: *People on the Move*, 99 (2005), available at: [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/migrants/pom2005\\_99/rc\\_pc\\_migrants\\_pom99\\_voss.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/migrants/pom2005_99/rc_pc_migrants_pom99_voss.html), accessed on 17. April 2014.

tribal conflicts in the various countries of origin, e.g. between Spanish and Portuguese speakers who come from Spain, Portugal or Latin America. In all these, a person's family or extended family often plays an influential and protective role.

To counteract any mere co-existence of German and non-German congregations, the German Bishops' Conference compiled a set of guidelines in 2003 for pastoral work among non-German Catholics, entitled "A Church in Many Languages and Nations".<sup>50</sup> It has been and still is an objective of the universal Catholic Church in Germany to foster integration, while at the same time preserving Germany's own traditions which are enriching for everyone.

This is an area in which further crucial steps must be taken to ensure greater participation of immigrants in Germany's Church life. Even among Christians one can regularly observe a latent antagonism towards those who are different. This antagonism must be overcome and replaced by a process of getting to know each other and of valuing diversity and differences in spirituality, religious practice and culture. Socially, it is vital to overcome the sometimes blatant inequality of opportunities experienced by migrants at school, at work and in society – a task that must be supported by the pastoral work of the German churches. While it is of course also important to foster bilingual and bicultural skills among people with migrant backgrounds, such skills are equally necessary for Germans. Furthermore, the Church clearly needs to enhance its own understanding of migration, as this is a phenomenon which has been changing in response to worldwide globalisation and the current crisis in several EU countries. We also need to develop a greater awareness of social structures among migrants, as those structures have been increasing in complexity in response to recent developments. Further improvements are desirable and necessary as regards the way we prepare and integrate foreign priests seeking to minister in Germany.<sup>51</sup> Only when we meet these challenges will we be able to support and improve the integration of

<sup>50</sup> Secretariat of the German Bishops' Conference, *Eine Kirche in vielen Sprachen und Völkern – Leitlinien für die Seelsorge an Katholiken anderer Muttersprache*, 13. March 2003, Arbeitshilfen, No. 171, Bonn 2003. In more detail on this point cf. also: Delgado, Mariano, *Lebendige Katholizität gestalten – Auf dem Weg zu einem Miteinander von einheimischen und zugewanderten Katholiken*, in: *Stimmen der Zeit*, 218 (2000) 9, 595-608.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Gabriel, Karl; Leibold, Stefan; Achtermann, Rainer, *Die Situation ausländischer Priester in Deutschland*, *Forum Weltkirche*, No. 13, published by the Academic Workgroup on Universal Church Tasks of the German Bishops' Conference, Mainz 2011.

non-German Catholics in the Church and society and do so in a spirit of true partnership as the universal Church.

### **Partnerships within the universal Church**

Needless to say, partnership within the universal Church goes much further than caring for and sharing with Catholic immigrants in Germany. Such partnership always includes fellowship with the regional and local churches and groups in other countries – something that is already being implemented by many parishes and dioceses. To this end the German Bishops' Conference set out guidelines for universal Church partnership work at the end of 2010.<sup>52</sup> This was in response to an initiative by universal Church liaison officers within the dioceses who had become aware during their ministry that there was an increasing interest in such partnerships and, therefore, felt prompted to support this interest and broaden its skills base. The guidelines are based on an understanding of the universal Church as a community that learns together, prays together and provides mutual support. As the document itself puts it, the universal Church needs an approach whereby we “learn from one another”, “pray for one another” and “are there for one another”. This, in turn, can best be realised through human contact between people and wherever fellowship and community can be tangibly experienced across borders. Such international and trans-continental partnerships are probably the most exciting and vibrant forms in which the universal Church can tangibly deliver on its claim to be truly one as the people of God.

Many missionary orders have gathered valuable experience through intercultural exchanges. Also, there are numerous communities of religious orders in Germany and worldwide in which members of different nations live together in harmony. Communities of this kind can function like magnifying glasses, showing how one's common faith can be lived and shared in the wider context of the universal Church. Moreover, eighteen of Germany's twenty-seven dioceses have committed themselves to partnerships with foreign dioceses or regional churches, while others are cultivating good relations with many different dioceses. In Bamberg, for instance, we set up a partnership in 2007 with the Diocese of Thiès in Senegal. . Like so many

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<sup>52</sup> Cf. Secretariat of the German Bishops' Conference, *Weltkirchliche Partnerschaften von Pfarreien und Diözesen – Leitlinien und Kontaktadressen, Arbeitshilfen*, No. 256, Bonn 2012, 4-11.

other partnerships between local churches, associations and groups, this link has clearly added substance to the fellowship of the universal Church. While the universal Church is often only perceived through the eyes of the media, these partnerships have enabled people to experience it as a living reality through visits and personal contacts. Experiences and perspectives can be exchanged at all levels of Church life, and whenever we are asked about our own lifestyle, we are able to gain a better concept of global reality. Finally, we and our universal Church partners can learn to take joint responsibility for a fairer world. Inasmuch as mutual care on a global scale cannot be restricted to a single partner, there is also a growing appreciation of the important work of our aid agencies.<sup>53</sup>

Such partnerships do not develop by themselves. Quite often they rest on the shoulders of a small number of individuals. Sometimes they even depend on specific individuals, e.g. missionaries or foreign priests in Germany. It also takes patience, intercultural skills and conflict resolution skills to deal constructively with the manifold differences and challenges that clearly characterise all partnerships in the universal Church. The effort that is required is not just inevitable; it is also worthwhile if we, the Church, do not simply wish to duplicate the restrictions we find among and around us. Partnerships within the universal Church are both challenging and rewarding. Within the life of the local church and the universal Church they are an indispensable indication that the message of the Gospel changes the world.

### Learning from the universal Church

When the universal Church manifests itself in the form of partnerships, it also does so through the things we learn from each other, including, in particular, on pastoral and theological issues. It is an area in which Germany, among others, needs to catch up, because the situation has changed so dramatically. What are appropriate responses to the increasing secularisation of our society? How can pastoral structures be reshaped so that they can do justice to the declining number of priests, but also to the needs of the laity?

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Nuscheler, Franz; Gabriel, Karl; Treber, Monika; Keller, Sabine, *Christliche Dritte-Welt-Gruppen – Praxis und Selbstverständnis*, Forum Weltkirche, No. 5, published by the Academic Workgroup on Universal Church Tasks of the German Bishops' Conference, Mainz 1996. Secretariat of the German Bishops' Conference, *Weltkirchliche Arbeit heute für morgen – Wissenschaftliche Studie in Gemeinden deutscher Diözesen*, Bonn 2009, 27-49.

What are the key theological issues today and how can we address them? We do not always need to answer all these questions on our own. Many regional churches are faced with similar challenges, and some have already found answers which can inspire us in our own quest.

When we look at the churches in the southern hemisphere, we are often impressed by the great vitality and naturalness of their faith. "This testimony," says the pastoral theologian and missiologist Michael Sievernich, "can humble and encourage us to resist relegating religion to the private sphere and, instead, publicly to proclaim our faith even in this age of post-modernism."<sup>54</sup> It can, therefore, be an inspiration for "missionary pastoral work" in a German context. Everywhere, he says, "we can sense an increasing urgency as people enquire about the missionary power of the Gospel. Other regional churches in Europe and worldwide are providing important stimuli for a renewal of missionary pastoral work."<sup>55</sup>

It is now vital that we should respond to such stimuli from the universal Church. In their annual campaigns Church aid organisations, for instance, have been regularly highlighting some important stimuli derived from thriving pastoral work in regional churches on other continents. In 2012, *adveniat* focused on the lives of basic ecclesial communities in Latin America, and in 2010 on the "Delegados de la Palabra" as they led the Word-of-God celebrations in Central America and Brazil. In October 2012 the aid organisation *missio* reported on the Church in Papua-New Guinea with its Small Christian Communities and their regular Bible-sharing fellowships. We as Bishops, those in pastoral ministries and, indeed, all Christians in Germany can learn from these experiences and apply them to the pastoral structures of our own country.<sup>56</sup> As I wrote in a different

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<sup>54</sup> Sievernich, Michael, *Von der Weltkirche lernen?*, in: Secretariat of the German Bishops' Conference, *WeltMission: Internationaler Kongress der Katholischen Kirche – Dokumentation, Arbeitshilfen*, No. 202, Bonn 2006, 282-292.

<sup>55</sup> Secretariat of the German Bishops' Conference, *Zeit zur Aussaat – Missionarisch Kirche sein*, 26. November 2000, *Die deutschen Bischöfe*, No. 68, Bonn 2000, 34.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Secretariat of the German Bishops' Conference, *Allen Völkern Sein Heil – Die Mission der Weltkirche*. 23. November 2004, *Die deutschen Bischöfe*, No. 76, Bonn 2004, 55-57. Cf. also my article: *Kleine Christliche Gemeinschaften als weltkirchliche Lernorte biblisch fundierter Pastoral*, in: Krämer, Klaus; Vellguth, Klaus, *Kleine Christliche Gemeinschaften – Impulse für eine zukunftsfähige Kirche, Theologie der Einen Welt*, vol. 2, Freiburg im Breisgau 2012, 72-85.

article, a learning community means “knowing about each other” and is “a mutual event.”<sup>57</sup> It is not a matter of idealising or romanticising the pastoral situations of churches in the southern hemisphere or, indeed, of trivialising our own wealth of experience. True dialogue only takes place if both sides actively engage with one another and are sufficiently willing to learn.

Work within the universal Church is not a matter of transferring skills, but of networking. It means plugging into a network of expertise, experience, perspectives and events in which everyone is supported, enriched and protected.

Theology is about God’s revelation of Himself in this world. However, our understanding of His revelation and the way we perceive the reality of this world always depend on a given context. It is, therefore, vital that cultures should communicate with one another so that there can be mediation between different viewpoints, so that we can gain a picture of how God reveals Himself today and hence, discern His will for us. This insight is by no means new. It is a practice that can be traced back to Biblical times. The Council of the Apostles (described in Acts 15:1-35) is a perfect example. Thanks to globalisation, such learning and communication processes have become more important than ever before: “In a globalised world where time and space have become condensed and where there is a widening gap between the haves and the have-nots we must move along a truly intercultural path and pursue a theology that is situated between the global and the local dimensions.”<sup>58</sup> Work within the universal Church makes the Catholic Church more and more catholic!

### Partnership with the world’s poor

As we saw in the last quotation, partnership in the universal Church always involves a special focus on the poor. When we look at the New Testament accounts, we can see straight away that Jesus had a heart for the oppressed and the powerless. They are the ones

<sup>57</sup> Schick, Ludwig, Von der Weltkirche lernen – Reflexionen zum Dialog zwischen den Ortskirchen, in: Krämer, Klaus; Vellguth, Klaus, *Mission und Dialog – Ansätze für ein kommunikatives Missionsverständnis, Theologie der Einen Welt*, vol. 1, Freiburg im Breisgau 2012, 208-218, especially 214.

<sup>58</sup> Schreiter, Robert J., *Die neue Katholizität – Globalisierung und die Theologie, Theologie interkulturell*, vol. 9, Frankfurt am Main 1997, 226.

to whom he was sent<sup>59</sup> and in whom he is present<sup>60</sup>. In their missionary letter *His Salvation for All Nations (Allen Völkern sein Heil)*, the German Bishops, therefore, say: "Creative fidelity to the Gospel requires a globalisation of responsibility and caring support for the poor and the weak. 'After all, they are the privileged ones with Jesus, and they must therefore also be the privileged ones in His Church. They, in particular, must have the assurance that they are represented by us.' (*Unsere Hoffnung III [Our Hope], 2*)."<sup>61</sup>

If partnership in the universal Church translates this care for the poor into action, then the Church can be experienced as a community of salvation. Cooperation between different regional churches always includes combating injustice and, therefore, it means dealing with the field of tension that was highlighted by Edward Schillebeeckx: "The big stumbling block is intercommunion between rich Christians who stay rich and poor Christians who stay poor, celebrating the same Eucharist, yet without any concern on the part of the rich that the Christian model is a distribution of wealth: this is what it means to share the cup of salvation. After all, this salvation also has social and economic consequences. [...] God's will is not that people should suffer, but that they should have life in abundance – and that applies to everyone, not just a third of the world's population."<sup>62</sup> Partnership in the universal Church, therefore, always includes the aim of demonstrating an "ethical model of fellowship around the Lord's table on earth."<sup>63</sup>

But it would be short-sighted to interpret the challenge of caring for the poor merely in terms of charitable giving or politics. Pope Francis says quite emphatically: "The Church is neither a political movement nor a well-organised structure. That is not what she is. We are not an NGO, and when the Church becomes an NGO she loses

<sup>59</sup> Cf. Lk. 4:18.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. Mt. 25:31-46.

<sup>61</sup> Secretariat of the German Bishops' Conference, *Allen Völkern Sein Heil – Die Mission der Weltkirche*, 23. November 2004, *Die deutschen Bischöfe*, No. 76, Bonn 2004, 15.

<sup>62</sup> Schillebeeckx, Edward, *Erfahrung aus Glauben, Edward Schillebeeckx-Lesebuch*, ed. by Schreiter, Robert J., Freiburg im Breisgau 1984, 298.

<sup>63</sup> Chiavacci, Enrico, Die ökonomische Realität Europas und die Konzeption des Christentums, in: Hünermann, Peter, *Gott - ein Fremder in unserem Haus? Die Zukunft des Glaubens in Europa*, Quaestiones disputatae, No. 165, Freiburg im Breisgau 1996, 123-133, especially 130.

her salt, she has no savour, she is only an empty organisation.”<sup>64</sup> For the partnership of the Church with the world’s poor is, in essence, profoundly theological. What is more, the face of Christ shows itself in the poor, because He Himself was among the poor and suffering.<sup>65</sup> As Francis puts it: “Poverty for us Christians is not a sociological, philosophical or cultural category, no. It is theological. I might say this is the first category, because our God, the Son of God, abased himself, he made himself poor to walk along the road with us. This is our poverty: the poverty of the flesh of Christ, the poverty that brought the Son of God to us through his Incarnation. A poor Church for the poor begins by reaching out to the flesh of Christ. If we reach out to the flesh of Christ, we begin to understand something, to understand what this poverty, the Lord’s poverty, actually is; and this is far from easy.”<sup>66</sup>

### De-secularisation and partnership in the universal Church

Benedict XVI often spoke of the “de-secularisation of the Church” – a phrase that triggered a controversial debate and one which is also used by Francis. He wants the Church to be authentic and open to everyone. But to become a Church for the entire world it needs to de-secularise itself, i.e. it must get rid of everything – all the “European world” assets – which it acquired over time in terms of power, wealth, behaviour, lifestyle and leadership style. De-secularisation must mean becoming a truly global universal Church – a Church for all the world.

Coming from the South, Francis is putting now a greater focus on people from the southern hemisphere, and thus on the poor, the hungry, the exploited and the disadvantaged with all their needs and concerns. In his homily at a Chrism Mass on 20. March 2013 Francis said: The Catholic Church “needs to “go out” to the “outskirts”, [...] not just the geographical outskirts, but the outskirts of human

<sup>64</sup> Francis, Vigil of Pentecost with the Ecclesial Movements –Address of the Holy Father Francis, 18 May, 2013, Rome, in: [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/may/documents/papa-francesco\\_20130518\\_veglia-pentecoste.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/may/documents/papa-francesco_20130518_veglia-pentecoste.html), 16. April 2014.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. also: Das Zweite Vatikanische Konzil, Die dogmatische Konstitution über die Kirche “Lumen Gentium”, in: Rahner, Karl; Vorgrimler, Herbert, *Kleines Konzilskompendium – Sämtliche Texte des Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzils*, Freiburg im Breisgau 2008, 130-132, No. 8.

<sup>66</sup> *ibid.*

existence.”<sup>67</sup> Moreover, the Church must take off the garment which it has accepted from the Western world. Instead, it must wear the garment of the Gospel which is open to all people and all cultures. Pope Francis will provide further impetus on this de-secularisation of the Church.

For true partnership which goes much further than mere sponsorship it is a vital requirement that the Church should de-secularise itself in the aforementioned sense. When there is a shared, open and equal exchange in the universal Church in all its manifold contexts, there will be a growth in both interpersonal understanding and our experience of God. When there is a genuine unfolding of human fellowship (*communio*), this will lead to greater fellowship between a person and God, and the “conciliatory encounter with the poor [and] care for them [becomes] an encounter with God.”<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Pope Francis’s Chrism Mass homily can be found at: [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2013/documents/papa-francesco\\_20130328\\_messa-crismale.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2013/documents/papa-francesco_20130328_messa-crismale.html).

<sup>68</sup> Für eine Zukunft in Solidarität und Gerechtigkeit – Wort des Rates der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland und der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz zur wirtschaftlichen und sozialen Lage in Deutschland, Gemeinsame Texte, No. 9, published by the Church Office of the Protestant Church in Germany and the Secretariat of the German Bishops’ Conference, Hanover/Bonn 1997, 44. In this context cf. also Rahner, Karl, Über die Einheit von Nächsten- und Gottesliebe, in: *ibid*, Sämtliche Werke, vol. 12: *Menschsein und Menschwerdung Gottes*, edited by Vorgrimler, Herbert, Freiburg im Breisgau 2005, 76–91.



## “Watching the workings of the Holy Spirit”

Winfried Montz

The following reflections on the universal Church as partnership are the product of encounters, events and developments over the past 25 years, during which time I had the opportunity of following in various capacities the partnership activities of the diocese of Limburg. The fact that the diocese of Limburg, in addition to its numerous contacts with institutions and individuals in the universal Church, actively maintains ecumenical relations with six dioceses in six different countries, offers a broad scope for reflection on the nature of partnership and permits various conclusions to be drawn.

Limburg is a diocese with a global awareness and worldwide significance. A local church with such broad horizons gains from both an inward and an outward perspective. The latter shows itself chiefly in the wide variety of diocesan partnerships with the local churches of Kumbo/Cameroon, Ndola/Zambia, Alaminos/ Philippines, Sarajevo/ Bosnia-Herzegovina, Košice/Slovakia, and Olomouc/Czech Republic. These partnerships between dioceses exemplify the encouragement of parishes, associations and groupings in the diocese to enter into relations with the universal Church. What takes place on the level of the diocesan partnerships applies equally to a partnership between parishes or associations. The idea is that the express recognition of the partnerships by the diocesan authorities should give rise to a diocesan-wide awareness of these special relations with other local churches. In addition, recognition by the diocesan authorities underlines the significance of these special contacts, which are distinguished by their continuity and variety.

In a letter sent in 2001 Bishop Dennis De Jong (†2003) of Ndola recalled his first encounter with Bishop Franz Kamphaus, who asked him if he had any particular wish, to which he replied: “I have no wishes. I have been invited by missio and the diocese of Limburg; all I wish is that we should share with one another our love for, and faith

in, Jesus.” All at once he felt the warmth generated by having found a brother and friend in Christ.

### **The universal Church means partnership**

“The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the followers of Christ”. This opening sentence of *Gaudium et spes* (the Pastoral Constitution of the Second Vatican Council), defines the framework within which universal Church business is conducted. The universal Church is a network of various local churches which maintain contact with one another. Every bishop, as the head of a local church, is ordained both to his diocese *and* to the universal Church. The ordaining of the bishop constitutes a bond between the local churches.

But the concept of the catholicity of our church also implies involvement. The word *catholic* comes from the Greek καθολικός (*katholikós*, from κατά *katá* ‘for sb.’s/sth’s ... sake’ and ὅλον *hólon* ‘the whole’), and means ‘concerning the whole’, ‘general’. To live a Catholic life means to live in a way that concerns the whole universal Church, which exists through the unity of faith in one God, but is also expressed in the relations between the local churches and their congregations with the whole of humankind.

The focus thus switches to the question of implementation. How and in what form can this contact find expression, and how exactly can this bond between the faithful and the other Church communities in our diocese – and indeed in the world – be experienced? In what way can joy and hope, grief and anxieties, be shared? How can one maintain a contact that bridges the gulf between rich and poor, insiders and outcasts? In a world of unjustly distributed resources, how can any attempt at intermingling, at initiating a dialogue between equals, at showing willingness to meet others half way in mutual respect and common humanity be successful?

The term “universal Church” refers to a partnership that is “gospel-inspired; mutually supportive; and devoted to prayer and study”. “These three pillars of the worldwide community of the faithful are what we may expect to find in a genuine partnership, if not always to the same extent. With this goal in mind, head, heart and hands

are all put to work to bring the partnership to life."<sup>69</sup> For a qualitative assessment of the term "partnership" it is essential that the three substantive dimensions be brought to life simultaneously: community of prayer, community of communication, and community of mutual support. Once this happens, we can talk about a universal Church learning community. This means, conversely, that in the absence of one of these three dimensions the relationship will not achieve the level of "partnership".

It should be mentioned at this point, though without going into any detail, that the term "partnership", indicating a type of association, may be defined variously and does not have the same connotations in every culture. In the Spanish-speaking world terms such as "hermandad" (fellowship) or "fraternidad" (fraternity) are better suited to describe the enhanced reality than the term "partnership".<sup>70</sup>

### How people can make partnerships live

In an accompanying letter to a delegation from his diocese of Ndola, which was visiting the diocese of Limburg at the time, Bishop Dennis De Jong wrote: "They are all longing to tell what God has done for them and eager to hear what God has done for you." Partnership is always a process in which people enter into a relationship and which develops openly as they get acquainted. People shape relationships, while Christians shape universal Church relations, not just as individuals, but also as members of the ecclesiastical community from which they hail or for which they stand and which they may also represent.

Living a partnership involves practical activity. It is above all the active verbs that describe this way of life involving universal Church interaction: start – set out – seek – dare – get involved – encounter – see – hear – taste – smell – expose oneself to risks – breathe – pray – marvel – admire – appreciate – sing. These concerned deeds that proceed from one partner and through personal interaction with others lead to further actions: rejoicing – mourning – hoping – taking courage – relating – informing – participating – accompanying –

<sup>69</sup> Cf. Sekretariat der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz, *Weltkirchliche Partnerschaften von Pfarreien und Diözesen. Leitlinien und Kontaktadressen*, loc. cit.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. Archbishop Edmundo Abastoflor Montero, La Paz, Bolivia, Symposium 8. June 2010 in Würzburg.

sharing responsibility – inviting – celebrating. The length of the list indicates that the shared life and the joint exertion are key moments in the relations – thinking and talking about partnership are not enough.

Partnership relations can be confirmed and approved by the resolutions of the responsible bodies and individuals who, in so doing, express their interest in them. But resolutions alone are not enough. Relations between partners must be filled with life and enriched with the experience of a fulfilled life, so that shared joy and hope, grief and anxieties, closeness and association may be experienced by those taking part.

The diocese of Limburg looks back with gratitude on its experience in the universal Church learning community. Thus participants in the Limburg-Kumbo partnership formulated in dialogical development a prayer which is now also used by people in other partnerships and is being increasingly translated into various local languages. It declares before God a determination to see differences, to bear witness to the common faith, and together to map out the common road ahead:

“[...] There is much that divides us, but more that unites us and leads us together into one big family. Together we are on the way to improving our mutual understanding, to seeing one another as sisters and brothers who are close to one another and ready to stand up for one another [...]”<sup>71</sup>

This spirituality characterizes the main attitude in the dialogue, in encounter tours and volunteer missions, in the comparing of notes on the changes in the pastoral development of the dioceses, and in the interest aroused when a development in a local church succeeds to the advantage of all through a sharing of the Bible and the life of the neighbourhood.

The communication channels in the age of the Internet, e-mails, blogs and short text messages have become denser than ever before. Essential to the growth of the partnership as network is that individual communication should be opened to the social context and inform it.

The learning community approach also involves mutual struggle, the understanding of different viewpoints, assessments and existing

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<sup>71</sup> Cf. [http://weltkirche.bistum-limburg.de/fileadmin/redaktion/Bereiche/weltkirche.bistum-limburg.de/bilder/Partnerschaftsgebetsseite/Deutsche\\_Version\\_allgemein.pdf](http://weltkirche.bistum-limburg.de/fileadmin/redaktion/Bereiche/weltkirche.bistum-limburg.de/bilder/Partnerschaftsgebetsseite/Deutsche_Version_allgemein.pdf), 17. April 2014.

interests. It requires trust, frankness and mutual esteem, for example when it comes to discussing different schemes for raising HIV/AIDS consciousness that are regarded as culturally divergent. When faced with project financing, a genuinely supportive community can surely openly discuss the interests and limitations involved without just making the decision dependent on the rich-poor hierarchy. In a dialogue between partners there is no point in papering over differences of opinion. Instead, the friction engendered by the joint search for truth can generate a warmth that can be used to fuel future joint efforts.

### **An intercultural journey to the inner self**

Moving forward in partnership (not "having" a partnership) means being open to what is new, different or unknown. This in turn means plunging into the life of the partner, scenting, hearing and tasting the other world with its sweaty exertions. Those who expose themselves to this reality and are prepared to give up the comfort of a room in the conference hall for three nights, or perhaps even longer, to be with people in their cramped quarters, sleeping, eating, living and ultimately dispensing with the truly superfluous, will find their eyes opened to entirely new perspectives. A reduction in the smog of our lives which surrounds us in the form of various agents that make our lives easier but are not really necessary to keep us alive, will open our eyes to the essentials.

These steps towards partnership may be compared with moving to the opposite bank of a river. Many people who have dared to take this step to the other bank have fallen in love with the other culture and way of life they have found there, a love they may retain for the rest of their days.

Those who visit the other side of the river and find themselves facing the various forms of a quite different way of living will be confronted inwardly with their former experiences on their "own" side of the river. This confrontation is concerned not with the "front" of the other side, which is seen as perverse and incomprehensible, but with the "con-", the putting together of heads, the bringing together of realities. Every time one looks back at the riverbank one has just left, one discovers that it suddenly looks different. The change of perspective caused by the switch to the point of view of the other side

gives rise to new insights concerning the circumstances of one's own life. While the view of one's own riverbank is different, the river of life is still the same reality.

What is important here is not the direct comparison, which is more of a helpful contrast medium and hence a way of reinforcing the realization. The insight into the realities of both one's own and the other bank is gained by exchanging views, thoughts and feedback, which generate learning experiences concerning one's own realities while at the same time enhancing the joys of dialogical togetherness. Those who manage to achieve such a change of perspective will find themselves wondering how human beings live. A Native American saying warns against hasty conclusions: "Great Spirit, save me from judging a man before I have walked a mile in his moccasins." Whoever changes perspective, whoever has walked the miles in the moccasins, will gain insights into his inner self which, after his return to his own riverbank, will make him see reality in a new light.

### **Companionship on the journey is a process**

The circumstances of the Church and the globalized world are subject to constant changes which give the learning communities cause for reflection. In the past fifteen years the diocese of Limburg has regularly presented reports on the development of the diocesan partnerships to its leading bodies for consideration and deliberation. Every three to four years they have paused to take stock and identify the changes and challenges to be faced in the coming period (specifying, where necessary, the resources to be employed). In the process, guidelines concerning quality standards were agreed upon, which in modified form are also transferable to parishes, associations and institutions.

This check has been followed since the last "audit" in 2011 by an attempt to draw up a partnership agreement for the partner dioceses. This involves deepening, together with our partners, our understanding of what partnership means and deriving from this a vision and a common mission for the coming years. Such a process incorporates the positive developments in our relations and experiences as they have evolved over time and celebrates what has been achieved. In January 2013 Bishop George Nkuo of Kumbo had this to say: "We not only believe that our partnership is a fruitful and vital one, we know that it is from the experience of the last 25 years."

The aim – elaborated in a joint workshop – of the next stage in the universal fellowship is based on a review of the shared spiritual posture and an analysis of the challenges involved, while making allowance for the circumstances of our future collaboration. After further years of partnership it is intended to hold a joint review to establish whether dialogical togetherness has succeeded, for example “[...] in enabling us to support one another in an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect, and to mutually enrich one another through the exchange of socio-cultural, economic and human values while retaining our own identities”.<sup>72</sup> In this process, too, doing is of crucial significance: inform – introduce – understand – reflect – consider – examine – preserve – know – pick up – pass on – show are only some of the words of doing that are relevant here.

We are glad that this method of continuously developing relations by means of this kind of exchange has proved its worth in practice. New people are recruited, others leave the relationship; external changes challenge one or both partners and call for answers; a change of bishop or responsible coordinator, crises affecting people and churches, require attentive monitoring at every level. External circumstances can also affect relations, such as the reconstruction of Sarajevo after the war; Zambia’s debt burden; or the typhoons in Alaminos.

Partnership, being a process, requires the involvement of people in positions of authority or expertise so as to ensure continuity.

### **Milestones that move**

When I look back at the partnership events of recent years in our diocese and in those of our partners, I see the workings of the Holy Spirit among us:

- The hospitality I have received from partners in this country and abroad testifies to Christian love of one’s neighbour and a desire to share.
- A partnership prayer that has evolved between Kumbo and Limburg, is put to music in Zambia and translated into Tagalog and Serbo-Croat.
- The German Catholic Youth Association (BDKJ) and the

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<sup>72</sup> Cf. Limburg-Ndola Partnership Agreement, 2012.

Volunteer Service Centre and their partners do not let themselves be discouraged by the repeated refusal of the German embassies to grant volunteers from Zambia or Cameroon visas for a reverse service and do all they can to ensure that the project succeeds in the end.

- Partners are invited on the occasion of anniversaries or personnel changes in the episcopate; condolences are exchanged in the event of bereavements; and, when disasters occur, solidarity and aid are forthcoming and public interest is aroused. Moments like these give *Gaudium et spes* a face.
- During the Balkan wars the Bishop of Limburg found his way into besieged Sarajevo and assured his fellow bishop: "We won't leave you in the lurch. Sarajevo shall not die!"
- Among the 21.4 million signatures for debt relief for the poorest countries submitted to the Cologne summit of the G8 in 1999 Bishop Dennis De Jong discovered petition lists from Zambia, written in Bemba.
- A parish which terminated its partnership, because it was no longer able to sustain the levels of communication and solidarity in the learning community, nevertheless resolved to continue mutual prayers.
- Staff at the Caritas advise centres in Sarajevo and Frankfurt to hold monthly video conferences at which they exchange tips, thus mutually improving their performance.
- Those involved in the Filipino partnership meet the Filipinos in German society and seek contact with their cultural centres in this country.
- Inspired by the Lumko method of Bible sharing, pro-bono and full-time pastoral workers in the Limburg diocese are practising how to form new local church communities.
- A priest of the universal Church, who lives and studies among us, was invited to hold the first spiritual exercises for a diocesan committee.
- Via the Limburg diocesan fair-trade campaign "Eine Welt fairstärken" the diocese of Alaminos and the Filipino children's charity PREDA (People's Recovery Empowerment Development Assistance) discovered each other and launched joint activities against child abuse.

## A final word

The present overhaul of the pastoral structure of the Church in Germany has awakened a new interest in discovering the universal Church in the form of a learning community. Participation in the life of one's partners and their Christian ways of life, whether in the ecclesiastical community or in the socio-economic dimensions of their societies, promises new insights that can give light and direction to us in Germany.

Such a step requires that we leave our side of the river and give ourselves over to a world that is physically, mentally and spiritually different. Participation also involves giving. To exchange our gifts in the one universal Church we have to give and take. The practice of sharing in the Church learning community involves the whole person and is holistic in its effect.

If this sharing is to become typical of the "life of the Church" in Germany, the experience must not be allowed to become the exclusive province of a few individualists, but must reach out to and involve people from all spheres of the life of the Church. Metaphorically speaking, the universal Church learning community must not remain limited to a piece of the Church pie, but must become a slice of the whole pie, determining the taste of every piece.

Partnership work must not be exclusive, but inviting, if it is to grow, thrive and flourish. This goes for the participating individuals of various generations, for all agencies and subdivisions of the Church, and also for the content and themes which, within the framework of the partnership, enrich and enliven the dialogue.

The partnership which, as the universal Church learning community, exists in the three dimensions of prayer, communication and solidarity, is not a programme or a procedure; it is an attitude in the Christian fellowship that brings together people, their faith-based communities, and their local churches. In this respect, friendship and trust in the workings of the Holy Spirit there will always be inspiring moments of astonishment and gratitude for seeing, "... what God has done for us, and ... an eagerness to hear what God has done for you." (Dennis de Jong)

And is still doing.



# **The Universal Church as a Community of Faith**



# Intercultural translation as a “law of evangelisation”

Michael Sievernich

*The message to be believed is a story to be told.  
Unless people hear it, they cannot be expected to believe it.  
Who except us, who are within the community of faith,  
can tell the world about Jesus Christ the Redeemer?*

Cardinal Avery Dulles<sup>73</sup>

From the humblest of beginnings in the Middle East the Church spread its influence via an expansionist global mission before assuming its current guise as the Catholic universal Church. At the dawn of the 21st century the world's largest religious community numbered over 1.2 billion members, which equates to 17.5 per cent of the global population. The signs indicate continued growth on all continents, despite the fact that, in Germany, the absolute figures are declining for demographic and cultural reasons (diminishing birth rates and chronic secularism respectively). However, reverse tendencies prevail in other parts of the universal Church. Taking figures from the 2011 edition of the Statistical Yearbook of the Church as a basis,<sup>74</sup> it becomes apparent that almost half of all Catholics (49 per cent) reside in the two Americas (North and South), making this continent the one in which the universal Church is numerically strongest. In contrast, the growth zones lie primarily in the southern hemisphere. The Church in Africa has experienced the most rapid growth with the Catholic section of the population expanding twice as fast as the population as a whole.

Europe is home to approximately a quarter (24 per cent) of all Catholics, while 16 per cent live in Africa and around 11 per cent

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<sup>73</sup> Dulles, Avery, *Evangelization for the Third Millennium*, New York 2009, 90.

<sup>74</sup> *Annuario statisticum Ecclesiae, Ecclesia Catholica / Statistical Yearbook of the Church*, Città del Vaticano 2013.

reside in Asia, the world's most densely populated continent. In the two latter continents the Catholic Church is experiencing dynamic growth, but is also subject to persecution. In Asia, with the exception of the Philippines, the Catholics form small minorities, a diaspora situation which gives them a concomitant missionary focus, essential elements of which include the appeal of the belief in Jesus Christ, the convincing lifestyle and the associated pastoral commitment. The number of priests and seminarians, and members of religious orders is also increasing in global terms, the losses in the North (Europe and North America) being compensated by growth in the South.

### Modest beginnings

The universal Church in its present dimension was able to emerge and establish itself across all cultures because its universal message, the Gospel (= Good News), transcended all geographical, ethnic and social boundaries and created a new religious narrative including all peoples, in which existing differences are eliminated in a mystic unity, "for you are all one in Christ Jesus".<sup>75</sup>

This story appears in all four Gospels, each of which culminates in a new beginning, namely the universal mission of the Risen One, who dispatches his disciples "to Earth's remotest end"<sup>76</sup> in order to spread the Good News. This removal of boundaries marks the start of global evangelisation „proclaimed to the whole world as evidence to the nations"<sup>77</sup>. Having begun in the two cities of Jerusalem and Antioch, the dissolution of boundaries spread initially to Greece and Anatolia. The paths of this diffusion included the capillary method in the familial and neighbourly spheres and via mobile professional groups, and the professional method employed by missionaries such as Paul and his colleagues. In both cases, however, small religious communities played a decisive role, particularly the houses which had converted to Christianity, presided over by women like Lydia, the first female Christian in Europe.<sup>78</sup> These house churches functioned simultaneously as mission stations and

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<sup>75</sup> Gal 3:28.

<sup>76</sup> Acts 1:8.

<sup>77</sup> Mt 24:14.

<sup>78</sup> Acts 16:14-15.

were responsible for the creation of urban networks.<sup>79</sup> The appeal of the Good News to men and women, rich and poor and, later, the new pro-Christian religious policy pursued by the emperors from Constantine the Great onwards promoted the growth of Christianity, which, by the close of the 4th century, counted among its converts half of the population of the Roman Empire, estimated at over 50 million individuals.

The social constellation established by Christianity as a religious community from the very outset is of crucial importance. Believers do not stand isolated next to one another, but live within a community-based structure consisting of four levels which shape its ecclesiology to this day: the community of faith which gathers for common worship<sup>80</sup>; the community of faith which meets regularly in a house for liturgy and social welfare work<sup>81</sup>; the community of faith within a city<sup>82</sup> and the Church in its entirety, symbolised by the Body of Christ.<sup>83</sup> All four social forms are described as the Church (*ekklesia*) in the New Testament; none can exist alone. The universal Church has its roots in communities of faith at all levels, and it continues to pass down and consummate these fundamental concepts to this day. Following in the spirit of Anselm of Canterbury, who proclaimed that "faith seeks understanding" (*fides quaerens intellectum*), one could also reformulate his words and state that faith seeks community (*fides quaerens communitatem*). The faithful can also always derive certainty from the community of the Church, "that one remembering subject", comparable to the certainty of the individual who stands as a believer before God.<sup>84</sup> The momentum of the early stages and the transmission of the faith across time and space were the produce of the Church in its function as collective memory; we stand in its debt.

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<sup>79</sup> Cf. Klauck, Hans-Josef, *Gemeinde – Amt – Sakrament. Neutestamentliche Perspektiven*, Würzburg 1989, 11-129.

<sup>80</sup> 1 Cor 11:18.

<sup>81</sup> Rom 16:5.

<sup>82</sup> 1 Cor 1:2.

<sup>83</sup> Col 1:24.

<sup>84</sup> Encyclical Letter "Lumen Fidei" of the Supreme Pontiff Francis to the Bishops, Priests and Deacons, Consecrated Persons and the Lay Faithful on Faith, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20130629\\_enciclica-lumen-fidei.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20130629_enciclica-lumen-fidei.html), no. 38.

## Global propagation

The mission's second phase, which was described at the time by the use of such terms as "Propagation of Faith" (*propagatio fidei*) or "Preaching among the People" (*praedicatio gentium*), lasted approximately a thousand years (500–1500). During the course of this long period, two major missionary movements evolved in the West and East which were on par in terms of motivation and audacity in their bid to make the Gospel known. At this time, the West with its indigenous populations and migrant Germanic tribes witnessed the Christianisation of Europe. Only passing reference can be made here of its varied history, which resulted in the establishment of churches in all European cultures.<sup>85</sup> The religious shift in the Christianisation of Europe, which occurred in the manner typical of the gentile religion, i.e. top-down, led to what was expressed in modern language, an inculturation of the Gospel and an evangelisation of cultures, from which the Christian Occident with Latin as its liturgical and scholarly language emerged.

Parallel to this development in the West, the East also saw the evolution of the Christian faith via oriental Christianity, particularly through the Baghdad-based Apostolic Church of the East with its Syrian liturgy. This movement was initially sustained by Christian traders before subsequently passing into the hands of professional missionaries, e.g. monks and (married) priests, who advanced to Asia via the Silk Road network and founded Christian communities and monasteries in Central Asia, India and China. This missionary church was organised into no less than 200 dioceses, in which a rich selection of translated Christian texts emerged in colloquial languages. In the era of the Chinese Tang dynasty, which was contemporaneous with the Carolingian period, the Emperor's tolerant religious attitudes permitted the spread of the "luminous religion", or "*jingjiao*", as Christianity was termed.<sup>86</sup>

The advent of the modern era witnessed the third phase, in which perspectives altered. Successfully missionised, Europe itself adopted missionary aspirations. In the West, the Christianisation of the two

<sup>85</sup> Cf. Padberg, Lutz E. von, *Die Christianisierung Europas im Mittelalter*, Stuttgart 1998. Stiegemann, Christoph; Kroker, Martin; Walter, Wolfgang, *Credo. Christianisierung Europas im Mittelalter*, 2 volumes, Petersberg 2013.

<sup>86</sup> Cf. Hage, Wolfgang, *Das orientalische Christentum*, Stuttgart 2007, 269-313. Malek, Roman, *Jingjiao. The Church of the East in China and Central Asia*, Nettetal 2006.

Americas was pursued from the early 16th century onwards. In both cases, this process was burdened by colonial conquest and land seizure, despite the fact that missionaries including Bartolomé de Las Casas fought for the rights and dignity of the Indians. Thousands of the missionaries sent out came from the religious orders, primarily Franciscans, Augustinians, Dominicans and Jesuits, who established Indian communities of faith and gave the Church sustainable roots.

The missionary initiatives in Eastern Asia, India, the Indochina Peninsula (Vietnam, Siam), South-East Asia, China and Japan contrasted with the above, as missionary work was free of any ties with colonisation. Here the missionaries acted in accordance with the principles of acculturation (accommodation) to the existing high cultures. The Cologne-born Jesuit, Adam Schall von Bell, who headed the imperial Astronomical Office in his role as high official (mandarin), ranked among the great missionaries. In addition to the study of languages, crafts, architecture, the arts (music, visual arts) and sciences, important vehicles for missionary work in America and Asia included personal friendships and successful communities.

Large-scale missionary activities in sub-Saharan Africa did not begin until the 19th century and they clashed with the efforts of Protestant missionary societies, resulting in denominational rivalry. Unfortunately, Christianisation was once more burdened by the weight of European colonialism, the countries involved dividing up Africa between them. The influential intellectual and financial participation of lay people in the new missionary societies provided fresh impetus. A prominent figure was Heinrich Hahn from Aachen. A doctor and member of the German parliament, the Reichstag, he founded the Francis Xavier Society (1832), which has now become the Pontifical Mission Society *missio*; his beatification is currently pending in Rome.<sup>87</sup>

## Intercultural translation

Globalisation is heralding a further phase of missionary propagation of the faith in a new guise, which finds expression in Pope Francis' Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium* (2013). Irrespective

<sup>87</sup> Congregatio de Causis Sanctorum, Beatificationis et canonizationis servi Dei Henrici Hahn christifidelis laici et patrisfamilias (1800-1882) positio super vita, virtutibus et fama sanctitatis, Roma 2012.

of the era of Christianisation or the cultural area, however, the fundamental question which always arises is that of translation. On the one hand, this includes the linguistic translation of standard Christian texts such as the Bible, the liturgy and the catechism, while, on the other, it also concerns translation into the respective cultural areas with their traditions, symbols and social and artistic means of expression. "From the beginning of her history the Church has learned to express the message of Christ with the help of the ideas and terminology of various philosophers, and has tried to clarify it with their wisdom, too. Her purpose has been to adapt the Gospel to the grasp of all as well as to the needs of the learned." This customisation gradually became the "law of all evangelisation".<sup>88</sup> As a result, linguistic and culturally adapted translation is also one of the current challenges faced by the Church in its quest to make Christianity accessible in the languages and cultures of the late modern age. Although linguistic translation may be a matter for specialists, cultural translation is the province of the Church itself, by living out the faith appropriately and lending it cultural expression.<sup>89</sup>

The essentially missionary nature of Christianity and the Church means that they both faced, and continue to face, the challenge of translation in the broadest sense. The German term for „translation“ (*Übersetzung*) has two meanings. When the third syllable is emphasised, translation signifies the process of transferring a text into another language. When the first syllable is stressed, it refers to the act of transporting someone by ferry from one side of a stretch of water to the other. Thus it is, in a twofold sense, a matter of the linguistic translation of Christian texts and the cultural passage to other countries, as Paul arranged a passage from Anatolia to Europe (Greece).<sup>90</sup>

The continual process of re-translation into other languages and within other cultures thus constitutes a typical feature of the Christian mission, which triggers intercultural learning processes and seeks reciprocal communication. The textualisation of the New Testament

<sup>88</sup> The Second Vatican Council, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vatii\\_cons\\_19651207\\_gaudium-et-spes\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vatii_cons_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html), no. 44.

<sup>89</sup> Cf. Sievernich, Michael, *Die christliche Mission. Geschichte und Gegenwart*, Darmstadt 2009, 187-203. Burke, Peter; Hsia, Ronnie Po-chia, *Cultural translation in Early Modern Europe*, Cambridge 2007.

<sup>90</sup> Cf. Acts 16:9-11.

in itself represents a translation process, as the authors chose neither Jesus' native language (Aramaic) nor the language of the people of Israel (Hebrew), but instead Koine, the common version of Greek spoken in Hellenistic antiquity in the Eastern Mediterranean. Shortly afterwards, St. Jerome translated the entire Bible into Latin (the Vulgate), thus making it accessible across the entire Roman Empire. Since then, the flow of translations of the Bible and other ecclesiastical texts from the liturgy, doctrine, catechesis and pastoral and moral fields has not ceased, with peaks being reached in the early modern age (American and Asian languages) and in the 19th and 20th centuries (African and Australasian languages).

Likewise, cultural translation processes within Christianity have since burgeoned; they are now grouped together under the neologism of inculturation and are swiftly moving towards interculturality. Both the linguistic and cultural translation processes are characterised by mutual enrichment, manifested in particular in architectural, scientific and artistic works, including music.<sup>91</sup> The world's linguistic and cultural spaces are thus becoming resonating cavities for Christianity, which is consequently growing in global plausibility as it reinterprets and redesigns those same spaces. As a result, the world becomes a "translation space" for Christianity, which is, in turn, transformed into an interpretative space for the world. This synthesis, which unites immanence and transcendence, provides God, as he communicates through Christ and the Holy Spirit, with a space in which the communities of brothers and sisters can live, celebrate and pass on their faith.

### **The religious community of the universal Church**

The globalisation of Christianity, which goes hand in hand with a process of global localisation, opens up cultural spaces and gives them mutual access.<sup>92</sup> As a result, local churches are able to assume responsibility for one another on the grounds of their ecclesiological unity as guaranteed by the Petrine ministry. What image of itself does the universal Church, born of its mission, now convey? Does it

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<sup>91</sup> For example: O'Malley, John W. et al., *The Jesuits. Cultures, Sciences, and the Arts, 1540–1773*, Toronto 1999.

<sup>92</sup> Cf. Reinhard, Wolfgang, *Globalisierung des Christentums?, Schriften der Phil.-hist. Klasse der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften*, vol. 41, Heidelberg 2007.

express what the “Spirit is saying to the churches” (*ekklésiais*)<sup>93</sup> in the present?

Those observing how the universal Church presents itself in Germany as a community of faith are confronted with a broad spectrum which reveals the personal and institutional aspects of the global community of faith. If we look first at the individuals, it is quite clear that Catholics with native languages other than German have been living among us for decades. The religious testimony of approximately 400 native-language communities from 30 linguistic groups, the majority of whom come from Poland, Croatia, Italy and the Iberian countries, gives Germans metaphorical food for thought, as this international Catholicism attests to the ubiquitous presence of the Holy Spirit and the one faith of the Church, whose roots are spread throughout the world. In a city such as Frankfurt am Main, for example, Church services are celebrated in 25 languages each Sunday, and the city’s cathedral is regularly filled to overflowing when the Croatian Catholics celebrate the liturgy at 12 noon.

The ministry of countless foreign priests, over half of whom originate from Poland and India, can be attributed more to pastoral need than to universal Church liberalism. These priests, who number over 1,300, are based in many dioceses, constituting more than ten per cent of the clergy in cities such as Augsburg, Munich, Bamberg and Cologne. They ensure that pastoral care is improved and give the universal Church a distinct profile.<sup>94</sup> Numerous religious orders have in the meantime taken on an international dimension and are now accepting members from other countries and other parts of the globe. They live and experience an intercultural community of faith, although they are not entirely spared problems of inculturation. The same situation applies to the astonishingly large number of foreign, usually female religious orders which have been established in Germany. Over 50 orders are now based there. Rooted in European, Asian and African countries, they have joined forces in the Association of Catholic Orders to Promote International Solidarity (*Vereinigung katholischer Orden zur Förderung der internationalen Solidarität*). Numerous spiritual movements are now also organised at the inter-

<sup>93</sup> Rev 2:7.

<sup>94</sup> Gabriel, Karl; Leibold, Stefan; Achtermann, Rainer, *Die Situation ausländischer Priester in Deutschland*, Forum Weltkirche: Entwicklung und Frieden, no. 13, Ostfildern 2011.

national level, thus reflecting the multi-faceted nature of the universal Church and its spiritual power.

Just as the missionaries from the religious orders communicate their experiences of the universal Church, so the large numbers of young people within the international Catholic Volunteer Network expand their horizons and those of their communities. One example of this trend is the MaZ programme (Missionar(in) auf Zeit, or Voluntary Service for Missionaries) financed by the religious orders, which sends out missionaries in accordance with the principle of participation in the lives, prayer and work of communities abroad. Volunteers are subsequently called upon to share their experiences in their local churches after they return; the programme enables them to experience the global community of faith beyond the borders of their own church. That the universal Church is a community of faith is reflected in institutional terms in the church aid organisations, for example in the two major German missionary societies, *missio* Aachen and *missio* München (Munich), which date back to the 19th century. Today, these organisations provide local churches in Africa, Asia and Oceania with valuable aid aimed at the promotion of self-help in the contexts of pastoral care and training. They also foster universal religious exchange. The *Bischöfliche Aktion adveniat* (*Episcopal Action adveniat*) performs similar work in Latin America.

As the world's largest government co-funded aid organisation, the Episcopal relief organisation *MISEREOR* promotes sustainable development cooperation with ecclesiastical and non-ecclesiastical partners, thus emphasising that the community of faith would be implausible without a pastoral dimension. All the religious missionary organisations, including *Renovabis* in Eastern Europe, *St. Ansgarwerk* in Scandinavia, *Kirche in Not* (*Church in Need*), *Caritas International* and the children's and young people's campaign *Sternsinger* (*Carol Singers*), thus illustrate how a community of faith is united in solidarity with its sister churches across the world. As a result, this fellowship is expressed with the humanity underscored so pertinently by the Council in its Church Constitutions.<sup>95</sup> Last but by no means least,

<sup>95</sup> Cf. the Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church - *Lumen Gentium* [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vatii\\_const\\_19641121\\_lumen-gentium\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vatii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html), no. 1; the Second Vatican Council, "The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et spes*", [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vatii\\_cons\\_19651207\\_gaudium-et-spes\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vatii_cons_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html), no. 1. For the humanitarian context, cf. Delgado, Mariano, Die

universal Church unity is demonstrated most clearly in the numerous initiatives at the diocesan and parish level, such as the thousands of committees dedicated to MEF (*Mission, Entwicklung und Frieden*, or *Mission, Development and Peace*) and in the universal Church partnerships forged by the same dioceses and parishes.

### Models of a community of faith

A community of faith acting on a worldwide scale requires guiding principles. Various biblical models of evangelisation demonstrate the diversity which can be useful for the structuring and animation of the community in faith. The models should not be regarded as alternatives, but denote instead metaphorical focal points which shape the community of faith in its respective context.<sup>96</sup>

- \* The *St. Stephen model* has its biblical origins in the story of Christianity's first martyr,<sup>97</sup> emphasising the personal witness of an individual who, by dint of his moral conduct, behaviour, piety and the undaunted communication of his faith, proclaims "what fills the heart."<sup>98</sup>
- \* Like Peter's first sermon at Pentecost,<sup>99</sup> the *Proclamation model* is concerned with the express proclamation which presupposes that the power of the Holy Spirit is ubiquitous.
- \* The *Jerusalem model*<sup>100</sup> refers to church worship and prayer in addition to the sharing of resources, which makes a community of faith both appealing and radiate with generosity.
- \* The *Loaves and Fishes model* refers to Jesus' healing of the sick and feeding of the four thousand,<sup>101</sup> thus calling attention to the healing powers of the faith and to acts of compassion. The model is concerned with a commitment to social welfare

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Menschheitsfamilie oder die Mystik des Konzils, in: Delgado, Mariano; Sievernich, Michael, *Die großen Metaphern des Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzils*. Ihre Bedeutung heute, Freiburg im Breisgau 2013, 422-443.

<sup>96</sup> Byerly, Timothy E., *The Great Commission. Models of Evangelization in American Catholicism*, New York 2000. We refer to this book at this juncture, but present the models in a different order.

<sup>97</sup> Acts 7:54-60.

<sup>98</sup> Lk 6:45.

<sup>99</sup> Acts 2:14-41.

<sup>100</sup> Acts 2:42-47.

<sup>101</sup> Mt 15:29-38.

expressed in the provision of immediate aid and the demand for the upholding of human rights and social justice.

These models describe the core tasks of witness, worship and service which are vital to the Church. These essential functions are performed wherever a community of faith exists, and, conversely, community (*koinonia*) emerges when they are present. Community-forming factors play a central role in two further models:

- \* The *Fraternity model* makes biblical reference to the appointment of the Twelve Apostles,<sup>102</sup> thereby emphasising the significance of small communities of faith, which exist today in the form of associations, new spiritual communities and small Christian communities (basic ecclesial communities) with a mission.
- \* The *Areopagus model* refers back to the sermon delivered by Paul at the Areopagus in Athens.<sup>103</sup> It is concerned with the encounter with human culture and the lasting inculturation of Christianity, which is confronted by a continual series of new challenges, for example that which exists at the present in the light of the cultural shift in today's new urban world.<sup>104</sup>

Personal witness and public proclamation, Church worship and prayer, care and compassion constitute the three core Church principles which emanate from the community of faith and, in turn, lead back to it. This is evinced by all fundamental forms of ecclesia, from small prayer communities to the polymorphous community of faith of the universal Church.

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<sup>102</sup> Mk 3:3-19.

<sup>103</sup> Acts 17:16-34.

<sup>104</sup> For more on this topic, cf. Sievernich, Michael; Wenzel, Knut, *Aufbruch in die Urbanität. Theologische Reflexionen kirchlichen Handelns in der Stadt*, Quaestiones disputatae, no. 252, Freiburg im Breisgau 2013.



# Religious Missionaries and the Universal Church in Germany

Martin Üffing

An essential characteristic of the Divine Word Missionaries (Society of the Divine Word, SVD) today is interculturality. The order's last General Chapter took the theme "Of all Nations, Peoples and Languages: Sharing Intercultural Life and Intercultural Mission."<sup>105</sup> Interculturality itself is interpreted as missionary witness. Assignments performed by intercultural missionary teams make the universal Church more tangible.

The SVD first realised in 1990 during a meeting of its European provincial superiors held in Roscommon, Ireland, that a new social, cultural and religious constellation had emerged in Europe which posed enormous challenges for the Church. Europe was regarded as a place of mission, and the consensus was that the Superior General be requested to take the SVD communities of this continent into consideration when distributing the first mission assignments.<sup>106</sup>

Now, 23 years later, over 200 Divine Word missionaries from other continents including Asia and Africa work in Europe. They give the Divine Word missionaries in Europe a young, multicultural image and exert a decisive influence on the society.

However, the presence of non-European missionaries, who are entrusted with pastoral ministry and play an active role in parish life, should not be attributed merely to the declining numbers of vocations in Europe. Their arrival not only serves to fill vacant posts, but is also the result of a new understanding and practice of mission by the Church.

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<sup>105</sup> Cf. *Im Dialog mit dem Wort* (IDW) no. 11, September 2012 (SVD publication, Generalate – Rome).

<sup>106</sup> Cf. on this subject, Üffing, Martin, *Missionar-sein in Europa*, in: Üffing, *Mission seit dem Konzil*, Sankt Augustin 2013, 177-219.

In the past, missionaries left Europe to proclaim the Gospel on other continents. Today it is clear that some individuals and groups living in Europe are unaware of Jesus Christ. This is why the European sections of SVD are concerned with evangelisation.

Europe is now a pluralistic continent in every respect. It is multifarious as far as its diversity of cultures, religions and secular ideologies is concerned as well as in terms of the many and varied antagonistic positions relating to family and social ethics. Europe is also a continent greatly influenced by globalisation and the fragmentation it has caused. There is no need to leave Germany to notice the large number of social groups excluded by the materialistic religion of trade and consumerism. It is within this context of pluralism, contradiction and injustice that the Divine Word missionaries are questioning the relevance of their mission. However, they are not the only ones to have pinpointed missionary challenges in Europe and in Germany.<sup>107</sup>

### **International religious life in Germany**

Germany is currently home to approximately 1,900 members of religious orders from other countries. Several of them belong to congregations which have consolidated to form the DOK (Deutsche Ordensobernkonferenz or German Conference of Superiors of Religious Orders) while others belong to the VKO (Vereinigung Katholischer Orden zur Förderung internationaler Solidarität e.V. or Association of Catholic Orders for the Promotion of International Solidarity).

Overseas orders in Germany are organised within the VKO as an independent registered association so that they can operate legally. This is particularly important for the conclusion of employment contracts. The majority of sisters and brothers in Christ belonging to the VKO live in extremely homogeneous communities (Indian, Nigerian, Polish, Croatian, Korean etc.) within a German environment. They came to Germany at the invitation of German bishops or ecclesiastical institutions in order to work in homes for the elderly and in hospitals and to perform pastoral ministry.

There are other international communities in which intercultural activities among their members are intended and deliberately fostered.

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<sup>107</sup> Cf. Arnoldus Nota (SVD Generalate), Rome, May 2013, 1-3.

In terms of their foundation and charisma these communities are often expressly missionary institutions with a focus on internationality. Missionary evangelisation is an essential characteristic of these communities as well as being a crucial feature of their internal activities and of the practical realisation of their mission in various contexts. Other communities have also become increasingly international and global in the wake of the Second Vatican Council, which emphasised the missionary dimension of the Church and the missionary duty of all Christians. After the Second Vatican Council these communities established branches overseas, becoming culturally more diverse as a result. Nonetheless, the term “mission” continued to be interpreted geographically in the post-Council era, construed and practised as a one-way street leading from the West to the remainder of the world.

Irrespective of the nature of, or motives for, internationality in the congregations and communities, which has been practised to a greater or lesser degree, an increasingly international approach remains a significant opportunity and a challenge. It goes without saying that internationality is not automatic. Genuinely international communities must be deliberately created, carefully mentored and cautiously advanced, all of which requires considerable openness and flexibility in terms of staff and structures. Internationality initially entails a certain degree of disorder within a lifestyle in which order is of the essence (religious order). A truly international community is distinguished by recognition of other cultures, the respect paid to cultural differences and the promotion of healthy intercultural exchange. Wherever members of religious orders from different countries succeed in living together in harmony, their international communities can send out a strong signal of the dawning Kingdom of God, in which “there can be neither Jew nor Greek, there can be neither slave nor freeman, there can be neither male nor female - for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”<sup>108</sup>

### **Missionaries today**

The term “mission” serves to describe a wide range of activities. Hence it is important that religious missionaries should be aware of their order’s specific charisma. The question of the locations and types of mission pursued by the SVD in Germany is thus a pertinent

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<sup>108</sup> Gal 3:28.

one. The place of mission is always outside ourselves and demands that we transcend limits in order to reach it. It is not a question of preserving the structures that are in place but of being prepared to embark on new projects in situations requiring an initial proclamation of the Gospel and of a creative invigoration of what already exists in this new context.

This is how the term “missionaries” is interpreted here. It refers to women and men active outside their native countries, who thus contribute to universal Church solidarity and cooperation.

In 1910, two thirds of all Christian missionaries were Europeans. By 2010, this figure had shrunk to approximately one third. In 1910, half of all European missionaries worked in Asia. However, this number declined drastically as the influence of the colonial powers waned. Today, the majority of European missionaries work in Europe itself. The number of European missionaries sent overseas has been in decline since 1970, while over the same period more and more missionaries from other continents have found their way to Europe. Most of the missionaries from Africa and Asia are active on their own continents, although their presence in Europe is increasing steadily.<sup>109</sup>

To illustrate my point, 34 of the 100 members of the German community of Divine Word missionaries (SVD) aged below 70 in 2014 come from Germany, while 66 were born in other countries. The biggest groups of confreres from 12 other nations are those from Poland (17) and Indonesia (14) followed by the Philippines and India with Ghana, Slovakia, the Congo and Vietnam bringing up the rear. A further 15 missionaries in training come from eight other countries.<sup>110</sup>

The growth of Christianity in countries in the southern hemisphere has led to a reversal of the Christian missionary movement. Although the West continues to initiate missionary projects directed at “the rest of the world”, a steadily growing number of missionary movements are now taking the opposite path. The broad missionary movement has not come to a standstill but is now moving in all directions. Activities are targeted at all continents and responsibility increasingly lies with people from the South. This is true of all the Christian churches. The

<sup>109</sup> Kim, Kirsteen, *Missionaries Sent and Received*, in: Johnson, Todd M.; Ross, Kenneth R., *Atlas of Global Christianity 1910-2010*, Edinburgh 2009, 274-275.

<sup>110</sup> SVD Catalogus, SVD Generalate, Rome 2014.

“Second International Congress on World Evangelisation” came to the following conclusion: “‘Mission’ as a movement which emanates exclusively from the ‘older’ churches has ceased to exist and can no longer be revived [...] Each regional church is missionary and must have a missionary focus [...] It is individually responsible for its own missions and jointly responsible for the missions of all its sister churches. Each regional church must, within the limits of its powers, share the gifts it has with others, depending on the needs of the other churches, for the benefit of the mission for all humanity, for the life of the world [...] The Spirit of the Lord calls upon all people and every culture to respond creatively to the biblical message.”<sup>111</sup> Forms of Christianity influenced by Asian, Latin American and African practices in all their diversity and different contexts can serve as role models for the Western world in creating a new, holistic form of religion and the Christian faith.

The paradigm shift from Western to universal Church has also become tangible in changes in the personal realm. According to Karl Rahner’s pivotal theological interpretation of the Second Vatican Council<sup>112</sup>, the Council was, “in an initial, tentative attempt to find itself, the first official self-realisation of the Church as a universal Church<sup>113</sup>.” While the Council itself constituted no more than a first, decisive step towards a universal Church (preparations for which had naturally taken place before the Council), developments over the course of the past fifty years confirm Rahner’s theory. “For the first time in history the Council was attended by bishops from all continents representing the various languages and peoples of the world [...] It completed a shift from Western to universal Church, from a Church with a strongly European focus to a Church rooted in different cultures [...]”<sup>114</sup>

Be that as it may, the question is whether Western churches are prepared to seize the opportunities that are right on their doorsteps. Is the German Church ready not only to accept “missionaries” from the southern hemisphere, but also to let itself be influenced and revived

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<sup>111</sup> Rosales, Gaudencio; Arévalo, Catalino G., *For All the People of Asia*, vol. 1, Manila 1997, 130.

<sup>112</sup> Rahner, Karl, *Zukunft der Kirche*, in: Rahner, *Schriften zur Theologie*, vol. XIV, Zurich, Einsiedeln, Cologne 1980, 287-302.

<sup>113</sup> *ibid*, 288.

<sup>114</sup> Sekretariat der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz, *Allen Völkern Sein Heil. Die Mission der Weltkirche*. 23. September 2004, Die deutschen Bischöfe, no. 76, Bonn 2004, 33.

by them, by their cultural context and their concepts of Christian life? Hollenweger once said: "Christians in Britain for many years prayed for revival, and when it came they did not recognise it because it was black."<sup>115</sup> There may well be analogies in other contexts. Prayers have long been said in monasteries for a renewal of religious life, but genuine internationality and multiculturalism remains difficult to achieve. European Christians frequently expect their brothers and sisters from the South to adjust to their new surroundings so well that they become "little Europeans". But that precludes all processes of renewal from the outset. It goes without saying that "church workers" who come to Germany from other parts of the world are required to familiarise themselves with the local culture as well as with local ecclesiastical and religious contexts. It is also self-evident that they must learn the local language. However, it cannot simply be a question of them filling the gaps created by the lack of "fresh blood" in dioceses and religious orders without being able to contribute something of their own backgrounds and experiences of Christianity and Church life.

Here again, mission must be understood as dialogue. Dialogue is, above all, a way of acting, a stance and a mindset which guides behaviour. It involves the demonstration of courtesy, respect and hospitality towards others. It leaves room for the identity of others, their ways of expression and their values. "Dialogue is thus the norm and the necessary strategy which should be adopted by every form of Christian mission and it applies to each of its aspects, be it simple presence, witness, service or proclamation. Mission which is not infused with this spirit of dialogue runs counter to the demands of authentic humanity and contravenes Gospel doctrine."<sup>116</sup> The Church is an integral part of God's mission, which assumed historical form in the person of Jesus Christ and is inspired by the Spirit of God. The aim of this divine mission is the establishment of the Kingdom of God.<sup>117</sup>

<sup>115</sup> Cf. Vethanayagamony, Peter, *Mission from the Rest to the West*, in: Kalu, Ogbu U. et al., *Mission after Christendom*, Louisville, KY 2010, 62-69.

<sup>116</sup> *Ecclesia Catholica / Secretariat pro Non-Christianis, Die Haltung der Kirche gegenüber den Anhängern anderer Religionen. Gedanken und Weisungen über Dialog und Mission*, Citta del Vaticano 1984, 29, cited in: Furlinger, Ernst, *Der Dialog muss weitergehen*, Freiburg im Breisgau 2009, 434-448.

<sup>117</sup> Sekretariat der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz, loc. cit., 9.

Peter Vethanayagamony writes: "Missionaries from the Global South are faced with several challenges. They do not have the economic and political clout that those from the West had in the past. Christianity was once the religion of the confident, technically advanced, and rising affluent, and sometimes those things were seen as a mark of God's favour. Christianity, now increasingly, is associated mostly with rather poor people and with some of the poorest countries on earth. Just like the Pauline mission, their mission is powerless in worldly terms and therefore dependent on the Holy Spirit. It not only lacks economic and political might; it also lacks the big organizational structure of the modern missionary movement."<sup>118</sup> Missionaries from southern countries act from a position of weakness and powerlessness. From a missionary perspective, however, that may well be very much their strong point and work in their favour. "Increasingly, exponents of the Christian mission are the weak, wounded, helpless [...] Increasingly, it is the poor who are bringing the biblical message to the rich [...] Many migrants are emerging from the new centres of Christianity and carrying the flame of faith back to the old ones, in which the fire now smoulders only weakly."<sup>119</sup>

The missionary path is attained by means of a prophetic dialogue<sup>120</sup> with those seeking faith, with the poor and marginalised, with those belonging to other cultures and practising other religions. In short, mission in Germany must develop new models and methods which react to the needs of an increasingly secular, pluralistic, post-Christian society marked by growing social inequality. There are many people in the country who are moved by a strong desire for spirituality, including members of the young generation, but the Church has failed to provide them with an adequate response.

With that in mind, non-European missionaries can be seen as an asset to local churches in Germany. The SVD communities can be transformed into places in which intercultural dialogue plays a central role, enabling us to bear witness to the Kingdom of God in a universal, integrative manner. On the other hand, Christians in daily contact with

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<sup>118</sup> Vethanayagamony, Peter, loc. cit., 65.

<sup>119</sup> Ross, Kenneth, Non-Western Christians in Scotland: Mission in Reverse, in: *Theology in Scotland* 12 (2005), 81.

<sup>120</sup> Cf. Üffing, Martin, *Prophetischer Dialog*, in: *Verbum SVD* 47 (2006) 1, 7-26.

missionaries from other countries are aware that faith in Jesus Christ knows no linguistic and cultural bounds and they appreciate the alternative ways used to express the same faith. Local churches are called upon to look beyond their pastoral concerns, to welcome overseas missionaries as brothers and sisters in faith and to be open to the catholicity of mission *ad gentes*. This will make the universal Church a tangible experience in Germany.

### Various missionary vocations

We are talking here about missionaries sent to other cultures and other countries. This does not exclude other forms of missionary vocation or other ways of participating in the mission of God. Naturally, German missionaries are also active within Germany. The fact is that today mission is increasingly about cooperation between various groups and individuals who expressly feel called upon to perform missionary work in one way or another. The significance of laypeople in this respect and of cooperative work with them is described in the document entitled "SVD – Laypeople. A Missionary Partnership".<sup>121</sup> It states: "Consequently, the Church of today finds itself in a privileged age. In no century before has it been endowed so richly with so numerous and such highly qualified laypeople, including many who make a generous contribution to pastoral care and missionary service. This has unexpectedly led to increasing tension between consecrated ministers and leaders from the ranks of the laity. Some view this as a serious problem involving possible rivalry which requires prompt resolution. However, it would be better to regard this as part of a creative process within which, if we persevere faithfully, we may discover an ecclesiastical revival."<sup>122</sup>

The text continues: "As a result, and in the light of the decline in priestly vocations and attendance at church services, European Catholics are increasingly becoming the sorry witnesses of the closure or amalgamation of their once thriving parishes. There is, however, a counter-movement which would appear to herald a different Europe, one which is not the graveyard of Christendom but rather the seedbed of a new Christianity. This is becoming evident in the emergence and spread of numerous different Church movements which range in their

<sup>121</sup> SVD – Laien. Eine Partnerschaft für die Mission, IDW 8, December 2008.

<sup>122</sup> *ibid*, 17.

social and cultural orientation from 'conservative' to 'progressive' and are run predominantly by the laity."<sup>123</sup>

Let there be no mistaking the significance of laypeople for our mission. As regards their taking up missionary assignments abroad, it is important that the missionaries themselves should seize the initiative. Good results cannot be expected if missionaries only come here because they are told to do so. This also applies to members of religious orders who travel to Europe to complete part of their training (e.g. a theology degree). While the requirements of the religious order are important, personal interest and the motivation to work in a specific field must also be considered. Different experiences and motives may make missionary assignments quite difficult. These may include economic or social factors: the experience of poverty, injustice, violence etc. in a certain environment invariably presents a stark missionary challenge, irrespective of how the term "mission" is interpreted. The "secularised" world, religious indifference, individualism, materialism, etc. all constitute challenges for Christians in Europe of diverse realities, contexts and cultures. This situation is compounded by the burden of history – Europe's role in the historical development of Africa and Asia – as well as by European history itself. Feelings of superiority or inferiority, to say nothing of direct experience of them, must be taken seriously by all concerned.

### **Learning intercultural mission**

Experiences of missionary work in Europe have underlined the importance of preparation both for the missionaries who travel here from other continents and for the host population. It may be helpful to address the issue of overseas missionaries within communities or in various ecclesiastical contexts as well as to discuss expectations and preconceptions. Divine Word missionaries wish to live in international, multicultural communities (or teams) in the various environments to which they are allocated. As a result, the missionaries' preparation, in addition to many other aspects, must include learning about intercultural communal life along with information on the local context and culture. Time and again conflicts arise as a result of individuals' endeavours to live as missionaries in intercultural communities and, at the same time, to "inculturate" themselves within their new environments.

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<sup>123</sup> *ibid.*, 21.

Preparations for the 2010 Edinburgh Conference included the establishment of committees charged with addressing nine subjects considered to be decisive for missionary work in the 21st century. Committee V was concerned with the preparation of missionaries.<sup>124</sup> The Church requires highly-qualified missionaries in view of the rapid changes in today's world. They must be men and women who combine a true vocation with the best possible professional and theological training. As missionaries themselves have observed, there is often a marked discrepancy between their ideals and the actual quality of their assignments. This applies both to the personal (physical, social, intellectual and spiritual) and the professional preparation they receive.

"In general we differentiate between the personal and the professional dimension of our vocation as members of religious orders. The process of personal growth and the need to come to terms with the concomitant changes in one's life are factors we must take into consideration. Furthermore, as far as our missionary activities and work are concerned, we find ourselves in a rapidly changing world which presents us with new opportunities and confronts us with unaccustomed challenges. The nature of our vocation thus demands continuous learning in both areas – personal and work-related."<sup>125</sup>

In the early years missionaries usually have to learn from others and from their field of activity. The temptation to take the initiative or assume personal responsibility too quickly should be resisted. At this early stage, in particular, it is important to have recourse to sources of support. A well-structured induction upon arrival in the country and, above all, instruction in the local language are essential for new missionaries. This includes personal mentoring by an experienced, empathetic fellow missionary. Regular meetings of new missionaries can also be useful. The provision of assistance for life and work in an international and intercultural team is indispensable.<sup>126</sup>

"Missionaries are people who live in faith [...]."<sup>127</sup> Missionary training should be "holistic" and promote diverse personal qualities:

<sup>124</sup> Kerr, David A.; Ross, Kenneth, *Edinburgh 2010. Mission Then and Now*, Eugene, OR 2010, 155-177.

<sup>125</sup> Weiterbildung in der SVD, IDW 4, December 2004, 7-8.

<sup>126</sup> *ibid.*, 44f.

<sup>127</sup> Bellagamba, Anthony, *Mission and Ministry in the Global Church*, Maryknoll, NY 1992, 93-114. Luzbetak, Louis, *The Church and Cultures. New Perspectives in Missiological Anthropology*, Maryknoll, NY 1988, 2-8.

*compliance* in the sense of openness and readiness to learn; *civility*, as this enables missionaries to comprehend the customs of the people to whom they are called; and *empathy*, which missionaries require to love those to whom they minister. The combination of these three characteristics leads to a fourth, to which all missionaries should aspire, i.e. *leadership qualities* relating to “the specific duties and responsibilities which arise from the missionary assignment.”<sup>128</sup> Missionaries should have received the best possible training in their home countries and from the Church, irrespective of what their specific duties may eventually be. The training given to a religious missionary must focus on professional expertise, which should be the objective of all further training and specialisation courses.

Ideally, training should approximate to real missionary situations and include regular interaction with missionaries active on the ground. In a monitored process, future missionaries should be encouraged to realistically appraise missionary responses to the needs of their particular neighbourhoods so that they can analyse both positive and negative aspects. Missionary realities should provide the impetus to learn new skills and develop new perspectives. Learning experiences of this nature are facilitated by practical missionary experiences. These should form an integral part of our training programmes. Hands-on missionary experiences help trainees to gain a realistic impression of what awaits them after their basic training is over.<sup>129</sup>

In an article on the philosophy of intercultural education Ivan Illich writes: “For what else is spiritual poverty but indifference, willingness to be without what we like? As spiritual poverty implies not the absence of likes but freedom from them, so the attitude of the missionary carries him not to the denial of his background but to communication with another, and this is a difficult goal to achieve. If it is difficult to become indifferent, detached from all exterior comforts, and if it is even more difficult to become indifferent to more intimate gifts such as physical integrity of the presence of those we love, or our reputation or our success, how much more difficult is it to become detached from convictions deeply rooted in us since childhood about what is and is not done. Yet it is this last detachment which the missionary will have

<sup>128</sup> Kerr, David A.; Ross, Kenneth, loc. cit., 156.

<sup>129</sup> Cf. SVD Publications, *Re-imagining the Pathways of Our Common Vocational Journey. Some Orientations*, Generalate Rome 2010, 26-27.

to achieve if he wants to be truly an instrument of the Incarnation rather than an agent of his own culture. No missionary has the right to insist, in the name of the gospel, on acceptance of his own human background, and thus to make Baptism or full church membership dependent on a degree of spiritual poverty in the convert which he himself is not willing to practice."<sup>130</sup> Missionaries should be excellent communicators able to create interpersonal connections. In pastoral care, teamwork is probably the only adequate method which meets the requirements of cooperativeness, community and partnership as a form of Church existence and missionary ministry.<sup>131</sup> Franz-Josef Eilers says: "It must be emphasised that a key prerequisite in this context is the development of sufficient insight into one's own culture, personality and religion, without which authentic intercultural communication is impossible. I must be familiar with the ways in which my culture has influenced me and continues to do so, how it affects my knowledge, behaviour, understanding and forms of communication, where the limits lie which I must observe, and where I am bound to transcend just those limits imposed upon me by my cultural heritage."<sup>132</sup>

### **Missionaries as bridge builders**

Missionaries sent to other countries are strangers when they arrive there. They are "outsiders", as their personalities are influenced by a culture completely different from that of their host countries and, as a result, they must transcend the boundaries of their own cultures. Anthony Bellagamba describes the modern missionary thus: "Missionaries must be people who live, or have lived, within more than one culture, who have had contact with more than one country, and who have prayed with followers of more than one religion. They have learned more than one language. As a result they can easily move from one place to another and from one culture to another without becoming confused, feeling lost or being unable to act.

As humanity moves closer to becoming a world community, only those in possession of these skills and qualities, which should be a

<sup>130</sup> Illich, Ivan, *The Philosophy of Intercultural Formation*, in: *SEDOS Bulletin* (1981), 266-269, 268.

<sup>131</sup> Cf. Bellagamba, Anthony, loc. cit., 70-92.

<sup>132</sup> Eilers, Franz-Josef, *Communicating between Cultures*, Manila 1992, 164-165.

distinguishing characteristic of missionaries, will be able to live, grow, work well and be at ease within this global village. Those unable to accept the coexistence of diverse cultures and different races, who are fearful of leaving their familiar surroundings and can only express themselves in a single language will find it difficult to adjust to this next stage of human cohabitation. Modern missionaries serve as examples of what everyone else will need to become in the course of the next stage of human development.”<sup>133</sup>

It used to be a matter of principle that missionaries should leave their native lands, often forever. We can either admire their willingness to make sacrifices and to accept the innumerable trials and tribulations they inevitably faced, or we can react with incomprehension. Nowadays missionaries have the same life expectancy as their fellow human beings; they often travel by air and can maintain contact via email. The former adventurer-conqueror-martyr model has been replaced by a completely different one: modern missionaries build bridges, facilitate communication and emphasise the need for partnership.

They can no longer feel buoyed up by the same ideology as their predecessors, who were able to sacrifice their lives to “save souls” condemned to “eternal perdition”, and to build up the Church. Their identity was clearly defined by the conviction of being on a divine mission to preach, convert others and baptise them.<sup>134</sup> Today’s missionaries must still be convinced that they have been sent, but their roles and identities are no longer as clearly defined. Their mission often appears to involve work and ministry out of a sense of conviction, but without any ideological baggage, being there for others, albeit often with empty hands. Although sacrifice and self-denial may assume a slightly different guise today, they naturally remain part of the lives of missionaries who take their duties seriously.<sup>135</sup> Louis Luzbetak writes: “The most mundane, painful and important form of self-denial, which is often underestimated, is the acceptance of the small, but nonetheless real, endless daily sacrifices [...] They include those required of all individuals committed to intercultural work, who

<sup>133</sup> Bellagamba, Anthony, loc. cit., 10.

<sup>134</sup> Cf. Matt. 18:16-20.

<sup>135</sup> John Paul II, Encyclical Letter REDEMPTORIS MISSIO by His Holiness Pope John Paul II on the Permanent Validity of the Church’s Missionary Mandate, [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_07121990\\_redemptoris-missio\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_07121990_redemptoris-missio_en.html).

must learn to understand and appreciate the customs and values of the community to which they are sent; they also involve the hard work and daily humiliation and frustration that are inevitably associated with any serious attempt to learn an apparently “insignificant” local dialect; in addition it includes the self-inflicted harm resulting from attempts to adjust to local interpersonal practices [...].<sup>136</sup>

The Thirteenth General Chapter of the SVD in 1988 said: “We Missionaries of the Divine Word acknowledge in our time three particular tasks in which we must live out the Paschal Mystery of the Lord in the form of a ‘crossing over’. We are called upon to ‘cross over’ when we enter other cultures, identify with the poor and engage in dialogue.”<sup>137</sup> The experience that missionaries have of different cultures, religions and lifestyles enables them to establish connections between various peoples and ways of living, to reconcile differences and foster mutual understanding and respect. Missionaries continually cross borders and come back, moving from one culture to another, from one religion to another and then return to their own lifestyles, their own religions.<sup>138</sup> Missionaries from Africa and Asia who are sent to Europe encounter individuals and societies whose culture is deeply influenced by Christianity. However, they must also confront European Christianity and religiousness as they now present themselves and address a whole new range of questions and problems, widespread secularism, a critical attitude to the Church, etc.

An open-minded attitude to the unknown and a desire to move beyond the confines of one’s own familiar world, culture and religion are of the essence here. The current international situation requires missionaries to be aware of new needs. It would be useful to include the subject of culture and cultures in the various preparatory programmes for missionaries.

### **The deployment of missionaries in Germany**

Divine Word missionaries from other countries are deployed in different spheres of activity in Germany. While some perform several

<sup>136</sup> Luzbetak, Louis, loc. cit., 5-6.

<sup>137</sup> Cf. *Following the Word* 1, in: *Nuntius SVD*, vol. XII, no. 5, 1988 (1990), 693.

<sup>138</sup> Cf. Dunne, John, *The Way of All the Earth. Experiments in Truth and Religion*, Notre Dame, IN 1978, 1.

duties, others concentrate on a particular area. The majority engage in pastoral ministry, acting as priests or chaplains. The missionaries usually live in intercultural communities and strive to become actively involved in specific missionary fields in addition to their pastoral duties. These include, for example, fostering dialogue with people from different social groups who are not members of the parish, working with compatriots and contributing the experience they have brought with them from their native countries.

A further group is comprised of missionaries who have received special training for particular remits. The tasks these entail have to do work in the fields of communication and pastoral care but primarily with the SVD's Philosophical-Theological Faculty and associated academic institutes in Sankt Augustin, Germany. Fellow missionaries from China, Ghana, India and Indonesia work as university lecturers, ethnologists, missiologists and sinologists. Their endeavours make the universal Church visible in a very special way.

Mobility is one of the signs of our times. We also consider immigrants as an element of our missionary assignment. As an intercultural and international religious community, the Divine Word missionaries have observed an increase in the number of external and internal, voluntary and forced relocations of individuals and groups, which have had an effect on the stability of families and communities. Missionaries work as pastors with immigrants in various German dioceses. The universal Church becomes eminently visible in the form of this ministry to people of various nationalities and cultures. In addition to pastoral care in "native-speaker communities" missionaries are also faced with the challenges of establishing closer links with the local church. Once again, this is not just a question of integration or assimilation. The universal Church becomes manifest, above all, through the diversity of life in Christian communities. Moreover, work on behalf of asylum seekers, refugees and people in difficult social situations constitutes a separate task in its own right. Missionaries are aware of the need to cooperate with experts – lawyers, social workers, etc. – in these fields. It is not merely about showing solidarity with immigrants, but, together with others, of seeking solutions for what often appear to be hopeless situations.

The Divine Word missionaries wish to dedicate themselves to social justice and solidarity with the poor. The experience of mis-

sionary work in many countries is that there is a steady increase in the number of people being pushed to the fringes of society and suffering various forms of poverty, exploitation and oppression. Wealthy countries such as the Federal Republic of Germany are no exception in this respect. The difficult work performed by missionaries from other parts of the world for marginalised Europeans constitutes a special type of witness.

Religion is essential to cultural identity. Sometimes, however, religion is needed to strengthen this identity by emphasising the differences which exist. Interculturality requires of SVD members that they develop a deeper understanding of others/the other. Ecumenical and interreligious dialogue should serve to promote respect, mutual acceptance and reciprocal enrichment. Asian missionaries, in particular, come from multi-religious societies, have widespread experience of living and working with people of other religions and bring this experience with them to Germany. This is a source of mutual enrichment, including for the local church.

As regards the future of SVD's missionary assignments in Germany, priority attaches to a reorganisation and consolidation of the Society's own presence. Human and material resources are limited. How can they be used more appropriately and in a spirit of solidarity? How should missionary work be organised to ensure that there is adequate scope for people's concerns and hardships as well as for the distinguishing characteristics of the religious order itself?

Secondly, the future of the assignments in Germany depends on how missionaries from other continents are received here and prepared for their duties. The aforementioned consensus reached in Roscommon did not focus on an administrative solution with missionaries from other continents being drafted in to fill the gaps caused by insufficient personnel in Germany. Roscommon represented a new vision which transcended the old geographical interpretation of mission and underlined the foresight of the Second Vatican Council in stating that the entire Church is by definition "missionary".<sup>139</sup> The Gospel was once proclaimed by European missionaries and introduced to the cultures of people from the South, as a result of which these nations

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<sup>139</sup> Cf. The Second Vatican Council, Decree "Ad gentes" on the Missionary Activity of the Church, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decree\\_19651207\\_ad-gentes\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651207_ad-gentes_en.html), no. 2.

were enriched both in life and in the expression and celebration of their Christian faith.

Today, missionaries from the South bring with them great gifts, from which Europe's churches can benefit. Their enthusiasm and specific ways of expressing their faith can help to inspire the Church in Germany. These missionaries are our partners in mission and we must learn to accept their origins and cultures. The intercultural nature of Christian communities is not something that can be taken for granted. On the contrary, it requires consistent open-mindedness towards others, listening and talking to them and accepting and acknowledging their contributions.



# On the Wholeness of Faith

Vera Krause

## Renaissance of a “magic word”

The term “universal Church”, once a “magic word” but now a little dated, has enjoyed an unforeseen renaissance ever since that evening in March 2013 when Jorge Mario Bergoglio from Argentina began to bewitch the world within minutes of his inauguration as Pope Francis. Catholics and non-Catholics around the world were prepared to entrust – and, admittedly, also to burden – this unprepossessing man from Buenos Aires with all manner of good things for the Church – and the world.

From a German perspective, too, the Pope “from the other end of the earth”<sup>140</sup> appears refreshingly different: marvelling, humble, sincere, humane; a man who lives out his faith. This contrast with accustomed practices has a liberating effect. The spirit of optimism it engenders has proved motivating and encouraging. “Joy and hope, sadness and fear”<sup>141</sup> with respect to present developments and the future viability of our Church are now being expressed in many places in a manner which was previously barely audible: full of confidence, free of anxiety, with deep emotional involvement – or, rather, trusting

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<sup>140</sup> Cf. Jorge Mario Bergoglio in his first words addressed to the world as Francis on the evening of the 13. March 2013 from the balcony of St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome: “You know that it was the duty of the Conclave to give Rome a Bishop. It seems that my brother Cardinals have gone to the ends of the earth to get one...[...] but here we are.. I thank you for your welcome. The diocesan community of Rome now has its Bishop. Thank you! [...] And now, we take up this journey: Bishop and People. This journey of the Church of Rome which presides in charity over all the Churches. A journey of fraternity, of love, of trust among us. Let us always pray for one another. Let us pray for the whole world, that there may be a great spirit of fraternity.” (Francis, The Cardinals have gone to the ends of the earth, in: <http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/elezione/> accessed on 28. April 2014).

<sup>141</sup> The Second Vatican Council, The Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_cons\\_19651207\\_gaudium-et-spes\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_cons_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html), no. 1.

that it is not utopian to dream of a Church prepared to move with the times in which people live. All over the world.

A similar spirit of optimism within the universal Church influenced local churches in Germany (and other countries) back in the 1970s and 1980s. At that time it was evinced by the openings in various areas of Church life and beyond, which were sanctioned by the Second Vatican Council's resolutions. It was also encouraged by the results of the Würzburg Synod. During that period the question of how other regional churches implemented the "*aggiornamento*"<sup>142</sup> or modernisation of the Church elicited some promising answers, especially in Latin America. In this part of the world, it was the basic ecclesial communities with their true-to-life, less hierarchical Church cultures which attracted many followers. They had adherents in Germany and other countries, too. The biblical message as a solid foundation and perpetually new point of departure in (Church) life,<sup>143</sup> the shared

<sup>142</sup> *Aggiornamento*: commonly translated into German as "Verheutigung" ("bringing up to date", "modernisation"), the term succinctly expresses the aim of the Second Vatican Council: to secure a vibrant present for the Church and the Christian faith amidst the daily life of a world which had embarked on a course of massive social and political change in the wake of the Second World War. The term was initially employed only in a general sense, the "*aggiornamento*" of canonical law meaning its revision, for example. From 1957 onwards, however, it received a new emphasis. In his capacity as Patriarch of Venice, the future Pope John XXIII opened the Venetian provincial synod with the following words: "Do you often hear the word *aggiornamento*? Take as an example our Holy Church, perennially youthful and prepared to follow the different courses of life with the aim of aligning, correcting, improving and encouraging." (Roncalli, Angelo, *Scritti e discorsi*, 4 volumes, Rome 1959-1962, vol. 3, 264). Later, as Pope, he referred once more to the specifically new meaning of *aggiornamento*. On 28 June 1961 he applied it specifically to the forthcoming Second Vatican Council, whose main task he described as "the *aggiornamento* of the Church after 20 centuries" (John XXIII, *Discorsi, messaggi, colloqui* [DMC], 6 volumes, Rome 1960-1967, vol. 3, 574). Over a year later, on 1. August 1962, John XXIII defined the Council "as a Council of *aggiornamento* [...], particularly as regards the deep understanding and love for the revealed truth [...]" (DMC, vol. 4, 448). During the Council itself – and just three months before his death – he acknowledged "the pastoral objective of the *aggiornamento* of structures 'in bonum animarum'" as his "greatest endeavour" (DMC, vol. 5, 128). Ultimately, he embedded the Italian word so successfully in the movement of ecclesiastical renewal that it is usually left untranslated in international Church linguistic usage to this day. He employed it as a common term for the necessary opening of the Church at any particular point in time, especially as far as its outward appearance is concerned, as well as of its liturgy and ministry to others, so that it is able to fulfil its mission in the modern world in an appropriate manner.

<sup>143</sup> For an understanding and practical application of mutual, praying, life-related Bible-sharing in Latin America, cf.: Mesters, Carlos, *Vom Leben zur Bibel, von der Bibel zum Leben. Ein Bibelkurs aus Brasilien für uns*, 2 volumes, Mainz 1989. Carlos Mesters says: "God wrote two books, one being life and the other the Bible. The Bible does not exist for its own sake, but is designed to help us understand life in a new light on the basis of the Word of God, after we became unable to decipher his script in life in the wake of the fall from

priesthood of all those who are baptised, the participation of the many, the social awareness and political commitment characteristic of many local churches and, last but not least, the genuine relevance of faith in people's everyday lives exude a little-known charisma which radiates out into large parts of the world and the universal Church.

The spiritual and pastoral momentum coming from Latin America is gradually being complemented by an ecclesiastical stimulus from Africa and Asia. This is attracting the attention of movements involved in the quest for Church identity in Europe. "Bible-sharing"<sup>144</sup>, for example, does not rely on expert exegetical knowledge or edifying sermons by individuals to render accessible the Holy Scripture in which we believe. Rather, it is opened up to us through a collectively experienced encounter with God and the liturgical celebration of God's Good News, which has always found its way into our hearts. Christianity's growing interest in the spiritual practices of Eastern religions<sup>145</sup> alerts us to the comparable scarcity, in many places, of our own (no longer) practised forms of piety. An everyday inter-religious dialogue, actively pursued in many places around the world,<sup>146</sup> reminds us that our Church is a universal Church, i.e. a global player with global responsibility in an era marked by a great diversity of religions, philosophies and lifestyles. It is a role which we,

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grace" (cf. Mesters, Carlos, *O Projeto 'Palavra-Vida' e a leitura fiel da Bíblia de acordo com a Tradição e o Magistério da Igreja*, in: *RIBLA* 49 (1989) 193-196, 90-104, here 94).

<sup>144</sup> Bible-sharing is at the heart of the "classical" seven-step method, which is also well known in Germany. It was developed by Oswald Hirmer and Fritz Lobinger at the South African Lumko Pastoral Institute ("Lumko" = "wisdom" in the Xhosa language) run by the South African Catholic Bishops' Conference and made internationally accessible in the 1970s. As Bible-sharing is non-denominational, the ecumenical practice has spread widely across many countries. The aim of Bible-sharing is not the acquisition of academic exegetical knowledge. Rather it is the mutual discovery that God's spirit invariably addresses us personally and as a community/local church via the words of the Scripture and calls upon us to act in whatever situation we find ourselves. For further information, cf. Hirmer, Oswald; Steins, Georg, *Gemeinschaft im Wort. Werkbuch zum Bibel-Teilen*, Munich 1999.

<sup>145</sup> Prominent pioneers here include Christian mystics of our time, who were, or are still engaged in recognised religious dialogue, including Bede Griffiths OSB (\*1906, English Benedictine monk, spiritual dialogue with Hinduism, leader of the Sat-Chit ashram in India until his death in 1993), Raimon Panikkar (\*1918, Spanish Roman Catholic priest, religious philosopher, ecosopher, practical interreligious and intercultural dialogue, global teaching activities, died 2010), David Steindl-Rast OSB (\*1926, Austrian-American Benedictine monk, spiritual dialogue especially with Buddhism, globally active spiritual teacher), Sebastian Painadath SJ (\*1942, Indian Jesuit, spiritual dialogue with Hinduism and Islam, founder and head of the Sameeksha ashram, India).

<sup>146</sup> It is worthwhile looking at developments in Egypt, Burkina Faso, Nigeria, Senegal, India, Sri Lanka and Indonesia in this respect.

as a Western/Occidental regional church, can either countenance or reject.

### **Farewell to the Eurocentric Church**

The Roman magisterium has not always acknowledged the vibrant diversity of the community of faith which makes up the universal Church. Taking the Second Vatican Council as a starting point, and following almost fifty years of ups and downs in universal Church activities, Pope Francis now calling on the Church to “come out from itself” so that it does not “get sick”. In doing so he refers equally to the “geographical peripheries” and the “existential (ones), those of the mystery of sin, of suffering, of injustice, those of ignorance and of the absence of faith, those of thought, those of every form of misery.”

The first ever Pope to preside over the universal Church knows from personal experience that, if the Church wishes to fulfil its “reason for being”, i.e. to “evangelise”, it must not be “self-referential”. Since March 2013 Pope Francis has repeatedly made it clear in both word and deed that a “Church, which lives in itself, of itself, for itself” has no future and, even worse, one which refuses to let out “Jesus, who is knocking from the inside”<sup>147</sup> has no future. He has thus drawn attention to the Church’s relationship with people and the world as well as to the deficits resulting from its Eurocentrism. Benedict XVI’s courageous public acknowledgement of his personal weakness followed by his resignation, an event of epochal importance, was a sign not just of the waning physical and psychological powers of the 85-year-old Joseph Ratzinger, but also of the limitations of the Church apparatus. In the eyes of many believers around the world it had withdrawn to a specific geographical corner of the earth and retreated into a narrowly delineated niche of philosophical and theological thought. As a result, it had frequently failed to respond adequately to the rapid transformation processes (including those in the sociology of religion), which are a feature of our globalised age.

In March 2013, Jorge Mario Bergoglio from Argentina was elected Bishop of Rome and Head of the Roman Catholic Church at

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<sup>147</sup> For the passages paraphrased here see the precise wording of the remarks made by Jorge Mario Cardinal Bergoglio before the conclave: There are two images of the Church, in: <http://chiesa.espresso.repubblica.it/articolo/1350484?eng=y>, 28. April 2014, and the sermon by Pope Francis at the Chrism Mass on Maundy Thursday, 28. March 2013, in: <http://www.news.va/en/news/pope-homily-for-chrism-mass-full-text> 28. April 2014.

a conclave which included cardinals from 48 different countries and all the continents. It was a visible sign of the growing awareness that the Church needs the many experiences from a wide range of different life and faith contexts if, as the universal Church in the 21st century after Christ, it wishes to extend a credible invitation to people in the surrounding streets and neighbourhoods to live a life in faith.

### **Universal Church milestones**

It would appear that the (universal) Church under Francis really has embarked on a cautious process of change. Its repercussions are being felt in Germany as elsewhere. In the first sentence of his last will and testament St. Francis of Assisi writes: "Il Signore dette a me, frate Francesco, d'incominciare a fare penitenza così."<sup>148</sup> Like him Jorge Mario Bergoglio appears intent on considering events of the past and making a fresh start. He runs papal affairs differently from his predecessors, just as the "Christendoms" (Giancarlo Collet) in the so-called southern continents, from which the Pope originates, are run differently. This is a source of fascination for the Church in Germany. However, it will only acquire practical value if we, as regional churches, are really prepared to be moved and enriched by our brothers and sisters in faith from other parts of the world, if we are not just influenced by the rhythms of their liturgical celebrations and their tenderness, but, more importantly, by their innovative pastoral care, welfare and social work, spiritual radicalism and challenging lifestyles. We still find this hard.

From a German or European perspective it is taken for granted that Christianity in its Western/Occidental guise continues to constitute the norm, even in remote areas of the world with their diverse cultural spaces. The ecclesiological awakening triggered by the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) has failed to bring about any decisive change in this attitude, even though fifty years have now passed since the Council was held. After more than a year in office Pope Francis has not (yet) managed to launch a turnaround either. Be that as it may, the Church of Jesus Christ, which has been aware from the outset of its mission to evangelise to the ends of the earth,<sup>149</sup> has progressed from being a Church of the Jews via a

<sup>148</sup> <http://www.santuariodelibera.it/FontiFrancescane/frame%20testamento.htm>.

<sup>149</sup> Cf. Matt 28:16-20.

Church of Jews and Gentiles to a Church which now encompasses (virtually) all cultures and nations. In the mid-20th century it began to perceive itself as a universal Church in the sense of a true community of regional churches. The Second Vatican Council is, “previous attempts notwithstanding, the first act in history [...], in which the universal Church officially began to present itself as such. During the 19th and 20th centuries the Church slowly and hesitantly developed from a potential universal Church into a real universal Church. It has evolved from a European/Occidental Church with European exports throughout the world into a universal Church with a presence all over the globe, albeit in varying degrees of intensity, and is no longer just a European/North American export article. [...] In terms of doctrine and law this universal Church acted with historical clarity for the first time at the Council.”<sup>150</sup>

In the course of the following decades Pope John Paul II, as the official representative of the Church, participated in 104 overseas tours to a total of 127 countries, thereby drawing attention to the universal Church dimension of the Christian faith in the Roman Catholic tradition. Benedict XVI continued this trend as far as his physical strength permitted. During this time, however, power remained centralised within the Vatican in Rome.

Pope Francis is the first pontiff to take decisive steps towards an authentic universal Church as an internally and externally effective *community* of faith. He paints a vivid picture of how it could develop in future:

“I prefer a Church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security.”<sup>151</sup>

“Nor do I believe that the papal magisterium should be expected to offer a definitive or complete word on every question which affects the Church and the world. It is not advisable for the Pope to take the place of local Bishops in the discernment of every

<sup>150</sup> Rahner, Karl, *Die bleibende Bedeutung des Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzils*, in: *Stimmen der Zeit* no. 12, December 1979, 795-806, here 796.

<sup>151</sup> Francis, Apostolic Exhortation “*Evangelii gaudium*” of the Holy Father Pope Francis to the Bishops, Clergy, Consecrated Persons and the Lay Faithful on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today’s World, 24. November 2013 [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/de/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20131124\\_evangelii-gaudium.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/de/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html), no. 49.

issue which arises in their territory. In this sense, I am conscious of the need to promote a sound “decentralisation”.”<sup>152</sup>

“The Second Vatican Council stated that, like the ancient patriarchal churches, episcopal conferences are in a position “to contribute in many and fruitful ways to the concrete realisation of the collegial spirit” [LG 23]. Yet this desire has not been fully realised, since a juridical status of episcopal conferences which would see them as subjects of specific attributions, including genuine doctrinal authority, has not yet been sufficiently elaborated. Excessive centralisation, rather than proving helpful, complicates the Church’s life and her missionary outreach.”<sup>153</sup>

“In these first two Christian millennia, countless peoples have received the grace of faith, brought it to flower in their daily lives and handed it on in the language of their own culture. [...] The history of the Church shows that Christianity does not have simply one cultural expression, but rather, remaining completely true to itself, with unswerving fidelity to the proclamation of the Gospel and the tradition of the Church, it will also reflect the different faces of the cultures and peoples in which it is received and takes root. In the diversity of peoples who experience the gift of God, each in accordance with its own culture, the Church expresses her genuine catholicity and shows forth the beauty of her varied face.”<sup>154</sup>

“We cannot demand that peoples of every continent, in expressing their Christian faith, imitate modes of expression which European nations developed at a particular moment of their history, because the faith cannot be constricted to the limits of understanding and expression of any one culture. It is an indisputable fact that no single culture can exhaust the mystery of our redemption in Christ.”<sup>155</sup>

### Treading new paths

Where should we look and where should we go if we wish to experience the universal Church as a living community of faith? The

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<sup>152</sup> *ibid.*, no. 16.

<sup>153</sup> *ibid.*, no. 32.

<sup>154</sup> *ibid.*, no. 116.

<sup>155</sup> *ibid.*, no. 118.

answer: as far away as possible. How else can we discover the world not “merely” as an abundance of ethnicities, languages, cultures, religions and philosophies, but also as a fullness of the Christian faith, *our* faith? When travelling “to earth’s remotest end”<sup>156</sup>, it is wise to keep baggage to a minimum – both that carried on one’s back and also in one’s heart and mind. Only if we are prepared to make room can space be created for what we encounter en route: the probing questions and profound answers we receive from beyond our own horizons and the way we normally live, think and believe.

However, the steps we venture abroad must be complemented by those which take us back home. That may sound banal, but it is not. If the homeward journey from a universal Church educational trip amounts to no more than the kilometres travelled, while the heart of one’s faith suddenly (and unwittingly) remains attached to one of the “promised lands” of the universal Church, the result can often be a disappointment in, and estrangement from, one’s own local church. Over the centuries the inculturation of Christianity has remained a core Church task in the “new” environments of faith, but in the meantime it has become a Church duty in “old” Europe too. In truth, we still find it hard to feel enthusiastic about both sides of the universal Church coin. On the one hand, there is the blaze of colour, the warmth, the liveliness, the forms of participation and the vitality of the faith we experience more easily and more readily away from home. On the other hand, we are acutely aware of the often painful and laborious paths leading us to a Church which is prepared to change its ways in the 21st century AD, to go out and meet those who, in our post-modern, globalised age, yearn for a credible proclamation of God’s Good News.

### **Indispensable: experience of the universal Church**

It was the 18th Sunday in Ordinary Time, a completely normal summer Sunday about ten years ago. I was baffled when Sister Lilian pressed a folding chair into my hand. “We’re late”, she said, “so we probably won’t find a place to sit in the church.” She was right. Well over a thousand people had gathered for Sunday mass in the not particularly spacious church of the parish of “Christ the King” in the 15,000-strong Ugandan town of Arua in East Africa. It was the second

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<sup>156</sup> Acts 1:8.

of three services held that morning. I suspected that the fifteen other chapels in and around the town were just as well attended.

I was touched that the church was so full. It absolutely hummed with life. And I was very moved that simply “everyone” was there. I saw young and old, mothers breastfeeding their babies, three or four generations of the same family, men and women, children and teenagers. The church was full, yet it never appeared to overflow. People kept on coming – and somehow found somewhere to sit. Practical ingenuity ensured that everything possible was used as a seat for worshippers in their Sunday best, while the term “holy ground” took on an entirely new meaning for me. Eventually I couldn’t suppress my curiosity and asked: “Is today a special occasion?” “No, why?” replied Sister Lilian.

***Precious: the experience that alternatives exist***

On this particular Sunday I was spending my second day in the far north-west of Uganda in a rather abandoned area which bore the scars of the never-ending rebel conflict. I’d only just arrived. Slightly concerned, I cast a glance towards the borders with the Democratic Republic of Congo and Southern Sudan, countries from which ill winds have blown for several decades now. It was perhaps not surprising, then, that my sense of wonder and astonishment persisted that morning. I was impressed by the openness and sincerity of the long-suffering population, the liveliness of their liturgy, the unfamiliar rhythms on which I was gladly borne along, and by the general intensity with which the congregation engaged in worship. At the beginning of the service one of the female catechists had announced the hymn numbers. She need not have done so, as everyone knew the hymns by heart.

I couldn’t follow the sermon at all. The priest spoke in Lugbara, one of the tribal languages in the West Nile region. However, I was once more touched by an unfamiliar sight. The priest moved between the pews and spoke with, rather than to, the people of his parish. His manner was very direct, as the congregation felt personally addressed, joining in, agreeing or even disagreeing with what was said. There followed a profound discussion on the text of the Sunday gospel, the passage about the five loaves and two fishes which were enough to feed everyone. Finally, everyone said “Amen” in unison. This was not the termination of the sermon spoken by one individual,

but rather a perceptible sign that God's Good News had reached the hearts and lives of all those present that Sunday morning.

The collection not only took place in an unfamiliar location, but also in an unusual way. As a mark of gratitude the congregation struck up one of its rousing songs. Large baskets stood before the altar. The music was followed by a typical African "dance", which I admittedly only describe in this way in order to explain more precisely what happened. People approached the altar in a random manner with their contribution to the collection, sometimes more, sometimes less. As they sang, their gait "automatically" turned into a type of dance step, which gave the moment great power. Here the collection was no routine transition between intercessions and offertory, no rapid passing of the collection plate deep in the pews, no furtive concealing of what was given – or not given. In the simple brick church in northern Uganda people collected, openly and joyfully, what was needed to ensure that the parish can be a community: fellowship in the name of Jesus Christ, who created a home for both faith and human life. Everyone contributed what they could. No more and no less.

It was only as the mass drew to a close that I noticed the special design of the chasuble the priest was wearing. It featured the contours of the African continent woven delicately into the material, the centre of which was dominated by a simple cross. The edges were embroidered with tiny, even finer silhouettes of all the African countries. When the priest stood in the middle of the congregation to give the blessing, his arms outstretched, and everyone asked for God's blessing in unison, each one of us suddenly formed part of a far larger community than the space around us could encompass. All (civil) wars, all (tribal) disputes, all (denominational) rivalries appeared suspended in the light of this trust in God, whose devotion transcends social, ethnic and political boundaries. At that moment I was struck by the existential nature of people's mutual dependence. Politically correct knowledge of the dignity and equality of all was transformed into a profound empathy, accompanied by a painful awareness of one's own entanglement in the systemic inequality of living conditions in our world.

***(Universal) Church: home and awakening***

That summer morning I left the Church service deeply moved. As I did so, I realised that what had touched my heart and soul most

deeply was not so much the new or unfamiliar impressions I had experienced as the utterly surprising and overwhelming intimacy I had felt despite the unfamiliar words, sounds, gestures and sequences. Here in the church my journey to distant Uganda was not a departure but an arrival. I felt at home. I experienced the universal Church at first hand, not in an institutional dimension or as a territorial claim, but as a living community of faith in full accord with the diversity of cultures, mentalities and living conditions at a specific point in time.

Catholic Christians share their belief with 1.2 billion brothers and sisters in faith worldwide. In almost all nations and cultures around the globe they are able to experience a sense of homecoming wherever they enter local churches. That is not just a statement of pious hope in the proverbial sense or the well-intentioned teaching of the universal Church. People well versed in the workings of the universal Church report that jointly celebrated faith in unfamiliar climes transcends boundaries and opens up new perspectives in unexpected ways – both internally and externally.

The fact that people in a remote corner of the world, in all its enduring “otherness”, are able to share “my” faith and to pray, sing, talk, celebrate, cry, dance and bear witness in a way that deeply moves me and makes me feel I belong, instils a profound sense of joy within me, engenders hope for my faith, encourages and inspires me. It challenges fixed behavioural patterns, both in faith and in life, and triggers in a manner I hardly suspected the yearning for God that is in me.

Those who open up to or, even better, enter unfamiliar worlds of faith are reminded that, ever since the time of Jesus, the Church has always signified the provision of a (spiritual) home *and* awakening. The universal Church reminds us not to forget this. We may feel at home in her. At the same time we are challenged by all her diversity. The inner sensations and sometimes the shocks and jolts they provoke accompany us on our homeward journeys. We encounter the different reality of the Church in Uganda, India, Brazil, Egypt, Norway, Korea and El Salvador, but what aspects of it ought we to take back and disseminate in Germany to enliven our faith? The extensive community of faith constituted by the universal Church prevents us from contentedly go on clinging to what we are familiar with and have become accustomed to in our own local churches.

## Believing together – or trust and respect

Being able to experience and value the universal Church as a community of faith depends on certain conditions. It can happen if I give the faith of others unconditional credit in certain, decisive areas, trusting that this constitutes a credible response to God, the “lover of life”<sup>157</sup>, who seeks people “after his own heart”<sup>158</sup> and can be found wherever people approach him with open and honest hearts.<sup>159</sup> The universal Church as a vibrant community of faith knows that the belief we share will not become whole until all paths, places and manners of experiencing God on all continents are able to inspire or challenge that belief. As cited above, Pope Francis uses the following words: “[...] faith cannot be constricted to the limits of understanding and expression of any one culture. It is an indisputable fact that no single culture can exhaust the mystery of our redemption in Christ.”<sup>160</sup>

Those words hark back to the Second Vatican Council and the realisation that “this characteristic of universality which adorns the people of God is a gift from the Lord Himself.”<sup>161</sup> Whenever and wherever we actively accept this gift, i.e. when we treat each other with trust and respect, listen to one another lovingly, unite individual perspectives and start learning from one another, our Church becomes part of the community of faith which is the universal Church, leading us towards a continually renewed “divine present”<sup>162</sup> in a local church in which people are always able to “encounter the living Christ.”<sup>163</sup>

<sup>157</sup> Wis 11:26.

<sup>158</sup> On God's own processes of seeking and discovering: 1 Sam 13:14. See also Matt 18:12-14, Lk 15:1-10, 11-32.

<sup>159</sup> On human processes of seeking and discovering: Cf. 1 Chron. 28:9; 2 Chron. 15:4; Ps. 9:11; 27:8; 34:5; 119:2; Prov. 8:17; Wis 1:1; Jer. 29:13; Lam. 3:25; Amos 5:4; Matt 7:7.

<sup>160</sup> Francis, loc. cit., 88, no. 118.

<sup>161</sup> Cf. the Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church – ‘Lumen Gentium’, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vatii\\_const\\_19641121\\_lumen-gentium\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vatii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html), no. 13.

<sup>162</sup> Sobrino, Jon, *Gemeinschaft, Konflikt und Solidarität in der Kirche*, in: Ellacuría, Ignacio; Sobrino, Jon, *Mysterium Liberationis. Grundbegriffe der Theologie der Befreiung*, Lucerne 1996, 853; cf. also *ibid*, 855.

<sup>163</sup> CELAM, *Aparecida 2007. Concluding Document of the Fifth General Conference of the Episcopate of Latin America and the Caribbean*, <http://www.celam.org/aparecida/Ingles.pdf>, no. 99e.

# Evangelising Ministry in a Secular Context

Paul B. Steffen

Let me begin by telling you something that happened during World Youth Day in Cologne in August 2005. A German radio reporter was requested to interview some participants in the gathering. After conversing with a number of young people, he decided not to include the interviews with them in his radio programme. The enthusiasm they expressed during their exchanges was completely at odds with his view of the world.

The journalist was unable or unwilling to comprehend the religious experiences these young people described. For him they belonged to an alien world of which he had no understanding. Put differently, he was not in a position to decipher the Christian experiences of young Catholics who had travelled to Cologne from all over the world. Perhaps he even felt that things which didn't tally with his view of the world were out of the question anyway.

His radio station decided not to report on what this spiritual meeting of young people was all about, but to portray it simply as a multicultural event that happened to be taking place that year in Cologne. Broad sections of the press concentrated solely on the Pope's visit or speculated on whether free condoms should be distributed among the participants. To have young people report on their joy in prayer and in the faith they live would have been an affront to the opinion makers in the mass media. Such testimonies are inappropriate in a society in which religion no longer has a place in public life and attracts less and less sympathy. Yet experts everywhere are propagating ambitious ideas and concepts about religion in today's pluralistic, secular society.

## Ways to broaden perspectives

In August 2005 I participated in the symposium entitled "Hindu-Christian Dialogue on Religion and Secularism", which was organised

by the Missiological Faculty of the Pontifical Urbaniana University and the K. J. Somaiya Bharatiya Sanskriti Peetham Institute in Mumbai, India. I found the Indian perspective very elevating. It has something to offer the Christian churches and secular Western society in particular. All too often German statements on religion and Christianity seem extremely stilted and prejudiced. So it would be good to incorporate Indian concepts and traditions in our exploration of the subject; they advocate the separation of church and state, but without banishing the sacred from society.

### **Can the Christian faith still be lived out in public?**

We should not merely take note of the authentic Indian interpretation of religion and secularism, but also be prepared to give it serious thought. The learning process involved could well help us to define an adequate relationship between religion and secularism which does justice to both realities in human society.

### **Pastoral theological and missiological aids**

I would like to contribute a pastoral reflection to this discussion. There is not just one way of understanding religious and secular perceptions of the world and of relating them to one another. Each context involves a unique situation in which a religious or secular life can be led. There are innumerable opportunities for interaction between them. How they relate to each other depends on the prevailing forces in the respective cultural and political situation.

From my own pastoral theological and missiological perspective it is important to respond to the needs of the religious community, as this is the only way to understand the religious and secular context in the society concerned. It is very important to know and respect the way in which the respective religious community and secular society see themselves.

How can comparative contextual pastoral theology and missiology provide believers and Christian communities with guidelines enabling them to play their role more effectively in a secular, pluralistic society? Christians and Christian communities today need encouragement and hope to perform with renewed vigour and confidence the task assigned to them by their risen Lord – to spread the Good News.

Or are we now little more than a helpless piece of wood thrust to and fro by a mighty current, whose strength we are powerless to resist? It would be more appropriate to compare us with a ship which can chart its course even in troubled waters, evade all possible dangers and thus reach its destination.

The question that arises here is how we Christians can do justice to our mission to proclaim and testify to the Good News in our private and public lives. How can we respond aptly to the challenges posed by a secular and pluralistic society and how can we make a positive contribution for the benefit of all?

Francis-Vincent Anthony SDB, a pastoral theologian from India, is convinced that modern culture, with its focus on scientific rationality and democratic consensus, rules out the automatic passing on of Christian religious traditions and, more pertinently, of Church authority. Moreover, in many areas of public life increasing secularism has resulted in liberation from religious control.

The new context of pluralism and relativism, which goes hand in hand with the process of secularisation, has presented the Church with new challenges of a kind it has never before encountered in its two-thousand-year history. One outstanding example is the crisis affecting those traditionally responsible for communicating the Christian faith, and the system of values on which it rests, from one generation to the next. The fact that the family, the school and the parish – until recently the key elements in this communication process – are now only partly able to fulfil this duty, for a whole variety of reasons, has had devastating consequences for the young generation. This inadequate transmission of faith often leaves the new generation to its own devices, without access to the Christian ethics and religiousness that characterised the lives of their forebears.<sup>164</sup>

It remains to be seen whether the new powers can fill the resulting vacuum in a meaningful and equivalent manner, as the Christian faith has invariably succeeded in doing during its long history.

On the other hand, the secular context offers the Church and its members new, unforeseen possibilities for pastoral care. Even though the Church may have forfeited its previous monopoly in the religious and spiritual market in countries with a long Christian tradition and is

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<sup>164</sup> Cf. Anthony, Francis-Vincent, *Una pastorale in prospettiva missionaria*, in: Istituto di Teologia pastorale, *Pastorale giovanile*, Elledici, Leumann 2003, 100.

now obliged to compete with other “providers” in the field, there are nonetheless innumerable opportunities to act as “leaven” in today’s society. The Church is no longer the sole influence on religious and Christian lifestyles.

Anthony talks in this context of “private” and “public” Christianity. A secularised society makes it possible to select religious elements to suit one’s personal wishes, some of which may be derived from the Christian heritage, and to put these elements together to form a whole new patchwork.

On the other hand, countries with ancient Christian traditions continue to uphold a series of Christian values, symbols and festivals, which are publicly manifested and celebrated. This can certainly be deemed “public” Christianity or religion. While there is a certain degree of ambivalence in this new situation, there can be no denying that it offers a range of new opportunities for today’s Christian believers. Everything depends on the way in which local churches, i.e. the parishes, basic Christian communities and house churches, respond to these new developments and on whether they are prepared to overcome their fears and phlegmatic attitudes in the face of these new challenges.

The future, especially of the Christian communities, depends on the right interpretation and correct analysis of the new social challenges to religion in combination with a varied and balanced response to them.

### **Experiencing God in a secular context**

Rediscovering God’s presence in a secular context without succumbing to the temptation to ignore, or even deny, the secular world with its own specific rules, provides the Church with new momentum. It enables the Church to view the crisis not simply as a dangerous threat, but as a new opportunity.<sup>165</sup>

### **The Church**

The law governing the life of the Church dictates that it must be continually reborn. John Paul II expressed this clearly in his Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis*. For him “pastoral or practical theology [...] is a scientific reflection on the Church as she is built up

<sup>165</sup> Cf. Anthony, Francis-Vincent, *Pastorale e cultura*, in: *Camillianum* 20 (1999), 261-277.

daily, by the power of the Spirit, in history.”<sup>166</sup> He goes on to say: [It is a reflection on] “the Church as the “universal sacrament of salvation”, as a living sign and instrument of the salvation wrought by Christ through the word, the sacraments and the service of charity. Pastoral theology is not just an art. Nor is it a set of exhortations, experiences and methods. It is theological in its own right, because it receives from the faith the principles and criteria for the pastoral action of the Church in history, a Church that each day “begets” the Church herself.”<sup>167</sup>

Accepting the fact that we live in a secularised and pluralistic society which shows an indifferent and often vehemently hostile attitude to religious experiences and views of the world does not mean that we should remain passive and act as if we were paralysed.

On the contrary, we should seize the opportunities that arise and make creative use of them. We can go a step further even and highlight the possibility of engaging in dialogue with others, regardless of whether they are religious or not. This can give new impetus to the relationship between religion and secularism, from which society as a whole can benefit.

We should also approach people with little or no religious understanding and experience, as this may well help them to overcome their indifference to or ignorance of religion. On the other hand, we must also seek ways of ensuring that religious believers acknowledge and respect the secular world with its own inherent dynamic. The definition by Aylward Shorter, a cultural anthropologist, is very helpful in this respect: “Sacred and secular represent two different ways of experiencing the same reality. In themselves, they are not in competition or conflict. At the sacred level, reality is experienced as being under the governance of God, as the object of religious faith. The secular, on the other hand, is the same reality construed as being accessible to humanity and under its control. The secular has nothing to do with the concept of ‘uncleanness’, and is therefore not intrinsically opposed to the sacred.”<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> John Paul II, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation ‘Pastores Dabo Vobis’ by Pope John Paul II to the Bishops, Clergy and Faithful on the Formation of Priests in the Circumstances of the Present Day, [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_exh\\_25031992\\_pastores-dabo-vobis\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_25031992_pastores-dabo-vobis_en.html), no. 57.

<sup>167</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>168</sup> Shorter, Aylward, *Secularism in Africa*, in: *Sedos Bulletin* 30 (1998) 1, 10.

Let me cite Germany at this point as an illustration of a pluralistic and secular Western society in which religion is increasingly being banished from public life. The most influential mass media are not prepared or in a position to communicate a religious view of the world. The impression created as a result is that religion is no longer “in” or that religious language is incommunicable. In consequence, religion is viewed by many members of our Western society as “out” or outdated and irrelevant.

Attitudes like this mean that no significance is attached to religion any more in public life and so it is now largely relegated to the private sphere. Moreover, religious influence on society and public life is increasingly being perceived as a threat. The chilling images of militant and menacing Islamists merely serve to confirm preconceived opinions of the negative role played by religion in society.

Nonetheless, our Western societies continue to celebrate countless festivals of religious origins. They remain popular as the expression of a family-based culture and seem to have lost none of their charm despite their annual recurrence. Interestingly, participation in these festivals has not diminished despite the fact that church service attendance and the influence of religion in personal and family life are in steep decline. This raises the question of whether such unfailingly popular festivals with their barely perceived religious origins should be interpreted merely as cultural festivals that inject an element of variety and relief into the monotony of our meritocracy. Or do they still provide access to the real Christian message of divine and brotherly love?

To what extent can the Church benefit from the appeal of festivals of this nature in order to fulfil its mission to evangelise in this day and age? Not all religious festivals are equally suited as a vehicle for new evangelisation. The fundamentally human symbols manifested in the festivals need to be reinvigorated so as to enhance understanding of the values of the Sermon on the Mount and of the entire Gospel. We must persevere in this respect and untiringly seek access to the Water of Life.

Our task as Christians, teachers, mothers, fathers, pastors and so on is to help others find their own way to the life-giving water.

Access to the fullness of life is equally significant for everyone,

but this initially has little to do with religious affiliation. Our duty is to clear the way ahead so that the dried-up spring can flow once more for people in our time, since religion properly understood and practised remains a crucial part of human life which helps people to find themselves and protect their dignity.

As Christians we can even say that the vocation given to us by God helps us to use our unique, God-given talents and bring them to full flower.

### **The timeless power of tangible compassion**

In my home town in Germany's Middle Rhine region, autumn sees the celebration of an important festival which, despite all predictions to the contrary, continues to be marked today with a verve comparable to that displayed in my childhood and many generations before me. On the evening prior to the Feast of St. Martin all the children participate enthusiastically in a procession of lanterns. The festival is observed in all towns and districts, even in places without a parish. Wherever that is the case, the procession is organised by the fire brigade, civil communities or primary schools.

The song of St. Martin, which is sung everywhere during the procession, emphasises his compassion, as he shared his cloak with a poor beggar on a cold winter's night. Legend has it that the following night the beggar appeared to him as Christ in a dream and he realised that he had shared his cloak with Christ Himself. Popular piety elaborated the tale, creating – in my home town of Andernach at least – the story of the rich miser who was never prepared to help people in need. This story was even celebrated in song in the local Moselle-Franconian dialect.

The moral of the story is made clear by popular religious belief. In the battle between good and evil everybody must decide which path they wish to tread, although there is no doubt who chose the right path and now serves as a radiant paragon of good deeds and merciful actions. The story of St. Martin and the popularity it enjoys demonstrates the pressing need for role models even in pluralistic and secular societies as a source of motivation to treat those in need with compassion, to act mercifully towards them and thus to counteract self-interest and avarice.

## **Evangelisation reaffirmed**

The deep roots and extraordinary significance of this festival give Christian parishes the opportunity to place it in the service of evangelisation, which must be lived out and reaffirmed on a regular basis. Family services in which children can participate on the Sunday after St. Martin's Day – as they can on the Feast of St. Nicholas – have a magical appeal for children, which in turn prompts their parents to attend the St. Martin's and St. Nicholas services with them.

This constitutes a unique opportunity to provide people with access to community church services, as a vibrant family service fascinates and motivates not only the little ones but the whole family. Services like these offer a chance for new trust to emerge and develop between the Church community and young families. Pre-schools and primary schools are places in which awareness of fundamental Christian behaviour and teachings can be raised, as is the case in many towns during the St. Martin's and St. Nicholas festivals. St. Martin is regarded as the prototype of a disciple of Christ; he does not hesitate to follow the Lord and, like his Master, he treats the oppressed with compassion. This is precisely what makes his "Christ-like" character so plausible and authentic.

Human life cannot be separated into spiritual, social, political and economic categories without taking account of the dynamic and reciprocal relationship between them. Although the necessity to earn a livelihood, i.e. the economic factor, is of crucial importance, it is not the only significant element in a meaningful, fulfilled life. It is the spiritual factors, above all, which permit us to live in a meaningful, fulfilled way.

## **The search for life-giving oases in the deserts of our time**

Pope Benedict XVI used a beautiful metaphor for the Church Fathers in the homily delivered on the occasion of his inauguration on 24 April 2005. He said: "The pastor must be inspired by Christ's holy zeal: for him it is not a matter of indifference that so many people are living in the desert. And there are so many kinds of desert. There is the desert of poverty, the desert of hunger and thirst, the desert of abandonment, of loneliness, of destroyed love. There is the desert of God's darkness, the emptiness of souls no longer aware of their dignity or the goal of human life. The external deserts in the world

are growing, because the internal deserts have become so vast. Therefore the earth's treasures no longer serve to build God's garden for all to live in, but they have been made to serve the powers of exploitation and destruction."<sup>169</sup>

While modern life with all its technical accomplishments has benefited humanity greatly, it has nonetheless failed to secure peace, justice and love amongst human beings. Benedict XVI appeals to us not to be indifferent to the fact that so many people are living in the desert. His words constitute a plea to support our fellow men to and find places in life where the Water of Life flows, allowing us to live life in all its fullness. Benedict XVI continues: "The Church as a whole and all her Pastors, like Christ, must set out to lead people out of the desert, towards the place of life, towards friendship with the Son of God, towards the One who gives us life, and life in abundance."<sup>170</sup>

The Church as a whole is called upon to live out its mission in a society strewn with a series of such metaphorical deserts. It is its lawful task to bear witness to Christ before all people and to invite them to accept His healing message. We must be ready to be guided by the Holy Spirit on unknown and untrodden paths so that His Church, led by the Holy Spirit, may be reborn with each new day.

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<sup>169</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, Holy Mass for the Inauguration of the Pontificate of Pope Benedict XVI. With Imposition of the Pallium and Bestowal of the Fisherman's Ring. Homily of His Holiness Benedict XVI, St. Peter's Square, Sunday, 24. April 2005, in: [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/homilies/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_hom\\_20050424\\_inizio-pontificato\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/homilies/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20050424_inizio-pontificato_en.html) 29.04.2014.

<sup>170</sup> *ibid.*



# **The Universal Church as a Community of Learning**



# Connections alone are not enough

## The universal Church as a learning community

Hildegard Wustmans

Connections alone are not enough. “There has to be a sphere and also some space. Neither a void – which, in a sense, is insurmountable – nor a connection is adequate, unless there is some distance. [...] There needs to be a space and some way of entering into dialogue with one another.”<sup>171</sup> This space can become a shared learning sphere – a space in which knowledge can be acquired and where each of the parties expects to be changed by the other. After all, learning “can only take place if a person is able to change”<sup>172</sup>. Unless we are willing to take this risk, we will not learn anything new in the end. If we insist on staying where we are, any knowledge we acquire will, at best, simply confirm what we know already. But learning is not just a matter of building on prior knowledge. There are also learning environments where we may be required to amend our existing knowledge. Consequently we can say that there is no learning environment without preconditions and that learning always includes re-thinking as an essential element.<sup>173</sup> Moreover, as a learning environment involves an encounter with something new and hence unfamiliar, there must also be an element of inquisitiveness and enjoyment in making new discoveries. This can turn learning into an adventure and the learning process into a vehicle enabling us to change positions. It is an aspect that is inherent in the Middle High German word *lernēn* or *lirnēn*, which meant not just “to learn”, but also “to follow or find the track”<sup>174</sup>. A learning process involves an effort for virtually everyone, and this is likewise contained as an implicit idea

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<sup>171</sup> Irigaray, Luce, *Der Atem von Frauen*, Luce Irigaray präsentiert weibliche Credos, Rüsselshheim 1997, 226.

<sup>172</sup> Otto, Gert, Art. Lernen, in: Mette, Norbert; Rockers, Folkert, *Lexikon der Religionspädagogik*, volume 2, Neukirchen-Vluyn 2001, 1218-1222, especially 1218.

<sup>173</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>174</sup> <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=learn>.

in the Middle High German term. It is strenuous to venture into new fields, above all when we cannot achieve our goals as quickly as we had hoped, when the fascination of the unfamiliar has faded and when we realise how painful it is to put our prior knowledge into perspective. With that in mind, it is important for us to have moments of success which confirm our progress while also motivating us to take the next steps in the learning process. A learning process is, therefore, not just an adventure of the mind, but also a challenge to cope with the space we encounter. These twin aspects can also be found within the universal Church.

### **The universal Church – a niche topic in parishes and dioceses**

Most of today's Christians live in the southern hemisphere, which is also where the Church is growing. In the German-speaking countries, by contrast, there has not been much growth at all, but a steady decline in Church membership – a situation which has prevailed for many years now.<sup>175</sup> This is also evidenced by the fact that more and more clergy from abroad are now beginning to work as parish priests in Germany. "According to the latest figures (2011), Germany has 1,742 clergy from other countries, including 808 secular priests and 934 religious priests. The two largest groups come from India and Poland."<sup>176</sup>

These facts show that salvation is no longer being exported by the European Church all over the world. Instead, European Christians have entered into dialogue with other regional churches around the globe and are connected with them on a reciprocal basis. Whenever there is contact within the universal Church, it is no longer a one-way street. One significant milestone in this development was the Second Vatican Council, at which the Catholic Church discovered its identity as a universal Church and as the people of God who "go forth", i.e. move forward. Following on this discovery, numerous partnerships have been formed with regional churches around the world over the years, not just between dioceses, but also between parish churches and religious associations. When we look at the objectives associated with such partnerships, we can see at the level

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<sup>175</sup> Cf. Deutsche Bischofskonferenz, *Katholische Kirche in Deutschland, Zahlen und Fakten 2012/13, Arbeitshilfen*, No. 263, in: [http://www.dbk-shop.de/media/files/DBK\\_5263.pdf](http://www.dbk-shop.de/media/files/DBK_5263.pdf), 2. June 2014.

<sup>176</sup> *ibid.*

of parishes that there is great keenness “to promote within their own churches an awareness of worldwide identification with the poor, to create conditions for fairer living conditions and to alleviate poverty and distress.”<sup>177</sup> The issue of fair trade plays an important role here, too. Yet it is equally noticeable that the spirituality of other regional churches hardly ever features as a learning objective within the universal Church. This is an area where Church aid organisations and diocesan institutions would very much like to see a change,<sup>178</sup> and they therefore “seek to promote a spirituality of care for the poor in their work in Germany.”<sup>179</sup> These endeavours notwithstanding, the learning that takes place at the parish level concentrates largely on information about living conditions in other parts of the world and on appeals to people’s hearts and minds. Much of the information comes from the material provided by Church aid organisations, whose professionalism and practical expertise are mostly highly valued.<sup>180</sup> In addition, first-hand information is also obtained through direct contact with committed activists – individuals who, as it were, embody many of these partnerships. They are the ones who keep the partnerships going, persistently drawing attention to them within their local churches, with which they otherwise have relatively loose ties, and staunchly refusing to be discouraged in their commitment. The source of their motivation and commitment is the direct contact they have with the various partner churches.<sup>181</sup> However, these same people also complain that they are not sufficiently valued and that too much rests on their shoulders. Nevertheless, they still place their faith in the local churches helping them in the longer term, even though this form of Church social work has lost much of its plausibility in recent years. This attitude shows that activists within a universal Church environment (wish to) see their involvement in a context of continuity rather than as a result of structural changes within the dioceses.<sup>182</sup>

Full-time professionals at the diocesan offices, on the other hand, take a different view. They feel that structural adjustments and

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<sup>177</sup> *ibid.*, 42.

<sup>178</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 57.

<sup>179</sup> *ibid.*, 55.

<sup>180</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 65.

<sup>181</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 49.

<sup>182</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 79.

savings targets are putting them under pressure to act in a certain way. At the same time they can see that local volunteers need to receive training on universal Church topics.<sup>183</sup> The main issues for diocesan offices are: “Voluntary work, education within Germany, PR work, cooperation with local churches and aid organisations, and training for volunteers”.<sup>184</sup> There is virtually no cooperation with ministers from other countries in Germany or with non-German local churches. This range of issues shows two things: first of all, that there is a major discrepancy between the perception of one’s own work, on the one hand, and views of the required learning content and learning processes, on the other; secondly, it also shows that a person’s self-perception and views are substantially shaped by his or her own position within the Church. In a nutshell, we can see that the universal Church is not regarded as an interdisciplinary topic, but that it is still the concern of a relatively small group. In fact, it is seen as a secondary issue.<sup>185</sup> I believe this is because any involvement with the universal Church includes the experience that there is more to it all than one’s own identity - and this “more” leads to uncertainty. Is it a shortcoming – i.e. within oneself – or does it pave the way to new structures and new ideas? Is it a sphere which is open to us, or does it involve the admission that something is missing within us? These and similar questions are rarely considered, because local problems appear far more serious in a given church situation. It rarely occurs to anyone that a universal Church perspective might help us find our bearings in our own development and that there may even be a space that can be used creatively.<sup>186</sup>

### **What if . . . or: the Church in “learning mode”<sup>187</sup>**

Before we adopt a different perspective and pluck up the courage to do things differently, we first need to understand and acknowledge that we ourselves have a deficit and that we cannot continue in the same way as before. Once we have understood this, we can look

<sup>183</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 76.

<sup>184</sup> *ibid.*, 106.

<sup>185</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 107.

<sup>186</sup> Cf. Rethmann, Albert-Peter, *Katholische Kirche in Deutschland – Organisationsentwicklung mit weltkirchlichem Bewusstsein*, in: euangel, Magazin für missionarische Pastoral 2 (2011), 34-39, in: [http://www.euangel.de/fileadmin/Downloads/Archiv/euangel\\_2-11.pdf](http://www.euangel.de/fileadmin/Downloads/Archiv/euangel_2-11.pdf).

<sup>187</sup> Neubert, Simon, *In Vielfalt verbunden – Weltkirchliches Lernen*, in: [http://www.katholisch.de/de/weltkirche/themen\\_2/lerngemeinschaft\\_weltkirche\\_1.php](http://www.katholisch.de/de/weltkirche/themen_2/lerngemeinschaft_weltkirche_1.php), 4. December 2013.

for a way out, for situations in which we can learn, for people who can teach us and whom we can trust, knowing that their support will provide us with a way out, so that we can rise above it. One vital requirement for such a learning relationship is the recognition that “more” can be found somewhere else, combined with a willingness to authorise others for this purpose. The crucial starting point is provided by the existing differences, and the resulting learning relationship has its basis in our trust that we can “help each other grow and learn from one another”.<sup>188</sup> Mutual authorisation is, therefore, a process and the result of a relationship and dialogue.

### Learning in the *spatial turn*

Based on these premises, we are in a position to ensure the fruitfulness of dialogue within the *spatial turn* for learning processes in the universal Church. Such dialogue has a range of distinctive features: “first of all, it means taking a critical look at social processes which have become unavoidable over time. Secondly, it means seeing the identifiable subjects in these processes in geographical terms, i.e. spatially, as such a perspective helps us focus on the essence of power and on the reality of powerlessness in the identities of those subjects. Thirdly, these spheres manifest themselves in real and unavoidable locations, in particular cities, places of exclusion and cultural contact zones. This puts our focus on practices, tactics, challenges, access attempts, expectations and explanations which oppose existing orders, shift topographical validities and raise topological issues.”<sup>189</sup>

Global learning within the universal Church would be unthinkable without certain spheres (first spheres) which create further spheres for dialogue (i.e. a second sphere) and then produce creative tension (i.e. a third sphere). Here again it is true to say that there is no place and, in fact, no dialogue “without an outside reality that faces it and which still implicitly influences the dialogue even when it is being excluded from it”.<sup>190</sup> In such contexts human issues, social issues

<sup>188</sup> Kahlert, Heike, *Differenz, Genealogie, Affidamento: Das italienische ‘pensiero della differenza sessuale’ in der internationalen Rezeption*, in: Becker, Ruth; Kortendiek, Beate, *Handbuch Frauen- und Geschlechterforschung, Theorie, Methoden, Empirie*, Wiesbaden 2010, 94–102, especially 95.

<sup>189</sup> Sander, Hans-Joachim, *Der ewige Gott hat Raum – Theologie im spatial turn*, in: *Theologische Revue* 109 (2013) 2, 92–110, especially 93.

<sup>190</sup> *ibid.*, 96.

and God are on the agenda. Yet God first needs to be discovered within those spheres. Initially, His presence is anonymous.<sup>191</sup>

Whenever people or organisations accept the challenge of spheres, questions or issues – of external perspectives, in other words – there are from the very beginning certain expectations that the reflected perceptions will inevitably get right to the crux of the problem. This is necessary, indeed, as otherwise our encounter with the unfamiliar will remain a temporary and, at best, an exhilarating experience, but one without a lasting impact once it has been applied to our own environment. Such an encounter would not be helpful for our own learning and change processes, and our communication partners would be no more and no less than providers of pleasant feelings and beautiful moments. To avoid this temptation, it may be helpful not just to visit the other regional churches, but also to invite people from overseas with a view to obtaining their feedback.<sup>192</sup> Structuring the relationship in this way would mean reorganising the familiar patterns of cross-cultural meetings within the universal Church. That may prove unsettling, but it would also be highly constructive. Alongside such places of sought-after encounters with one or more people from abroad there are also complex situations which people do not choose freely but which they endure or may even prefer to avoid. Such inescapable environments include, for instance, non-German local churches within Germany and the fact that priests from other countries are no longer a rarity in German-speaking local churches.

### **The challenge of the intercultural element in the local church**

Germany's regional churches include a large number of non-German local churches. In Frankfurt am Main, for instance, the mother tongue of one in three Catholics is not German.<sup>193</sup> Priests from abroad are now present in increasing numbers in German-speaking dioceses. In both cases regional churches often have problems with them. Non-German churches are very rarely integrated into the activities of local parish churches. The two exist alongside each other, yet without being

<sup>191</sup> Cf. *ibid*, 99.

<sup>192</sup> Cf. Montz, Winfried, *Von Gästen lernen*, in: *Lebendige Seelsorge* 56 (2005) 3, 134-139. Müller, Hadwig, *SPRING oder Pfingsten heute, Wenn Vertrauen und Strategie zusammenkommen*, in: *Lebendige Seelsorge* 56 (2005) 3, 157-163.

<sup>193</sup> Cf. <http://frankfurt.bistum-limburg.de/interkulturelle-pastoral.html>, 4. December 2013.

in fellowship with one another. Each prefers to stay among its own kind.<sup>194</sup> One good objective for a parish church, therefore, would be to proceed from toleration to integration. "If a church prioritises intercultural openness, it increases its chances of creating an environment which will foster a positive approach to foreigners and to intercultural fellowship, an environment in which German and immigrant Church members accept the challenge of mutual learning, based on their shared faith. In such an environment the church can develop constructive ways of dealing with cultural differences while also opening up, step by step, to further-reaching inter-denominational and inter-religious encounters in its immediate surroundings. Moreover, since these encounters take place within people's own spheres, they are far more effective than compensating for an avoidance of contact at home by means of intercultural engagement in remote parts of the world (e.g. through contact with a partner church in Latin America).<sup>195</sup>

A German local church that proceeds in this way could move from its purely German-speaking niche to a genuine experience of the universal Church and receive the added value which results from taking up the challenge of something different. It would mean accepting a third sphere – a sphere that takes a different perspective of our own first sphere, so that acceptance might become highly significant for our own development. This might be a basis for growth, as it enriches us through the things we learn from others.<sup>196</sup>

Experience with priests from other countries in German-speaking local churches has shown that such challenges and new perspectives can be demanding and may involve problems of their own at times. Mutual access is not always readily available, and the two groups often remain alien to one another.<sup>197</sup> The fact that priests from abroad remain strangers is partly due to language problems and partly also to substantial differences in the way they have expe-

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<sup>194</sup> Cf. Scheidler, Monika, *Interkulturelles Lernen in der Gemeinde, Analysen und Orientierungen zur Katechese unter Bedingungen kultureller Differenz*, Glaubenskommunikation Reihe "Zeitzeichen" No. 11, Ostfildern 2002, 186 ff.

<sup>195</sup> *ibid.*, 183.

<sup>196</sup> This thought can also be found in: Markert, Dorothee, *Wachsen am MEHR anderer Frauen, Vorträge über Begehren, Dankbarkeit und Politik*, Rüsselsheim 2002, where she develops the idea for connections between women, society and politics.

<sup>197</sup> Cf. Gabriel, Karl; Leibold, Stefan; Achtermann, Rainer, *Die Situation ausländischer Priester in Deutschland, Ergebnisse einer empirischen Studie*, Forum Weltkirche: Entwicklung und Frieden No. 13, Ostfildern 2011.

rienced church and society back home and in Germany. Many of them therefore believe that the Church and faith in Germany are in crisis. As they see it, the challenge of the Church is not “to open up more to the modern world”, but to be “re-evangelised” within itself. [...] “The faith of Christians in Germany needs to be rekindled by a ‘missionary offensive’ from outside.”<sup>198</sup> They see themselves as being entrusted with this mission.

When we look at the issues of intercultural relations within parish churches, the question somehow arises as to whether strangers are only of interest if we can relate to them outside our own everyday lives.<sup>199</sup> How else can we explain the fact that, on the one hand, parishioners are happy to donate money to other regional churches and to take an interest in the universal Church, yet, on the other hand, they find it hard to relate to non-German Catholics and, indeed, to Nigerian, Polish and Indian priests? People from other countries who live among us appear to be a disturbing and at times unsettling factor within our own circles. They confront us with an intercultural component that is not seen as desirable, and there appears to be no inkling that something could actually be learned from them. Instead, the foreigners themselves are treated as people who need to learn something, and it is felt that this learning process should be a matter of cultural adjustment.

Obviously, these highly challenging situations also include other very different learning opportunities. However, in order to leverage this potential, it is vital to recognise one another’s differences and to allow a space for something new to be born. Then foreignness no longer needs to be kept at bay and, instead, both groups can discover ways to develop their own perspectives and identities. This may enable a local church to acquire some clearly discernible intercultural colourfulness. Such local churches would be living evidence that, as Franz Gmainer-Pranzl puts it, the Church has been and still is characterised by migration as one of its essential features. The Church is the people of God on the move – “going forth”.

<sup>198</sup> Gabriel, Karl; Achtermann, Rainer; Leibold, Stefan, ‘Ausländische Priester in Deutschland’ – Ausgewählte Ergebnisse der schriftlichen Befragung ausländischer Priester, in: <http://www.forum-weltkirche.de/de/artikel/11274.auslaendische-priester-in-deutschland.html>, 4. December 2013.

<sup>199</sup> Cf. Arnold-Rammé, Pia, *Mit Nachbarn lernen?*, in: *Lebendige Seelsorge* 56 (2005) 3, 140-145, especially 141.

## Volunteering programmes: seeking cultural immersion, accepting a feeling of insecurity and finding one's own perspective

"I naively used to think that everything was better in Africa. Quite soon, however, I realised that it's the same as everywhere else. There are good and bad points just as there are all over the world. Tanzania showed me what really matters and that life is a gift."<sup>200</sup> Those words were the result of a young woman's learning experience after she had deliberately left her accustomed environment and taken a gap year abroad. She is one of many, mainly young people who have participated in the German government project *weltwärts* ("worldwards")<sup>201</sup> in a scheme called *Missionare auf Zeit* ("Temporary Missionaries"), set up by various German religious orders<sup>202</sup>, or who have joined Jesuit Volunteers<sup>203</sup> to serve in a project in countries such as Romania, Peru, Tanzania and India. In their experience, requests for their service come from the actual places themselves. Preconceived ideas turn out to be utopian dreams. Making contact is not as easy as it originally seemed. Offers of help are not taken up and coordination with local stakeholders does not always run smoothly.<sup>204</sup> So it is all the more impressive when a young person comes to the following conclusion: "I am very grateful for the time I spent in Dodoma. I learned a great deal for myself and I think I was also able to give something in return. As a result of our tutoring sessions Godlove discovered how much he enjoyed reading. Cathrin had a great time playing music with me once a week. Several teachers felt encouraged to rethink their attitudes when they saw my different approach to treating students. I regularly gave comfort and consolation to Pulo, who was constantly being beaten by another boy. Regina stopped hitting other children and, instead, has great fun singing now. [...] These are small steps and small victories."<sup>205</sup>

<sup>200</sup> Arbeitsgemeinschaft MaZ der Orden, "Wer lernt hier von wem?" 25 Jahre MissionarIn auf Zeit, Cologne 2007, 31.

<sup>201</sup> Cf. <http://www.weltwaerts.de/>, 4. December 2013. The same partnership scheme also offers opportunities for international volunteers to come to Germany. In the Diocese of Limburg, for instance, there are currently two international volunteers – Claris Yufenyuy and Sandrine Tanlaka – from the twinned Diocese of Kumbo in Cameroon. Cf. <http://www.bdkj-limburg.de/aktuelles/meldungen/details/artikel/endlich-sind-sie-da/>, 4. December 2013.

<sup>202</sup> Cf. <http://www.missionarin-auf-zeit.de/>, 4. December 2013.

<sup>203</sup> Cf. <http://www.jesuitenmission.de/volunteers/freiwilligendienst.html>, 4. December 2013.

<sup>204</sup> Cf. <http://www.bdkj-limburg.de/aktuelles/meldungen/details/artikel/endlich-sind-sie-da/>, 4. December 2013.

<sup>205</sup> Meister, Nelly, *Meine letzten 4 Monate*, in: <http://www.jesuit-volunteers-blog.org/index.php/category/tansania/>, 4. December 2013.

People are changed by such experiences. A period of time in another country plays an important role in the development of a person's identity which, for many volunteers, also includes their identity as Christians.<sup>206</sup> All of them are united by the experience that "a close look at the dimensions of a different place"<sup>207</sup> automatically has an impact on their identity. The "who" and the "where" are brought together and belong together whenever people seek their identity.<sup>208</sup> This first-hand experience enables them to understand that it is not enough to ask *who* the others are, but that it is equally important to enquire *where* they are. It is in a given local setting that we experience who we are and how fragile this "who" can be. Once we find ourselves in a new locality, we no longer have the same amount of control over this "who", because we are now less secure. At the same time, however, it is possible to experience "who" we might yet become, as certain characteristics come to the fore because we are no longer at home. Being unable to avoid these aspects can be a painful experience and most definitely a challenge. Yet mastering this challenge means learning something vital about ourselves: that life itself is a task to be fulfilled. This is something volunteers experience and formulate not just in relation to themselves, but also in relation to the Church. They get to know other regional churches which are characterised and influenced by their own local circumstances.

It is these learning experiences, in particular, that volunteers take home with them from their encounters with people, with the Church and with other religions in a very different part of the world. However, applying those experiences and using their potential back home is by no means easy. The interest of the local church tends to fade as quickly as people's memories of the slideshow in the parish hall. Why is this so? Is it because local church members experience the universal Church as a shortcoming within themselves? Is it because they lack curiosity?

After all, such an intellectual adventure and the challenge of the "space" require a change in our assessment of ourselves – and that is unsettling. It would certainly explain the intuitive reaction to

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<sup>206</sup> Cf. Arbeitsgemeinschaft MaZ der Orden, op.cit., 48.

<sup>207</sup> Sander, Hans-Joachim, *Andere Räume sind Orte Gottes, Eine Heterotopologie spiritueller Präsenz*, in: *Lebendiges Zeugnis* 68 (2013) 3, 163-177, especially 167.

<sup>208</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 167.

stay away from “them out there”. Parishioners consequently relegate these experiences of the universal Church to the realm of subjectivity. They see them as the experiences of the volunteers: they are theirs, and that is the way things should remain. Yet responding in such a way means missing an opportunity to question our own environment and to look at our own activities in a new light. Such questioning would mean accepting someone else’s ideas – the ideas of people who have travelled and who are generally younger, too. In fact, if we make the most of the opportunity – our encounter with a different “who” and “where” – we have a chance to sharpen our own profile.

Another sphere in which we meet and study different Christians and different religions and where our own profile plays a part is the theological faculty of a university.

### **The universal Church as a learning community within the sphere of a theological faculty**

When we look at the present designations of just three chairs at Catholic universities in German-speaking countries, we can see that there has been quite a learning process in theological thought over the past few decades.<sup>209</sup> The names of those chairs reflect the historical developments and discussions that have taken place. The Institute of Missiology at the University of Münster is now called the *Institute of Missiology and Non-European Theologies* and its equivalent at the University of Würzburg has been renamed the *Foundation Chair in Missiology and Dialogue between Religions*. The University of Salzburg has set up a department called *Centre for Intercultural Theology and the Study of Religions*.

With regard to teaching content (and this also includes chairs in pastoral theology which look at universal Church issues and perspectives in teaching and research) these chairs are largely united in their endeavour to implement central aspects of the Second Vatican Council: the connection between dogma and pastoral care (*Lumen Gentium* and *Gaudium et Spes*), the relationship between a regional church and the universal Church (*Lumen Gentium*) and relations

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<sup>209</sup> A further assessment of developments in missiology is offered by Delgado, Mariano, *Neue Entwicklungen an Theologischen Fakultäten in Sachen Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft*, in: *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft* 93 (2009) 1/2, 123-124.

between Christianity and other religions (*Nostra Aetate*).<sup>210</sup> The main purpose at each of these institutions is to foster dialogue with different Christians and different religions and to learn how to establish creative connections with unfamiliar religious and cultural elements. Moreover, they encourage dialogue and encounters (e.g. through symposiums) with individuals from within the universal Church and with adherents of other religions. These chairs can currently still be described as “niche chairs” and only time will tell whether they are capable of reformatting theology at their respective universities and elsewhere, too. They certainly have the potential to do so.

The places mentioned above serve as examples and generally represent the opportunities to learn about and from the universal Church that are available in German-speaking environments. They show that there is more to it all than our own existence and that we can learn something from others which they have but which we lack. They also illustrate that connections can be established which leave “spaces” in which we still have sufficient distance from and respect for one another, where the void is not insurmountable and where being connected need not mean merging but can offer opportunities for mutual development.

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<sup>210</sup> Cf. <http://www.uni-salzburg.at/index.php?id=32156>, 4. December 2013. The relevant Council texts can be found on the Vatican website: <http://w2.vatican.va/content/vatican/en.html>.

# Teachers and learners, learning venues and eagerness to learn, curriculum and teaching theory within the universal Church as a learning community

Michael Huhn

## A missionary exhibition as an experience of the universal Church

Nearly 60 years ago, six years before the beginning of the Second Vatican Council, on the Feast of the Ascension in 1956, the Pontifical Mission Society *missio* staged a large-scale missionary exhibition at the Gruga Exhibition Centre in Essen. Ascension Day was a deliberate choice, as it commemorates the occasion when the resurrected Christ sent out his disciples with the words: “Go out to the whole world; proclaim the gospel to all creation” (Mark 16:15). In the period up to Trinity Sunday 27 religious orders and congregations, three Missionary Institutes and the Societies for the Propagation of the Faith showcased the missionary activities and work of over 21,000 German nuns, monks and priests working under the Catholic World Apostolate.

The halls of the exhibition centre were full of works of art from the various world religions together with exhibits illustrating daily life in missionary countries and the working day of a missionary. Numerous missionary films were shown, the late 1950s having become a veritable heyday for them. It was the time when missionary films and brief presentations in weekly cinema newsreels were the most important way of conveying impressions of developing countries through motion pictures. German missionaries frequently reported on their work. As Essen was part of the Cologne Diocese at the time, the diocesan magazine *Kölner Kirchenzeitung* said: “Visitors understood that mission is not a matter of giving Negro children a European education or of undertaking romantic adventures in foreign parts. Neither does

it mean simply bringing civilisation to the American Indians or culture to Malays, the Chinese or the Japanese. Rather, mission means no more and no less than fulfilling the Great Commission given by Christ. Everything else is included.”<sup>211</sup>

What was even more important was the physical presence of “Young Churches”, as they were called at the time. There was a performance by an Indonesian dancing group, a group of “mothers superior from indigenous African monastic communities” was available to answer questions, and the opening mass was celebrated by “the Negro priest and giant of a man, Dr. Kagame. He came from a Bantu tribe and was preparing for his second doctorate at the University of Leuven in Belgium. While celebrating mass, he was assisted by two Chinese servers. [...] It was the first time in the German Catholic Church that the Gospel was preached in various world languages. [...] At that moment it was as if the large crowd of the faithful who had gathered were holding their breath, as suddenly everyone became aware of the full breadth of the Catholic Church.”<sup>212</sup>

The *missio* exhibition in Essen was the first time that visitors had experienced the universal Church as a learning community. Even though the event also featured the missionary work of Germans (and Europeans in general) *ad gentes*, everyone who came was deeply impressed by the “harvest” (a widely used metaphor at the time), personified by the many Catholics from mission countries. It demonstrated to visitors that being a Christian can take on very different forms and express itself in different ways from those we are familiar with.

The language and tone of the reports published in the church magazine were typical of the time, and it would be wrong to read them today with a sense of superiority on account of their political incorrectness. From today’s perspective the crowds drawn by *missio* were remarkable. Although an entrance fee was charged, the exhibition attracted over 15,000 visitors on the first six days alone. It is, of course, hardly surprising that Catholic organisations were so well represented at all the events and services and that the Catholic Youth drew such large numbers at its “commitment ceremony”. What should come as a surprise, though, is the amount of “secular” support

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<sup>211</sup> Kölner Kirchenzeitung, 13. May 1956.

<sup>212</sup> Kölner Kirchenzeitung, 20. May 1956.

for *missio*, which included miners from Essen's coal pits, the City of Essen and its institutions, the state government of North Rhine-Westphalia, the German Foreign Office and ambassadors from the various missionary destinations who had come to Essen to present their countries at the exhibition. Having had its *première* in Essen, *missio* was subsequently presented at the 77th German Catholic Conference at the Cologne Exhibition Centre as well as in Aachen and Münster and, in 1957, in several cities in southern Germany.

### Teaching and learning

The *missio* exhibition was a further indication that the big shift towards the universal Church – which included the foundation of MISEREOR in 1958 and *adveniat* in 1961 – was not the result of the Second Vatican Council but had started earlier. Thus was the ground prepared for the Council to sow its seed. It gave the participating bishops a unique experience of the universal Church while also spawning many diocesan partnerships, e.g. between the Tula Diocese in Mexico and the German Diocese of Münster. But what turned out to be even more important was that, after a century of centralisation, imposed by Pius IX to an unparalleled degree, the Council gave back to the regional churches the right to develop in their own ways. It permitted the universal Church to become a learning community by enabling a transition “from a model of dominant uniformity (bureaucratic catholicity) to a model of pluriformity”.<sup>213</sup>

This was new. After all, throughout its history the universal Church had seen itself more as a teaching community than a learning community: “Go therefore, make disciples of all nations, [...] teach them to observe all the commands I gave you.”<sup>214</sup> Missionaries often used to encourage their audiences to accept the Christian faith in the same form and with the same content that had been conveyed to them, rather than showing them ways in which they might learn to believe. Obviously, the acquisition process involved learning. In the early Middle Ages, for instance, when Germanic tribes decided to follow Christ, they “translated” this concept into their own culture, based on their tribal associations: as becoming loyal followers. After

<sup>213</sup> Dussel, Enrique, *Die Gezeiten des Evangeliums – Wenn die evangelisierten Armen zu Evangelisatoren werden*, in: *Concilium* 22 (1986), 382-388, especially 385.

<sup>214</sup> Matthew 28:19-20.

the *Conquista* the noble sons (rarely also the daughters) of the Aztecs and Incas naturally learned the *Catechismus Romanus*, although this often meant no more than learning alien “material” from an alien world. What they genuinely learned in any real sense of the word – i.e. appropriated for themselves – was whatever had been selected and practised by the *sensus fidelium* from among the enormous *depositum fidei* and from Christian tradition.<sup>215</sup> “Lex orandi, lex credendi.” – This axiom, set up by the Augustinian student, Prosper Tiro from Aquitaine, was picked up by Lucio Gera, the theologian and teacher of Mario Bergoglio: for us, as theologians, the so-called “simple” people are our teachers in the way they believe and pray.<sup>216</sup> It was this understanding of teaching as a two-way rather than a “top-down” process which eventually spread from Argentina into the universal Church.

There are many idealised concepts (and, indeed, much wishful thinking) about the “universal Church as a learning community”, and there is no need here to add to the list of desirable features that should characterise it. Instead, we will start with an appraisal of the current situation in the “universal Church as a learning community” and, in doing so, we will follow the three-step procedure practised by the Latin American Church: “observe – interpret – apply”. Apart from our parental home, the learning community which is most familiar to us from our own lives is, of course, school. So what can we learn about the universal Church as a learning community if we look at it as a classroom?

### Learners instead of teachers

No matter how important the “curriculum” may be, learning is always personal and involves personal development. The first two questions should therefore be: Who are the teachers? And who are the learners? Paulo Freire, the Brazilian educational theory expert, gives an account of how a strict distinction between teachers and students has persisted for centuries and has influenced learning: “Students

<sup>215</sup> Espín, Orlando, *Idol and Grace – Traditioning and Subversive Hope*, Maryknoll 2014.

<sup>216</sup> Gera, Lucio, *Pueblo, religión del pueblo e Iglesia*, in: Azcuy, Virginia R. et al., *Escritos teológico-pastorales*, volume 1: *Del Preconcilio a la Conferencia de Puebla (1956–1981)*, Buenos Aires 2006, 717-744. And *ibid*, *Teología de los procesos históricos y de la vida de las personas*, in: *Escritos teológico-pastorales*, volume 2: *De la Conferencia de Puebla a nuestros días (1982-2007)*, Buenos Aires 2007, 869-890.

are asked not to gain understanding, but to take in whatever learning content is handed to them by their teacher. [...] The teacher teaches and the students are taught. The teacher knows everything and the students know nothing.”<sup>217</sup>

This dualism has been overcome by the universal Church thanks to the Second Vatican Council. It is indicative that nowadays hardly anyone wants to see themselves as a teacher. On the contrary, those who have experienced the universal Church – wherever and in whatever form – speak about what they have learned. The nouns we hear are “learning” and, to an even greater extent, “encounters”. This is reflected in any content analysis of personal learning testimonies within the universal Church, e.g. testimonies presented by “missionaries on furlough” whenever they come together for an annual study week at the invitation of the German Conference of Religious Orders.<sup>218</sup>

In fact, religious orders have always been global learning communities *par excellence*. Many are international in character as regards the origins of their members and their respective deployment locations. For many years they were sent out from Europe and North America to countries in the southern hemisphere, whereas nowadays the flow is mainly in the opposite direction. The number of German Fidei Donum priests, i.e. the group of secular priests who work abroad for a while, particularly in Latin American regional churches, has dropped. On the other hand, there is a growing number of Temporary Missionaries (*Missionare auf Zeit*) – young people who go abroad for a year or longer, living, praying and working with religious orders.

The vast majority of Catholics in Germany do not have the option of travelling abroad for a period of time, and the flying visits that are offered to decision-makers, to get some exposure to another culture, are not open to ordinary Catholics and are beyond their budgets. However, there is every chance that, if they are churchgoers, they can nonetheless experience the universal Church directly, personally and one-to-one. The opportunity arises through meeting foreign priests, mainly from India and Africa, whence growing numbers of clergy are

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<sup>217</sup> Freire, Paulo, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2000, quoted here from: <http://www2.webster.edu/~corbetre/philosophy/education/freire/freire-2.html> (Chapter 2).

<sup>218</sup> Neumann, Stephan, *Wir waren Missionare*, in: *Christ in der Gegenwart* 65 (2013), 145-149.

being sent to German churches to conduct pastoral work. One of the simplest and, indeed, most obvious and most frequent ways of experiencing the universal Church is the practice – common in the priests’ home countries – of greeting each churchgoer on the church doorstep in person, whether after mass or after an event at the presbytery. Many of these “universal Church priests” (as they are called, for instance, in the Münster Diocese) have initiated partnerships between their home churches and their German churches, sometimes even leading to the formation of small-scale aid organisations. (This, incidentally, can sometimes make it difficult for an official aid organisation to obtain support and funds for its own purposes, as a large part of a local church’s attention may already be focused on its “own” universal Church projects.)

One potential source, however, of which very little use is made for global encounters, is the presence of foreign Christians (including non-Europeans) in our own society. Despite the fact that these Christians come to services and take part in the lives of local German churches, they are rarely questioned by local parishioners about the way they live out their faith back home. If, on the other hand, they are part of non-German-speaking Catholic churches, there are only very few encounters with German-speaking congregations. There is even less knowledge about and contact with churches from developing countries, which are currently experiencing the greatest growth, i.e. urban immigrant churches with a mainly Charismatic or Pentecostal emphasis. The Ruhr Area and Düsseldorf alone have a total of some 30 Brazilian Pentecostal churches.<sup>219</sup> In Hamburg, African churches attract more people to their Sunday services than Lutheran churches.<sup>220</sup> However, their presence does not trigger any desire to learn from the universal Church, and virtually no one among the “indigenous” population of Hamburg and the Ruhr Area ever ventures into these churches. In fact, their vitality appears to meet with suspicion rather than curiosity.

<sup>219</sup> Cf. Döring, Eva-Maria, *¡Ven, ven Espíritu Santo ven! Zur religiösen Praxis lateinamerikanisch-brasilianischer Pfingstler in Deutschland*, in: Nagel, Alexander-Kenneth, *Diessseits der Parallelgesellschaft – Neuere Studien zu religiösen Migrantengemeinden in Deutschland*, Bielefeld 2013, 121-143.

<sup>220</sup> Cf. *Fremde Nachbarn: Religionen in der Stadt, Kirche in der Stadt*, volume 7, Hamburg 1997. Kahl, Werner, *African Theological Training in Germany* (ATTiG), in: *Zusammen wachsen: weltweite Ökumene in Deutschland gestalten, Weltmission heute*, volume 73, Hamburg 2011, 221-225.

## The big classroom – or: the learning venues and “teaching methods” of the universal Church

When we look at the language of publications about the universal Church, it is apparent that the words *learning* and *encounter* often occur together, either in the same paragraph or even within the same sentence. This applies particularly to publications reporting on or encouraging involvement with the universal Church, issued, for instance, by diocesan universal Church liaison officers, One World groups in local churches, aid organisations and missionary orders. There is a good reason for this. If, as we have seen, learning takes place on a personal level, then meetings between people are ideal opportunities for learning from the universal Church.<sup>221</sup> Such encounters take place whenever congregations, schools, church organisations, etc. are in partnership with one another and visit each other. Right up to the present day, one of the most striking testimonies of how much we can learn from the universal Church through personal contact is a report about a trip to Africa by the Bishop of Münster, Michael Keller, in 1956. The trip took just over a month and the report was published as a book.<sup>222</sup>

The most obvious learning centres of the universal Church are Jerusalem and Rome. No other places attract so many Christians from so many traditions and cultures – pilgrims, theology students and also guests of various local institutions. After many centuries of being the centre of teaching in the universal Church, Rome has now become a centre of learning within it. Francis has been instrumental in this transformation, which has taken place “with” him, not “under” him. The Church in Francis’s native Latin America has regarded itself as a listening church ever since the Bishops’ Assemblies of Medellín and Puebla. Obviously, it also sees itself as a teaching church (and, indeed, it teaches quite resolutely, e.g. on God’s justice), but it primarily seeks to understand the “signs of the times” and to follow the three steps mentioned above. In other words, it endeavours to learn from the here and now. The Latin American Church became truly contextual by looking at the context, i.e. the circumstances in

<sup>221</sup> Rensinghoff, Katharina, *Ökumenisches Lernen auf den crossroads weltkirchlicher Gemeindeperschaften*, in: Bünker, Arnd et al., *Gerechtigkeit und Pfingsten – Viele Christentümer und die Aufgabe einer Missionswissenschaft*, Ostfildern 2010, 187-197.

<sup>222</sup> Angerhausen, Julius, *Brückenschlag nach Afrika – Die Reise des Bischofs von Münster Dr. Michael Keller in die ost- und südafrikanischen Missionen*, Düsseldorf 1957.

which it preaches the good news of God's Kingdom in both word and deed. This was totally new. Previously, the Church had seen itself as a counterpart or even as the opposite of "the world", "out there" (both deliberately in quotation marks to remind ourselves how big this distinction was in the Church's own self-perception). After the Council, and after Medellín and Puebla, the Church began to find its place within the world again. It no longer saw the world as a mere stage for pastoral activities but as a constitutive part of its theology. It was the end of a one-way street along which, for centuries, theology had travelled from Europe to Latin America. Now the tables were turned. The "New World" began to teach the "Old World", for instance through liberation theology. Some European theologians and Church leaders, as Paulo Süß experienced in Brazil, make life rather too simple for themselves: "In their self-deception and delusion they fill their old wineskins with the vinegar of complacency and easy feasibility while believing they are full of good, sweet wine. They know what's 'in' and what's popular, they've read the latest literature, they've seen the favelas, and – like in the story of the hare and the hedgehog – they're always one step ahead, although they haven't moved an inch."<sup>223</sup>

The new diversity of learning and teaching venues and of learning methods requires not a simplistic transfer but a U-turn. It is not just a matter of learning to express oneself in unfamiliar ways. The first step in itself requires an appreciation of the new terms as well as plenty of trust in the Holy Spirit. "When it comes to the views and customs of other parts of the world, I judge them against the views and customs of my own country," confesses Flora Tristan with a fine sense of self-mockery after returning from her famous trip to Peru in 1833/34.<sup>224</sup> Latin American bishops and theologians have experienced rather painfully – especially in the 1980s – what happens when, unlike Flora Tristan, people look at others without first reminding themselves of the obstacles they have to clear themselves in order to learn from the universal Church.

<sup>223</sup> Süß, Paulo, *Junger Wein und alte Schläuche – Zum Theologietransfer aus und nach Lateinamerika*, in: Schillebeeckx, Edward, *Mystik und Politik – Theologie im Ringen um Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, Mainz 1986, 44-56, especially 49.

<sup>224</sup> Tristan, Flora, *Meine Reise nach Peru*, Frankfurt am Main 1983, 40-41.

### **“Can’t be bothered with school?” – or: Is anyone still keen to learn?**

“The Church in Limburg sees itself as an active member of a learning community – the universal Church.”<sup>225</sup> The Synods of the Diocese of Rottenburg-Stuttgart (1986) and Hildesheim (1990) adopted the “option for the poor” from the Church in Latin America and committed themselves to adjust their pastoral work accordingly. The same commitment was undertaken by dozens of others, and many have delivered on it, too. Nevertheless, the question remains whether, outside the current committed circle, there is anyone who might (still) want to learn (or start learning) from the universal Church. Whenever offerings are announced for the universal Church during mass, they have become noticeably shorter. During the 1980s, collections were regularly made on Whit Sunday in the Archdiocese of Freiburg to fund clergy training in Brazil and Peru. The announcements contained vivid descriptions of Church life in those countries and powerfully illustrated the importance of ensuring good training for future priests. It took 10 to 11 minutes to read out those announcements.<sup>226</sup> Today such notices need to be presented much faster – even though we may wonder whether there has really been such a decline in interest among churchgoers or whether this decline is just something which the authors (i.e. the bishops) believe in, on the assumption that churchgoers have a maximum attention span of one minute. The response from priests and full-time lay workers in local churches is often rather a sigh, when an aid organisation tries to encourage the faithful to learn from the universal Church: “Oh dear, is there no end to it?” This is because they are so busy and have too much on their plate – “... and now we’re supposed to support them as well”. When there is a growing feeling that identification with the poor and vulnerable is yet another burden (rather than a fundamental Christian attitude), it is difficult to find new “bearers of burdens”. (Incidentally, support groups for the poor and vulnerable have been shrinking and, above all, getting older and older in local churches.) This experience is by no means limited to the Church: twinning schemes between towns are equally difficult to keep alive and often increasingly unsustainable.

<sup>225</sup> Tebartz-van Elst, Franz-Peter, *Exploring Closeness – Small Christian Communities as hubs of pastoral care*, in: Krämer, Klaus; Vellguth, Klaus, *Small Christian Communities – Fresh Stimulus for a Forward-looking Church, One World Theology*, volume 2, Freiburg im Breisgau 2013, 108.

<sup>226</sup> Cf., for example, the request for donations to the 1985 Whitsun collection published in *Amtsblatt der Erzdiözese Freiburg*, 15. May 1985, 141-143.

It seems that the problems “on our doorstep” take up so much energy that any small glimpse beyond it appears to require a major effort. Yet if we were to look further afield, taking a universal Church perspective, our own immediate needs might well appear in a very different light.

### **Privileged to learn – or: a curriculum of opportunities**

The East German communist state had a ubiquitous slogan: “Learning from the Soviet Union means learning to win!” However, as we now know, victory failed to materialise. What has emerged is the realisation that “recipes for success” in one country cannot be (naïvely) applied to another. It is only right and proper that such warnings should be found in any guidebook on “international identification with the poor”. So there is no need for us to focus on this hazard. On the other hand, we should also beware of being too hasty with this warning. When someone says: “Careful! This might not work here!”, it might also mean: “We don’t want it.” That was certainly the response to an early (probably premature) report in a mission magazine on women as Church leaders.<sup>227</sup>

Sometimes, without ever being asked, the Latin American Church found itself saddled with the burden of being the “better” Church and of setting an example for us.<sup>228</sup> Some time ago now, in 1965, Franz Hengsbach, Bishop of Essen, said: “Think of the emotional power of faith among the people of Latin America. That could certainly be a shot in the arm for our intellectually detached style of Christianity.”<sup>229</sup> The response the basic ecclesial communities met with in Germany was (partly) an expression of hope, since these fellowships were regarded as an antithesis to the experience of our own church.<sup>230</sup>

That said, there is still a lot that can be learned by German Christians from Latin American Christians:

<sup>227</sup> Krause, Gustav, *Pfarrer Schwester?*, in: *Kontinente* 13 (1978) 5, 7.

<sup>228</sup> Cf. also: Piepel, Klaus, *Lerngemeinschaft Weltkirche – Lernprozesse in Partnerschaften zwischen Christen der Ersten und der Dritten Welt*, Aachen 1993. Even after two decades this book is still the best available on the subject.

<sup>229</sup> *Das Modell der armen Kirche – Ein Interview mit dem Vorsitzenden der Bischöflichen Kommission für Lateinamerika, Bischof Dr. Franz Hengsbach*, in: *Dein Adveniat-Opfer: Lateinamerika atmet auf! Rechenschaftsbericht über die ersten fünf Jahre der Bischöflichen Aktion Adveniat*, Essen 1965, 2-4, especially 4.

<sup>230</sup> Grossbötling, Thomas, *Der verlorene Himmel – Glaube in Deutschland seit 1945*, Göttingen 2013, 175.

- For example, living by the Word of God, sharing the Bible, and also sharing with others upon hearing God's Word.
- For instance, their experience with lay church leaders: When *adveniat* presented this practice, which had proved its worth in Latin America, the relevant models met with great interest among pastoral workers in Germany's dioceses.
- For example, the practice – now the accepted norm in Brazil – whereby the Church must disclose its income and use of funds.
- For instance, their confidence in living out their Christian faith as a "little flock" – in godliness, trusting God and without any supporting structures.

Jon Sobrino's words, written nearly a quarter of a century ago, still ring true today: "The church of the poor supports the other church by offering them its poverty as an ideal place of repentance, of the Christian faith and of living in community."<sup>231</sup>

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<sup>231</sup> Sobrino, Jon, *Gemeinschaft mit den gekreuzigten Völkern, um sie vom Kreuz abzunehmen – Kirchliche communio in einer pluriformen und antagonistischen Kirche*, in: Bertsch, Ludwig, *Was der Geist den Gemeinden sagt – Bausteine einer Ekklesiologie der Ortskirchen*, Freiburg im Breisgau 1991, 101-135, especially 131.



# Learning Laboratories of the Universal Church – an invitation and a challenge

Stephan Ackermann

The past few decades have seen some clear developments in our understanding of the universal Church. Over and above the usual forms of funding and project support, an increasing emphasis has been placed on specific experiences of what it means to learn from one another. A wide range of learning processes has been initiated through relationships between committed Christians, local churches, Church organisations and dioceses in Germany, on the one hand, and Church partners on other continents, on the other. These learning processes have become vital ingredients of those relationships and of the universal Church's endeavours to fulfil the Great Commission. As project partners enter into dialogue with one another, they develop and agree on prospects and strategies of collaboration between them. Personal visits together with universal Church multipliers are a way of getting to know the realities of regional churches on other continents as well as their social and pastoral activities. Global parish partnerships are making it possible to explore the stimuli that may come from a partner church, impacting one's own church life back home.

So what is the position of such learning processes on a wider scale, within the work of the universal Church? How does the term "learning community" influence our understanding of global cooperation within the universal Church? What ecclesiological aspects are linked to the "universal Church as a learning community"? The fundamental changes taking place in the German and, indeed, all Western regional churches have given rise to certain expectations, as partners in the universal Church hope to receive human resources, spiritual enrichment and potential solutions to pastoral issues. The term "learning community" may help us gain an idea of the priorities for cooperation within the universal Church.

Following the three-step procedure of *observing, interpreting and applying* – a method valued and practised by partners in the universal Church – I would like to base this article on three areas of personal experience in which the universal Church stands out very clearly as a learning community.

### **International voluntary services as learning environments**

The Diocese of Trier runs a missionary organisation called Soziale Friedensdienste im Ausland (SoFiA, Social Peace Ministry Abroad), which celebrated its 20th anniversary in 2012. This took the form of a three-day conference, which was attended by former volunteers, representatives of overseas partner organisations, members of the sponsorship organisation and cooperation partners. The number of delegates alone illustrated the large network that had grown up over a period of two decades. During that period, over 300 volunteers had travelled with SoFiA and its members to over 80 different destinations. In return, more than 70 volunteers from overseas partner groups had travelled to the Diocese of Trier to serve in a reverse volunteering scheme. When I went to Bolivia in 2010 and spoke to volunteers, I was impressed both by their matter-of-factness and their enthusiasm as they talked about their work, their experiences, their cultural adjustment issues, their impressions of Bolivian hospitality, their many areas of active involvement in social welfare projects and their exposure to forms of worship and religiosity that were quite foreign to them.

Serving as a volunteer is a learning experience. The central element is “experience-oriented and action-focused learning through a combination of practical social welfare and charitable work, the life of the local church and reflecting upon one’s own experiences.”<sup>232</sup> Project partnerships in the universal Church are ideal for such a comprehensive learning process, as they offer an environment in which people can meet and reflect. The partners, too, make contributions – through their charitable activities and through the strong Christian witness they bear as they enter into dialogue with the volunteers, who are mainly young people. In this way the local contacts and project partners support the volunteers in reflecting upon and processing

<sup>232</sup> SoFiA e.V., Rahmenkonzept für das Bistum Trier vom 02. März 2005, 2, in: <http://cms.bistum-trier.de/bistum-trier/Integrale?MODULE=Frontend.Media&ACTION=ViewMediaObject&Media.PK=945&Media.Object.ObjectType=full>, 5. May 2014.

their experiences, in helping them to take a critical look at the specific realities they encounter and in formulating their own responses. These elements contribute to a volunteer's learning experience. Everyone who is involved is therefore part of a learning community. Admittedly, a volunteer's learning process is not always successful and not always good. Conflicts, excessive demands and inappropriate behaviour can lead to a volunteering period being discontinued and, when a person returns, to more rather than fewer prejudices or, indeed, to a painful realisation of personal or cultural limits.

So how can we characterise the learning environment of a voluntary service period? First of all, this learning environment is both special and unusual. Each place of deployment is necessarily always a place of caring for other people's welfare. It is a place where partners share their witness of "life in fullness" through care for the vulnerable. The work they do focuses on fellow humans and on brothers and sisters who lack this fullness. The target groups are, for instance, disadvantaged children and young people growing up in deprived suburban neighbourhoods. Others are people with disabilities and with no social net to help them lead autonomous lives. Then there are girls in rural areas who are being given a school education. Others again are people living on the edge of society who have become impoverished through unfair economic structures, who have experienced marginalisation and humiliation on account of their gender, ethnic origins or some other reason. In other words, serving as a volunteer means meeting Christ among the poor, as Pope Francis emphasises so frequently. It means serving in the "peripheral areas of existence".<sup>233</sup> Meeting and working with the poor means being in a particularly privileged place within the universal Church as a learning community.

Moreover, it is the volunteers who give a partnership scheme its own specific and characteristic face. By giving their time, volunteers demonstrate within the universal Church that their partners have a joint responsibility. They also reveal the commitment and self-image of the partner churches and organisations under whose partnership schemes they serve. The actual learners are, of course, the volunteers themselves, as they realise that Christian responsibility covers not

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<sup>233</sup> For instance in his Pentecost Sunday homily on St. Peter's Square on 19. May 2013, in: <http://www.zenit.org/en/articles/pope-francis-homily-at-pentecost-mass//whispersintheloggia.blogspot.co.uk/2013/05/for-pentecost-three-words-newness.html>.

only their own local sphere, but also the global dimension of poverty and exploitation. By participating in specific partnership processes, volunteers learn that a project in a given location is enhanced by their own appreciation of and care for the poor and by their endeavours to help the poor towards dignity and development prospects. This means that voluntary work has inestimable potential in providing hope and a future for individuals, for regional churches and for global society.

### **An exposure programme as a learning environment**

In July 2011, I spent three days with a small farmer's family in the village of Kibanyi in Uganda. Those three days were at the very heart of our exposure and dialogue programme. To be precise, it meant living with the family throughout that time, sharing in their work in the fields and in the house, getting to know their lives through numerous conversations, understanding the conditions of their subsistence economy while accepting and exploring the cultural differences between us. It meant acquiring a new starting point and a new perspective, enabling each one of us, as it were, to look at our hosts' daily lives through their own eyes, under their conditions of poverty, while at the same time experiencing the self-confidence with which they managed their lives and resources. Any change must come from them. It is only when they are respected as partners that they can accept empowerment and respond to the stimuli given to them by organisations such as diocesan charities, foreign foundations or NGOs helping them in the entrepreneurial development of their agriculture.

My stay in southern Uganda was very much in line with the fundamental intention of the exposure and dialogue programmes conducted since the mid-1980s first by the German *Justitia et Pax* committee and now by a dedicated sponsorship organisation. Decision-makers in the Church, politics, business and science immerse themselves – for a few days at least – in the daily lives of the poor in a southern or eastern country and learn to appreciate the skills and the vital energy these people have. They are encouraged to reflect upon their own scope of action and to adopt new perspectives so that they can act in tandem with the poor and in recognition of those people's development opportunities and potential for self-help.

So how can we characterise the learning environment of an exposure programme? The aim of this learning environment is to bring

about change within a given social and political context. By focusing on life's prospects and on enabling the poor to participate, (Universal) Church activities aim to ensure the elaboration of suitable economic and development policies. Exposure and dialogue programmes therefore provide good learning opportunities for decision-makers working in those areas. Decision-makers within the Church are co-learners and dialogue partners. They are supported by their partner organisations within the relevant regional churches in southern and eastern countries. A learning community based on exposure and dialogue, therefore, reaches beyond the boundaries of the Church. By focusing on the poor and their opportunities in life, such programmes also seek to serve people who do not relate to the Church or to the Christian faith.<sup>234</sup>

### **A pastoral exchange as a learning environment**

Finally, let us have a look at a third learning environment in the universal Church. In 2009, as part of the partnership scheme between the Diocese of Trier and the Bolivian Church, the Diocesan Pastoral Care Department and Universal Church Unit invited teams from parishes and groups of parishes to a pastoral exchange in Bolivia entitled "Doing Church – Venturing Forth". The target groups were full-time and volunteer decision-makers from parishes in our diocese. The exchange was organised at a time when our parishes and groups of parishes were undergoing a process of profound restructuring and geographical expansion. This process had been initiated a few years earlier under the heading Project 2020. The pastoral exchange involved teams from three pastoral units: priests, parish council chairpersons, and parish and pastoral care workers.

To flesh out the exchange, the organisers used elements of the exposure programmes, especially the well established learning and action groups with the four elements: encounter, reflection, dialogue and action. Here, too, the central element involved several days of "immersion" in the life of the local community. A special emphasis was added to the programme through its integration into various partnership processes with Bolivia that were already in place. For instance, the entire scheme was developed and implemented by

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<sup>234</sup> Cf. the self-image presented in the "Über uns" ("About us") section <http://www.edpev.de/ueber-uns/>, 5. May 2014.

a joint German-Bolivian team. The proven practice of face-to-face encounters and of learning together under a partnership programme – for instance through personal visits – provided a feeling of security, while also enabling guests and hosts to enter quickly into an open and interesting dialogue in which they could exchange experiences of their mutual partnership. The pastoral theology focus under the title “Church and Church Development” involved the following stages:

- During their preparations for the exchange the participants first made sure they were sufficiently knowledgeable about the current situation and any critical elements in the development of their own local churches. This was followed by an introductory session in the country itself, in which Bolivian theologians presented ecclesiological and pastoral theology models to help participants gain an understanding of the pastoral work conducted by the local churches in Bolivia.
- The core element of the exchange – the actual exposure days – involved each German parish team sharing the life of a local Bolivian church for a few days. This gave them an opportunity to discuss their impressions, experiences and questions among themselves, based on their time with the church.
- Any reflections within the parish team, in the plenary and also with the Bolivian hosts took place against the background of Church developments back home in the light of certain steps or decisions pending at the time or of difficulties that had been encountered.
- Ultimately, the aim of this global exchange was to make a constructive contribution to the further development of one’s own parish or group of parishes. Having sent teams rather than individuals to Bolivia, it was subsequently much easier to put into practice what the travellers had learned, as it had been a joint learning experience.

So what exactly were the learning experiences which the participants took home with them from the project “Doing Church – Venturing Forth”? Three things, in particular, stood out for the travellers.

First of all, it is the laity who bear witness to their faith and who support the local church. “We were particularly impressed by the commitment and self-image of the catechists. What motivated them

was not so much the pleasure of working with young people as their profound conviction, rooted in their faith, that they should share the facts of their faith and their Christian witness with others,” said one participant at the debriefing session. The commitment of adults, young people and even married couples – coming to the presbytery, for instance, as catechists – were experienced as vital elements of Church life and as authentic testimonies.

The active power of their spirituality: During the debriefing session back home, the participants were asked about any “gems” they had found during the exchange. Under the heading “Inspiring objectives and attractive tasks” the travellers mentioned a range of different experiences which had impressed them at the three local Bolivian churches. It included the process of building community, as experienced in a church in Bolivia, and finding one’s home in it. One church in a deprived suburban area had successfully built up a healthcare ministry which had led to tangible improvements among the population. Great things were set in motion through collaboration. The vital foundation of this process was a biblically focused spirituality that characterised all the leaders, groups and initiatives.

Vibrant, confident groups within the local church: The travellers who stayed with the church Nuestra Señora del Carmen de la Zona de los Chacos on the outskirts of Santa Cruz saw a church which regarded itself as a *comunidad de comunidades* – a “community of communities”. About 30,000 people live within this parish which consists of six *comunidades* (communities) and has four chapels. During meetings with members the programme participants were impressed by the high level of autonomy and responsibility in each *comunidad*. The *comunidades* are largely self-governing, with a major emphasis on *autofinanciamento*, covering both self-organisation and financial autonomy. This, incidentally, applies to both levels – the individual *comunidad* and the wider parish.

So what are the specific features of a pastoral exchange as a learning environment? The pastoral exchange model put the German programme participants and their Bolivian hosts on an equal footing, as they met in person and exchanged ideas. For the Bolivian hosts it was certainly a crucial experience to be appreciated in this way, as their church life, their pastoral ministries and their initiatives were clearly the focus of attention and were perceived as providing stimulus

for their German partners. The universal Church and its partnership programmes are thus perceived as an environment enabling learning and mutual exchange to take place between regional churches in different cultural and social contexts.

### **The impact of a learning community**

The areas of experience I have described here are examples of learning “laboratories” in the universal Church. They show that the development of a global learning community in the universal Church is both an invitation and a challenge. The essential requirement is to step out of one’s own Church context and reference system, to put this system into perspective and thus to see it in proportion to the wider global Church of Jesus Christ – as manifested in a different regional church which is then explored as a specific instance. This is the only way to discover the universal Church as a learning community. Whenever this learning community is formed, a number of things happen:

- The learning community invites us to come face to face with the poor and thus with Jesus Christ through his brothers and sisters.
- It enables us – for instance through voluntary service – to experience some kind of “initiation” as we are introduced to faith in action and thus to our partner’s hands-on practical faith.
- The learning community highlights the social and political witness of Christians and of Church communities.
- It involves the Church in cooperative partnerships on social and global processes and on the resulting socio-ethical objectives. However, it also means entering into dialogue with those of other faiths and with non-believers.
- The learning community strengthens the identity of regional churches as they exchange ideas with others, thus facilitating mutual enrichment.

### **The need to strengthen the learning community and to keep exploring its potential**

Processes of this kind, which help the universal Church to develop as a learning community, deserve to be discovered and recognised by

the German Church and integrated more resolutely into explorations of pastoral ministry options, since they open up specific opportunities for a credible and attractive witness of vibrant church planting projects and robust, reliable care for the poor as a way to help solve the global issues of the future.

The experiences outlined here illustrate the enormous assets that are being formed in Germany through the learning processes of volunteers serving abroad and of reverse volunteers coming to Germany. It is highly rewarding to support Church missionary organisations, aid organisations, religious orders, associations and dioceses in such work, and it is worthwhile helping them achieve a good level of quality, assisting returnees when they come home, involving them in universal Church projects and promoting suitable initiatives for this purpose.

Development programmes are a vital part of global action and learning within the universal Church. After all, they can raise awareness of global challenges, support people on joint learning ventures within and outside the Church and create an environment in which people are stirred by their partners' testimonies. This challenge is both fascinating and motivating, as I know from my own experience.

Initiating a pastoral exchange with universal Church partners and doing so in a way that opens up development opportunities for one's own church life and for the ministry of one's own church means primarily investing in joint explorations. It also means experimenting and trying out new paths. In the Diocese of Trier we have now launched a project entitled Local Church Development through Stimuli from the Universal Church. It is aimed at members of our parishes and groups of parishes who feel that we need to move along new paths, but who are also prepared to recognise their duty as baptised Christians and who want to be "empowered" for this task. The most important learning paths in this project will be listening to the Good News of the Bible, keeping alert and understanding the signs of the times, being open to the experiences of brothers and sisters on other continents, joining with others in striving for and being prepared to find answers to people's needs through Christian care for the poor.

A few years ago the German Bishops' Conference held a consultation on the results of a project it had helped to support. The project was called "The Future of Universal Church Work in Germany" and involved the participation of Church aid organisations and the

dioceses, in particular. Acting in response to the new situation that had arisen in the Church, its purpose was to keep developing the global work of the universal Church and to ensure its sustainability in the future. The final report contains a comment that the educational work of the universal Church should include a “global educational offensive”.

The experiences and models, of which I have presented a few examples, show that global learning processes in the universal Church comprise some fundamental parameters of what it means to be human and Christian. These include developing one’s own personality and faith, making an impact on the socio-political dimension of the world and strengthening Church planting initiatives, to name but a few. However, as Francis reminds us, such learning processes must not become lost in the Church’s focus on its own developments, but must be resolutely geared to people with all their hopes and needs. Once the universal Church is understood as a learning community, it can strengthen the attitude that is required for this purpose – “to go forth from ourselves to seek the good of others”<sup>235</sup>. It, therefore, seems only appropriate to launch a “global educational offensive” in the universal Church that will help more than ever before to discover the opportunities which lie hidden in the worldwide community of the Church.<sup>236</sup>

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<sup>235</sup> Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* of the Holy Father Francis to the Bishops, Clergy, Consecrated Persons and the Lay Faithful on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today’s World, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20131124\\_evangelii-gaudium.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html), no. 39.

<sup>236</sup> Cf. Matthew 13:44-46 and 25:14-30.

# The Institute of Missiology (missio) and its place as a learning community within the universal Church

Harald Suermann

The Institute of Missiology (MWI) was founded by missio in 1971. There are various accounts of what led to its foundation. One was that the MWI was to observe, document and support the development of the Church in Africa, Asia, the Pacific region and Latin America in the wake of the Second Vatican Council.

It is difficult to say whether today's MWI as an institution is still actively involved in the "universal Church" as a learning community. It has undoubtedly accumulated a large amount of knowledge, which is clearly reflected in its library and its documentary records. But that in itself does not automatically constitute learning within a learning community. Without going into any reasoned argument, I do believe that the MWI is in itself a learning organisation on account of its learning processes, team spirit, critical approach to its own position, focus on its partners, in-depth knowledge and, most certainly, its clear vision of its own mission.

Since 2009 the MWI has been going through a process of restructuring and a change in its function, so we need to take a fresh look at whether the MWI is still a learning institution within the universal Church as a learning community. The main task of the MWI is now the placement of scholarships for postgraduate students of theology and philosophy. Further functions include building up a circle of alumni, evaluating academic courses in theology and raising funds for its scholarship holders. This would indicate that the MWI is not so much an active protagonist within the universal Church as a learning community but "merely" a support organisation for the learning processes the Church undergoes.

In this article we will look more closely at the role of the MWI in the universal Church as a learning community. We will ask to what extent the MWI is a supporter of a learning community and to what extent it is itself an active protagonist in such a community. Before providing any answers, we will first highlight the characteristic features of a learning community. The concept comes from educational theory and can only be applied to the universal Church by analogy. We will then ask whether the MWI as an institute is an active protagonist within the learning community. Is the MWI as an institution capable of learning or can this only be said of its members? We will look at the features of a learning institution as defined in organisational theory and then apply them to the MWI by analogy.

### Learning community

The concept of a “learning community” was defined in educational theory in the 1980s to distinguish it from other forms of collective learning, such as group work. The outstanding feature of a learning community is its emphasis on learner participation. The learning process is deemed to be a collective endeavour in which the protagonists are involved in different ways. The aim is to ensure long-term participation and to develop a learning culture which is characterised by a collective endeavour to develop understanding. The hallmark of learning within a learning community is that the inculcation of knowledge is accompanied by constant reflection on the learning process and its progress. The learning process is treated not as a gradual expansion of knowledge but as a circular process in which new knowledge leads to new questions and these, in turn, generate new knowledge. The relationship between individual and collective knowledge is similar in structure. Each person’s individual knowledge leads to an increase in collective knowledge, which can then be accessed by each individual. In this process it is important to learn from one’s mistakes. Trial and error trigger a process of knowledge acquisition until such time as those involved are satisfied with the outcome. The goal is not *acquired* knowledge about a subject, but *experiential* knowledge of it. The role of teachers is not to convey knowledge, but rather to organise, to create a framework and conditions which are conducive to learning and to use their expertise in helping each learner to learn. Another feature is that the learning situation is true-to-life and the intended outcome is relevant to the

real world. The aim of the learning process is that each member or each subgroup should look at a different aspect of the problem, as a result of which both the learning process and the final outcome are characterised not by uniform knowledge but by complementary knowledge.

The members of a learning community participate in a shared learning process, in which everyone contributes their own different knowledge and skills, thereby leading to the formation of a team spirit. Team members learn to handle the diversity which exists among them, how to value this diversity and to turn it to good effect. After all, diversity enriches collective knowledge and fosters knowledge interdependence. This also promotes a group identity with a focus on a common goal.<sup>237</sup>

The subject matter within the universal Church as a learning community is Christian discipleship, spirituality and Church life. Other areas such as administration and finance are not subjects within the universal Church as a learning community, although their benefit and the need to study them cannot be denied. While they are necessary for the universal Church, they are not central functions within it.

### ***Who is the community of the universal Church?***

The question "Who is the community of the universal Church?" can be answered by looking at the Church's definition of itself: it is everyone who has been called by Christ and who has entered the community of the called. This immediately raises the question of how this community manifests itself in the world. Primarily, of course, it is the community of the baptised, with baptism as the formal act of acceptance into the community. While this provides a common feature and a certain feeling of togetherness, it does not automatically create a shared structural organisation. The community of the baptised is divided into different churches and church communities, each with its own structures.

The MWI belongs to the Catholic Church and thus to one of the churches that sees itself as a manifestation of the universal Church. In addition, there are numerous other churches with organisational structures which also see themselves in this way.

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<sup>237</sup> Cf. also: [de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lerngemeinschaft](http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lerngemeinschaft), 29. April 2014.

The Catholic Church itself consists of a range of organisational units. The legally and theologically most important “sub-structure” is the diocese, but alongside it there are also religious orders and religious communities. Various other structures have developed in the course of history. Above the diocesan level there are bishops’ conferences and associations of bishops’ conferences, while below the dioceses there are deaneries and parishes. Such sub-structures are often referred to as regional churches. They are different entities, characterised by different regional features, and they differ from one another on account of their distinctive characteristics. The smallest unit has as its members a group of baptised individuals.

### *Subjects of the learning community*

Given this structure, we must ask who the potential subjects of the learning community are. The individual baptised member of the universal Church is undoubtedly such a potential subject. What is less easy to establish is whether the different organisational units may also be subjects of the learning community. Are there organisations within the Church which learn or are capable of learning, or is the Church itself an organisation endowed with the capacity to learn? The ability to learn is a vital requirement to qualify as a subject of the learning community. Once we have identified teachable organisations within the Church, and provided the Catholic Church as a whole is capable of learning, two questions arise: a) is the Catholic Church the subject of a learning community within the universal Church, which regards itself as the community of all baptised Christians, and b) does it thus form part of a learning relationship with other organised churches and church communities? That is the ecumenical dimension of the question about the universal Church as a learning community. But there is another question which needs to be asked in this context. If the Catholic Church – or the community of the baptised as a whole – constitutes a learning community, does this learning process take place solely within the Church, i.e. among the learners, or does the community as a whole also learn together with other communities and with other religious groups in particular? This is a question of inter-religious and social dialogue.

According to organisational theory, a teachable and learning organisation can be characterised as follows:

- clear visions, joint target-setting processes and a focus on customer benefit;
- mutual trust, team spirit and conflict resolution skills;
- process orientation and self-regulation;
- democratic and participation-focused leadership style and ideas management;
- reward for commitment and error tolerance in risk-prone projects;
- ability to monitor one's own activities and make future projections.

According to Senge, five skills are important for the development of a learning organisation:

- personal mastery, i.e. the personal development of each member;
- mental models, visualising the underlying assumptions which explain the surrounding world;
- shared vision and therefore common goals;
- team learning: all members of the team engage with each other profoundly and operate as more than the sum total of its parts;
- systems thinking: looking at an entire organisation as a bounded object.<sup>238</sup>

The same criteria can be largely applied to Church institutions, given that they are part of the universal Church as a learning community.

### **The MWI as a subject within the universal Church as a learning community**

As a scholarship-awarding institution, the primary focus of the MWI is on providing financial support. The MWI's partners also perceive it to be a source of funding for the training of clergy (in dioceses and religious orders) and of university lecturers. The scholarship itself, however, is for the purpose of obtaining academic qualifications – usually a PhD, though also a Master's or a Licentiate's degree. An academic degree can only be obtained by means of a learning process which, for the most part, must be seen as more than the acquisition of knowledge. This is certainly the case whenever

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<sup>238</sup> Cf. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Learning\\_organization](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Learning_organization).

scholars conduct their studies in different cultures, since they also undergo experiences within those cultures, and the knowledge they acquire forms part of a specific context. In many cases students are not shielded from the world around them to such an extent that they see nothing of the varied life of the Church in that country. By getting involved in university Christian fellowships and local churches, scholarship holders experience forms of Church life which they would not normally encounter back home. Careful observation may also enable them to understand why Church life and theology have developed in a certain way in their host country.

Moreover, the study of theology should reflect the background and development of that country's pastoral ministry, theology and church. This is the case whenever a given theology itself is steeped in the country's culture. As the students work with their supervisors on their respective thesis (PhD, Master's or Licentiate's degree), these cultural and theological differences should form the focus of discussions whenever they look at specific topics together. This does not necessarily require the scholarship holders to make any direct comparisons with the theology in their countries of origin.

It is certainly true, however, that European theology is still frequently seen – sometimes explicitly and consciously and sometimes less so – as being universal in character and is thus taught in exactly the same way at seminaries in Africa and Asia. The more theology is seen as universal, the lower its learning impact on the universal Church. Instead, the main focus is on conveying knowledge and so there is much less emphasis on partnership-based learning, the comparison of contexts and learning from different conclusions. This is true of the students and, in particular, of the lecturers. Within the global learning community of the universal Church, the lecturers and the students are learners and teachers at one and the same time. They each contribute different knowledge and a different background to the learning process, while exploring the others' insights and knowledge. At the end of the day, therefore, they jointly have more knowledge than each of them separately. Ultimately, it is not a question of one person drawing level with the others, but of each obtaining a greater understanding of and insights into the theologies of their fellows.

This is the kind of learning process which is funded by the MWI. But is the MWI involved in the process itself? To answer this question

we need to take a closer look at two processes: the awarding of scholarships and the supervision of scholarship holders. Not everyone who applies for a scholarship receives one. The selection is based on certain criteria. To start with, the candidates must have been sent by a Church institution, a university, a diocese or a religious order, specifying the purpose of his or her studies, i.e. the function for which the student is to be equipped by means of the academic degree. The candidates then present a brief outline of their topic and its relevance to their future function. Based on these details, the MWI staff must then undertake an assessment, ranking the applicants against a list of priorities. To do so they must have adequate knowledge of the circumstances in the relevant countries and in the regional churches of all the applicants. Such knowledge cannot be gathered exclusively from an application, however, as some are worded well and others not so well. To gain some idea, experience and feeling of the needs and strengths of a regional church, the individual staff member needs to travel there. Visiting the countries concerned and their regional churches is not just helpful but a vital necessity. Special significance attaches to attending theological and philosophical conferences, since scholarship holders are going to obtain their degrees in an academic environment. If applications were selected and assessed solely on the basis of formal criteria and presentation quality, the MWI could not meet the aspiration of the universal Church to care for the vulnerable and opt for the poor. Such a policy would favour those in the universal Church who have the best academic backgrounds. Dialogue with each of the regional churches is, therefore, fundamental to the task of the MWI.

It can be safely assumed that any MWI member travelling to the relevant countries will learn to think in terms of the universal Church. Whether this also leads to a learning community with the relevant regional church, however, depends on the things the regional church learns through its dialogue with the MWI member. The emphasis should be on learning with a focus on the universal Church, not on finding the most successful way to complete an application form. Universal Church learning can mean that the bishop, the provincial, the vice-chancellor of a university or some other partner in the dialogue begins to understand the perspective of the MWI – a perspective that looks at different regional churches, at each pastoral situation and also at the theological potential and different contexts. This perspective,

which takes account of churches in other regions, also focuses on the reasons why the MWI comes to a certain conclusion about the need for academic education or training. Conversely, the other person in the dialogue shows the MWI member the regional church's own perspective of its academic needs and necessities, clarifying questions and helping the MWI member to reach an understanding. It is a learning process between two partners who, ideally, do not merely acquire new knowledge but also begin to understand each other's perspectives. Although, in the end, they will not have the same level of knowledge, they will have complemented their knowledge and experience to their mutual benefit. Based on what they have "learned", it is now possible for an informed decision to be taken in the selection of scholarship students. Ideally, such dialogue should be ongoing and not be terminated as soon as a candidate has or has not been granted a scholarship. After all, the universal Church as a learning community is not just about funding, but also embraces pastoral, theological and missionary questions as well as social and welfare work. For the MWI the central issues are theological aspects and the academic training of Church workers.

Once the candidates have been selected, the MWI begins a dialogue with each scholarship holder. The formal supervision process, whereby the student reports on his or her studies, gives the MWI information about that person's academic progress and about the subject they are working on. As the student and the MWI do not enter into dialogue on the learning content, one cannot speak of a learning community between them at this point. Opportunities do arise, however, at the regular scholarship holders' meetings when individual students present their academic work or their regional churches. Each talk is followed by a discussion among students and MWI staff. These discussions are about issues and points of criticism from the perspectives of different cultural and Church contexts. After all, the students come from different countries and continents. Such meetings take place on an annual basis but, as they are rather short, they still cannot be described as learning communities. A learning community is not formed until these meetings lead to more, i.e. when scholarship holders who have been studying in the same place, but usually different subjects, stay in touch with each other and continue to exchange ideas. Such learning communities mostly no longer involve the participation of MWI staff.

In some cases a learning community continues after the students have concluded their academic courses and returned to their home countries. These learning communities are supported by the MWI, for instance in the form of an alumni forum.

All alumni are asked to become members of this forum, as it enables them to stay in touch with other alumni and exchange ideas. However, no more than sporadic use is made of the forum, mostly to share personal news. The MWI, too, primarily uses it to stay in touch and pass on information. So while the forum has the potential to sustain a learning community, it is not being tapped.

The alumni learning community also takes on other forms. For instance, there are often conferences and symposia at which present and former MWI scholarship holders meet and exchange ideas. These include research groups and theological associations. Many of these groups and networks have been initiated by the MWI, but without any direct involvement as a partner. Most are created without MWI support or have long functioned as independent entities. The MWI is not the subject of this learning community, although it does occasionally feature as a guest and can be found among the audience.

There is one area, though, in which the MWI is an active member of a global learning community within the universal Church. This learning community has formed around the subject of theological training and curricula. Inspired and greatly encouraged by a former member of staff, Raül Fonet-Betancourt, a permanent group is now in place which looks at the content of theological training. This involves regular conferences in which the MWI often takes part. In the same context the MWI also conducts evaluations of theological training facilities which it then discusses with its partners. Another element in the learning process is an ongoing dialogue and exchange with the various Roman departments in charge of training clergy. A forum has been set up recently to foster communication within this learning community. It has all the necessary elements: members have knowledge in different areas and a variety of cultural backgrounds. They complement each other in their knowledge and they challenge each other. Since the participants are involved in teaching, any new insights they gain have a practical influence on their work, and their discussions are far from abstract. Moreover, the group can potentially continue as a long-term fixture.

This learning process also has practical implications for the MWI. The discussions form the basis for sponsoring students and theological institutions and also for advising students about places where they might wish to study. Such a discussion is then continued with quite a few theological faculties when their lecturers are approached by the MWI about the academic performance and difficulties of its scholarship holders. The dialogue often goes further than dealing with specific cases and also covers more fundamental issues of doctrine in an inter-continental and inter-cultural environment. Each meeting is a learning process which takes place in a global learning community within the universal Church.

The participants of this academic, theologically focused learning community are not all equally active and their communication with the MWI may differ in intensity. Whereas dialogue with the theological faculty in Leuven is particularly intensive and dialogue with the faculties in Rome and Paris is making good progress, there is still room for improvement in the German-speaking countries. Dialogue with theological faculties and, to some extent, also with seminaries in Asia and Africa has been fairly regular despite the distance. The MWI is not always the initiator, which shows that interest in this learning community is not one-sided.

Before coming to my conclusions, I would just briefly like to comment on another group with which the MWI seeks intensive contact: the donors. Needless to say, the MWI reports both on its activities and on the learning community. However, communication has been rather one-sided. Feedback on the content of its promotional material has been rare and attendance at donors' meetings has been on a very small scale. This is an area in which all the elements of a learning community are missing.

### **Summary and conclusions**

Being mainly a scholarship provider, the MWI is perceived as a funding entity within the universal Church. This perception is reinforced by the fact that it shares the supervision of scholarship holders with the Albertus Magnus theological scholarship programme of the German Bishops' Conference.

Moreover, there is very little time to become involved within learning communities, as the MWI has to cope with numerous

administrative demands, greater involvement as a service provider for other scholarship-granting institutions, the necessary cooperation with its parent institution, *missio*, and other establishments and also because it needs to conduct substantial promotional activities in a hotly contested donation market.

Nevertheless, there are some indications that a global learning process has begun in the scholarship sphere within the universal Church – through meetings between scholarship holders, as well as with regional churches and through conferences and forums on curriculum development. The MWI is an equal partner in these learning processes. Whenever the MWI enters into dialogue, its members endeavour to gain a full understanding of their partners' positions. The learning process is far more than a transmission of knowledge. It is a spiral-shaped process in which new knowledge raises new questions. It is also an ongoing dialogue in which the partners remain dependent on one another, as they complement each other with their knowledge. For the MWI staff this learning process has a practical impact on their assessment of scholarship applications and on the way they support students during and after their scholarships.

The learning community displays more distinctive contours at forums and curriculum development conferences. It has certain agreed structures of communication (conferences, publications and forums) and regular agreed intervals for meetings and exchanges of ideas.

The active protagonists in this global learning community of the universal Church are not just the individual MWI staff members, but also the relevant institution as such. However, this is only possible if the institution remains capable of learning and maintains a clear vision of its brief to train future leaders. It also requires mutual trust, team spirit, an ongoing willingness to question scholarship policy, as well as appropriate ideas management and the responsible participation of all the staff. As a learning organisation, the MWI can make a modest contribution to the global theological learning community of the universal Church.



# **The Universal Church as a Community of Solidarity**



# How do we want to lead our lives?

## Development policy guidelines for Christians and the Church in a worldwide solidarity network

Pirmin Spiegel

### Being human among humans

#### Forbearance as a fundamental attitude

Our personal life style, our political arrangements, our organization of the economy, our systems of thought and belief in Germany – all these things have consequences not just for ourselves, but for the people in our immediate neighbourhood and in the remote regions of the world, and for creation in general. Many people on our planet need to know the following:

- what we in Germany consume and under what conditions (e.g. mobile phones, clothing),
- what ways we have of influencing the processes of manufacturing, buying and selling and negotiating with others (access to raw materials, production conditions, environmental consequences, commerce),
- what happens to the money thus generated (wages and profits),
- how these processes are assessed (responsibility).

However, it is not only the production of goods that determines the lives of many people. Nowadays their lives are determined by the global cash flows which are wholly detached from specific goods and based solely on the technical capabilities of digital communication. Manufacturing processes and financial relations cannot be determined arbitrarily, since their influence on the lives of so many people around the globe is simply too great. That is why we in Germany today can only lead our lives responsibly if we also take into account the lives of our fellow human beings. The converse is also true. I can only live

if my fellow human beings are taking account of me, want my life to continue, accept me, support me, with all the physical and mental weaknesses and strengths I possess. For that reason we need to be forbearing to one another so as to be mutually supportive and tolerant. Where forbearance and acceptance are no longer possible, coexistence will also be difficult and ultimately impossible. Where forbearance is no longer a factor, where the battle lines have already been drawn and there is no place left for it, we abandon our fellow human beings to their fate – and hope we will not have to share it. The core concern of this basic attitude of “forbearance” could be pursued further to include compassion, justice, recognition and fraternalism, but that would take us too far afield.

### **Solidarity and self-conversion as mission**

From the Christian faith I know that I have been accepted by God, unconditionally, with all my strengths and weaknesses. This state of being accepted by God cannot be taken from me. Having been made in the image of God, I am entitled to an inalienable dignity, just as all other human beings are. The development and the protection of this dignity are a logical consequence of the awareness of having been created. This applies regardless of whether a human being personally experiences this acceptance or not. Although Christians hope to experience it, there is no guarantee. It is a gift of the kind theologians call “grace”.

Where the dignity of human beings is threatened or violated – whether because they are poor, female, black, old, expelled, disfigured or whatever – God Himself is ignored. Consequently it is the task of Christians, and of the Church as the community of all God’s faithful pilgrims, continually to reflect on where they themselves adversely affect the lives of others on a personal or structural basis, when they do harm to their own lives and destroy natural resources (self-conversion). Equally, the individual is obliged, as is the Church as a whole, to help ensure that others should not be robbed of their dignity nor reduced to poverty (solidarity). It is a matter of dignity and justice that all people should be able to lead their lives in an unspoiled natural environment.

This basic concern of the double corrective – solidarity and self-conversion – encompasses a further consideration which needs to be

examined. The essence of this way of being a Christian or a church does not consist in contemplating one's own navel, but in going forth to those places where human dignity and natural resources are under threat. Pope Francis constantly gives voice to this concern: to the need to get away from self-referentiality to the uttermost bounds of human existence. Such an understanding of one's role has consequences for being a Christian or a church here in Germany, in Central Europe, in the whole world.

### The ecclesial mission of MISEREOR

In founding the episcopal aid organization MISEREOR in 1958 the German bishops created an institution to organize their worldwide solidarity with those suffering from "hunger and disease in the world". For MISEREOR setting off to the uttermost bounds of human existence is both a mission and a programme. In the spirit of the Gospel and Christian social ethics MISEREOR strives to help the particularly disadvantaged inhabitants of Asia, Africa and Latin America to achieve "a life in dignity, thus promoting justice, freedom, reconciliation and peace in the world".<sup>239</sup> At the time of its founding Cardinal Frings set the organization three tasks for the future which have lost none of their topicality today: first, the provision of financial support for partner organizations that operate on the principle of help through self-help; second, a Lenten pastoral and educational work in Germany; and, finally, political lobbying, which Frings described as "appealing to the conscience of the powerful".<sup>240</sup> Thus MISEREOR's mission consists in extending financial support to organizations that help overcome poverty, exclusion, environmental pollution and their causes in the southern hemisphere. To this end MISEREOR strives to motivate parishes, schools, groups and associations as well as individual Christians, indeed all citizens of Germany, to adapt their chosen roles and lifestyles to greater solidarity and more sustainable objectives and/or to support them in these efforts. Another equally important part of MISEREOR's field

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<sup>239</sup> Charter of the episcopal aid organization MISEREOR e.V., § 2.2 dated 16. November 1989, in <http://www.misereor.de/ueber-uns/auftrag-struktur/satzung.html>, retrieved on 5. May 2014.

<sup>240</sup> Cf. Frings, Joseph, *Abenteuer im Heiligen Geist*. Speech on the founding of MISEREOR, held on 19. August 1958 at the Bishops' Conference in Fulda (19-21. August 1958), in <http://www.misereor.de/fileadmin/redaktion/Fringsrede1958allgemein.pdf?PHPSESSID=e4a537d6bc9b8bf15bd6391db3adca37>, retrieved on 5. May 2014.

of activity is political intervention in favour of ordinary people in the southern hemisphere.

At the same time certain questions keep cropping up concerning the idea of “development”. These are questions regarding the self-determination of the poor and excluded, the appropriate form of solidarity with them provided by Christians and the churches, what political institutions facilitate justice, peace and a good life for all, and what constitutes an appropriate personal lifestyle in Germany.

In the almost six decades of MISEREOR’s existence the answers were always adapted to meet the new challenges. So what are today’s political guidelines for “development” (Section 2), a development which serves the lives of everyone and the preservation of natural resources in an unspoiled natural environment? What obstacles can be anticipated in the implementation of these guidelines and how can MISEREOR help to overcome them (Section 3)?

### **How do we want to lead our lives so that all can live?**

MISEREOR takes the view that the whole planet is in need of change. It is not true to say there is no alternative to a situation in which there is hunger on the one side and surfeit on the other. The question is what kind of development do we want to have? To what end? And defined by whom? Whichever way you look at it, for us humans there is no getting round the fact that we are going to have to reach agreement at a global level on how we can and want to live in future. MISEREOR has set itself the following key question for the next few years: *How do we want to live and how are we going to live so that all of us can live well?* This is a discussion that MISEREOR does not intend to conduct merely from the perspective of the educated European middle class. It also wants to hear more often and more clearly the voices of the world’s poor in this process. For this reason efforts are being made, both in Germany and in the countries of the southern hemisphere, to discuss with some of the partner organizations the question: “How do we want to live and how are we going to live so that all of us, especially the poor and needy, can live?” and examine possible answers.

## Guidelines for global action

### *Redefinition of the tasks and goals of development policy*<sup>241</sup>

The limits of our planet's resilience have been reached. Our civilizational model, which is based on *continuous growth* and *increasing consumption of resources*, is globally unsustainable. Refugees accumulating at the borders of the European Union, climate change in the form of exceptionally long droughts in sub-Saharan Africa, the banking crisis in Europe, the Fukushima nuclear disaster in Japan, and the wars over oil and water resources fill our headlines. The moment developing and threshold countries, in accordance with the former slogan of "catch-up development", succeed in copying the path we have taken, the system will collapse. At the same time, poor people in developing and threshold countries must be granted the possibility of a development that gives them access to basic and vital goods. Worldwide social and ecological justice on the principle of joint, but different, responsibility requires a rethinking not only of development policy, but also of the development paths that we follow.

As a reaction to this situation the German Advisory Council on Global Change (WBGU) developed the concept of a "grand transformation",<sup>242</sup> according to which a sustainable development policy must also be geared to the needs of environmental, climate-change and raw-materials policy and the over-arching protection of common global assets to a far greater extent than in the past.<sup>243</sup>

The attainment of the Millennium Development Goals/MDGs for 2015<sup>244</sup> adopted by the UN in 2000/01 has largely determined the international development agenda. For the period up to 2013 the results look rather mixed. Some targets were achieved in some

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<sup>241</sup> For a detailed account see the MISEREOR position paper "Entwicklungspolitik in globaler Verantwortung", Aachen, February 2013, in [http://.misereor.de/fileadmin/redaktion/MISEREOR\\_Positionspapier\\_BT-Wahl\\_2013\\_final.pdf](http://.misereor.de/fileadmin/redaktion/MISEREOR_Positionspapier_BT-Wahl_2013_final.pdf), retrieved on 5. May 2014.

<sup>242</sup> Cf. the study at <http://www.wbgu.de/hauptgutachten/hg-2011-transformation/>, retrieved on 5. May 2014.

<sup>243</sup> Cf. the detailed account in Misereor / Institut für Gesellschaftspolitik an der Hochschule für Philosophie, Weltgemeinwohl. Neue Ansätze um Postwachstum und globale Gerechtigkeit, Weltsichten-Dossier 12-2013/1-2014, Frankfurt am Main 2013.

<sup>244</sup> Including the halving of hunger worldwide; the provision of primary schooling for all children; equality between the sexes; the reduction of infant mortality by two-thirds; the reduction of the mortality rate during childbirth by three-quarters: combating HIV/AIDS and malaria; halving the number of people without access to clean water; the development of a more equitable trading and financial system.

regions of the world at least, while in others there were clear shortfalls. At the 2012 UN conference in Rio it was decided to adapt targets to “sustainable development”. The idea was to draw up Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to cover the ecological, social and economic dimensions of development. In development jargon, the post-2015 agenda process has begun and will soon reach completion. It will be an important factor in determining the goals and direction of future international development cooperation. Thus MISEREOR is seeking ideas for an integrated system of global sustainability goals that will combine MDGs and SDGs and be incorporated in a human rights and value-based action programme.

### **War on poverty and social inequality**

The “wealthy North v. poor South” paradigm, which typified the development policy of the past, is gradually being abandoned. There is less and less talk of the poor “South” and the rich “North”. For some years now the *threshold countries* China, India, Brazil, Indonesia, Mexico and South Africa have been important actors in the international political structures and bodies known as Global Governance. Global poverty has a new face. Almost three quarters of the poor live in the economically “successful” threshold countries, which are characterized by an extreme degree of social inequality. Great changes have been brought about in the world by the growing economic and political importance of these countries, which have now become donors of development aid themselves. The challenge consists in integrating this fact in the ongoing breakdown of targets and instruments while having to continue development cooperation with these countries.

In addition to classical development cooperation, special attention must be paid in these countries to ensuring that agrarian and raw materials policy is shaped in such a way that the social injustices between rich and poor are not further aggravated, but can make a contribution to the development of all sections of the population. The war on poverty and social inequality and the promotion of democratic participation must remain the overriding aim of development policy.

Most of the people in African countries torn by violent conflict live in poverty. In these cases priority must be given to working with the poorest and often most fragile states. An important instrument for

reducing poverty is the social security system. Social programmes of the kinds introduced in different forms in Brazil and India, for example, could be implemented in African countries, depending on local conditions. Of crucial importance for an effective and sustainable war on poverty are the health and education fields and special protection for the rights of women and children.

MISEREOR's guiding principle is to be found in a sentence in the Encyclical *Populorum Progressio*: "Development is the new name for peace." There is quite clearly a close relationship between peace, justice and development. The wars, violent conflicts and terrorist attacks of the past show that the world is afflicted by conflict dynamics that are ideologically complex, ethnically or religiously inspired and determined by power politics. In its World Development Report for 2011 the World Bank pointed out that poverty is worst in the countries that are torn by violent conflicts. Thus civil conflict resolution and crisis prevention are key factors determining development policy.

### **Development requires active and independent civil societies**

Sustainable social development requires political scope for active and unhindered participation in civil society. Civil society groups operate as important catalysts for much-needed political change in their countries. By promoting civil society partner organizations in the southern hemisphere the churches' aid organizations, political foundations and non-governmental organizations render an indispensable contribution. This work will continue to receive strong support from the German government.

### **Human rights as the basis and target of development cooperation**

In seeking a good life for everyone we must ensure that everyone can exercise their human rights. The granting and protection of human rights is primarily the task of governments. For this reason MISEREOR supports the pledge of the German government to pursue a human-rights-based development policy. By signing the international human rights conventions Germany has pledged itself to their binding implementation. Development cooperation helps support partner countries in fulfilling their human rights obligations under the various human rights pacts. Furthermore, in keeping with the Maastricht principles, governments – including the German government – have extraterritorial state obligations to protect populations

in partner countries against human rights violations by state institutions or private companies. The voluntary business initiatives (Corporate Social Responsibility, Global Compact) are not enough and must be supplemented by binding regulations. We need more stringent rules to ensure greater transparency and keep companies accountable for conditions along the entire production and supply chain as well as to guarantee participation by the local population. We must also ensure the transparency of cash flows, as this will facilitate more effective prevention of corruption and tax evasion.

### **Financing of sustainable development and climate protection**

In view of such global challenges as the war on poverty and the consequences of climate change, the political pledge to raise public development cooperation to 0.7 percent of the gross national income (GNI) by 2015 has lost none of its urgency. The problems of poverty and the destruction of natural resources cannot be solved with funds amounting to 0.7 percent of GNI alone. Social, political and economic structures along with culturally determined lifestyles and values must be changed as well. Moreover, the financing of global development goals after 2015, especially in the climate field, will require the use of additional and innovative financing instruments, such as the financial transaction tax.

### **Rural development, alleviation of hunger, and food security**

The guiding principle for the promotion of rural development and food sovereignty is the right to nutrition. On the one hand, it is essential to guarantee the poor access to seed, land and water resources. To achieve this, German and EU policy must be geared to the principle of the primacy of food over the use of biomass as fodder or a source of energy. On the other hand, agricultural investments and markets should increasingly be geared to gradually making the right to food a reality. In particular, an expanded public programme of agrarian research could help to better satisfy the specific needs of the overwhelming majority of the world's small farmers. The German government should support the efforts of developing countries to strengthen local and regional markets. There is an urgent need to gear the agrarian policy of the European Union to development policy criteria. This will involve, among other things, the assumption of international responsibility by the EU, the acceptance of the right to food

as a basic principle, and the reduction of socially and ecologically dubious fodder imports.

### **Development through climate protection policy and sustainable use of resources**

Climate protection and the war on poverty are two sides of the same coin. For many of Germany's partner countries in the field of development cooperation global protection of the climate and resources is essential if development opportunities are to be realized at all. An International Climate Treaty is an absolute necessity. At the national level Germany must not just content herself with abandoning nuclear energy. A genuine shift in energy policy must serve climate protection and thus also protect the developing countries against even greater consequences of climate change. We must aim at getting a climate protection law which stipulates, for example, that by 2020 greenhouse gas emissions must be reduced by at least 40 percent compared to their 1990 level. It must also set the long-term target of developing a virtually carbon-free economy by 2050.

In the financing of climate protection measures and German development cooperation, the partner countries should be comprehensively supported in their efforts to convert to being low-carbon societies. This includes the promotion of decentralized energy systems based on renewable sources of energy whose aim is to ensure that the poor have access to energy.

### **Resistance to and resources for change**

For the political guidelines outlined above to be implemented, thus opening the door to change, we need people and organizations as actors who want that to happen and strive to bring it about either on the spot or at the regional, national and international levels. These potential actors also have to be motivated, however, which means new incentives, information and promising new courses of action at the twin levels of personal lifestyle and political influence.

MISEREOR addresses itself, via the Lenten pastoral, primarily to a church-going public. The educational work of the aid agency in parishes, schools, academies and universities reaches people with different ideological backgrounds. Cooperation with other ecclesiastical and secular organizations involved in its lobbying work extends

its capabilities and increases the political weight of the demands made of political decision-makers. In all activities the difficulties of implementation must be taken into account.

### **The gulf between knowledge and action**

In Germany people have every opportunity of finding out about unjust living conditions and environmental hazards. So what prevents those people, once they have the knowledge, from accepting their responsibility and making the dream of a different, more just world come true? There is an unmistakable gulf between knowledge and action. This gulf is attracting increasing attention in development work.<sup>245</sup>

By compelling us to adapt to competition, our economic system keeps us in a permanent state of anxiety as to whether what we are doing is enough. Individuals, companies, banks and even states must constantly improve in order to survive. The fear of no longer living up to requirements and consequently no longer belonging penetrates ever more deeply into the consciousness of individuals and organizations. Control over one's own life and actions is lost.

Another explanation for resistance to change is the fascination exerted by the affluence created by the accumulation of goods. The belief in progress helps sustain the notion of unlimited growth. This kind of belief in progress ultimately rests on irreversible change as an article of faith.<sup>246</sup> Here the word "change" is almost too weak for what we are doing, as in fact we are breaking with inherited forms of a lifestyle and its political and economic foundations.

### **Difficult solidarity**

A glance at the results of opinion polls conducted by the Allensbach Institute<sup>247</sup> of September 2012 brings the gulf between knowledge and action into sharper focus:

- 55 percent of citizens want money and material aims to play less of a role in our lives;

<sup>245</sup> On what follows cf. Linz, Manfred, *Wie lernen Gesellschaften – heute? Zur Verwirklichung politischer Einsichten oder Abschied vom Wunschdenken*, Wuppertal 2012, 20 ff.

<sup>246</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 21.

<sup>247</sup> Cf. the supplement "Denk ich an Deutschland 2012" to the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* of 26. September 2012.

- 66 percent would welcome a trend towards a simpler life style;
- 76 percent desire more solidarity and social cohesion. But only 9 percent expect such a trend to emerge. 67 percent believe that people are getting more selfish;
- 80 percent desire a reduction in the social differences between rich and poor.

But people's actual behaviour runs counter to all this. The Allensbach polls revealed a marked enjoyment of possessions and consumption. Accordingly, the great majority of the population want to retain their standard of living. This majority – according to its own assessment – has a lot to lose, which in turn reinforces the desire to maintain the status quo. Those who deny themselves material gratification are in the minority. A majority finds that risks are on the increase. This makes it relevant to ask where people look for security. Eighty percent say that they derive a sense of security from their savings, while 52 percent derive it from ownership of real estate. The results of the surveys merely reflect what aid and charity organizations know from their own work. When it comes to resources, solidarity is in short supply. If there was enough of it, we should not have to keep appealing for it.

This means it is mainly fear of loss and the powerlessness coming from a sense of their own limitations which make people incapable of acting. It is fear and a sense of powerlessness that prevent the dream of a better world – in theological terms the Kingdom of God – from becoming a reality.<sup>248</sup>

### **Keep pressing for change nevertheless**

For the sake of the lives of today's and future generations we must be unrelenting in our attempts to overcome powerlessness.

One resource that can motivate incisive change is the Christian faith with its hope that life is stronger than death. Failure is part of this, because faith in the resurrection only has meaning if one has previously attempted to defend life without success. There are numerous initiatives which show how we can act in a spirit of social and ecological responsibility. They range from ecological agriculture

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<sup>248</sup> Cf. Duchrow, Ulrich; Krüger, René et al., *Solidarisch Mensch werden*, Hamburg 2006.

through the sharing of cars and local currencies to the energy turn-around.<sup>249</sup> Self-sufficiency is one of the key buzz words of the current debate: only consume as much as is enough to meet your own needs. The problem is how to define what is “enough”. Here the visions of other peoples, cultures and religions can inspire us, as symbolized by such concepts as *buen vivir* (Latin America), *ubuntu* (southern Africa) and cosmic harmony (Asia). We now have plenty of suggestions to define what “enough” is:<sup>250</sup> slowdown, disentanglement, clearout and de-commercialization, according to Wolfgang Sachs<sup>251</sup> or, as Bishop Luiz Falvio Cappio of Brazil says: “More life with less.”<sup>252</sup>

In Germany the churches are in the midst of a thorough-going renewal. The Catholic Church is pondering Francis’s vision of a poor church for the poor. For MISEREOR, as a church aid organization for development cooperation which arose out of a Lenten fast, his message for Lent 2014 is a confirmation and recurring challenge which it strives to pass on: “Let us not forget that real poverty hurts: no self-denial is real without this dimension of penance. I distrust a charity that costs nothing and does not hurt.”<sup>253</sup>

<sup>249</sup> For the wide range of such initiatives that have sprung up in the meantime cf. e.g. Schneidewind, Uwe; Zahrnt, Angelika, *Damit gutes Leben einfacher wird. Perspektiven einer Suffizienzpolitik*, Munich 2013. Kessler, Wolfgang, *Zukunft statt Zocken. Gelebte Alternativen zu einer entfesselten Wirtschaft*, Oberursel 2013.

<sup>250</sup> Cf. Schneidewind, Uwe; Zahrnt, Angelika, *ibid*, 14.

<sup>251</sup> Cf. Sachs, Wolfgang, *Die vier E’s: Merkposten für einen maßvollen Wirtschaftsstil*, in *Politische Ökologie*, No. 33, 1993, 69-72.

<sup>252</sup> “Mehr Leben mit weniger. Bischof Cappio berichtet vom Widerstand am Rio São Francisco”, in [http://www.franziskaner.de/uploads/media/wmf\\_2\\_09\\_cappio\\_in\\_hofheim\\_01.pdf](http://www.franziskaner.de/uploads/media/wmf_2_09_cappio_in_hofheim_01.pdf), retrieved on 5. May 2014.

<sup>253</sup> Francis, “[https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/lent/documents/papa-francesco\\_20131226\\_messaggio-quaresima2014.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/lent/documents/papa-francesco_20131226_messaggio-quaresima2014.html)”, retrieved on 5. May 2014.

# Universal Church development cooperation in Germany

## In support of the globalisation of charity

Werner Thissen

Development cooperation is an indispensable expression of the nature and life of the Church. Poverty, hardship, hunger and violence, the exploitation of women and children, the inequitable distribution of goods and the depletion of creation make it imperative that the Church continue to promote global justice among all people.<sup>254</sup> The pastoral constitution of the Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, expressed this interrelationship with great eloquence: “The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts.”<sup>255</sup>

Ecclesiastical development cooperation constitutes the fulfilment of this compassionate understanding of the Church described by the Second Vatican Council. In consequence, the Church also always remains the „Church of the poor“, as Pope Francis recently emphasised. The development cooperation performed by our episcopal aid organisation MISEREOR, which superficially appears indistinguishable from public development aid or the activities of a secular non-governmental organisation, is based on a core ecclesiological insight. While there are objective and pragmatic reasons for the specialisation and distribution of tasks among *missio*, MISEREOR, *adveniat* and Caritas (international) – the relief organisations run by

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<sup>254</sup> Cf. Sayer, Josef; Lohner, Alexander, *Teilnahme an Christi misereor super turbam. Der soziolethische Auftrag Misereors*, in: Anzeiger für die Seelsorge. Zeitschrift für Pastoral und Gemeindepraxis, 113 (2004) 3, 18-21, here 18.

<sup>255</sup> Cf. The Second Vatican Council, The Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*: [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_cons\\_19651207\\_gaudium-et-spes\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_cons_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html), no. 1.

the Catholic Church in Germany – their activities in countries in the southern hemisphere are also rooted in genuine theology. Although there is no mission without solidarity, there is certainly development without explicit mission, a Christian solidarity which does not so much speak of faith as living it out.

The *one* Christ-given salvation incorporates a transcendent dimension, which tends towards eternity, and an immanent dimension, aligned to the modern age. By analogy, there are the two forms of consummation of the *one* ecclesiastical witness - proclamation and development, or kerygma and diaconia. Although it is necessary to distinguish between them, they cannot be separated from one another in any substantial way.<sup>256</sup> The Acts of the Apostles tells of the choice of the seven for the social duty of “giving out food”<sup>257</sup>, so that the apostles can “continue to devote ourselves to prayer and to the service of the word.”<sup>258</sup>

In his opening speech marking the founding of MISEREOR, Cardinal Frings said the following: “Wherever the Lord appeased hunger, including the hunger of those who utterly misunderstood him, the individuals involved regarded the experience as religious [...]. And whenever the apostles healed the sick, initially out of sheer compassion, they did so in the name of Jesus. Let us hope, therefore, that the activities of the planned relief organisation [...] will be recognised as a religious process, as aid in the name of Jesus and his Church.”<sup>259</sup> This is how MISEREOR interprets its ministry to the poor of the world – as an organisation driven by faith and the Church.

But what are the challenges facing this ministry in a globalised world?

### Problems and challenges in a globalised age

Globalisation harbours both risks and opportunities. It signifies the amalgamation of individual countries into a global society and a global

<sup>256</sup> Cf. Die deutschen Bischöfe, *Die eine Sendung und die vielen Dienste. Zum Selbstverständnis weltkirchlich orientierter Einrichtungen und Initiativen heute*, Bonn 2000, 18 (I, 19).

<sup>257</sup> Acts 6:2.

<sup>258</sup> Acts 6:4.

<sup>259</sup> Frings, Joseph, *Abenteuer im Heiligen Geist*. Speech on the occasion of the founding of MISEREOR, held on 19. August 1958 at the Fulda Bishops' Conference (19-21. August 1958), in: <http://www.misereor.de/fileadmin/redaktion/Fringsrede1958allgemein.pdf?PHPSESSID=e4a537d6bc9b8bf15bd6391db3adca37>, retrieved 5. May 2014, 5.

economy, a higher level of competition, more freedom, an increased, intensive exchange between individuals and of ideas, capital, goods and services around the world. All this *could* represent an enormous opportunity – for developing and developed countries alike.<sup>260</sup>

However, there are many indications that a number of countries in the South are overwhelmed by the task of seizing the opportunities presented by globalisation and of averting the threats associated with it. In fact, entire regions are being marginalised by globalisation. On the one hand, local producers (artisans, fishermen, farmers) are losing their material foundations and employment opportunities as a result of sharper competition from industrialised countries penetrating their regional markets, while, on the other hand, the long-established producers have no chance to gain a foothold in the global market, and a regional industry is unable to develop. Fears that globalisation is adversely affecting the future prospects of social groups and even entire nations raise the question of what can be done to achieve more equitable globalisation.

Political initiatives have been launched with a view to consolidating macroeconomic power at a trans-state level. They aim to limit price-cutting wars by means of internationally binding standards, to make internal distribution structures more resistant to globalisation and to help weaker countries and regions become “more robust in the face of globalisation”.

Prelate Josef Sayer, Managing Director of MISEREOR until 2012, said: “It is also important that preferential, case-by-case consideration be given to the needs of developing countries during the World Trade Organisation negotiations. If greater justice is to be achieved in global trade, the weak and the strong must be granted *different rights* and subjected to *different obligations*. For example, developing countries must be able to protect their agriculture against (subsidised) food imports at dumping prices in order to guarantee the food security of their populations.”<sup>261</sup>

The Catholic Church itself is one of the largest “global players”, and that includes its social and charitable commitment. All over the

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<sup>260</sup> Cf. Sayer, Josef, *Globalisierung und Solidarität*, in: Xiping, Zhuo; Kropp, Michael, *Christliche Soziallehre und ihre Verantwortung in der Gesellschaft*, Beijing 2009, 350-360, here 350 ff.

<sup>261</sup> *ibid.*, 352f.

world, people of faith are performing development work on behalf of dioceses, relief organisations, associations and religious communities, which benefits everyone – Christians and non-Christians alike. The global aid network established by the Church proves its worth time and again in the contexts of development cooperation and emergency and disaster relief. The expertise developed by the Church in respect of local conditions, its closeness to the poor on the ground and its global experience enable it to contribute to collective solidarity.

During the first year of his pontificate, Pope Francis spoke of a “globalisation of indifference”.<sup>262</sup> I have frequently been confronted by this phenomenon in the course of my work for MISEREOR. I am grateful, however, to have witnessed many instances of the globalisation of charity, too. I shall report on both below.

### **Global nourishment and hunger**

MISEREOR and other relief organisations continually find themselves having to remind the German public that global hunger and malnutrition are by no means a thing of the past. Approximately 842 million people worldwide suffer from chronic hunger<sup>263</sup> and a child dies of malnutrition every five seconds. The other side of the coin is that at least as many people are morbidly obese.

At the same time, around 2.3 billion tonnes of grain are being harvested around the world, more than ever before. Yet just 47 per cent of this harvest is intended for human consumption. The remainder is processed into fodder, petrol and industrial commodities – goods in which industrialised nations and aspiring emerging countries have a prime vested interest and for which they have established demand.<sup>264</sup>

<sup>262</sup> Cf., among other writings, Francis, Apostolic Exhortation “*Evangelii gaudium*” of the Holy Father Pope Francis to the Bishops, Clergy, Consecrated Persons and the Lay Faithful on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today’s World, 24. November 2013, [https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20131124\\_evangelii-gaudium.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html), no. 54.

<sup>263</sup> Cf. the latest statistics from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), online at: <http://www.fao.org/docrep/018/i3458e/i3458e.pdf>, retrieved 5. May 2014.

<sup>264</sup> Cf. Albrecht, Stephan; Engel, Albert, International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD). *Weltagrarbericht. Synthesebericht*, Hamburg 2008.

One cause of global hunger is excessive meat consumption. According to the „meat atlas“<sup>265</sup>, published in January 2014, the global consumption of meat is increasing significantly. It rises wherever people become more affluent and a middle class forms within society. This abundant consumption has far-reaching effects.

The necessary cultivation of animal feed requires large surfaces, which are urgently needed to plant food crops. Over one third of the world's grain harvests are processed into fodder while millions of people are starving to death. This constitutes an extreme waste of food because, during the conversion of vegetable food into animal products, the majority (around 90 per cent) of its energy content is lost. Only approximately 10 per cent of the grain fed to livestock is converted into meat mass.<sup>266</sup> Moreover, a study published by MISEREOR in 2012 shows that enormous amounts of drinking water are used in large-scale animal husbandry. Global livestock also produces around 18 percent of the world's greenhouse gas emissions.<sup>267</sup>

This state of affairs requires political and economic measures which are also explained in more detail in the MISEREOR study.<sup>268</sup> The many problems caused by excessive consumption of meat also call on us to reconsider our own consumer behaviour when it comes to eating meat. Both are required: changes in our individual behaviour and efforts to introduce different political and economic framework conditions. Meat-free Friday, a long tradition within the Church, thus takes on a new – political – meaning in this light.

### **Promotion of smallholder agriculture and fair trade**

A key tool in the struggle against hunger and malnutrition is the promotion of smallholder agriculture, which has failed to reach its full potential in poor countries. In many cases it is relegated to remote,

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<sup>265</sup> Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung, Bund für Umwelt- und Naturschutz in Deutschland, Le Monde Diplomatique (eds.), *Fleischatlas. Daten und Fakten über Tiere als Nahrungsmittel*, January 2014. <http://www.boell.de/en/2014/01/07/meat-atlas>.

<sup>266</sup> Cf. Gold, Mark, *The Global Benefits of Eating Less Meat. Compassion in World Farming Trust*, Hampshire 2004.

<sup>267</sup> Keller, Markus; Kretschmer, Jürgen, *Instrumente im Sinne einer nachhaltigen, klimafreundlichen Fleischproduktion. Eine Untersuchung im Auftrag von Misereor*, August 2012. ([http://www.misereor.de/fileadmin/redaktion/Studie\\_Fleischproduktion\\_3\\_2013.pdf](http://www.misereor.de/fileadmin/redaktion/Studie_Fleischproduktion_3_2013.pdf), retrieved 7. May 2014).

<sup>268</sup> *ibid*, 62 ff.

inadequately developed regions with poor-quality soil and is cut off from information and agricultural advisory services, public investors in irrigation and veterinary services, accessible markets and political decision-making.<sup>269</sup>

For that reason MISEREOR provides smallholders in many countries with training in climate-appropriate farming methods, enabling them to live despite the hostile aridity. These methods include raising sheep and goats, which are more suited to the hot climate and can subsist on very little, instead of cattle and small animal breeding. In some of the world's regions, the cultivation of drought-resistant millet or sorghum is advisable instead of maize. Saving the scant rainfall via the construction of cisterns, rainwater retention basins and underground dams is crucial. This is complemented by the use of hand pumps, the creation of fish ponds and protected fields, the distribution of suitable seedlings and much more besides. A combination of diverse seminars and workshops on organic agriculture, preparation of natural fertiliser for soil improvement, training in costing and marketing and on the management of micro-loans rounds off the programme for the sustainable, optimised use of the already scarce resources.

Smallholders require land security and water supply, seeds, fertiliser and knowledge of pest control methods. They also need money to invest in agriculture, for school fees and consumer goods, and they require advice, infrastructure and marketing opportunities.<sup>270</sup>

In contrast to approaches advocating the one-sided advancement of agriculture in developing countries with the help of genetic engineering, artificial fertilisers, pesticides and modern agricultural machine technology, MISEREOR's chief solution is "adapted methods of agriculture". The traditional and regional knowledge of farmers, agriculturalists, foresters, shepherds, fishermen, gardeners and housewives, which must be preserved and used, is usually more complex and more suited to the local conditions than the frequently monocausal thinking of western engineers and scientists.<sup>271</sup>

<sup>269</sup> For further information on this topic, cf. Hoering, Uwe, *Agrar-Kolonialismus in Afrika. Eine andere Landwirtschaft ist möglich*, published by the Forum Umwelt und Entwicklung, Hamburg 2007. ([http://www.globe-spotting.de/fileadmin/user\\_upload/globe-spotting/Africa/VSA\\_Hoering\\_Uwe\\_Agrar-Kolonialismus\\_in\\_Afrika.pdf](http://www.globe-spotting.de/fileadmin/user_upload/globe-spotting/Africa/VSA_Hoering_Uwe_Agrar-Kolonialismus_in_Afrika.pdf), retrieved 7. May 2014).

<sup>270</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 138.

<sup>271</sup> Cf. *Zukunftsfähige Landwirtschaft, Wege aus der Hungerkrise. Die Erkenntnisse*

And what can we do here in Germany? One example is fair trade. Compared with the macroeconomic turnover of goods, the proportion of fair trade products sold is quantitatively almost negligible. Although the domestic sales volume of coffee – the product with which fair trade was launched over forty years ago – has tripled in the past decade, the proportion of fair trade coffee sold in 2012 was a mere 2 per cent against the overall sales of the product.<sup>272</sup>

Nonetheless, I know from my own experience that being involved in a fair market as opposed to a conventional market can make an enormous difference to smallholders and cooperatives. In the fair trade sector, cultivated products are increasingly not only traded fairly, but also grown ecologically. This benefits both the environment and the farmers, particularly as far as health protection is concerned.

The symbolic effect of fair trade should not be underestimated either. Debates about equity and occupational safety, education and participation in world trade, conducted in just a small part of our society twenty years ago, are now followed attentively by a wide audience. Today, most conventionally managed companies are unable to avoid formulating minimum standards for their production and that of their suppliers. More and more segments of the economy are involved in this discussion: communications electronics<sup>273</sup>, the automotive industry<sup>274</sup>, quarrying<sup>275</sup> and many more. I have observed that, even if fair trade continues to play a small role in the economy in quantitative terms in future, it will nonetheless continue to alter the ways in which we think about the contribution made by the economy to the global common good.

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*des Weltagrarberichts und seine Vorschläge für eine Landwirtschaft von morgen*, Berlin, Hamburg, Bochum 2009, particularly 11 f. and 32 ([http://www.weltagrarbericht.de/downloads/Wege\\_aus\\_der\\_Hungerkrise\\_2.4MB.pdf](http://www.weltagrarbericht.de/downloads/Wege_aus_der_Hungerkrise_2.4MB.pdf), retrieved 7. May 2014).

<sup>272</sup> Cf. <http://www.fairtrade-deutschland.de/produkte/absatz-fairtrade-produkte/absatz-fairtrade-produkte-2013/#c49345>, retrieved 7. May 2014.

<sup>273</sup> Cf. "Aktion Saubere Handys" ("Campaign for Clean Mobiles") by missio, in: <http://www.missio-hilft.de/de/aktion/schutzengel/fuer-familien-in-not-weltweit/petition/>, retrieved 7. May 2014.

<sup>274</sup> Cf. Bornhorst, Bernd; Seitz, Klaus, Vom Erz zum Auto. Rohstoffe für die Reichen – schlechte Lebensbedingungen für die Armen, in: Dossier von Welt-Sichten 5/2013 ([http://www.misereor.de/fileadmin/redaktion/ws-Dossier\\_Vom\\_Erz\\_zum\\_Auto\\_5-2013.pdf](http://www.misereor.de/fileadmin/redaktion/ws-Dossier_Vom_Erz_zum_Auto_5-2013.pdf), retrieved 7. May 2014).

<sup>275</sup> Cf. the work of the organisation Xertifix (<http://www.xertifix.de/startseite/>, retrieved 7. May 2014).

## Flight and migration

During my travels to southern countries I was frequently confronted by a problem which is also a widely-debated issue in Germany: flight and migration. While in these countries I gained first-hand experience of the reasons why people are motivated to flee and emigrate. Many Germans only read about these reasons second-hand in newspapers. However, anyone who travels to the South and is confronted directly with the consequences of climate change, malnutrition and inequitable economic structures receives a so-called “reality check”. Let me cite an example. In the autumn of 2009 I travelled to Ethiopia with MISEREOR. On trips of this kind it is normal to travel a lot around the country and visit partner organisations involved in ecclesiastical development cooperation. During a lengthy car journey I noticed an enormous area covered with greenhouses. I asked my companion what it was all about. He replied that an Indian investor had constructed the greenhouses in order to cultivate flowers for the overseas market.

My first reaction was that foreign investment brings jobs and development, but my companion was quick to correct me. Previously this land had been inhabited by smallholders and cattle breeders. However, these people held no documented land rights. They had to yield to the investors’ scheme. I asked what had happened to the people concerned. The answer was that a few had found work but the majority had lost their entire livelihood.

Land grabs like this one by investors – legal, but far from legitimate – are common in Ethiopia and many other countries in the South. Smallholders consequently lose their means of subsistence and become landless. Even as the long rows of greenhouses flashed by, a thought passed through my mind: the farmers and shepherds whose land and homes have been taken will have to try their luck elsewhere, in the country’s metropolitan cities, for example, where they will likely end up in the suburban slums. Alternatively, they may set off immediately on the long, dangerous journey to Europe.

This is just a small example drawn from my own experience. I could relate other observations from other trips. No refugee leaves his or her home without reason. Some are driven away by armed conflict, as in the case of the countless people who have had to leave Syria due to the war. Others see no economic future for themselves and their families in their home countries.

The difficult situation described underlines the fact that we in Germany are part of the problem, but also that we can become part of the solution. It is up to us to decide which kind of globalisation retains the upper hand: the globalisation of indifference or that of charity.

It is significant that the German Caritas Association should point to a host of global problems in its 2014 annual campaign. For me this once again underlines how closely intertwined our welfare is with that of people overseas who live far away from us. In the above I have already listed the many different reasons which cause people to leave their homes. Since I started paying regular trips to southern countries, the following thought has rarely left my mind: development cooperation can prevent people from leaving their homes as refugees. Our refugee policy makes most sense if we strike at the heart of the problem – the refugees' homelands. If we fail to do so, we should not be surprised if the number of refugees thronging towards Europe continues to rise.

Sustainable development, as advocated by our ecclesiastical aid organisations around the world, helps people to create an adequate livelihood for themselves in their native countries. It opens up new avenues which go beyond the appeasement of the most urgent hunger. The expansive greenhouses in Ethiopia, which I used to illustrate my point, made me realise that investments are all too frequently made without the consistent involvement of local people. When refugees and immigrants enter our country, it goes without saying that we must help them. However, we in Germany can help most by supporting our development organisations as they work to ensure that people can live a life of dignity in their homelands, in conditions fit for human habitation.

### **Local answers to global questions**

During my trips for MISEREOR I have never just been confronted with problems. My visits to the many projects – in 2012, MISEREOR funded over 1,100 projects from ecclesiastic, public and private donations<sup>276</sup> – have always involved meeting people who were working on solutions. Sometimes development cooperation seems to be a mere drop in the ocean. It certainly often receives poor marks

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<sup>276</sup> Cf. Misereor, Misereor: Jahresbericht 2012, Aachen 2013, 32f ([http://www.misereor.de/fileadmin/redaktion/MISEREOR\\_Jahresbericht\\_2012.pdf](http://www.misereor.de/fileadmin/redaktion/MISEREOR_Jahresbericht_2012.pdf), retrieved on 7. May 2014).

from its critics. However, anyone who visits the men, women and children on the ground and hears their stories cannot avoid one truth: ecclesiastical development cooperation has helped many people change their lives for the better. Yet progress can frequently only be experienced locally. There again, this is part of the entire complex: seeking local answers to global problems.

That last remark – global problems demand local answers – certainly does not mean that the Church is above lobbying politically in favour of the poor in national and international decision-making processes. MISEREOR campaigns in a number of different ways to ensure that the voice of the South can be heard in German politics and, via the coalition of ecclesiastical relief organisations CIDSE (Coopération Internationale pour le Développement et la Solidarité, or International Cooperation for Development and Solidarity), at the European level, too. This is not due simply to activism, but to the conviction that it is our Christian duty to fight against the “structures of sin”<sup>277</sup> on a global scale. This requires determined political action by the Church, as I explained at the outset: action which is dedicated to promoting the globalisation of charity.

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<sup>277</sup> John Paul II refers to the “structures of sin” inter alia in his encyclical *Sollicitudo rei socialis*: John Paul II, Encyclical *SOLLICITUDO REI SOCIALIS* by Pope John Paul II, for the twentieth anniversary of *Populorum Progressio*, [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_30121987\\_sollicitudo-rei-socialis\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_30121987_sollicitudo-rei-socialis_en.html), no. 36.

# Networks of Solidarity

## A broader concept than the provision of assistance

Klaus Vellguth

In discussions about the universal Church as a solidarity-based fellowship, the concept of solidarity<sup>278</sup> frequently tends to be narrowed down to an economic or monetary dimension and is understood in terms of financial support for needy Christians and regional churches provided by financially stronger Christians or regional churches. However, solidarity means more than financial support for the poor by the rich. Etymologically, it stems from the Latin words *solidus* (sound, robust, securely founded) and *solidum* (firm ground, foundation).<sup>279</sup> It refers primarily to an attitude comprising an allegiance to and mutual support for ideas, activities and aims, based on shared values.

Following the concept of solidarity elaborated by Auguste Comte, Emile Durkheim distinguished between two types of solidarity: mechanical solidarity, based on given group characteristics (e.g. we as workers, as Christians or as Catholics), and organic solidarity, based on mutual dependence and reliance (e.g. people in a process which involves a division of labour or people in a value chain). It is worth noting that both types of solidarity are marked by reciprocity. Both mechanical and organic solidarity are not primarily a matter of subsidiarity (or even assistentialism – the mere provision of assistance), but concentrate on participation and on building community. The focus is

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<sup>278</sup> Translator's note: In this article the author uses the term *Solidarität* – translated here as “solidarity” – as defined in Catholic social ethics, where it forms one of its five principles (cf. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catholic\\_social\\_teaching](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catholic_social_teaching)). In other articles the German word *Solidarität* has been translated as “care for the poor”, “care for the vulnerable”, “identification with the poor and vulnerable”, etc. Such a translation, however, would be too unilateral here, as the author emphasises an important reciprocal aspect, i.e. more than the provision of assistance. Both uses differ from everyday use in English.

<sup>279</sup> Cf. Baumgartner, Alois, Stichwort ‘Solidarität’, in: *Lexikon Theologie und Kirche*, volume 9, Freiburg im Breisgau, Basel, Vienna 2000, 706f.

not on commitment or advocacy on behalf of an individual, but on a shared, unifying quality.

It was only later, in the early 20th century, that the concept of solidarity became an ethical ideal, particularly in Christian social ethics, influenced by the works of Heinrich Pesch<sup>280</sup>, and later by his students Gustav Gundlach and Oswald von Nell-Breuning. The emphasis was not so much on a solidarity based on ethical principles or on interests, but on a solidarity of action, commitment to and identification with the socially weak. The global dimension of such solidarity-focused commitment was highlighted by John XXIII in his Encyclical *Pacem in Terris* and also by his successor Paul VI's Encyclical *Populorum Progressio* as well as John Paul II's Encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*.<sup>281</sup> This understanding of solidarity – etymologically reduced and more focused in character – also prevailed in a paper on social welfare published in Germany by its two major denominations (i.e. Roman Catholic and Lutheran/Reformed Protestant). Entitled “For a Future in Solidarity and Justice”, it describes solidarity as a constitutive feature of the Church<sup>282</sup>, since “the decision concerning people’s ultimate fellowship with God is dependent on real-life solidarity with the lowest of the low.”<sup>283</sup>

In view of this world’s unfair global economic structures, its marginalising, often deadly poverty and its exclusion of the poor, it would be totally unrealistic, ignorant and perhaps even cynical to question the de facto importance of the solidarity of the rich towards the poor in financial and monetary terms. It is a great strength of the Church in Germany that, in its commitment to the universal Church, it has developed a keen sense of the need to look beyond its own horizons and is actively involved in care for socially disadvantaged regions in the world.<sup>284</sup> Year by year, Catholics in Germany provide some €500 million to support universal Church project partners in Africa, Asia,

<sup>280</sup> Cf. Pesch, Heinrich, *Solidarismus*, in: *Stimmen aus Maria Laach* 32 (1902), 38-60.

<sup>281</sup> Cf. also *Ecclesia Catholica*, *Katechismus der Katholischen Kirche*, Munich, Vienna, Leipzig and Fribourg 1993, no. 1939.

<sup>282</sup> Cf. *Kirchenamt der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland / Sekretariat der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz*, *Für eine Zukunft in Solidarität und Gerechtigkeit – Wort des Rates der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland und der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz zur wirtschaftlichen und sozialen Lage in Deutschland*, Hanover and Bonn 1997, 101.

<sup>283</sup> *ibid*, 106.

<sup>284</sup> Cf. Spiegel, Pirmin; Bükler, Markus, *Misereor als Querschnittsaufgabe und Querschnittsauftrag der Kirche*, in: *Anzeiger für die Seelsorge* 123 (2014) 4, 20-24.

Latin America, Eastern Europe and the Pacific.<sup>285</sup> In doing so, they send a signal against the “globalisation of indifference” which has been so frequently highlighted by Francis, helping to create at least some oases of a fairer world.

Nevertheless, there is more to solidarity than the strong supporting the weak. This was pointed out by Francis in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*. While he emphasises that solidarity is a spontaneous response on the part of those who understand the social function of property and have grasped the universal significance of goods as realities, he also reminds us that “solidarity must be lived as the decision to restore to the poor what belongs to them”.<sup>286</sup> But a few lines earlier he points out that the term “solidarity” has become “a little worn and at times poorly understood.” The word, he says, “refers to something more than a few sporadic acts of generosity. It presumes the creation of a new mindset which thinks in terms of community and the priority of the life of all over the appropriation of goods by a few.”<sup>287</sup> The concept of solidarity cannot, therefore, be reduced to the provision of finance. Rather, it is an attitude based on the community and on the priority of life as a shared value. Francis thus advocates a holistic concept of solidarity, following Durkheim’s distinction between organic and mechanical solidarity. Monetary solidarity primarily means the dependence of the poor on the rich (so that it is apparently unilateral) and is, therefore, organic. An emphasis on community and on the shared value of life, on the other hand, is a characteristic feature of mechanical solidarity. The solidarity of the universal Church, therefore, has two sides. As well as economic support for the weak, solidarity is also a characteristic feature of community within the universal Church as a fellowship based on a shared faith, shared traditions, shared prayers and a shared hope – not merely the provision of assistance. Christian solidarity, therefore, (also) exists independently of financial needs and can even be

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<sup>285</sup> The total expenditure of the German aid agencies *adveniat*, *Caritas International*, *Kindermismissionswerk*, *Misereor*, *missio* and *Renovabis* was €493,224,575 in 2011. Cf. *Konferenz Weltkirche / Sekretariat der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz, Jahresbericht Weltkirche 2012*, Bonn 2012, 27.

<sup>286</sup> Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* of the Holy Father Francis to the Bishops, Clergy, Consecrated Persons and the Lay Faithful on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today’s World, 26. November 2013, [https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20131124\\_evangelii-gaudium.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html), no. 189.

<sup>287</sup> *ibid.*, no. 188.

regarded as a synonym of the Church's catholicity and the Church as a community (*communio*).

### Paul's collection

This understanding of solidarity was a characteristic feature of the Early Church and fundamental to Pauline theology.<sup>288</sup> Speaking about the collection for the impoverished Early Church in Jerusalem, the Apostle Paul emphasises that the essence of this solidarity-focused financial support is not the money as such but the fellowship created by its provision. It is a manifestation of God's grace, showing itself through their action of giving freely and generously to others.<sup>289</sup> Essential to Paul's understanding is that his collection was occasioned by a reciprocal relationship that went beyond the economic dimension<sup>290</sup> – a relationship that created fellowship and reciprocity beyond any financial considerations. Whereas, on the one hand, the Gospel initially originated from Jerusalem and was received by the Gentile churches from that church, the Gentile churches now responded through financial contributions to Paul's collection. Within the community of the Early Church this was a way in which Gentile Christians could give something back to their brothers and sisters in Jerusalem and thus respond to what they themselves had received from them, "for if the Gentiles have been given a share in their spiritual possessions, then in return to give them help with material possessions is repaying a debt to them" (Romans 15:27). By taking this collection, Paul displayed an understanding of solidarity in which, financial gifts notwithstanding, the focus was on a certain understanding of community and not merely on the provision of assistance.

<sup>288</sup> Cf. Vellguth, Klaus, *Kirche und Fundraising – Wege einer zukunftsfähigen Kirchenfinanzierung*, Freiburg im Breisgau 2007, 79-102.

<sup>289</sup> Cf. Frettlöh, Magdalene L., *Der Charme der gerechten Gabe – Motive einer Theologie und Ethik der Gabe am Beispiel der paulinischen Kollekte für Jerusalem*, in: Ebach, Jürgen; Gutmann, Hans-Martin; Frettlöh, Magdalene L.; Weinrich, Michael, *Leget Anmut in das Geben, Zum Verhältnis von Ökonomie und Theologie*, Gütersloh 2001, 105-161. Müller, Oliver, *Vom Almosen zum Spendenmarkt – Sozialethische Aspekte christlicher Spendenkultur*, Freiburg im Breisgau 2005, 89.

<sup>290</sup> Today similar thoughts are being developed about the functional position of money. In his talk "The World of Communication – a Global Society" (held at the first Convention on Communicative Theology in Innsbruck in February 2003), Wolfgang Palaver described money as a "monetary means of communication". (Cf. Palaver, Wolfgang, *Kommunikationswelt Weltgesellschaft*, in: Hilberath, Bernd Jochen; Kraml, Martina; Scharer, Matthias, *Wahrheit in Beziehung – Der dreieine Gott als Quelle und Orientierung menschlicher Kommunikation*, Mainz 2003, 37-50.)

By regarding his collection as based on reciprocity and community, Paul continues a line of thought that centred on the principle of equality and was well known at his time, particularly in Hellenistic culture. The Apostle says: "It is not that you ought to relieve other people's needs and leave yourselves in hardship; but there should be a fair balance – your surplus at present may fill their deficit, and another time their surplus may fill your deficit. So there may be a fair balance; as scripture says: No one who had collected more had too much, no one who collected less had too little." (Corinthians 8: 13-15). In his argument Paul emphasises the principle of equality between people, but he also works on the assumption that there is equality between spiritual and material giving. Furthermore, Paul's argument in this respect goes hand in hand with his understanding of equality between the Gentile and Jewish Christian churches.<sup>291</sup> Paul's collection, says Klaus Berger, was a "sign of fellowship and a desire to be part of it."<sup>292</sup> Joachim Gnilka, too, interprets the agreed collection as something that went much further than economic or monetary assistance. It was, he says, an "expression of fellowship between Jewish and Gentile Christians."<sup>293</sup> It was, therefore, more than the provision of financial support to the Early Church in Jerusalem. In fact, financial assistance is merely the visible sign of a far more important dimension: the community of the Church. Within this community, offerings may differ in size but they must nevertheless be valued as equally important.

### The universalism of Christian solidarity

In taking the collection, Paul's underlying understanding of equality and solidarity focused on the worldwide fellowship of all local churches, a community that goes far beyond the narrow confines of a given church and overcomes all cultural and economic differences. The concepts of solidarity and catholicity are thus very closely related and partially overlap. Following *Evangelii Gaudium*, the model of soli-

<sup>291</sup> Cf. Gnilka, Joachim, *Die Kollekte der paulinischen Gemeinden für Jerusalem als Ausdruck ekklesialer Gemeinschaft*, in: Kampling, Rainer; Söding, Thomas, *Ekklesiologie des Neuen Testaments*, Freiburg im Breisgau, Basel, Vienna 1996, 313.

<sup>292</sup> Berger, Klaus, *Almosen für Israel*, in: *New Testament Studies* 23 (1976/77), 204.

<sup>293</sup> Gnilka, Joachim, op.cit., 312. Elsewhere Franz Mussner describes a handshake as a "public seal (perhaps a demonstrative gesture against 'false brothers') of an abiding 'community'" (Mussner, Franz, *Der Galaterbrief*, in: *Herders Theologischer Kommentar*, volume IX, Freiburg im Breisgau, Basel, Vienna 1974, 121.)

solidarity must, therefore, not be understood in terms of higher-ranking givers and lower-ranking takers (i.e. focused on the mere provision of assistance), but rather as a “polyhedron which reflects the convergence of all its parts, each of which preserves its distinctiveness. Pastoral and political activity alike seek to gather in this polyhedron the best of each. There is a place for the poor and their culture, their aspirations and their potential. Even people who can be considered dubious on account of their errors have something to offer which must not be overlooked. It is the convergence of peoples who, within the universal order, maintain their own individuality; it is the sum total of persons within a society which pursues the common good, which truly has a place for everyone.”<sup>294</sup> Solidarity does not mean uniformity, but a living universalism, one which trusts that the very differences of all the sides of the polyhedron will contribute to its special character. In the pastoral domain, solidarity also means trusting that the various regional churches – with all their differences and different contextual settings – can contribute something specific that is also relevant to other regional churches. This can offer a glimmer of hope for everyone, including the economically wealthy churches, as many of them – despite the availability of financial resources – consider themselves to be in the throes of a profound existential crisis, not knowing how they can pull themselves up by their own bootstraps and so overcome this crisis.

Although a Christian understanding of solidarity is much broader than a financial understanding which focuses merely on the provision of assistance, the conceptual narrowing of this understanding has acquired a surprising degree of plausibility in recent decades, especially within the Church. It would be good, first of all, to ask why this is so and what the contributing causes are. We might hypothesise that the concept of solidarity is easily reduced to an economic dimension (which it also contains) during a period and in the face of a *zeitgeist* which are dominated by economic and monetary considerations. Indeed, this seems so plausible in its affirmative character that it has even found its way into theological discourse. Furthermore, when we look at the original concept of solidarity (with its emphasis on equality and connectedness) and when we observe its replacement by a concept restricted to financial support, we might further hypothesise that this development reflects endeavours in society to divide the

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<sup>294</sup> Francis, *op.cit.*, no. 236.

world into two types of players: the dominant and the marginalised. The dominant players in this system could be seen as having active and supportive roles, while the marginalised are relegated to passive and vulnerable roles. The reduced concept of solidarity would thus be a reflection and at the same time the cause or tool (we might almost call it an “anti-sacrament”) of an understanding of the world based on inequality. These two hypotheses should trigger some fundamental questioning of the (conscious and implicit) self-image of aid organisations, especially those operating within the universal Church. Based on our understanding of solidarity, it would be good to ask whether the work of church aid organisations – which might superficially appear critical of the current *zeitgeist* and may well contain elements of social critique – are genuinely critical of the system or whether this is merely the first impression, whereas in reality they are the exact opposite, with a stabilising effect on the system (ultimately also in the way they see themselves).

### **Networks of solidarity in the universal Church**

In addition to the necessary reflection on the reasons and causes of such an understanding it is equally important to ask how relationships which are narrowly focused on the provision of assistance, especially within the Church, can be dissipated. This applies to relationships between the universal Church and regional churches, but also between the regional churches themselves. One sustainable model might be to develop and promote networking structures within the Church. These structures would be based on an understanding that different players within the Church can contribute valuable theological, pastoral and spiritual skills and thus enrich other players in the network. Moreover, they can make their contributions independently of their respective financial situation. The development of such networks would involve the help and perhaps also the facilitation of universal Church aid organisations. Their role would partly be to contribute to a lively (South-South or South-North) exchange between different players within the Church. On the other hand, they might also help to change the self-image of universal Church aid organisations, so that they start defining themselves not primarily by their roles as givers but also by their roles as representatives of “recipient regional churches”. By building up universal Church networking structures, the word “mission” would no longer be seen as a one-way street. It

would be stripped of its ideological baggage and genuinely brought to life.<sup>295</sup>

### Creating a pastoral network

This is the background to a range of pastoral networks that have been set up in Asia and Africa in recent years. They aim to provide international environments for reflection on pastoral theology, to act as forums for an international exchange delivering pastoral stimuli, and to serve as leaven for innovative approaches in pastoral ministry.<sup>296</sup> Networks of this kind have brought together representatives of leading pastoral institutes, enabling them to share their experiences and to strengthen and inspire one another. These pastoral institutes, many of which were founded in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Pacific in the 1950s and 1960s, are ideal networking partners. Stimulated by the Second Vatican Council, many of the institutes have developed into influential training centres, offering initial and further training not just for priests, but also increasingly for the laity and for members of religious orders. Although Germany's Catholic Church has supported the work of pastoral institutes in the past, particularly the Church aid organisations *missio* and *adveniat*, the Church's contact with these institutes did not extend much beyond financial support and was rather sporadic in nature. These pastoral institutes were primarily regarded as project partners in need of support and not as valuable pastoral exchange partners and sources of inspiration for other regional churches. There was very little perception of the work performed by these institutes in the southern hemisphere or, indeed, of the pastoral input that might be relevant to the German church. Moreover, there was virtually no networking between pastoral institutes in the southern hemisphere. They knew very little about each other's programmes and so a joint learning process was virtually ruled out.

To improve communication between pastoral institutes, establish a pastoral network and facilitate a joint learning process, a project entitled *Netzwerk Pastoral* ("Pastoral Network") was launched in 2010. Under this research project, *missio*, *adveniat* and the Institute of Missiology (IMW) at the Vallendar College of Philosophy and

<sup>295</sup> Cf. Vellguth, Klaus, *Pastoral global – Kirche als weltweite Lerngemeinschaft*, in: *Anzeiger für die Seelsorge* 120 (2011) 10, 20-23.

<sup>296</sup> Cf. Vellguth, Klaus, *Pastorales Netzwerk wächst in Asien – Pastoralinstitute suchen gemeinsam nach neuen Perspektiven*, in: *Verbum SVD* 54 (2014), 1-2.

Theology contacted a large number of pastoral institutes and sent them a questionnaire designed to provide a more accurate idea of the work carried out by these institutes. This information was to be shared with all the other pastoral institutes worldwide, so that they could be inspired by one another and, if they were interested, establish contact with each other. The responses from the pastoral institutes were subsequently published in a separate wiki in four languages (English, German, French and Spanish), so that each institute's profile became globally available on the internet.<sup>297</sup> This wiki now includes 31 pastoral institutes from Asia, 17 from Africa and 17 from Latin America.

In their feedback many of the pastoral institutes indicated that they were very much interested in getting to know each other and in intensive mutual networking. This prompted *missio* and the East Asian Pastoral Institute to invite several principals of Asian pastoral institutes to Manila for an initial meeting of the Asian Pastoral Network.<sup>298</sup> The conference, which was held at the East Asian Pastoral Institute in the Philippine capital from 29 October to 1 November 2012, was attended by representatives of the Saigon Pastoral Institute (Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam)<sup>299</sup>, the National Biblical Catechetical and Liturgical Centre (Bangalore, India)<sup>300</sup>, the Pallottine Animation Centre (Nagpur, India)<sup>301</sup>, Pusat Kateketik (Yogyakarta, Indonesia)<sup>302</sup>, the Singapore Pastoral Institute (Singapore)<sup>303</sup> and

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<sup>297</sup> Cf. [www.pastoral-global.org](http://www.pastoral-global.org), retrieved 15. May 2014.

<sup>298</sup> Cf. Vellguth, Klaus, *missio – The Network Pastoral and the Pastoral Institutes of Asia*, in: *East Asian Pastoral Review* 50 (2013) 4, 313-323.

<sup>299</sup> Cf. Nguyen, Thi Lanh, The Saigon Institute, in: *East Asian Pastoral Review* 50 (2013) 4, 376-382. Nguyen, Thi Lanh, Pastoralinstitut der Erzdiözese Hoh Chi Minh Stadt, unpublished manuscript, Ho Chi Minh City 2012.

<sup>300</sup> Cf. Fernandes, Cleophas D., *The NBCLC: A Renewed Mission and Role*, in: *East Asian Pastoral Review* 50 (2013) 4, 313-323. Leeuwen, Gerwin Van, *Fully Indian – Authentically Christian, A Study of the First Fifteen Years of the NBCLC (1967-1982)*, Bangalore – India in the Light of the Theology of Its Founder, Duraiswami Simon Amalorpavadass, Kampen 1990.

<sup>301</sup> Vijay, Thomas, The Pallottine Animation Centre of Nagpur, in: *East Asian Pastoral Review* 50 (2013) 4, 355-363. Vellguth, Klaus, *Eine neue Art, Kirche zu sein – Entstehung und Verbreitung der Kleinen Christlichen Gemeinschaften und des Bibel-Teilens in Afrika und Asien*, Freiburg im Breisgau 2005, 245-250.

<sup>302</sup> Cf. Putranto, Carlos, *Participation in a Growing Local Church: Reflection on Pusat Kateketik*, in: *East Asian Pastoral Review* 50 (2013) 4, 364-375.

<sup>303</sup> Cf. Arnold, Thomas, *Where Will You Bring Christ? The Singapore Pastoral Institute*, in: *East Asian Pastoral Review* 50 (2013) 4, 383-407. Goh, Arthur, *Eine Kirche für eine moderne Welt – Missionarische Herausforderungen der Kirche Singapurs*, in: *Forum Weltkirche* 130 (2011) 2, 20-25. Steffen, Paul B., *Places and Models of Formation for Mission and Ministry – Pastoral Institutes in Africa and Asia*, in: *Verbum SVD* 51 (2010), 423-438.

the East Asian Pastoral Institute (Manila, Philippines)<sup>304</sup>.<sup>305</sup> In order to learn from one another and to identify potential synergies, the representatives of the pastoral institutes started this first convention of the Pastoral Network by introducing their own organisations and the work on which they focused. Next, they formulated a joint definition of pastoral ministry which was supported by all delegates and took account of the Church's Asian context. One year later, in November 2013 in Bangalore (India), the second convention of the Asian Pastoral Network also attracted representatives of the Verbiest Institute (Taiwan), the National Catechetical Educational and Biblical Centre (Sri Lanka)<sup>306</sup> and Ishvani Kendra (India)<sup>307</sup>. This time the meeting focused on the question of inculturated pastoral training in Asia at the beginning of the third millennium and what shape it might take. After the first two conferences in Manila (2012) and Bangalore (2013), the Asian Pastoral Network now plans to expand further. The third conference of the Asian Pastoral Network, scheduled for October 2014, will be held in Ho Chi Minh City (former Saigon, Vietnam). By then a range of new relationships will have been formed in the Asian Pastoral Network and further pastoral institutes will have joined. The first national network meeting of Indian pastoral institutes was held in Bangalore, for instance, in the first half of 2014. Twenty-four pastoral institutes were represented. Based on the final declaration of the Asian Network meeting, they developed a number of prospects for the work of the pastoral institutes in India. In Africa, too, there is a growing interest in a pastoral network. In December 2013 the first conference of the African Pastoral Network took place at the

<sup>304</sup> Cf. Leger, Arthur, *The EAPI: from Mission Apologetics to Mission Networking*, in: *East Asian Pastoral Review* 50 (2013) 4, 324-336. Meili, Josef, *East Asian Pastoral Institute – A Power House of Inculturation and Interreligious Dialogue*, in: *Forum Mission* (2005) 1, 221-222, especially 222.

<sup>305</sup> It should be pointed out here that pastoral institutes face difficult situations in some places. Pakistan's Multan Pastoral Institute had to cancel its participation at short notice, as did representatives of the National Catechetical Centre from Bangladesh, since both groups were barred from leaving their countries. Cf. Vellguth, Klaus, *Pastorale Initiativen in bedrängter Lage – Der Einsatz des Multan Pastoral Institute für Dialog und Verständigung*, in: *Cibedo-Beiträge zum Gespräch zwischen Christen und Muslimen* 3 (2012), 92-97.

<sup>306</sup> Cf. Fernando, Piyal Janaka, *Challenges Faced in Pastoral Contextualized Formation in Sri Lanka*, unpublished document, Colombo 2013.

<sup>307</sup> Cf. Kendra, Ishvani, Institute of Missiology and Communications, Pune 2013. Kendra, Ishvani, 2014 Programmes, Pune 2013. Malipurathu, Thomas, *Ishvani Kendra and Its Contribution to the Field of Evangelization*, in: *Mission Today* 3 (2001) 3, 329-337. Kavunkal, Jacob, Ishvani Kendra, in: *Dharma Deepika* 2 (1998) 2, 67-68. Kavunkal, Jacob, Report about Ishvani Kendra, Pune, in: *Verbum SVD* 35 (1994), 269-271.

South African Lumko Institute, and the second meeting will be held in Malawi in November 2014 with a focus on “inculturation”.

### **Solidarity-based fellowship implies a learning community**

It seems at first sight that the development of pastoral networks in Asia and Africa is strengthening the universal Church as a learning community<sup>308</sup> by promoting a South-South and a South-North dialogue. After all, the main point of a pastoral network is to embark on a joint pastoral exchange and learning process. However, when a pastoral network is developed, such a process clearly reflects a concept of solidarity that overcomes any reduction to mere assistance (assistentialism). In fact, the process expresses the very essence of solidarity, as its players move forward in fellowship with one another and so manifest the universal Church as a solidarity-based community. This community overcomes any distinctions between (financial) givers and takers among the regional churches as well as the dichotomy between the universal Church, on the one hand, and the regional churches, on the other. The Church becomes a living network, a microcosm which demonstrates what the Church in its universality can be at this level, if only it manages to overcome its fixation on itself. It is this kind of forward-looking ecclesiological profile that Pope Francis has in mind when he says in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*: “The papacy and the central structures of the universal Church also need to hear the call to pastoral conversion.” A few sentences further on he adds: “Excessive centralisation, rather than proving helpful, complicates the Church’s life and her missionary outreach.”<sup>309</sup>

Promoting the development of international church networks represents a contribution to the work of the universal Church in Germany in that it projects the universal Church as a learning community and also as a solidarity-based fellowship (the real meaning of solidarity).<sup>310</sup>

<sup>308</sup> Cf. also Wustmans, Hildegard, *Connections alone are not enough. The universal Church as a learning community*, in: Krämer, Klaus; Vellguth, Klaus, *The Universal Church in Germany – Living the Faith Together, One World Theology*, volume 6, Freiburg im Breisgau 2014. Ackermann, Stephan, *Learning Laboratories of the Universal Church – an invitation and a challenge*, in: Krämer, Klaus; Vellguth, Klaus, op.cit.

<sup>309</sup> Francis, op.cit., no. 32.

<sup>310</sup> In addition to the pastoral networks supervised, among others, by Monika Kling there are plans to launch other networks which should enrich the global work of Germany’s church in the future. The Small Christian Communities Network, set up by Michael Meyer, will have its first meeting in Accra (Ghana) in November 2014. The first meeting of the Religious Freedom

If representatives of the Church in Germany participate in pastoral networks, it may help them to discover pastoral visions, models and initiatives and may, therefore, be of good use to them back home. Such participation means trusting that the Holy Spirit is at work – which is especially important in this age of globalisation – not exclusively in the universal Church or in one’s own regional church, but in all regional churches. After all, this is part of its polyphonic Pentecostal character. Pastoral networks are environments which encourage us to listen attentively to the work of the Spirit, “advancing along the path of a pastoral and missionary conversion which cannot leave things as they presently are.”<sup>311</sup>

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Network, established by Christoph Marcinkowski, will be held in Cyprus in April 2015. Another meeting scheduled for the first half of 2015 will be that of the African Theologians’ Network, set up by Marco Moerschbacher.

<sup>311</sup> Francis, *op.cit.*, no. 25.

# Solidarity and Support during Crises and Disasters

## On the role of ecclesiastical humanitarian assistance

**Oliver Müller**

Like almost no other event natural disasters quickly elicit a global wave of solidarity with the victims. When earthquakes, floods or cyclones destroy the livelihoods of thousands of people within the space of a heartbeat, as it were, a few appeals are normally enough to mobilise aid for the survivors. The fact that, in the face of a disaster, people are not bothered with the stricken region's average gross domestic product is testimony to the presence of a deeply-rooted compassion in society as a whole. On the contrary, drastic (television) images in the wake of natural disasters trigger a knee-jerk reaction of solidarity from many donors, irrespective of where the event has occurred. As a result, the distribution of donations may not accurately reflect real needs in the world. According to estimates by the German Central Institute for Social Issues, approximately 72 million euros were donated in Germany after the tsunami in Japan in 2011.<sup>312</sup> Although one may question the large amount of money donated to one of the richest countries on earth, it certainly demonstrates the mobilising power of humanitarian aid. It therefore comes as no surprise that emergency and disaster relief has for many years now been high on the list of the reasons to donate. Over a quarter of all donors state that they have supported such causes.<sup>313</sup> Nevertheless, not all victims of crises and disasters have the same chance of receiving such aid. In the event of man-made disasters, the pledged support is considerably lower than in the case of natural catastrophes. Complex, inscrutable conflicts involving a variety of stakeholders, such as in Syria, inhibit

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<sup>312</sup> Cf. DZI, Für das Jahr 2011 zeichnet sich ein Spendenrückgang ab, press release dated 19. December 2011, in: <http://www.dzi.de/dzi-institut/das-dzi/presse/presse-detailansicht/?9332>, retrieved 7. May 2014.

<sup>313</sup> Cf. TNS Infratest, Deutscher Spendenmonitor – Classics, Munich 2012, 53.

the willingness of many donors to support the victims. Increasing importance consequently attaches to the persuasive skills of relief organisations, which raise awareness of the plight of suffering people without resorting to tired clichés.

Humanitarian aid brings people together and builds bridges between hostile countries. Herein lies its great power to foster solidarity. Emergency relief can also transcend boundaries and reduce inflexibility in places where political dialogue has been put on hold or un-scalable walls have been erected. One example of this are the aid programmes in North Korea, which offer one of the only means of access to this sequestered country. Here it has proved possible to overcome the most difficult of conditions, establish reliable contacts and penetrate the country's fortress – in some small respects, at least. In Cuba, too, humanitarian aid was for many years an important means of developing trust-based cooperation between the government, the country's Church and Western organisations. Of particular significance, however, is the aid provided in conflict and war zones, where all initiatives – even those by aid organisations – are regarded with scepticism by the parties involved. Giving support to needy sections of the population in an overall situation of violence and exploitation is often a psychologically propitious way of counteracting the prevailing circumstances. This is even more important when ethnic or religious tensions are involved. In such situations neutral, impartial humanitarian aid can develop the capacity to build peace and link religions. A striking example are the aid programmes which have been carried out for years now by ecclesiastical organisations such as Caritas International in countries including Afghanistan. The fact that Western Christian relief organisations provide aid to people of the Muslim faith constitutes an important rectification of extremist propaganda, as disseminated by parts of the Taliban, and it can help to reduce fundamentalist tendencies. Recipients of such aid frequently express their amazement that both foreign individuals and governments should provide money and resources for humanitarian reasons. Even in the most difficult of circumstances, such as those prevailing in Afghanistan and Pakistan, ecclesiastical aid organisations are able to act with relative freedom, provided they are completely open about the humanitarian orientation of their activities and leave no doubt in the mind of the authorities that proselytising is not on their agenda. In this context it is vital that ecclesiastical organisations providing emergency relief should observe the universal principles of humanitarian aid.

## Helper dilemmas

The logic of aid provision dictates that aid should not be determined by the capabilities and resources of the giver, but should be defined solely on the basis of the needs of those affected. The immutable principles of humanitarian aid include impartiality, neutrality and independence.<sup>314</sup> All three principles are enshrined in humanitarian international law. Impartiality implies that the emergency alone dictates who receives aid. People in need require aid irrespective of their ethnicity, religion or political convictions. The fundamental principle of neutrality means that no particular side is taken in a conflict. However, this need not signify that a blind eye is turned to injustice, persecution and severe human rights violations. The implementation of the neutrality principle frequently means that emergency relief organisations have to tread a fine line in armed conflicts, inasmuch as the victims of violent confrontations require urgent support on both sides of the battle lines, and simultaneous advocacy work within the framework of humanitarian aid is possible only to a limited extent, or not at all. As a result, organisations active in the field of emergency and disaster relief are often faced with a dilemma as far as the implementation of humanitarian principles is concerned. This arises from the frequently diverging challenges of human entitlement, on the one hand, and the enactment of justice, on the other.<sup>315</sup> When an organisation brings charges of human rights violations, for example, this may lead to the abandonment of urgently necessary relief initiatives, because the organisation in question has its permission to carry out work in the area withdrawn by one of the parties to the conflict in question. Another frequently insoluble problem for aid organisations consists in the challenge of reaching those in need without simultaneously supporting their oppressors. In 1994, for example, after the war in Rwanda, several hundred thousand people were cared for in refugee camps of the former Eastern Zaire, which included some of the perpetrators of the Rwandan genocide. The murderers lived undetected in the midst of tens of thousands of families with women and children,

<sup>314</sup> Cf. on this subject: Europa, Caritas, *Den Widerspruch zwischen Politik und Praxis überwinden. Humanitäre Hilfe braucht klare Prinzipien auf Grundlage des Europäischen Konsenses*, Brussels 2011.

<sup>315</sup> Schweizer, Beat, *Humanitäre Dilemmata: Anspruch und Wirklichkeit der humanitären Prinzipien*, in: Lieser, Jürgen; Dijkzeul, Dennis, *Handbuch Humanitäre Hilfe*, Berlin 2013, 343.

and aid workers were unable to recognise them. Discontinuing the provision of aid would, in all probability, have resulted in the deaths of thousands of innocent people and triggered further unrest. The humanitarian aid workers were faced with a catch-22 situation.

Finally, the principle of independence from political or economic interests is of central importance to emergency relief. In this context, aid organisations undertake to retain their independence during their assignments, ensuring that the humanitarian mandate alone remains the guiding principle of their daily work. This also includes not allowing media coverage or the situation in the donations sector to determine the organisation's actions. In recent years, various publications have criticised the practices of several humanitarian organisations, castigating them as players in a "pity industry"<sup>316</sup> and putting their own profits before the well-being of those in need. Among other aspects, the criticism has centred on the accusation that aid organisations have implemented projects simply to re-finance their own internal structures. While this does not apply to the vast majority of established organisations, it does emphasise the temptations to which emergency relief organisations, in particular, are regularly exposed. A good example is provided by disaster situations in which the public expects immediate, direct solidarity, but the conditions on the ground make its provision extremely difficult. One of the fundamental principles observed by helpers is that the aid provided should always be commensurate with the level of need.

The humanitarian principles described here are occasionally interpreted to the effect that humanitarian aid should essentially be regarded as *non-political*. However, this fails to do justice to the demands placed on it. Humanitarian aid is almost invariably provided in climates of political and economic tension and during periods of upheaval. As a result, organisations active in these contexts must be in a position to "recognise the political dimension of their own actions and counteract tendencies of political appropriation and exploitation at the various levels. While humanitarian aid should not be influenced by political interests, it is not given in a political vacuum."<sup>317</sup>

<sup>316</sup> Cf. on this subject, for example: Polman, Linda, *Die Mitleidsindustrie. Hinter den Kulissen internationaler Hilfsorganisationen*, Frankfurt, New York 2010.

<sup>317</sup> Lieser, Jürgen, *Humanitäres Personal: Anforderungen an die Professionalität*, in: Lieser, Jürgen; Dijkzeul, Dennis, loc. cit., 303.

## Quality and Christian compassion go hand in hand

“Compassion needs quality” – this motto aptly describes the different extremities of the humanitarian sphere of action, accurately outlining the challenges associated with responsible, up-to-date emergency and disaster relief. Emergency relief was long associated with a simple distribution of goods, for which no specific expertise was required. Since the mid-1990s, the field of humanitarian aid has built up a considerable degree of professionalism, which is now reflected in numerous international quality standards. The starting point and impetus for the conceptual development of humanitarian aid were the negative consequences of inappropriate measures taken.<sup>318</sup> One striking example is the food aid sector, which constitutes both a life-saving yet dangerous form of assistance that can rapidly turn starving people into passive recipients of charity if the administered quantities and local distribution prove to be ill-judged.<sup>319</sup> The discussion on quality standards also arose from the ethical consideration that the victims of crises and disasters have a right to receive the best possible aid. Of crucial significance in this respect is the Sphere Project, which advocates minimum standards in the field of disaster relief. This initiative was launched in 1997 by a group of non-governmental organisations in conjunction with the Red Cross and Red Crescent societies with a view to defining joint professional protective standards in the field of humanitarian assistance. Over 4,000 representatives of 400 organisations in 80 countries collaborated on the first Sphere Handbook<sup>320</sup>, which was published in the year 2000. The publication focuses on the specification of minimum standards for all relevant fields of emergency relief (including water supply and sanitation, hygiene awareness, food safety and nutrition, shelter and health services). Sphere is not merely a handbook, but also a continual process of collaboration in which hundreds of organisations are still actively engaged.

<sup>318</sup> Cf. Roßbach, Manuela, *Qualitätsstandards in der humanitären Hilfe*, in: Lieser, Jürgen; Dijkzeul, Dennis, loc. cit., 273ff.

<sup>319</sup> This is the case, for example, when peasant farmers abandon their fields to settle at central food distribution sites and are then no longer able to cultivate their crops.

<sup>320</sup> The Sphere Project, The Sphere Project. Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response, Northampton 2011. See also: [www.sphereproject.org](http://www.sphereproject.org), retrieved 7. May 2014.

### Does a specific form of ecclesiastical emergency relief exist?

The distinguishing feature of ecclesiastical emergency relief is that it springs from cooperation with local partner organisations. The assistance provided can thus build on well-established local structures. Programmes are planned and implemented together with local partners. This is of particular relevance as far as a community of solidarity is concerned, because organisations like Caritas international use local partners to gain access to people in need in disaster regions and, in so doing, strengthen their autonomy. The subsidiarity principle is of great importance in the field of emergency relief, as it averts passivity and dependence on the part of the disaster victims at an early stage. Involving them in aid measures encourages an appropriate approach to the activities undertaken. To enable local partner organisations to assume responsibility for these tasks, they must receive personnel, financial and material support *prior to* an emergency relief situation. Ecclesiastical organisations have a global network which ensures they are part of the social structure of the societies concerned before disasters occur. The communities affected are also provided with post-crisis support by local church structures, as a result of which crises frequently present opportunities for new beginnings. This type of joint assistance also means considering and respecting the cultural realities on the ground.

Is specifically ecclesiastical or, indeed, Catholic emergency relief possible? Firstly, it is important to take account of the necessary professional expertise of helpers and the observance of statutory standards. In his Encyclical Letter *Deus caritas est* Benedict XVI sets out a guideline which also applies to emergency relief: "Individuals who care for those in need must first be professionally competent: they should be properly trained in what to do and how to do it, and committed to continuing care." The Pope continues: "Yet, while professional competence is a primary, fundamental requirement, it is not of itself sufficient. We are dealing with human beings, and human beings always need something more than technically proper care. They need humanity. They need heartfelt concern."<sup>321</sup> The "nobleness of heart" demanded by Benedict of the helpers in this context is an

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<sup>321</sup> Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter "Deus Caritas Est" of the Supreme Pontiff Benedict XVI to the Bishops, Priests and Deacons, Men and Women Religious and all the Lay Faithful on Christian Love, [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_benxvi\\_enc\\_20051225\\_deus-caritas-est\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf_benxvi_enc_20051225_deus-caritas-est_en.html), no. 31.

essential requirement, particularly for Christian aid organisations.<sup>322</sup> First and foremost, emergency relief inspired by Christian faith should be organised in a highly professional manner. It refuses to acknowledge the existence of “hopeless” cases and lends victims support beyond the usual assistance provided. The specific strength of ecclesiastical emergency relief lies in the fact that the Church is in a position to implement the idea of an international community of solidarity in a sustainable manner thanks to the availability of local partner structures both *before and after* a crisis situation.

Observance of this partner principle<sup>323</sup> may ultimately provide more comprehensive protection of the dignity of those affected by emergencies and disasters, as particular attention is paid to respect for their cultural and religious identities. In the exceptional circumstances of a crisis, local helpers are most likely to be able to provide victims with effective support and to safeguard their dignity. They are familiar with local traditions and are in a better position to encourage the principles of self-help and personal initiative among victims thanks to their natural closeness to these groups. Invigorating psychosocial work with disaster victims in a familiar environment is highly effective against such phenomena as apathy, passivity and prolonged traumatisation. At the same time it is quite clear that humanitarian aid performed via local partners also brings considerable efficiency gains. In keeping with the „do no harm“ approach, which is generally respected by providers of humanitarian assistance,<sup>324</sup> local partner organisations are, in many cases, much less likely to make errors in the selection and support of disaster victims, provided they resist the considerable social pressure exerted by other groups involved.

If we wish humanitarian aid to constitute a credible sign of a universal Church as a community of solidarity, any cooperation between North and South must take place on an equal footing, yet without completely losing sight of the asymmetrical relationship between the two partners. The financial autonomy of the supporting

<sup>322</sup> *ibid.*, 46, no. 31.

<sup>323</sup> Cf. on this subject Müller, Oliver, *Almosenempfänger oder selbstbewusste Akteure? Die Rolle der lokalen Partner*, in: Lieser, Jürgen; Dijkzeul, Dennis, loc. cit., 149f.

<sup>324</sup> The “do no harm” approach describes standards designed to avoid unintentional negative consequences of support measures. These may, for example, include social tensions which arise as the result of insufficient regard for ethnic criteria during the provision of assistance. Cf. also <http://www.donoharm.info/content/welcome/welcome.php>, retrieved 7. May 2014.

organisation should not be rashly concealed by florid partnership rhetoric. The pressure arising in an emergency aid situation to use project funding which exceeds the southern partner's annual budget for the previous year several times over within the space of just a few days underlines the huge challenges facing local partners in this context. Experience shows that organisations can grow in stressful situations of this nature, but they may well also founder. For the southern partners much depends on their being able to use the generous level of financial resources available for emergency aid and systematic reconstruction work to initiate a process of growth and transformation within their own organisations. This requires aid donors to make a solidarity-based contribution to consolidate the efficiency of their southern partners and to assess their options in a realistic manner. In addition, southern partners must be allocated sufficient flat rates for administration costs, as these help to cover their overheads. Measures of this nature require a climate of trust geared to long-term collaboration, which strengthens the autonomy and identity of the southern partners. A simple "give and take" relationship would do justice neither to the complex nature of emergency relief nor to ecclesiastical requirements.

### **Prevention rather than reaction: disaster management is the order of the day**

In recent years, the number and intensity of natural disasters has risen considerably as a result of global climate change, extensive environmental damage and population development. Examples include extreme levels of precipitation and hail and storms in Bolivia, droughts in East Africa and severe flooding in India, which drive people away from their homeland. Although not every weather phenomenon can be directly attributed to climate change, the consequences of the global rise in temperature are generally undisputed. The Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research has established that one in ten people live in a location which may be subject to the effects of global warming by the end of this century.<sup>325</sup> Countries in which living conditions are already far more precarious than those in Europe are most seriously affected. According to a report by the World Bank,

<sup>325</sup> Cf. on this subject Piontek, Franziska; Müller, Christoph; Pugh, Thomas et al, *Multisectoral climate impacts in a warming world. Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, in: <http://www.pnas.org/content/early/2013/12/12/1222471110.abstract>, retrieved 7. May 2014.

aridity will result in around 40 per cent of the surface of Africa being rendered unsuitable for the cultivation of maize by 2030. The number of malnourished Africans could rise to up to 90 per cent by 2050. In South Asia predicted changes in monsoon patterns could lead to significantly more flooding and, simultaneously, longer and more severe periods of drought.<sup>326</sup>

Climate change will increase hunger around the world. A current study by nutritional researchers has found that approximately two billion people will be affected by hunger or malnutrition as a result. The effects of this are already apparent from an assessment of refugee figures. In 2012, the Norwegian Refugee Council estimated that 32.4 million people fled their homelands as a result of natural disasters,<sup>327</sup> while, in the past five years, a total of 144 million refugees in 125 countries were counted. The causes for flight were primarily flooding, storms and forest fires, which destroyed people's livelihoods; their increasing frequency is linked to climate change. As a result, political agreements on the reduction of environmentally-damaging greenhouse gases are required to tackle the causes of further negative change. At the same time, increased disaster prevention efforts are needed on a global scale to reduce the impacts of climate change. Aid organisations are attempting to implement intermediate and long-term disaster prevention measures in order to mitigate the most serious consequences of climate change, including water management systems, which comprise both the construction of wells and water retention basins, and advice and training in pasture farming and sustainable land cultivation. In regions prone to flooding, important strides can be made in disaster prevention with comparatively modest financial resources and through the use of simple techniques. A great deal of human suffering can be averted by evacuation plans, early warning systems linked to mobile phones and public awareness campaigns.

In future, humanitarian aid must concentrate more on raising funds for the support of prevention programmes. This requires inten-

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<sup>326</sup> For more information, cf. Hans Schellnhuber, Joachim; Hare, Bil; Serdeczny, Olivia et al, *Turn down the heat: climate extremes, regional impacts, and the case for resilience* – full report, Washington D.C. 2013. (<http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/2013/06/17862361/turn-down-heat-climate-extremes-regional-impacts-case-resilience-full-report>), retrieved 7. May 2014.

<sup>327</sup> Cf. Norwegian Refugee Council – *Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, Global estimates 2012 – People displaced by disasters*, in: <http://www.nrc.no/?aid=9661151>, retrieved 7. May 2014.

sified efforts of persuasion by private donors and public institutions, as it is more difficult to describe a disaster which has failed to materialise because of the appropriate measures taken. Nonetheless, disaster prevention is an ethical necessity, as it helps to reduce human suffering. The role of ecclesiastical relief organisations in this context is to direct the attention of donors to particularly vulnerable population groups in the interests of holistic, Christian solidarity.

# **The Universal Church as a Community of Prayer**



# The World Day of Prayer: Global prayer – Global Player

## Women move ecumenism – in regional churches and the universal Church

Petra Heilig

“Those who join in the World Day of Prayer cannot continue to live as though they have heard nothing from the women in the country concerned. Whoever prays in the words of another woman can no longer observe the life of women as a mere spectator. Common prayer acts as a bond and ‘is worth it’. This experience has buried itself deep in the minds of the women involved in the World Day of Prayer. I treat the prayers said on this day as a gesture of confidence. Women from other cultures and nations let us know how they express their feelings to God, what moves them, what makes them suffer, what distresses them or gives them joy, and where their hopes take root. On the World Day of Prayer women pray in a particularly heartfelt manner. They make the printed texts come alive when they are read out. This gives rise to the global fellowship which nourishes the World Day of Prayer movement.”<sup>328</sup> Many women active in the World Day of Prayer movement experience situations similar to that of Hildegard Müller-Brünker. Her description of the unique nature of the prayer community during the World Day of Prayer is both apt and poetic. In the following I will attempt to explore the aforementioned characteristics in greater depth, as a manifestation of the World Church in the form of a community of prayer for which women are responsible.

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<sup>328</sup> Müller-Brünker, Hildegard: ‘Ein Land ins Gebet nehmen’ Almut Voss im Gespräch mit Hildegard Müller-Brünker über den Weltgebetstag, in: Schlangenbrut. *Zeitschrift für feministisch und religiös interessierte Frauen*, 23 (2005) 89, 26-28.

## **The World Day of Prayer – an invitation from women of all denominations...**

... this is the annual message on the colourful posters, invitations and orders of service relating to the World Day of Prayer, as the motivation to achieve ecumenical cooperation locally, nationally and globally unites those active in the World Day of Prayer movement. Here ecumenism is not an end in itself, but is designed to facilitate peaceful interdenominational co-existence and to help ensure that religious and/or denominational differences are not misused to fuel tension and conflict. The introduction to the order of service for the World Day of Prayer in 1949 stated: "From the icy region of Greenland to the ports of South America, in thousands of communities in the United States and in many churches across Europe, young and old women of different tongues, races and churches are all treading a common path to Our Father in heaven. Is there a more unifying power than these joint entreaties by women from all over the world? It is as if they were joining hands to form a chain of peace around the globe."<sup>329</sup>

The World Day of Prayer (WDP) is celebrated annually on the first Friday in March. On this day, people in approximately 170 countries around the world participate in an ecumenical service, for which the order of service is prepared each year by women (writers) from a different country (priority country). The service centres around a different globally relevant theme each year, such as reconciliation (WDP Romania 2002: "Challenged to Reconcile"), equitable distribution and food sovereignty (WDP Chile 2011: "How Many Loaves Do You Have?"), migration and inclusion (WDP France 2013: "I Was a Stranger and You Made Me Welcome"). The order of service issued by the writers' committee is sent to all national committees to be translated into the respective local languages and subsequently distributed, this via the International World Day of Prayer Committee, which has its office in New York, USA.

## **The World Day of Prayer in Germany**

In Germany around one million people participate in the World Day of Prayer each year. In local ecumenical groups it is usually women

<sup>329</sup> Hiller, Helga, *Ökumene der Frauen. Anfänge und frühe Geschichte der Weltgebetstagsbewegung in den USA, weltweit und in Deutschland*, Düsseldorf 2006, 362f.

who prepare the services for the whole community. Here, a creatively planned service makes the message of the writers and their personal circumstances come alive. Global solidarity emerges during common prayer, and the national committees use the proceeds of collections to support projects and organisations which address similar concerns to those of the World Day of Prayer movement, i.e. the promotion of gender justice in both the Church and society. In Germany smaller “World Days of Prayer” are held in many places between the official annual dates. Women organise special events focusing on the year’s specific theme, the country in question or the passages from the Bible. In many communities in Germany the work carried out in preparation for the World Day of Prayer is extremely vital and consistent – and often the only ecumenical initiative. The charisma with which this work is infused is drawn from the unique combination of prayer and action which, as elucidated below, has exerted a decisive influence on this movement from its earliest beginnings.

### **On the history of the World Day of Prayer movement**

Two World Day of Prayer jubilees, the centenary of the International World Day of Prayer in 1987 and, above all, the fiftieth anniversary of the World Day of Prayer in Germany in 1999, prompted many women to embark on a historical investigation. One of these women was Helga Hiller, who carried out comprehensive research. Her extensive findings on the origins and early history of the World Day of Prayer movement in the United States, globally and in Germany, in addition to a host of source documents, were made accessible to a broad readership in her book entitled “Ökumene der Frauen” (“Women’s Ecumenism”), which was first published in 1999. Grassroots women workers and academics of both sexes in Germany and other countries have benefited from Helga Hiller’s authoritative work. On 17 October 2002 she was awarded an honorary doctorate for this important research by the Roman Catholic Theological Faculty at the University of Tübingen. The faculty took the occasion to expressly honour the commitment of the countless women involved in the World Day of Prayer both in the past and the present.

### **International roots of the World Day of Prayer movement**

The history of the World Day of Prayer, which is now the largest international ecumenical grassroots movement, goes back over one

hundred years, having begun in the United States in the 19th century. In 1812 Mary Webb, a Baptist from Boston in the United States, called on the women of New England to attend a monthly prayer meeting for the mission. "This marked the first step towards common public prayer by women."<sup>330</sup>

The women's mission movement gave rise to other forerunners of the World Day of Prayer movement. Women in Great Britain and North America concerned themselves with the plight of women and children in mission countries. Overcoming male opposition, they founded independent women's mission societies in England in 1833 and the United States in 1861, which sent out female missionaries on assignments related predominantly to work with women and children in mission territories. These women's societies for foreign missions were soon joined by those concerned with home missions. Their endeavours were distinguished by a combination of evangelisation, educational, social and health work by women for women as well as by efforts to transcend the boundaries of individual denominations in the quest for cooperation. "Here, personal and common prayer, which has the power to bridge even the greatest of distances, played a key role."<sup>331</sup> From 1887 onwards, annual prayer days and prayer weeks developed among various denominations in the USA and Canada. In 1897, an interdenominational day of prayer for the home missions was established, which resulted in collaboration between women from six different denominations. They issued women's study books on the subject of mission, thus laying the foundations for the "informed prayer", which was to prove so important to the later World Day of Prayer movement. From 1912 onwards, tens of thousands of women in the USA celebrated a united day of prayer for the foreign missions in local ecumenical groups. The amalgamation of both days of prayer in 1920 was the result of the deep conviction that all Christians had an obligation to work together for peace in a world riven by the World War. World mission and world peace were deemed to be closely related, as were prayer and action: "The day of prayer united women of all colours. It was followed by campaigns against war and racial discrimination."<sup>332</sup> In 1926, the American women extended their summons to participate in the day of prayer to the world at large.

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<sup>330</sup> *ibid.*, 174.

<sup>331</sup> *ibid.*, 174.

<sup>332</sup> *ibid.*

It received an enthusiastic welcome and, on 4. March 1927, a *World Day of Prayer* was celebrated for the first time.

### **History of the World Day of Prayer movement in Germany**

The beginnings of the World Day of Prayer in Germany go back to 1927, when Methodist women joined this international movement. Their spokeswoman, Luise Scholz, sent circulars and concise prayer guidance to Methodist women all over Germany until 1943. However, ecumenism failed to expand as a result of the political situation in the country at the time, which was both anti-clerical and anti-ecumenical. In 1947, despite the effects of the order prohibiting fraternisation, a bilingual ecumenical service was celebrated in Berlin on the initiative of Luise Scholz, which was attended by American and English wives of members of the allied forces. From 1949, the World Day of Prayer was introduced across Germany with the assistance of Protestant women's organisations and their umbrella organisation (EFD: *Evangelische Frauenarbeit in Deutschland*, now EFID – Protestant Women in Germany) and the support of women's groups in "smaller churches". The driving force behind the initiative was Antonie Nopitsch, founder of the Bavarian Mothers' Mission in Stein, near Fürth/Nuremberg, who sent ten thousand orders of service to women all over the country from her home in Stein in 1949. Services for the World Day of Prayer were celebrated throughout Germany at parish level for the first time, usually taking the form of an ecumenical cooperation between Protestant regional churches and the so-called "smaller churches", i.e. Methodists, Baptists, Old Catholics and female members of the Moravian Church and the Salvation Army.

### **A grassroots prayer movement adopts a structure – nationally and internationally**

The grassroots movement of the World Day of Prayer continued its global growth and adopted an organisational structure. In 1968 the International World Day of Prayer Committee was founded in Vallingby, Sweden, and in 1969 the first Friday in March was set as an annual date. This was made possible by the fact that the World Union of Roman Catholic Women's Associations moved its own World Union Day from 25 March to May and encouraged Roman Catholic women around the world to participate in the World Day of Prayer. Ecumenical participation and growth has always needed

concession and compromise. In Germany, too, Roman Catholic women have been participating in the celebrations surrounding the World Day of Prayer since the mid-1960s, and their women's associations have been involved in the German World Day of Prayer Committee, which was founded in 1966, since 1971. Since then, Mennonite women and women from the Committee of the Orthodox Church in Germany have also joined. As a result, the German World Day of Prayer Committee, a registered association, today comprises twelve member organisations from nine different denominations.<sup>333</sup> The German World Day of Prayer Committee meets twice a year and, like all national World Day of Prayer Committees, is charged primarily with taking decisions on the use of collection monies and authorising the translation of the order of service into the required languages. The briefings on each new liturgy are part of the overall "process of adoption" of the "voices of foreign sisters", which ultimately reaches its peak in the decentralised ecumenical church services on the first Friday in March. During this process the German World Day of Prayer Committee supports participants on all levels (national, regional, local) by providing educational training (ecumenical workshops) and a wide range of materials (print and digital) and assists in networking and public relations activities. In this process of adoption, participants always ensure they remain "faithful" to the statements and messages of the authoresses of the order of service. At the same time they endeavour to devise and implement ways of creatively enhancing the gift of the service stipulated at a local level ("loyalty and creativity").

<sup>333</sup> The member organisations of the German World Day of Prayer Committee are as follows: Arbeitsstelle für Frauenseelsorge in der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz (Office for Ministry to Women in the German Bishops' Conference), Bund Alt-Katholischer Frauen Deutschlands (German Association of Old Catholic Women), Bund Evangelisch-Freikirchlicher Gemeinden in Deutschland (German Association of Protestant and Free Church Communities), Bundesverband der Gemeindeferent/innen und Religionslehrer/innen i. K. in den Diözesen der BRD e. V. (Federal Association of Parish Workers and Church Teachers of Religious Education in FRG Dioceses), Die Heilsarmee (Salvation Army), Evangelische Brüder-Unität – Herrnhuter Brüdergemeine (Moravian Church), Evangelische Frauen in Deutschland e.V. (Protestant Women in Germany), Frauenwerk der Evangelisch-Methodistischen Kirche (Women's Association of the Protestant and Methodist Church), Arbeitsgemeinschaft Mennonitischer Gemeinden in Deutschland (AMG) (German Syndicate of Mennonite Communities), Katholische Frauengemeinschaft Deutschlands (German Catholic Women's Association), Katholischer Deutscher Frauenbund (Catholic German Women's Association), Kommission der Orthodoxen Kirche in Deutschland (Committee of the Orthodox Church in Germany).

## Informed prayer – prayerful action

The motto of the International World Day of Prayer, “informed prayer – prayerful action” was adopted as part of the declaration of principles at the International World Day of Prayer Conference in Zambia in 1978. The alliance of prayer and action has influenced the movement since its beginnings in the women’s mission movement of the last century. Ulrike Bechmann, long-time director of the German World Day of Prayer Committee, has identified important aspects of the World Day of Prayer for a university and practical context in a series of specialist articles. On the subject of the international motto she writes: “Women have consistently retained the close connection between prayer and action as a unit and have not abandoned one in favour of the other.”<sup>334</sup>

## Informed prayer as active listening to sisterly external prophecy

During “informed prayer”, supplicants seek to discover accurate, nuanced information on the priority country (geography, history, economy, culture, religion/churches, social and educational systems) and, above all, to familiarise themselves with the various (living) situations of the women there. Many of those committed to the WDP have experienced this part of the WDP preparations as a “window on the world”, an opportunity to encounter others, particularly women, their fates and their message over great distances and across borders. We listen to the writers’ message with openness and respect. We open ourselves to their “external prophecy”, when we engage with their contextual interpretations of the Bible and personal faith traditions. This requires mutual respect and open-mindedness and the ability to encounter and listen to one another in such a way that we begin to talk and confide in each other. This is why, during the World Day of Prayer service, we do not pray *for* the sisters from other countries but *with* them. In doing so, we practise changing our perspectives, which is part of a global learning process.

<sup>334</sup> Bechmann, Ulrike, *Beten – Zielort des Glaubens. Anregungen zur politischen Arbeit und zu entsprechenden Aktionen*, in: Deutsches Weltgebetstagskomitee, *Miteinander unterwegs*, Düsseldorf 1998, 43.

### **Informed prayer as a critical learning aid to an equitable life in a globalised world**

*“Informed prayer”* also means specifying the ways in which women (and men) are connected to or separated from each other in a globalised world and acknowledging the consequences of this. The authoresses of an order of service tell us about their life situations and demonstrate how abstract globalisation phenomena tangibly affect their daily lives. Women descend into poverty because they are unable to sell their products in a market swamped with cheaper imports; they are increasingly solely responsible for the care of ill and older family members since there are no appropriate public services; economic and social pressure leads to migration to cities and abroad, which results in changes in traditional forms of community life and mutual support. This applies especially to women who frequently bear sole responsibility for the survival of their families. Women have to work in hazardous conditions for a wage barely above the minimum subsistence level, must tolerate sexual abuse at the work place and are fired immediately in the event of illness or pregnancy. This is what economic and political deregulation means in practice. The consequences of globalisation are thus audibly verbalised and made visibly tangible. These voices and faces are brought not only “before people”, but also “before God” along with everyone else who celebrates the World Day of Prayer on the first Friday in March. As the World Day of Prayer raises up the voices of women, their lamentations, their thanks, their supplications, their prayers and their songs, their Bible interpretations and their symbolic actions – indeed, their “external prophecy” to God and to all people – it creates a space of ecumenical learning and action which can also promote the positive aspects of globalisation: the awareness of the absolute mutual dependence, the ability to listen to one another, to encounter each other free of fear and on an equal footing, and to work together for a good life for all. This is because those who celebrate the World Day of Prayer not only have the chance to reappraise their own situation when listening to and accepting the situations of others, but are also exposed to the solidarity of common action and receive the impetus to practise “prayerful action”.

### **Prayerful action as ecumenism of daily life and spirituality**

To believers *“prayerful action”* means action which springs from

an encounter with God. Prayer allows Christians to continually realign their actions in a world of growing complexity. *Prayerful* action means allowing God's promise of compassion and justice to take effect in this world. "And, conversely, God only reveals himself in prayer through the practice of this compassion and justice or at least the desire for them."<sup>335</sup>

### **Prayerful action in a spirit of solidarity: individually – collectively – structurally**

The World Day of Prayer encourages us, both as individuals and communities, to commit ourselves to justice, e.g. via the promotion of peace, in the ecology movement, through work dedicated to human and women's rights, by advocating fair trade, via work with asylum seekers and refugees and in the form of opposition to violence against women. Our individual and collective achievements equate, on a structural level, with the institutional commitment demonstrated by the development-related work of the German World Prayer Day Committee, a registered association under German law. The project work carried out by the German World Prayer Day Committee seeks to make perceptible improvements to the living conditions of girls and women. World Day of Prayer projects strike at the roots of exploitation, oppression and discrimination and strengthen the social, political and economic rights of women. In collaboration with various partner organisations around the world, ranging from recently established grassroots initiatives and rural cooperatives of women farmers to well-connected human rights organisations in capital cities, support is given primarily to work in the following areas: social and political participation of women, women's health, combating violence against women and sexualised violence, education and professional training, economic independence and securing livelihoods in cities and in the countryside, food sovereignty, women's perspectives in the Church, ecumenism and inter-religious dialogue.

Individually – collectively – structurally. The exchange of gifts is organised at the World Day of Prayer in a manner as simple as it is ingenious. The guidelines adopted in 2007 at the 11th International Conference of the WDP in Toronto state: "The rotational composition of the liturgy expresses the fact that everyone is capable of giving and receiving. In allowing each other to share in prayers, music, art

<sup>335</sup> Bechmann, Ulrike, loc. cit., 10.

and culture we discover our similarities and our differences, which we celebrate and which can enrich us. The division of resources occurs in a multitude of ways: by sharing gifts, talents, skills, hospitality, care, time, commitment, reliability, perseverance and many other forms of assistance. Through the collections made on the World Day of Prayer women share their resources with women and children around the world.” However, each year the initial gift is the order of service itself.

### **The universal Church needs the capacity for ecumenism: learning from the World Day of Prayer model**

The international, inter-cultural and inter-denominational focus of the World Day of Prayer provides its participants with learning experiences for viable ecumenism. World Day of Prayer women can, and wish, to relate these experiences in their own churches, thus increasing the capacity for ecumenism and actively shaping the universal Church perspective at grassroots level.

### **The World Day of Prayer as a successful model for ecumenism with grassroots participation**

In ecumenical work a distinction is frequently drawn between “grassroots ecumenism” (“lived” ecumenism) and “official church ecumenism” (“discussed” ecumenism), although attributions of this nature are in themselves problematic, as the means and goals of all ecumenical work are ultimately those which are lived out. In other words, this is ecumenism that is practicable and practised, which makes it grassroots ecumenism. The commitment of women in the World Day of Prayer movement falls into the category of grassroots ecumenism, which appears to be subordinate to official and political ecumenical work performed by the Church. However, the significance of the respective activities is experienced differently within the World Day of Prayer movement. The joint ecumenical preparation, execution and reflection of the church services on the first Friday in March, and a host of ecumenical initiatives resulting from the same, give women involved in the World Day of Prayer practical experience of purposeful cooperation in an ecumenical team. Getting to grips with the order of service also turns the participants into experts on questions of global ecumenism, contextual theology and inter-denominational and inter-cultural learning. World Day of Prayer women contribute these experiences when promoting ecumenism at the structural and political

church level. In many regions, and down on the ground, they dedicate their time to organisations including regional groups of the ACK (Christian Churches Working Group), work for the Christian Women's Council and the Ecumenical Forum of Christian Women, participate in and lead ecumenical discussion groups within their parishes and take part in local and national Ecumenical Church Conventions.

### **The World Day of Prayer as a success model for ecumenism with a sense of community**

In ecumenical dialogue the question of how a homogeneous church structure can be achieved is no longer posed. In fact, it never existed in this form in the past. Thus the issue at stake is not to merge divided churches (again), but to (re-)gain a sense of community. This sense of community may be expressed in sacramental life, in the reciprocal recognition of divine ministry and, above all, in collectively performed service and witness in the world. This feeling of community deliberately relies on diversity. Different theological traditions, different interpretations of the Church and a variety of cultural, historical and ethnic contexts are desirable and are promoted. During their ecumenical work for the World Day of Prayer women advocate this type of relationship between the churches. They integrate their experiences from the "World Day of Prayer learning model" into the work they perform in their own churches, thus strengthening the capacity for ecumenism. In contrast to other ecumenical organisations, the structures of the World Day of Prayer do not differentiate between guest members and full members or members with observer status. They are all involved in the work in an equitable manner and thus also share equal responsibility. Decision-making processes are organised democratically. Although, due to the efforts of its members, the German World Day of Prayer Committee maintains close relations with denominational women's organisations and associations which are, in turn, part of their respective churches, it is able to make independent decisions unconstrained by denominational church structures. The Committee thus constitutes an autonomous institution in its own right. In conflict situations, such as the situation which arose concerning the 1994 World Day of Prayer in Palestine<sup>336</sup>, this permits freedom

<sup>336</sup> Palestinian Christian women wrote the order of service for the 1994 World Day of Prayer and used biblical texts relating to the Passion and Resurrection of Christ to interpret the situation they faced. Subsequently, and often without precise knowledge of the actual texts

of manoeuvre enabling important discussions to be held without external pressure or interference by ecclesiastical authorities. This leeway can also prove advantageous for local ecumenical work. When ecumenical cooperation is hindered by the statements or conduct of a church, women continue to uphold the ecumenical community via their work for the World Day of Prayer and can thus discuss and clarify denominational “annoyances” and “disruptions”. This permits the development of a wholesome ecumenical “culture of debate”, as women discuss issues together as representatives of a specific denomination. As a result, every woman is able to state her position on the stance “her church” teaches, disseminates and lives, and can explain, elucidate, appeal for understanding and, where necessary, criticise her own church in an ecumenical setting. This brings out the differences of opinion within specific denominations – “externally”, during a discourse with members of other denominations, and “internally” in discussions with those of the same denomination. In this way ecumenical work within the World Day of Prayer movement also helps participants to reinforce their allegiance to their own church and their own denominational identity and to become “ecumenical” from this perspective. This is a two-way process, with denominational gifts enriching World Day of Prayer ecumenism and gifts emanating from the latter enriching the various churches in the form of experience, knowledge, contacts, songs, texts, prayers, images, spiritual and theological traditions, symbolic actions, equal partnership between men and women and church officials and laypersons of both sexes.

### **Outlook: the World Day of Prayer as a Church of Women – Church of Women as a model of a universal Church**

A central challenge for the future viability of the Church as a universal Church is the attainment of gender justice. Elisabeth Schüssler

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used in the order of service, the German World Day of Prayer movement was accused of anti-Judaism and an anti-Israeli stance by various parties involved in Jewish-Christian dialogue. In some instances, female organisers of the World Day of Prayer were pressured to alter the texts of the Palestinian Christian women. The World Day of Prayer Committees in West and East Germany supported the women on the ground by opposing any censorship or change so that the voices of the Palestinian sisters might be heard. WDP women in Germany are committed to a differentiated stance of “double solidarity” – for the State of Israel's right to exist and the right to self-determination of the Palestinian people. The 1994 World Day of Prayer politicised the participants and strengthened their courage and determination to incorporate the authentic testimony of faith by the women of Palestine in the praying world community and to join them in their desire for peace (Cf. Deutsches Weltgebetstagskomitee, Dokumentation zum Weltgebetstag 1994 aus Palästina, Düsseldorf 1995).

Fiorenza, a New Testament scholar, has introduced her hermeneutic concept of a “Church of women” to the discourse surrounding the depatriarchalisation of religion, church and ecumenism.<sup>337</sup> Schüssler regards the “ecclesia of women” as a community of women *and* men, as a collective space for dialogue amongst equals, who take the marginalised life situations of women worldwide as a hermeneutic starting point for processes of transformation. As Ulrike Bechmann has said, this is also of fundamental significance for the World Day of Prayer movement.<sup>338</sup> The universal Church as a gender-neutral community of prayer is made manifest in the informed prayer and prayerful action of the World Day of Prayer. It is crucial that we promote, use and continue to develop this asset.<sup>339</sup>

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<sup>337</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, Elisabeth, *Zu ihrem Gedächtnis. Eine feministisch-theologische Rekonstruktion christlicher Ursprünge*, Munich, Mainz 1988.

<sup>338</sup> Cf. Bechmann, Ulrike, *Unser Volk heilen, speisen und befreien – Reflexionen zum Weltgebetstag der Frauen*, in: *Jahrbuch der Europäischen Gesellschaft für die theologische Forschung von Frauen*, vol. 1, 1993, 111-128.

<sup>339</sup> Further literary references: Bechmann, Ulrike, *Spiritualität und Aktion. Kennzeichen und Ziele des Gottesdienstes am Weltgebetstag der Frauen*, in: Jost, Renate; Schweiger, Ulrike, *Feministische Impulse für den Gottesdienst*, Stuttgart, Berlin, Cologne 1996, 189-203. Bechmann, Ulrike, *Frauen bewegen Ökumene. 50 Jahre Weltgebetstag der Frauen in Deutschland*, in: Una Sancta 1998, 311-317. Heilig, Petra, *Frauen bewegen Ökumene*, in: *Ev. Frauenhilfe in Deutschland, Arbeitshilfe zum Weitergeben*, no. 1, January 2003, 53-60. Heilig, Petra, *Der Weltgebetstag: global player – global prayer. Globale Ökumene und der Frauenblick auf Globalisierung*, in: Rheinweiber, *Zeitschrift des Frauenreferats der Evangelischen Kirche im Rheinland*, no. 19, 2007, 37. Hiller, Helga, *Weltfreundschaft der Frauen*, in: Bieger, Eckhard, *Wurzeln und Visionen. Auf den Spuren einer lebendigen Kirche*, Munich 1999, 74-178. Rieck, Ute, *Empowerment. Kirchliche Erwachsenenbildung als Ermächtigung und Provokation*, Berlin 2008.



# Contemporary Forms of a Universal Community of Prayer

Stefan Dartmann

## Introduction

What better place to begin an article on my assigned topic than in Jerusalem? In the Acts of the Apostles, the Early Church is described as a community of prayer that developed after the account of the miracle of the Pentecost, which in essence constituted the birth of the universal Church, and Peter's first missionary sermon: "These remained faithful to the teaching of the apostles, to the brotherhood, to the breaking of bread and to the prayers."<sup>340</sup>

Prayer is an expression of faith and of a relationship with God; at the same time it is always a gift of God. The prayers of the individual are invariably linked to the prayers of the entire Church and, vice versa, the prayers of the Church are nourished by the prayers of the individual within an extensive fellowship. Like every authentic community of Christians, communities of prayer only emerge through the Spirit which moves in each supplicant. When we allow the Holy Spirit to guide our prayers, as Jesus taught us: "Our Father in heaven [...]"<sup>341</sup>, we realise that we, each and every one of us, are part of the larger family of God and joined in fraternal unity with the community of the entire Church and with Christ, its head. Common prayer allows us to experience what the Second Vatican Council described as the sacramental character of the Church: "The Church is in Christ like a sacrament or as a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race."<sup>342</sup>

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<sup>340</sup> Acts 2:42.

<sup>341</sup> Cf. Matt. 6:9.

<sup>342</sup> The Second Vatican Council, "The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church – 'Lumen Gentium'", [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vatii\\_const\\_19641121\\_lumen-gentium\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vatii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html), no. 1.

In his Letter to the Romans, Paul had already extended the horizons of supplicants beyond their immediate surroundings, opening their minds to the suffering of all creation when he wrote of Christian existence<sup>343</sup>, describing the Holy Spirit as the ideal intercessor for the faithful.<sup>344</sup> The fellowship of the individual communities in prayer played a crucial role as the Church began to spread. In the Deutero-Pauline Letter to the Ephesians, the central theme of which is the Church, it is stated: "In all your prayer and entreaty keep praying in the Spirit on every possible occasion. Never get tired of staying awake to pray for all God's holy people."<sup>345</sup> In accordance with Early Church linguistic usage "all God's holy people" signifies all Christians.

Let us now take a brief glance at the universal Church as it is today. After analysing important characteristics and recent developments in the universal prayer community, I will go on to discuss various collective forms of prayer.

### The universal Church today

According to the Second Vatican Council, the Church of Christ "is truly present in all legitimate local congregations of the faithful which, united with their pastors, are themselves called churches in the New Testament."<sup>346</sup> The Catholic Church consists in and of particular churches<sup>347</sup>, which refers chiefly to the dioceses.<sup>348</sup>

Today, almost one third of the world's population, around 2.2 billion people, are Christians.<sup>349</sup> Two thirds of the world's 1.2 billion

<sup>343</sup> Cf. Rom. 8:18-30.

<sup>344</sup> Cf. Rom 8:26 f.: "And as well as this, the Spirit too comes to help us in our weakness, for, when we do not know how to pray properly, then the Spirit personally makes our petitions for us in groans that cannot be put into words; and he who can see into all hearts knows what the Spirit means because the prayers that the Spirit makes for God's holy people are always in accordance with the mind of God."

<sup>345</sup> Eph. 6:18.

<sup>346</sup> The Second Vatican Council, loc. cit., 154, no. 26.

<sup>347</sup> Cf. *ibid*, 146, no. 23.

<sup>348</sup> Cf. CIC can. 368. According to the Code of Canon Law, it is one of the pastor's duties to "work so that the faithful [...] consider themselves members of the diocese and of the universal Church, and participate in and sustain efforts to promote this same communion." (can. 529. § 2)

<sup>349</sup> Cf. The Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life, The Global Religious Landscape. A Report on the Size and Distribution of the World's Major Religious Groups as of 2010, cited in accordance with <http://www.pewforum.org/global-religious-landscape-christians.aspx>, retrieved 20. May 2015.

Catholics<sup>350</sup> live outside Europe. That is the provisional outcome of a process furthered not least by European missionaries in recent centuries and now being continued by the local “young churches” in a self-confident, independent manner. Diverse relationships exist between the various local churches. Historically, fellowship with other parts of the universal Church, including fellowship in prayer, has been one of the cornerstones of every local church. It follows that the so-called “heathen mission” conducted by European missionaries – the ecclesiastical mission movement with which we are most familiar – was not only a faith-inspired achievement of devoted men and women on the ground, but was accompanied in spirit from the very beginning by countless supplicants in the mission societies of the sending churches.

For centuries the mission movement essentially moved in one direction – from Europe to other nations. Nowadays, however, there is a growing reciprocal exchange between regional churches on all continents, which makes all participants into contributors and recipients.<sup>351</sup> Increasing mobility is an ambivalent phenomenon of our times, standing both for freedom, flexibility and cross-border relations and for lack of freedom, persecution and social hardship. Mass migration has had considerable effects on regional churches.<sup>352</sup> In Germany, a multitude of native language communities has sprung up, particularly in large cities, which are engaged in more or less lively exchanges with German-speaking congregations and with each other. One might say that the universal Church has established a physical presence on our doorstep, as it were.

## **Characteristics and recent developments of the universal community of prayer**

### **The apostolic orientation of the universal Church's community of prayer**

The universal Church's community of prayer signifies transnational, common worship of God, which may be expressed in thanks

<sup>350</sup> Cf. *Annuario Statisticum Ecclesiae* 2011, cited in accordance with [http://de.radiovaticana.va/news/2013/05/13/%C3%BCber\\_1,2\\_millarden\\_katholiken\\_auf\\_der\\_welt/ted-691587](http://de.radiovaticana.va/news/2013/05/13/%C3%BCber_1,2_millarden_katholiken_auf_der_welt/ted-691587), retrieved 20. May 2014.

<sup>351</sup> Cf. Sekretariat der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz, *Allen Völkern Sein Heil. Die Mission der Weltkirche*, Die deutschen Bischöfe, no. 76, Bonn 2004, 34f.

<sup>352</sup> With the current flows of refugees and migrants our era is experiencing the largest mass exodus of all time.

and praise, intercession, supplication or lamentation as well as in wordless “elevation of the soul to God”.<sup>353</sup> It is about “prayer with and for all peoples, but also for this world.”<sup>354</sup> “From the rising of the sun to its setting” (Third Eucharistic Prayer) God’s people, who are scattered around the world, bear witness to and celebrate the work of the triune God in an awareness of their common bond. It is precisely this focus on the work of the triune God that makes the community of prayer part of the mission of Christ and of the Church apostolate. In an age in which praying is often lauded as an experience of spiritual “wellness” particular significance attaches to the apostolic orientation of prayer as an explicit sharing in the prayer of Jesus, which we encounter first and foremost in the Lord’s Prayer, but also in the Farewell Prayer of Jesus.<sup>355</sup>

Francis has referred to the necessity of a spirituality which “comes out of itself” and “goes to the peripheries”, which does not succumb to narcissism.<sup>356</sup> As a result, in addition to the official liturgy, aspects of universal Church solidarity should appear in all public forms of devotion and in personal prayer. The intercessions play a major role in this respect. The Body of Christ, understood as a universal community of prayer, develops an awareness of the joys and sorrows of each of its members: “If one part is hurt, all the parts share its pain. And if one part is honoured, all the parts share its joy.”<sup>357</sup> This type of devotional practice does not stop at simple spiritual fellowship. It urges the supplicants to exercise the apostolate in the form of solidarity expressed in works of love.

### **Encounter with other (Catholic regional) churches: otherness and enrichment**

Just as each believer develops his or her more or less individual practice of prayer, so the individual (particular) churches develop their traditions of prayer, not least as a result of the cultural influences to which they are exposed.<sup>358</sup> It follows that encounters between

<sup>353</sup> *Ecclesia Catolica, Katechismus der Katholischen Kirche*. Kompendium, 643, no. 5559.

<sup>354</sup> Cf. Sekretariat der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz, loc. cit., 58.

<sup>355</sup> Cf. John 17.

<sup>356</sup> He made initial comments on this subject when still Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio SJ in the pre-conclave at the Vatican in March 2013.

<sup>357</sup> 1 Cor.12:26.

<sup>358</sup> Needless to say there is generally an interdependence in this respect, as the Church can also influence culture.

different churches may result in experiences of both otherness and enrichment.

When Christians from our country, who have grown up in the Latin Church, discover the treasures of Eastern Orthodox tradition during a church partnership, for example, they usually find it extremely enriching after some initial feelings of estrangement. The sacred music, which may seem unfamiliar at the start, and the piety surrounding icons open new avenues to heaven, while the so-called “Jesus Prayer” (also known as the “Prayer of the Heart”) is now widely used outside the Eastern cultural sphere.

As I pointed out earlier, universal Church diversity can often be encountered today in one and the same place, as a result of which prayer in local churches is assuming an increasingly international character. One of many examples of this is the Stations of the Cross procession in Munich.<sup>359</sup> Today, approximately a quarter of all Munich-based Catholics have roots abroad. So it is a good idea to provide opportunities for the faithful to get to know each other better, dissipate feelings of otherness and experience each other as brothers and sisters in faith who can engage in a mutual process of giving and receiving. It also demonstrates the way in which the universal Church is a community of prayer and learning in equal measure. An exchange of gifts, including the treasures of different traditions of prayer, can occur more or less by chance, although it can also be deliberately encouraged.<sup>360</sup>

### **Encounter with other Christian denominations: ecumenism**

The contacts which have been built up with Christians of other denominations over many years have made us more sensitive to their

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<sup>359</sup> The Stations of the Cross procession through the city centre of Munich came into being in 1998, largely on the initiative of believers from Spanish-speaking countries, Italy and Vietnam, who were familiar with the custom of a Good Friday procession from their home countries; members of over twenty linguistic and ethnic groups now take part in it each year.

<sup>360</sup> The statutes of the Renovabis solidarity campaign, for example, state: “The initiative shall contribute to the exchange of gifts between the local churches in the individual parts of Europe [...] Especially the rich spiritual heritage of the church in Central and Eastern Europe and the experience of faith that has grown despite all restrictions shall benefit the renewal of Christian life in our own country.” The handout entitled “Glauben in vielen Kulturen” (“Faith in Many Cultures”), published in the context of the 2010 Renovabis Pentecostal Campaign, describes a model for just such an encounter, in which Catholics of various cultures can get to know each other and pray together. Cf. Bistum Limburg / Renovabis, Glauben in den vielen Kulturen. Wie sich Katholiken verschiedener Muttersprachen kennenlernen können. Eine Arbeitshilfe, in: [http://www.renovabis.de/sites/default/files/glauben\\_in\\_vielen\\_kulturen.pdf](http://www.renovabis.de/sites/default/files/glauben_in_vielen_kulturen.pdf), retrieved 20. May 2014.

idiosyncrasies and preferences, while increasing our willingness to “screen” our own tradition of prayer for any unnecessary ecumenical obstacles. As a result, it is now normal practice to leave the controversial addition of the “filioque”, the use of which is a matter of dispute between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church, out of the Nicene Creed during ecumenical services.<sup>361</sup> The agreement on the ecumenical version of the Lord’s Prayer in 1970 greatly facilitated common prayer in the German-speaking world.<sup>362</sup>

On the other hand, traditions are being adopted which prove enriching for personal spirituality and forge links in an ecumenical context. In the new tradition of spiritual song (“he who sings praises twice!”), hymns from various denominational contexts are used in turn, with great ecumenical openness.

The Taizé community is a prime example of how ecumenical groups can create new traditions of devotional practice. Over the years Taizé has influenced entire generations of young people all over the world, providing them with an experience encompassing common prayer, spiritual exchange and practical commitment. One example of the ecumenical prayer groups, some of which were founded in Germany prior to the last Council and have now formed international networks, is action 365, launched by Father Johannes Leppich SJ, which aims to encourage inter-denominational collective prayer and Christian cooperation.

The fact that ecumenical prayer communities continue to face limits, obstacles and difficulties should naturally not be ignored. This applies not just to the joint celebration of Holy Communion. Believers are sometimes forbidden by their ecclesiastical authority to attend services held by other Christian denominations or to participate in common prayer. This doubtless has to do in part with the fact that, over long stretches of ecclesiastical history, circumstances prompted some regional churches to go their own separate ways relatively detached from the remainder of Christianity. As a result, their clergy

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<sup>361</sup> This is generally the case in the Catholic Eastern Churches united with Rome, particularly as their vernacular translations are usually based on the original Greek version of the text. (Cf., on this subject, Wyrwoll, Nikolaus, Das ‘filioque’ in der Diskussion, in: <http://www.oki-regensburg.de/filioque.htm>, retrieved 20. May 2014).

<sup>362</sup> In the area of sacred music, the Gotteslob prayer and hymn book of 1975 included ecumenical versions of church hymns, which facilitates collective singing by Catholics and Protestants.

and members frequently lack (theological) knowledge of both their own creeds and those of other religious groups.

### **Globalisation and the significance of the new media**

Whenever discussion moves to the topic of the “globalised world”, it generally continues, sooner or later, to the subject of the media revolution, which allows us to experience other countries and cultures in a completely different way. News of churches and Christians in other countries and cultures reaches us far more frequently than was the case in the past. This makes it easier to bolster the universal prayer community through more practical experience. Thanks to its policy of centralism, which may well also have its downsides, the Catholic Church is able to ensure that the one Church shares this experience across all continents. When the Pope gives the apostolic blessing “urbi et orbi” in Rome and millions the world over follow his words via radio or television, it represents a very modern expression of universal fellowship. It should certainly be noted that the opportunities presented by a universal network supported by the media are counteracted by the risk of a centralistic form of enforced conformity. The media can be used or abused in the one way or the other. It follows that prayer communities are now less and less centralised or “top-down”, but rather decentralised or “bottom-up”, whenever they are the product of social media such as Facebook and Twitter, etc. For example, flash mobs have been organised simultaneously in different countries<sup>363</sup>, successfully initiating public prayer campaigns on topics such as the abolition of human trafficking and world peace.

### **Forms taken by a universal community of prayer**

The official liturgical prayer of the Church plays a specific role in the establishment of a community of prayer in the universal Church. I will now take a look at it before going on to discuss other forms of prayer community.

### **The Eucharist**

The celebration of the Eucharist is the “fount and apex” of

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<sup>363</sup> In Darmstadt, among other places, over Whitsun 2013, organised by the Chemin Neuf community.

the whole Christian life and thus also of Christian prayer.<sup>364</sup> The *communio*, or union of believers with the true and the mystical *corpus Christi*, is accomplished anew each time the Eucharist is celebrated.<sup>365</sup> Communion signifies oneness with the Body of Christ in its sacramental and social form. In the Eucharist the Church consummates the universality of the experience of salvation in a sacramental way.

The universal unity of the Body of Christ, which is not only sought in the Eucharist<sup>366</sup> but also celebrated in reality, appears in many sections of the liturgy. Let us start with the Eucharistic Prayer. The preface to the second Eucharistic Prayer contains the following: "It is truly right and just, our duty and our salvation, always and everywhere to give you thanks, Lord, Holy Father, almighty and eternal God, through Christ our Lord." In the post-sanctus of Eucharistic Prayers II and III, the missal for dioceses in German-speaking regions on Sundays includes the insertion: "This is why we gather in the presence of your countenance and celebrate in communion with the entire Church the first day of the week as the day on which Christ rose from the dead."<sup>367</sup>

The communion epiclesis, with which the Holy Spirit is called to the celebrating congregation so that they may be "gathered into one Body" (Eucharistic Prayer IV) and "joined [...] with him [Christ] and with one another" (Eucharistic Prayer for special occasions), just as it is called to the gifts of bread and wine with the request to transform them into the Body and Blood of Christ, certainly addresses the com-

<sup>364</sup> Cf. The Second Vatican Council, loc. cit., 135, no. 11.

<sup>365</sup> It is well known that, during the course of the history of theology, the use of these terms was reversed. While, in Augustine's time, *Corpus Christi verum* still signified the Church, this term has been used since the 12th century to refer to the Eucharist, while *Corpus Christi mysticum* signified the Eucharist in the Early Middle Ages before being used for the first time in the 12th century by Master Simon to allude to the Church. Cf. Jorissen, Hans, *Corpus Christi mysticum*, in: Kasper, Walter et al., *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, Freiburg im Breisgau, Basel, Rome, Vienna 1994, 1318f.

<sup>366</sup> This is very vividly expressed in the Early Christian ecclesiastical treatise, the *Didache* (founded around 100 AD): "Even as this broken bread was scattered over the hills, and was gathered together and became one, so let Thy Church be gathered together from the ends of the earth into Thy kingdom." (*Didache*. The Lord's Teaching Through the Twelve Apostles to the Nations. Translated by Peter Kirby, "Historical Jesus Theories." Early Christian Writings, 2014, 9.0, in <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/didache-roberts.html>, retrieved 23 November 2014)

<sup>367</sup> There is a similar formulation at another juncture in the Eucharistic Prayer I: "In communion with the entire Church we celebrate the first day of the week as the day on which Christ rose from the dead."

municants directly present. However, it is essentially directed towards the Church as a whole.

The concept of *communio*, which refers to the entire Church,<sup>368</sup> is expressed explicitly in the intercessions: “Lord, remember your Church throughout the world; make us grow in love” (Eucharistic Prayer II). In addition to the Pope, the local bishop is named as the “visible principle and foundation”<sup>369</sup> of Church unity. However, the prayer does not stop at the level of church leadership, but expressly includes “all the clergy and the entire people you have gained for your own” (Eucharistic Prayer III).

In Roman Catholic worship a particle of the Host, the “fermentum”, is still added to the cup during the breaking of the bread in the course of the Communion celebration.<sup>370</sup> This ancient custom is interpreted in a number of ways. During the first centuries AD,<sup>371</sup> it was customary for the bishop of a diocese to send a piece of the Host consecrated during the celebration of the Eucharist to the provosts of other dioceses as a sign of unity between local churches.<sup>372</sup>

During the Liturgy of the Word within the celebration of the Eucharist, the intercessions are doubtless the most prominent form of prayer in which the universal Church is articulated as a community of prayer. “The Celebration of Community Mass” in the missal for the dioceses of the German-speaking regions states the following with respect to the intercessions: “As a ‘General Prayer for Believers’, they encompass the concerns of the universal Church and the local community, the (political) leaders, the needy, all people and the salvation of the entire world.”

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<sup>368</sup> Both the living members of the universal Church on earth and those who have passed away are remembered.

<sup>369</sup> *Lumen Gentium* 23: “The Roman Pontiff, as the successor of Peter, is the perpetual and visible principle and foundation of unity of both the bishops and of the faithful. The individual bishops, however, are the visible principle and foundation of unity in their particular churches, fashioned after the model of the universal Church, in and from which churches come into being the one and only Catholic Church. For this reason the individual bishops represent each his own church, but all of them together and with the Pope represent the entire Church in the bond of peace, love and unity.” (The Second Vatican Council, loc. cit., 149f., no. 23)

<sup>370</sup> Variations on the custom of mixing the consecrated bread with the wine also exist in all Eastern rites.

<sup>371</sup> Earliest documented examples date back to the 2nd century.

<sup>372</sup> The fermentum long continued to play a crucial role in Rome, where the fermentum from the Pope’s Eucharistic celebration was brought to the priests of the city who were unable to attend.

The practice of mass stipends can also constitute an expression of universal Church fellowship, when “mass intentions” linked to monetary donations given outside the celebration of mass are accepted in Germany and passed on to bishops and priests in other countries in return for reading prayers or saying mass.<sup>373</sup>

### **The Liturgy of the Hours**

The Second Vatican Council attempted to introduce the Liturgy of the Hours in congregations as a form of prayer. To be honest, this has enjoyed only very modest success. The Liturgy of the Hours, performed in proxy by clergy and religious orders, was always understood as the prayer of the entire Church, despite the constraints imposed by its mandatory character. Even if prayed alone, it is not a private prayer. With the exception of local adaptations, the guidelines apply equally to the universal Church, which means we are concerned here with a globally regulated, clearly structured prayer network in which the universal Church stands united before God and derives strength and orientation for its other expressions of life.

### **Universal Church prayer networks and partnerships**

The Apostolate of Prayer,<sup>374</sup> founded in 1844 and entrusted by Pope Leo XIII to the Jesuits in 1896, may no longer play a significant role in Germany today, but is nonetheless known throughout the world and of an importance which should not be underestimated. Its special status derives from the fact that the universal dimension of prayer is linked to prayer intentions as a result of the Pope’s explicit mission, which gives the prayer a specific conceptual orientation. The Apostolate of Prayer has its roots in the Sacred Heart devotions of the 19th century, which were greatly influenced by the French, and may be thought of both as a global network of prayer and as a worldwide network of hearts. Through their prayers its members all

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<sup>373</sup> During the celebration of mass, the bishops and priests explicitly adopt the prayer intentions of the donors as their own. The practical implementation of this mutual support is not without problems and ambiguities in the present-day context. However, those who urge the abolition of this practice are usually unaware of how important this form of financial aid is to clergy in other countries and have probably lost any sense of the reality of the universal community of prayer as expressed by this practice.

<sup>374</sup> Canonically, it is now deemed a public association of believers (in accordance with CIC can. 212–320).

over the globe<sup>375</sup> serve the universal Church mission as witnesses of the Father's love for the world. According to its current statutes, the fundamental principle is that "Each external apostolic pursuit must be linked to prayer and self-sacrificing devotion in order to be able to contribute to the building of the Body of Christ in the strength of the Lord's sacrifice on the Cross."

The official Church Apostolate of Prayer, whose "top-down" approach enjoys the approval of the Pope, has many parallels with international communities of prayer which have developed in a "bottom-up" manner in the various spiritual families within the Church. There is now a whole series of global prayer communities in which it is common practice to meditate on a specific quotation from the Bible on a specific day.

In many dioceses and parishes there are universal Church partnerships "with heads, hearts and hands", in which the partners view themselves as a community of faith in the complete sense of the term, i.e. explicitly also as a community of prayer.<sup>376</sup> In 1995, for example, the *Christi Himmelfahrt* congregation in Kempten, Germany (which is now part of the Kempten parish association), embarked on a partnership with the *Maria Geburt* parish in Bratislava/Slovakia, which was arranged by Renovabis and is now involved in a broad range of activities. The parishes pray for each other during Sunday services, thus expressing their cross-border fellowship.

Depending on its origin and charisma, the universal Church component comes into its own in specific ways in the "charismatic structures" that complement the hierarchical and administrative Church structures. Traditional religious and spiritual families (Benedictine, Dominican, Franciscan, Ignatian, Carmelite, etc.) are now being supplemented by more modern international communities, movements and associations with a specific spiritual orientation. The abundance of these communities underlines the very different ways in which universal communities of prayer are lived out today.

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<sup>375</sup> The Apostolate itself claims 60 million members.

<sup>376</sup> Cf. Sekretariat der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz, loc. cit., 55. "The mission in the universal Church needs heads, hearts and hands which, as in the human body, must work together. Hence, the universal Church as a community of faith is equally a community of learning, of prayer and of solidarity."

## International prayer meetings and prayer days

In modern times, international prayer meetings have assumed proportions which would have been unthinkable during the last Council. For example, the universal Church has received significant impetus from World Youth Day, which was instituted by John Paul II. For many young people, these encounters still constitute their first liberation from the narrow horizons of the local church. The annual large-scale event, the so-called "Movimenti", held on the evening before Pentecost in Rome, also belong in this context. These meetings are, above all, celebrations of faith in which linguistic barriers are overcome in an impressive manner.<sup>377</sup>

In addition to international meetings which are held in a single location, international prayer days or weeks exist which are organised simultaneously in different places and in which the prayers usually focus on specific themes. In the Catholic world, for example, the 1st of January is dedicated to prayers for world peace. The "Week of Prayer for Christian Unity" plays a significant role in the ecumenical field.<sup>378</sup> Women's World Day of Prayer is an example of an ecumenical Christian grassroots movement. The service is prepared annually by women from different countries. Renovabis, the solidarity initiative of German Catholics with the people of Central and Eastern Europe, publishes texts as guidelines for the novenas in the days prior to Whitsun, initially in the sense of a prayer "for the people", which is increasingly developing into a prayer „with the people.“<sup>379</sup>

The Hour of Eucharistic Adoration, initiated by the Pope as part of the Year of Faith and observed simultaneously worldwide on Sunday, 2 June 2013 at 5 p.m. local Roman time, was a new experience for the universal Church and a sign of the Catholic Church's global unity

<sup>377</sup> In the eyes of Christians, the international Meeting for Peace, organised annually by the Comunità di Sant'Egidio, in which members of various religions participate, constitutes an inter-denominational, collective prayer for the world. The strong emphasis on religious dialogue is not without controversy, however, and Benedict XVI clearly rejected "inter-religious prayer" in the strict sense of the word.

<sup>378</sup> The relevant texts are published jointly by the World Council of Churches and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity.

<sup>379</sup> This prayer to the Holy Spirit follows the guiding principle of "Nine Days of Prayer in Solidarity with the People of Central and Eastern Europe." On Whit Sunday, the collection in all German dioceses is dedicated to the activities of the Renovabis initiative, primarily contributing to improving the situation of the Church and the living conditions of the people of Eastern Europe and clearly linking spiritual and material solidarity.

and fellowship. The initiative, in which churches in over 70 countries participated, was held under the motto “One Lord, One Faith”.

### **Popular devotions**

There is much to discover in popular devotions practised in various countries and cultures, some of which may initially seem disconcerting, but which on closer examination can lead to a deepening of one’s personal understanding of faith.

The phenomenon of international pilgrimage deserves its own mention. In the light of Israel’s experience after exile, the prophecy of the pilgrimage of the nations to Zion<sup>380</sup> becomes the vision of a universal eschatological realm of peace, in which the nations participate in the revelation of God in Israel. Part of this larger biblical vision is inherent in every Christian pilgrimage.<sup>381</sup> The history of the major international pilgrimages is one of experiences of prayer that unifies the nations.

In the context of Marian devotions, places in which the Mother of God is believed to have appeared or which have a particular connection with her unite people across all borders. Częstochowa, Lourdes, Fatima and Guadalupe are just some of these focal points, each of which has created something approaching an international community of prayer in its own right. Given that we venerate Mary as the “Mother of the Church”, it is not surprising that universal Church concerns are frequently expressed in forms of Marian devotion.

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<sup>380</sup> Isa. 2:1-4 and Mic. 4:1-4.

<sup>381</sup> The history of Christian mission can also be interpreted in the context of the apocalyptic pilgrimage of the nations to Zion.



# A Tangible and Effective Universal Church Community

Claudius Gross

## A “missionary” community of prayer?

It was quite plausible back in 1956 that a young person with an affinity towards the Church should come across the so-called Missionary Rosary while visiting the Pontifical Mission Society (now *missio*) in Aachen. The five mysteries were each shown in a different colour, representing the five continents. At the time prayers under this rosary were meant for missionaries, who were often believed to be adventurers or even heroes of the Christian faith. After all, the distances between continents were still enormous and could not be mastered as easily and quickly as nowadays. Moreover, prayer was seen as an expression of solidarity – as formulated later in an intercession: “For the brothers and sisters on missions where they often live in places of hopelessness.”

To signal such solidarity, several missionary societies were founded in the 19th century, which then gave rise to prayer communities and financial support groups, including a confraternity set up by the physician Dr. Heinrich Hahn in Aachen. Dr. Hahn’s confraternity was officially recognised by the Church in 1842. Membership was open to any Catholic “who prayed the Lord’s Prayer for the success of the missionary work every day and who, for the same purpose, donated weekly alms of 5 pfennigs to the society’s funds.”<sup>382</sup> This initiative eventually grew into the prayer community that has since then supported *missio* (in Aachen and Munich) and other aid organisations right up to the present day.

Paradoxically, the increasing colonialism of European states in the 19th century was accompanied by a new phase of missionary

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<sup>382</sup> “Geschichte von *missio*”, in: <http://www.missio-hilft.de/de/missio/geschichte/franziskus-xaverius-verein.html>, retrieved 22. May 2014.

work carried out by existing religious orders. It can hardly be denied that the churches often followed the colonial powers without much questioning (and therefore rather unspiritually) in the same way as they had previously done at the beginning of the modern era, after the rediscovery and conquest of the American continent. Quite often they allied themselves with political structures, even though most missionaries may well have been motivated by fervour for the “salvation of heathen souls”. This led to the creation of further (Catholic) religious communities for men and women, organisations which became apostolates for missionary work. In the sending countries it was taken for granted that the *missio ad gentes* should be accompanied by prayer for these brothers and sisters on other continents. Even today, whenever missionaries are sent out, both the apostolic and contemplative sides of their work are regarded as belonging together like the two chambers of one heart. The word “missionary” thus implies not only active involvement, but also “prayerful support”.

This might be seen by some as an instrumentalisation of prayer, in the same way that people turn to God to achieve something on a personal level (whatever that might be). However, such motivation is highly unlikely to dominate this practice. Christian prayer always includes an awareness of God’s sovereignty. Praying for one another is an expression of trust that, in His love and care, God knows everything that moves us. Anyone who intercedes for others knows that they are connected with them in a common faith before the one God and responsible for fulfilling Jesus’ Great Commission.

### Community of prayer?

Prayer communities have existed to a greater or lesser extent down the centuries. Starting with the Early Church (and the Apostle Paul, see below), through mediaeval and modern-day prayer confraternities, there has been an awareness of being united in prayer for a variety of reasons. Quite often (and this is still the case) the decisive elements have been very personal aspects related to one’s sanctification, e.g. the simple desire to commit oneself to a more disciplined prayer life.<sup>383</sup> For the founders of mission societies prayer was, of

<sup>383</sup> For example, to make the right decisions (with prayer as the “mother of good advice”), to die a good death, etc.

course, part of the “basic equipment” of a Christian lifestyle. They generally prayed individually as well as in fellowship with others.

When we look at other religions, it is worth noting that corporate prayer is often seen not just as a natural expression of one’s common faith, but occasionally as something of a higher order. For a practising Jew, corporate prayer is normal practice even today. Quite a few psalms are the prayers of a community, particularly with an awareness of their calling as the people of Yahweh, to which each person belongs in a special way.<sup>384</sup> Monotheistic Islam, too, knows, practises and celebrates corporate prayer, albeit under a different rationale.<sup>385</sup>

### **Biblical foundation**

The members of the Early Church took it for granted that they should pray in fellowship with one another, interceding for each other and giving thanks together. As we can gather from Paul’s example and from the accounts in his letters and in Acts, this kind of fellowship was common practice. As a witness to the faith, the Apostle was aware that, both in both human and spiritual terms, the community of the Early Church could only be sustained through prayer for one another: “I thank my God whenever I think of you. And every time I pray for you all, I always pray with joy.”<sup>386</sup>

Paul repeatedly testifies to this praying community:

“In all your prayer and entreaty keep praying in the Spirit on every possible occasion. Never get tired of staying awake to pray for all God’s holy people.”<sup>387</sup>

<sup>384</sup> “The Psalms both nourished and expressed the prayer of the People of God gathered during the great feasts at Jerusalem and each Sabbath in the synagogues. Their prayer is inseparably personal and communal: It concerns both those who are praying and all men.” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 2586, in: <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/catechism/catechism-of-the-catholic-church/epub/OEBPS/39-chapter18.xhtml>.)

<sup>385</sup> “Our religion emphasises corporate prayer, because a person who prays in a community meets others, people get to know one another more closely, learn from each other and develop friendships and learn to care for one another. Those who pray in community receive greater rewards than those praying on their own. Our Prophet says on this point: ‘The reward for corporate prayer is twenty-seven times higher than prayer on one’s own.’” (Qur’an, surah 88) [quoted in <http://islampraxis.wordpress.com>, retrieved 22. May 2014]

<sup>386</sup> Philippians 1:3-4.

<sup>387</sup> Ephesians 6:18-19.

“Never worry about anything; but tell God all your desires of every kind in prayer and petition shot through with gratitude, and the peace of God which is beyond our understanding will guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus.”<sup>388</sup>

“I urge then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercessions and thanksgiving should be offered for everyone, for kings and others in authority, so that we may be able to live peaceful and quiet lives with all devotion and propriety. To do this is right, and acceptable to God our Saviour: he wants everyone to be saved and reach full knowledge of the truth.”<sup>389</sup>

The last passage is no longer just about the inward focus of prayer but also about the “effect” of prayer on others, beyond the community of the faithful. According to Jesus’ Great Commission, the completion and fulfilment of human existence is something which genuinely covers “all people”, and the Apostle therefore goes on to say:

“For there is only one God, and there is only one mediator between God and humanity, himself a human being, Christ Jesus, who offered himself as a ransom for all. This was the witness given at the appointed time, of which I was appointed herald and apostle and -- I am telling the truth and no lie -- a teacher of the gentiles in faith and truth.”<sup>390</sup>

Having experienced splits (i.e. heresies and schisms) and combated provincialism and sectarianism, the theologians of the Early Church left no doubt about the catholicity of Christianity.

## The universal Church as a community of prayer

### Catholic – “against the self-sufficiency of the regional church”<sup>391</sup>

Augustine of Hippo (d. 430), for instance, criticised the Donatists for being exclusively concerned with a certain part of Africa while being indifferent towards the *orbis catholicus*, “because the Church

<sup>388</sup> Philippians 4:6-7.

<sup>389</sup> 1 Timothy 2:1-4.

<sup>390</sup> 1 Timothy 2:5-7.

<sup>391</sup> Cordes, Paul Josef, *Nicht immer das alte Lied – Neue Glaubensanstöße der Kirche*, Paderborn 1999, 30.

is worldwide, and a person who is Catholic is in fellowship with all nations. [...] The community-creating power of faith and the Church must necessarily be concerned about everyone and everything. [...] In particular, it must reach beyond its own horizon in the intellectual and spiritual dimensions. [...] Of course, it is in the salvific impact of the Gospel that the Church finds the decisive momentum for its universal orientation: The Church never tires of proclaiming the Good News to all people; for it is convinced that it cannot offer mankind anything better than God's love in Jesus Christ."<sup>392</sup>

Isidore of Seville (d. 636) complained that Christians had lost sight of their catholicity: "We can see that heresies find their homes in some corner of the world or in a single nation. Yet just as the Catholic Church encompasses the entire world, it also develops through its growing fellowship (*societas*) with all pagan peoples."<sup>393</sup>

### Sign of unity

The Second Vatican Council returned the Church's missionary work to this biblical foundation. It recalls and emphasises the solidarity of all Christians, wherever they live and wherever they seek to live their personal lives, so that they can personally fulfil the calling upon their lives as Christians, a calling for which Jesus commissioned his disciples, sending them out to bring salvation to mankind.

"[...] though there are many nations there is but one people of God [...] All the faithful, scattered though they be throughout the world, are in communion with each other in the Holy Spirit, and so he who dwells in Rome knows that the people of India are his members."<sup>394</sup>

"In virtue of this catholicity each individual part contributes through its special gifts to the good of the other parts and of the whole Church. Through the common sharing of gifts and through the common effort to attain fullness in unity, the whole and each of the parts receive increase."<sup>395</sup>

<sup>392</sup> *ibid*, 28-29.

<sup>393</sup> Sent. Lib. 1:16, *Patrologia Latina* 83, 572, quoted in: *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>394</sup> Cf. Second Vatican Council, "Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*", [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19641121\\_lumen-gentium\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html), no. 13.

<sup>395</sup> *ibid*.

All the baptised are called upon to use their manifold gifts and duties – as bishops, priests, deacons, laypeople, married couples, parents, widows, single people, workers, the poor, the weak and the persecuted. True Christians can be recognised by their love of God and love of their neighbour.<sup>396</sup>

“This duty, to be fulfilled by the order of bishops, under the successor of Peter and with the prayers and help of the whole Church, is one and the same everywhere and in every condition [...]”<sup>397</sup>

“As members of the living Christ, incorporated into Him and made like unto Him through baptism and through confirmation and the Eucharist, all the faithful are duty-bound to cooperate in the expansion and spreading out of His Body, to bring it to fullness as soon as may be.”<sup>398</sup>

“But since the People of God lives in communities, especially in dioceses and parishes, and becomes somehow visible in them, it is also up to these to witness Christ before the nations. The grace of renewal cannot grow in communities unless each of these extends the range of its charity to the ends of the earth, and devotes the same care to those afar off as it does to those who are its own members. Thus the whole community prays, works together, and exercises its activity among the nations through those of its sons whom God has chosen for this most excellent task.”<sup>399</sup>

### “Spiritual cooperation”

Taking his cue from the Second Vatican Council, John Paul II repeatedly expressed his desire to raise awareness of the Church’s missionary orientation and of the commissioning of all believers, particularly in his Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio* (1990). He saw prayer as the expression of and empowerment for the joint commissioning of all the baptised who are connected with one another as a community in Jesus Christ within the worldwide Church.

<sup>396</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, no. 41.

<sup>397</sup> Second Vatican Council, “Decree Ad Gentes on the Mission Activity of the Church”, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decree\\_19651207\\_ad-gentes\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651207_ad-gentes_en.html), no. 6.

<sup>398</sup> *ibid.*, no. 36.

<sup>399</sup> *ibid.*, no. 37.

“Sharing in the universal mission therefore is not limited to certain specific activities, but is the sign of maturity in faith and of a Christian life that bears fruit. In this way, individual believers extend the reach of their charity and show concern for those both far and near. They pray for the missions and missionary vocations. They help missionaries and follow their work with interest. And when missionaries return, they welcome them with the same joy with which the first Christian communities heard from the apostles the marvellous things which God had wrought through their preaching (cf. Acts 14:27).”<sup>400</sup>

“Among the forms of sharing, first place goes to spiritual cooperation through prayer, sacrifice and the witness of Christian life. Prayer should accompany the journey of missionaries so that the proclamation of the word will be effective through God’s grace. In his Letters, St. Paul often asks the faithful to pray for him so that he might proclaim the Gospel with confidence and conviction.”<sup>401</sup>

“Cooperating in missionary activity means not just giving but also receiving. All the particular churches, both young and old, are called to give and to receive in the context of the universal mission, and none should be closed to the needs of others. The Council states: “By virtue of [...] catholicity, the individual parts bring their own gifts to the other parts and to the whole Church, in such a way that the whole and individual parts grow greater through the mutual communication of all and their united efforts toward fullness in unity [...]. Between the different parts of the Church there are bonds of intimate communion with regard to spiritual riches, apostolic workers and temporal assistance.”<sup>402</sup>

## Prayer in the One World

It is virtually impossible for the majority of Christians and Christian churches and communities to maintain contacts around the globe. However, regional churches do not remain at a distance – on the contrary. An awareness of togetherness in the worldwide Church expresses itself very clearly in the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith (Propaganda Fide) in Roman Catholicism

<sup>400</sup> John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, on the permanent validity of the Church’s missionary mandate, [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_07121990\\_redemptoris-missio\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_07121990_redemptoris-missio_en.html), no. 77.

<sup>401</sup> *ibid.*, no. 78.

<sup>402</sup> *ibid.*, no. 85.

as well as in the World Council of Churches<sup>403</sup> and in national pontifical missionary societies. Yet such an awareness cannot simply be delegated. Based on Jesus' Great Commission and the Church's own self-conception, the Church is missionary in character, and this includes all its members, not just certain specialists, i.e. missionaries.

### **“Spiritual Community of Prayer”**

Inspired by the Second Vatican Council, John Paul II emphasised the mutual give-and-take in spiritual communication between all cultures and continents. “In its missionary activities the universal Church is a communication-oriented learning community, a spiritual community of prayer and a community of solidarity focused on serving others.”<sup>404</sup> That statement has featured in this and similar forms in numerous Church documents over the past few years and decades.

The universal Church derives its strength from its experience as a spiritual community of prayer. The three aspects of communication, spirituality and solidarity are very much in the minds of activity groups focused on the universal Church and in their resulting reflections. “Universal mission makes the universal Church a community of spirituality and solidarity, a community which is focused on God through prayer and in which people take responsibility for one another. It has a model character for the universal community of all nations whose cultural diversity must be seen as enriching and not as a threat.”<sup>405</sup>

### **Re-learning to pray from and with others . . .**

The above-mentioned cultural diversity should increasingly be seen and understood as an opportunity, not just as the right to find a Christian identity in every cultural mentality. Personal contact within the universal Church also leads to mutual perception and enables us to receive new stimuli.

In every culture that is based on religious traditions prayer has its own form and content as it is articulated within that culture. Such form and content are generally based on human symbols and rituals,

<sup>403</sup> The World Council of Churches (WCC) comprises about 350 churches in 120 countries, covering all continents. See [www.oikoumene.org/de/oerk.html](http://www.oikoumene.org/de/oerk.html), retrieved 26. May 2014.

<sup>404</sup> Sekretariat der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz, *Allen Völkern Sein Heil – Die Mission der Weltkirche*, Die deutschen Bischöfe, no. 76, Bonn 2004, 55.

<sup>405</sup> Sievernich, Michael, *Mission der Weltkirche*, in: *Stimmen der Zeit*, 129 (2004) 5, 290.

expressing ideas and longings which transcend the human level. For many centuries Christianity “baptised” such original and sometimes merely temporary and regionally limited form and content – until, in its Eurocentricity, it eventually tried to define (nearly) everything under a common ritual, liturgical and spiritual denominator. This narrowing resulted from Europe’s political dominance and from the arrogant ignorance with which the Church in Europe attempted to carry its supposed truth “to the ends of the earth”.

Ever since the Second Vatican Council (and possibly before then) the development “from the Western to the universal Church”<sup>406</sup> has been a “communicative learning community” in spiritual matters, with a focus on mutual impact. It is the merit of missionary societies that the former “one-way street” from North to South has turned into a lively exchange through contact with the cultural environments of other Christians and through spiritual input from them. The praying, singing and liturgical practices of local churches, particularly in the “old churches” of Europe, have received beneficial inspiration from Latin America, Africa, Asia and the Pacific region.

### **Prayer and action for the One World**

The Apostle Paul was aware that active engagement is not the only type of missionary activity. In 1 Timothy 2:1-4 (see above) he reminds one of his students that when we pray “for all people”, the aim should be to pray for “all people to be saved”.

Prayer by itself, however, is equally pointless. Both aspects belong together and are very closely connected – as was illustrated so clearly by the Women’s World Day of Prayer in 2013 which ran under the motto: “Informed Prayer and Prayerful Action” Prayer certainly must not be exploited as a means to an end; however, it can become the motivating factor and driving force for care and identification with the poor and vulnerable in the One World. The same line of reasoning was presented by Albert Schweitzer, who was above any suspicion of other-worldly piety: “Prayer does not change the world. But prayer changes people, and people change the world.”

Missionary solidarity can never be one-sided, meaning *either* prayer *or* action, with one group of people praying and the other

<sup>406</sup> Cf. Bühlmann, Walbert, *Weltkirche – neue Dimensionen*, Graz 1984.

group being active. Life in the Spirit is not a self-contained dimension. It means perceiving the essential and often distressing reality of humanity. On the other hand, any action that does not lead to Jesus Christ and involves no connection with Him has almost no impact on a personal inner decision.

The *One World* needs people who are actively engaged because, while being aware of their own limitations, they are grounded in and borne by their trust in Jesus Christ and in their confidence that they have been sent by Him. Obviously, we must not overlook, diminish or ignore the care and support for the poor that is provided by countless individuals and also by national and international initiatives and organisations. Christians can, however, present a spiritual alternative to the sobering experience of state-controlled and privately sponsored activities which are often diminished in their impact by numerous interests whenever power, influence and material gain are at stake – sometimes even in places where help and development for the benefit of the needy are propagated as part of a programme.

Christians can and must trust, without arrogance, that their personal solidarity with the worldwide Christian community will open up a deeper dimension and will produce positive benefits for mankind. The early Christian anonymous author of an open letter expressed this in the following words:

“Christians are people like everyone else: they do not differ from others in nationality, language or customs. Nowhere do they dwell in their own cities, nor do they have their own dialect, and there is nothing unusual about their way of life. [...]

They live within society, but not like the rest of society. They are in the midst of the world, but they are also citizens of God’s world. [...]

To sum up, Christians are to the world what the soul is to the body. [...] they are the ones who keep the world together.”<sup>407</sup>

The universal Church as a community of prayer is tangible and effective in all baptised persons who, being aware of their Christian calling and commissioning, engage in action beyond their own man-

<sup>407</sup> Brief an Diognet, Bibliothek der Kirchenväter, volume 12, Munich 1913, <http://www.unifr.ch/bkv/kapitel79-4.htm>, retrieved 26. May 2014.

ageable environment. This means prayerfully and actively making one's contribution to mankind's inner cohesion – work which is a sign of the Kingdom of God where growth is often inconspicuous and hidden from sight, and it means doing so despite all sobering experiences.



# The Miracle of the Universal Church

Simon Neubert

## Global Church and global player

The universal Church is both a *fact* and a *miracle*. The fact is that this organisation has 1.2 billion members worldwide and is strongly represented on a global scale. This is certainly impressive. It is, indeed, amazing that people in totally different geographical and cultural spheres should have a common identity and that they should share the same symbols, rituals, traditions and even administrative and legal structures.<sup>408</sup> Many Catholics know that familiar feeling when they are in a distant country and then enter a Catholic church where they find a font, a Madonna and an altar – all in the usual places. There are of course differences in style: the highly rhythmic character of African hymns, the special meditative quality of an Indian liturgy and the uncommonly charismatic emphasis of a Latin American mass. Yet there are always certain global identifiers that mark off a Catholic church as belonging to a wider family, with the Pope at its head and as the obvious figure of identification.

However, taken by itself, is that really so extraordinary? After all, the same can be said of successful international corporations that have created cross-national, cross-cultural institutions through their branch networks and which use clever marketing techniques to sell global product identities to their customers. Consumers of globally marketed products become part of an international lifestyle community which suggests to them a sense of home and belonging. In fact, the global sense of community created by the Catholic Church has highly successful parallels in the global communities generated by international corporations, the World Cup, the Occupy movement, the Internet and the United Nations. Whether we are excited or critical

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<sup>408</sup> Where the Eastern Catholic Church is concerned, this is clearly only true with certain qualifications, as its ecclesiastic practices are subject to a different Code of Canons – the CCEO instead of the CIC.

about specific globalisation players and their motives or strategies or whether we see them in a more mixed light, this type of globalism is now certainly nothing unusual.

### **An organisation *sui generis***

What makes the universal Church so special, therefore, is neither the fact of its worldwide presence nor an awareness of a shared identity. Rather, when we look at it in terms of sociological patterns, it seems in many ways like a *normal* global organisation. It has elements of both subsidiarity and centralisation, it has fee-paying members and a management structure, it pursues interests and produces scandals, and it meets with both support and opposition.

It is, therefore, hardly a very promising exercise to apply detailed empirical analysis methods in order to establish a unique selling point of the Church as an organisation. To show the uniqueness of the universal Church among today's global players, the considerations presented in this paper will take us in a different direction. It means moving along a path that is outside the interpretative parameters of organisational, political or socio-economic theories. Instead, it involves the universal Church's own intrinsic theological rationale as a system of both thought and action.<sup>409</sup> It is a different field of vision and one that will only unfold if we look at the Church against the background of a spiritual reality. The central hypothesis of this paper is, therefore, that ultimately the multi-faceted phenomenon of the universal Church can only be fully grasped and appreciated in terms of its spiritual dimension. We will exemplify this by looking at the category of a miracle.

However, before we pursue these thoughts in more depth, we need to understand the two theological terms that are relevant for this purpose: the "universal Church" and a "miracle". Both concepts can have a wide variety of meanings, and our first step in the argument must be to provide clear definitions.

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<sup>409</sup> Niklas Luhmann presents an analogous argument in his sociological system theory: any criteria for the proper determination of functional connections, he says, must be derived in a way that is consistent with the relevant system. Looking at self-maintaining systems, he concludes that they are self-referential because when they "receive their structures", those structures are "not finished products that can be found in the relevant environment". Luhmann, Niklas, *Soziologische Aufklärung 6 – Die Soziologie und der Mensch*, Wiesbaden 2008, 13.

## The term “universal Church”

The term “universal Church” was coined in the wake of the events and theological developments during and after the Second Vatican Council, although the phrase itself never found its way into any of the Council papers. The term is extremely interesting because its many different shades of meaning reflect at least four levels of tension.

*Firstly*, it highlights the “transformation of the Western Church into the universal Church”<sup>410</sup> and, therefore, expresses a concomitant awareness of catholicity as a culturally heterogeneous phenomenon. Karl Rahner attributes an epoch-making character to this development, dividing Church history into three periods: a very brief Judaeo-Christian period, a very long Hellenistic-Occidental and Eurocentric period and, finally, the more recent universal Church period.<sup>411</sup>

*Secondly*, talking about the “universal Church” inevitably includes the newly defined fundamental relationship between the Church and the world as outlined in *Gaudium et Spes*, a relationship which means, in particular, a readiness to enter into dialogue with mankind,<sup>412</sup> “to render service to each other”<sup>413</sup> and to accept the “duty of scrutinising the signs of the times.”<sup>414</sup> The phrase thus tacitly hints at the Church’s concern with spheres outside its own organisation and with the acute issues and needs of humanity as a whole.

*Thirdly*, the concept of the universal Church oscillates between two meanings: a worldly understanding, outlined above, with a focus on the Church’s visible and empirically tangible aspects, on the one hand, and a spiritual understanding, on the other. In the same way that the spiritual and the earthly Church are described in *Lumen Gentium* as forming “one complex reality which coalesces from a

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<sup>410</sup> Sekretariat der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz, *Allen Völkern Sein Heil – Die Mission der Weltkirche*, Die deutschen Bischöfe, no. 76, Bonn 2004, 33.

<sup>411</sup> Cf. Rahner, Karl, *Über eine theologische Grundinterpretation des II. Vatikanischen Konzils*, in: *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie*, 101 (1979), 290-299, especially 294.

<sup>412</sup> Cf. Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Gaudium et Spes*, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_cons\\_19651207\\_gaudium-et-spes\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_cons_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html), no. 2.

<sup>413</sup> *ibid.*, no. 11.

<sup>414</sup> *ibid.*, no. 4.

divine and a human element"<sup>415</sup>, the term *universal Church*, too, has the same productive polarity which forms the basis for a sacramental understanding of the Church.

*Fourthly*, the term "universal Church" is sometimes used in contrast to "regional churches". This is reflected in German which has two words for the universal Church: *Weltkirche* and *Universalkirche*, with the latter being used in this contrastive sense.<sup>416</sup> In Catholic ecclesiology this shows a certain state of inherent tension between regional churches and the universal Church. In a high-level public debate from 1999 to 2001, described by Medard Kehl as a "dispute between cardinals",<sup>417</sup> the question arose as to how an adequate ecclesiological understanding of the two dimensions might be achieved. The debate can be traced back to a letter published in 1992, which was written by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, headed at the time by Joseph Ratzinger. Entitled "Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on Some Aspects of the Church Understood as Communion".<sup>418</sup> its aim was to "ward off increasing tendencies towards 'de-theologising' the concept of Church."<sup>419</sup> The intellectual duel was opened in 1999 when Walter Kasper (then Bishop of Rottenburg-Stuttgart) responded to the letter by sharply criticising the Congregation's position. In his replique, which formed part of a commemorative publication,<sup>420</sup> he described the postulated theological primacy of the *Universalkirche* (universal Church) over *Ortskirchen* (regional churches) as an "attempt to achieve the theo-

<sup>415</sup> Cf. Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19641121\\_lumen-gentium\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html), no. 8.

<sup>416</sup> Cf. e.g. Waldenfels, Hans, *Weltkirche*, in: *Lexikon Theologie und Kirche*, Volume 10, Freiburg, Basel, Vienna 2009, 1077.

<sup>417</sup> Cf. Kehl, Medard, *Der Disput der Kardinäle – Zum Verhältnis von Universalkirche und Ortskirchen*, in: *Stimmen der Zeit*, 128 (2003) 4, 219-232.

<sup>418</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on Some Aspects of the Church Understood as Communion, Bonn 1992: [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_28051992\\_communionis-notio\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_28051992_communionis-notio_en.html), no. 107.

<sup>419</sup> Kehl, Medard, *Zum jüngsten Disput um das Verhältnis von Universalkirche und Ortskirchen*, in: Walter, Peter; Krämer, Klaus; Augustin, George, *Kirche in ökumenischer Perspektive – Kardinal Walter Kasper zum 70. Geburtstag*, Freiburg im Breisgau, Basel, Vienna 2003, 81-101, especially 87.

<sup>420</sup> Kasper, Walter, *Zur Theologie und Praxis des bischöflichen Amtes*, in: Schreier, Werner; Steins, Georg, *Auf neue Art Kirche sein – Wirklichkeiten – Herausforderungen – Wandlungen*, Munich 1999, 32-48.

logical restoration of Roman centralism which threatens to create an imbalance between regional churches and the universal Church.<sup>421</sup> As the debate continued, Ratzinger made it clear that the primacy of the universal Church referred to the Church as “God’s pre-existent idea” and certainly not to the realisation of this idea in the Church’s own history or in its development as a sacrament.<sup>422</sup> Kasper, on the other hand, said that, although he wanted to highlight the fundamental “inner primacy of Church unity [the Church being God’s idea] over its essential diversity”,<sup>423</sup> his critique was prompted primarily by pastoral concerns and not so much by systematic considerations.<sup>424</sup> The two debating cardinals eventually agreed that their ongoing difference of opinion was a dispute between theological schools and did not have any direct bearing on Church politics.<sup>425</sup> While the debate revealed the responsibility of a theological discourse endowed with interpretative power, it also unveiled, in particular, the sensitive nature of the balance, described here, between regional churches and the universal Church. The Council document *Lumen Gentium*, which is definitive on this ecclesiological issue, specifies the relationship between particular churches and the universal Church by saying that those “churches come into being” “in and from” the universal Church, thus forming “the one and only Catholic Church.”<sup>426</sup> However, such teaching must not simply be understood in empirical terms, where the whole is the sum total of its parts, and it certainly does not endorse the centre lording it over the periphery. Rather, it opens up an interpretative space with a glimpse of the final sacramental character of the Church, a character which is not subject to human control. The concept of the universal Church comprises this tension between the individual regional churches in the world and the One Church in the world.

### The term “miracle”

The idea of a miracle is bandied about quite widely in contemporary popular culture, and in post-war history much use has been

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<sup>421</sup> *ibid.*, 44.

<sup>422</sup> Cf. Kehl, Medard, *op.cit.*, 99.

<sup>423</sup> Ratzinger, Joseph, *The Local Church and the Universal Church*, in: *America* 185 (2001) 16, 7-11, especially 10.

<sup>424</sup> Cf. Kehl, Medard, *op.cit.*, 95.

<sup>425</sup> *ibid.*, 98.

<sup>426</sup> Second Vatican Council, *op.cit.*, no. 23.

made in the German language of the word *Wunder* (“wonder, marvel, miracle”). The *Wunder von Bern* (“the Miracle of Berne”, when West Germany won the World Cup in 1954); the *Wunder von Lengede* (“the Miracle of Lengede” in November 1963 when 11 West German miners were rescued from a collapsed mine after surviving for 14 days); the debate on *Wunderwaffen* (“wonder weapons” developed by Nazi Germany in the Second World War); and later the *Wunder des Mauerfalls* (the “miraculous fall of the Berlin Wall” in November 1989) have all generated a lively discourse on miracles.<sup>427</sup> When a representative survey was conducted by the Allenbach Institute for the German daily *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* in 2006, as many as 56% of all German respondents said they believed in miracles, while consciously making a distinction between the everyday secular use of the word in sports and society, on the one hand, and “genuine” miracles, on the other.<sup>428</sup> Similar to the term “universal Church”, the concept of a miracle tends to be understood in both secular and spiritual terms. Interdisciplinary miracle research, therefore, differentiates between transcendental / religious *miracula* and inherently natural *mirabilia*,<sup>429</sup> a distinction which is also reflected in several European languages. While English distinguishes between a *miracle*, on the one hand, and a *marvel* or *wonder*, on the other,<sup>430</sup> French has the two words *miracle* and *merveille*, and Spanish *milagro* and *maravilla*. German, by contrast, uses only one word – *Wunder* – which therefore has a certain fuzziness.<sup>431</sup> The miracle researchers Alexander Geppert and Till Kössler conclude that the term marks “the borderline between understanding and incomprehension and is, therefore, located at an interface between different epistemic systems.<sup>432</sup> What seems obsolete, however, is any dualistic distinction between the laws of nature and inexplicable violations of those laws in the form of miracles. This distinction, which goes back to the Enlightenment, has been

<sup>427</sup> Cf. Geppert, Alexander C. T.; Kössler, Till, *Einleitung: Wunder der Zeitgeschichte*, in: *ibid*, *Wunder – Poetik und Politik des Staunens im 20. Jahrhundert*, Berlin 2011, 9-69, especially 9.

<sup>428</sup> Cf. Noelle, Elisabeth; Petersen, Thomas, *Wer glaubt an Wunder?*, in: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, issue 219, 20. September 2006, 5.

<sup>429</sup> Cf. *ibid*, 16.

<sup>430</sup> Translator’s note: In everyday speech, of course, the English word *miracle* is just as ambiguous as the German, e.g. “miracles of healing” - “It was a miracle that more people hadn’t been killed”. The word *marvel*, on the other hand, lacks any spiritual dimension.

<sup>431</sup> Cf. *ibid*.

<sup>432</sup> *ibid*, 16f.

used extensively by rationalist critics of religion, on the one hand, and Church apologetics, on the other. Serious scientists are aware of their methodological and epistemological limits and, therefore, do not attempt to try and disprove miracles on a scientific basis. In the same way, theologians have stopped using miracles as evidence for tenets of faith.

The German Dictionary of Religion Past and Present (*Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*) defines the word *Wunder* (miracle) as something which “must not be understood as a violation of inalienable laws of nature, but as an extraordinary act of God through which He draws special attention to nature and to his purpose in relating to his creation.”<sup>433</sup> This gives us some indication of the *first* of four aspects that characterise a Christian theology of miracles and should be considered crucial. Miracles are primarily expressions of a living relationship between God and human beings. It is through miracles that God reveals Himself. However, miracles are not hard and fast, objectively verifiable facts, but are directly associated with the way they are perceived. This is how humans experience God’s closeness and power. Important prerequisites are trust and openness towards God – referred to in the Gospels as *πίστις* (faith). Without people’s faith Jesus cannot work miracles,<sup>434</sup> and if there is enough faith, the impossible becomes possible (Matthew 17:20). Faith precedes a miracle, yet it is also strengthened and aroused by a miracle.<sup>435</sup>

*Secondly*, miracles always point beyond themselves. A miracle is never an end in itself,<sup>436</sup> but symbolises the almighty and powerful presence of God. The healing miracles of Jesus and His disciples are ideal demonstrations of the freedom He brings, foreshadowing the coming Kingdom of God. They are a form of proclaiming the Good News.

*Thirdly*, miracles are not subject to human control,<sup>437</sup> which makes

<sup>433</sup> Webster, John, Wunder – VII. Dogmatisch, in: *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, Volume 8, Tübingen [et al.] 2005, 1727-1729, especially 1728.

<sup>434</sup> Cf. Mark 6:1-6a.

<sup>435</sup> Cf. Kertelge, Karl, Wunder – II. Biblisch-theologisch: Neues Testament, in: *Lexikon Theologie und Kirche*, op.cit., 1313-1315, especially 1314.

<sup>436</sup> Cf. Weimar, Peter, Wunder – II. Biblisch-theologisch: Altes Testament, in: *Lexikon Theologie und Kirche*, op.cit., 1311-1313, especially 1312.

<sup>437</sup> Cf. Evers, Dirk, Wunder – V. Fundamentaltheologisch, in: *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, Volume 8, Tübingen [et al.] 2005, 1726f., especially 1726.

them essentially distinct from all forms of magic. On the contrary, they are experienced as undeserved gifts of grace.<sup>438</sup>

*Fourthly*, miracles cause *wonderment* or *admiration*. Wonder is a constitutive element of a miracle. All miracles have something extraordinary and surprising about them, yet also a certain ambivalence.<sup>439</sup> They are capable of instilling excitement, of energising and rousing a person. However, they also have a terrifying quality, because God is suddenly seen as bigger and more powerful than previously imagined.<sup>440</sup>

This should provide us with an adequate definition of miracles, so we can now move on. Let me add in conclusion that it is not only isolated experiences which can be perceived as miracles, but also more fundamental series of related experiences, as long as the believer thus “encounters the infinite mystery of God in the midst of this finite world and through this world”.<sup>441</sup>

### The universal Church as a palpable experience

When members of a house church meet for worship in China, they gather around the same Lord’s table as Catholics in a poor neighbourhood in the West African mega-city of Lagos, pilgrim tourists at a Papal mass in St. Peter’s Basilica, a basic community in a remote jungle village in Bolivia or churchgoers in New York or Düsseldorf. Human fellowship with God and among people is foreshadowed by the divine fellowship within the Trinity and reflected in the *communio ecclesiarum*, the community of the churches. As people look to God in prayer, that “community with the entire Church” becomes palpable. This is the community mentioned in Eucharistic Prayers I, II and III and it is also clearly expressed in the intercessory prayers for the needs of the universal Church. The liturgy is the fount and apex of the Church’s life (SC 10) and as such is also predestined as an environment for Christians to experience the universal Church.

<sup>438</sup> Cf. Wiedenhofer, Siegfried, Wunder III – Systematisch-theologisch, in: *Lexikon Theologie und Kirche*, op.cit., 1316-1318, especially 1317.

<sup>439</sup> Cf. Evers, Dirk, op.cit., especially 1726.

<sup>440</sup> In the Old Testament the fearsome character of divine miracles is expressed very clearly in the Hebrew word *twarwn*, e.g. Deuteronomy 10:21f. and Psalm 106:22. Cf. Weimar, Peter, op.cit., 1312.

<sup>441</sup> Cf. Wiedenhofer, Siegfried, op.cit., 1317.

Over and above this, the universal Church manifests itself wherever Christians from different cultures and regional churches relate to one another. This happens at major events such as a Council, a Synod or a World Youth Day, and at spiritual centres such as Jerusalem, Taizé and international places of pilgrimage. Moreover, universal Church contacts are also formed at an institutional level, within religious communities and orders, at national bishops' conferences, within the Vatican authorities and as part of teaching and research at Church colleges and theological faculties. In Germany, in particular, universal Church contacts become tangible for many Christians through the partnership projects of parishes and dioceses as well as through the projects and campaigns of Church aid organisations and charitable associations. Another visible expression of the bond created by the universal Church can be found in the many different personal encounters experienced by Christians on international visits and volunteering trips and in the large number of committed missionaries.<sup>442</sup> The global migration movements of the past few decades and the work of priests from other countries have also led to intensive international communication in many German parishes and dioceses.<sup>443</sup> Pope Francis, in particular, has initiated a global dialogue within the universal Church, based on the theological emphasis of his Latin American background and also on his personal charisma.

It is difficult to generalise on the extent to which the large number of global relationships within the universal Church have a spiritual dimension. The universal Church is an ambivalent communication and information environment which offers opportunities for a more profound encounter with God, although it can also be a place of ungodly banality. The German Catholic Church's debate on its secularisation, which was triggered by Benedict XVI in his Freiburg speech,<sup>444</sup> may indicate a certain spiritual insecurity within this regional church which

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<sup>442</sup> While many Germans continue to serve in classical African and Latin American mission countries – as members of religious orders, *Fidei Donum* priests and "Temporary Missionaries" – it has long become common for Indian missionaries to serve in Western Europe and East Africa.

<sup>443</sup> Seen globally, the parallel structures that have developed in many places in Germany "with churches of other native tongues" is far from typical.

<sup>444</sup> This speech was held by Benedict XVI on 25. September 2011 during his trip to Germany before a selected audience of committed Catholics at the Concert House in Freiburg im Breisgau, [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/speeches/2011/september/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_spe\\_20110925\\_catholics-freiburg\\_ge.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2011/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20110925_catholics-freiburg_ge.html), retrieved 27. May 2014.

wishes to set an example by being “in the world”<sup>445</sup> but at the same time has problems with the fact that it is not “of this world”.<sup>446</sup> The high level of commitment to social welfare, to partnership and to its institutions and its often amazing efficiency and professionalism are not necessarily a sign of an encounter with God as part of the universal Church. It is worth noting that spiritual issues were virtually absent in a representative study entitled “Today’s Work for the Universal Church of Tomorrow”, a study that evaluated work within the universal Church at the request of the German Bishops’ Conference.<sup>447</sup> Just as the universal Church can be reduced to its sociological manifestations as an international organisation and deprived of its theological core, so certain inner attitudes of the universal Church’s players are quite capable of stifling its spiritual reality. The diversity and otherness of different environments within the universal Church are not necessarily perceived as an enrichment, but may also be seen as entertaining folklore or even as a threat. A person’s engagement in a One World group may simply be a pleasant hobby, and a diocesan partnership may just be a prestige project. An Indian pastor in a German local church may never be more than an “odd foreigner”, and when a group of African liberation theologians are invited, such visitors may simply serve as tools to boost one’s own academic profile. A pilgrimage to Lourdes may be a fig leaf to cover one’s own parochial mentality, and a gap year abroad may just be a bit of an adventure holiday. “Partnership” can function as an alibi for an asymmetrical financial contract. Consultations can end in petty self-righteousness and divisions.

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<sup>445</sup> Cf. Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_cons\\_19651207\\_gaudium-et-spes\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_cons_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html), no. 1.

<sup>446</sup> John 17:16.

<sup>447</sup> The questionnaires that were used for the survey also contained a question about the most important aims of educational work in the universal Church. This was one of the few questions that allowed for a spiritually focused answer. The option “Spirituality within the Universal Church” was assessed by the respondents (comprising both full-time staff and volunteers) as being by far the least important aim of educational work (15.3 per cent), whereas raising awareness of “justice and identification with the poor” (“Justice and Solidarity”) was regarded as the most important objective (73.9 per cent). Cf. Sekretariat der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz, *Weltkirchliche Arbeit heute für morgen – Wissenschaftliche Studie in Gemeinden deutscher Diözesen*, Arbeitshilfen no. 235, Bonn 2009, 55.

## The universal Church as a miracle

The Second Vatican Council was seen by many as a miracle. There was a good deal of amazement when the Council was suddenly convened and subsequently produced some surprising changes within the Church. The speed, the extent of the changes and, above all, its general character and the level of unanimity with which the decisions were reached by the Council Fathers were elements which many Christians ascribed to the work of the Holy Spirit. They experienced this Council as a gift from God who wanted to make His Church “a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race” (LG 1), to use the language of *Lumen Gentium*. The universal Church, whose epoche-making birth was traced by Karl Rahner to this Council for a good reason, certainly qualifies as a miracle, because it bears all the relevant marks. It can be understood as manifesting the relationship between God and mankind, it symbolically points beyond itself, it can be experienced as a gift that is not subject to human control, and it is a potential source of amazement.

A few years ago Germany’s bishops came up with a very pithy description of the universal Church as a learning community, a community of solidarity<sup>448</sup> and a community of prayer.<sup>449</sup> Within such an equation the biggest unknown quantity is prayer.<sup>450</sup> It presupposes that solidarity between regional churches and the learning processes within the churches do not remain at a purely secular level, but that their protagonists are open to an encounter with God who is, after all, so much greater. It can generally be assumed that any self-centred motives and attitudes will dwindle as the decision-makers within the universal Church intensify their relationships with God. Liturgical and spontaneous prayer, along with collective and individual prayer, form the basis of any relationship with God and can, therefore, be charac-

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<sup>448</sup> Translator’s note: Solidarity, as a literal translation from the German, here means “mutual care and identification, especially with the poor and vulnerable”.

<sup>449</sup> Sekretariat der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz, *Allen Völkern Sein Heil – Die Mission der Weltkirche*, Die deutschen Bischöfe, no. 76, Bonn 2004, 55.

<sup>450</sup> On the other hand, thanks to missionary and aid organisations, the German regional church has developed a very pronounced culture of care and support (i.e. solidarity) for its needy sister churches. Moreover, its pastoral and spiritual hunger for stimuli from the wider Church has also enabled it to discover more and more areas in which it can learn from the universal Church. Cf. e.g. Hennecke, Christian, *Glänzende Aussichten – Wie Kirche über sich hinauswächst*, Münster 2010.

terised theologically as “basic manifestations of the Church”.<sup>451</sup> <sup>452</sup> Only a praying universal Church can truly manifest God’s unifying vision of universal brotherhood and love. The discovery of the fellowship of all those who pray in the universal Church – being connected among themselves and with God – can thus become a powerful Christian experience.

The spiritual fellowship of different regional churches, in particular, points to the very core of the Church’s salvific, sacramental action. If the Church is taken seriously in its universality, then we can clearly see its role as “the universal sacrament of salvation” (LG 48). The culturally unifying presence of the Church bears witness to the integrating power of the Gospel and reveals God’s will of universal salvation. In Christ as the “Light of nations” the universal Church is a “sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race.” (LG 1, AG 4) In this way the “collegial union” (LG 23) of the many regional churches symbolically anticipates the goal of all creation. The debate, described above, between Ratzinger and Kasper on the equal authenticity of regional churches and the universal Church indicates the extent to which the unity of the Church eludes human explanation and feasibility. With all its internal contradictions and tensions, the universal Church remains fundamentally dependent on God’s healing presence. It must continually receive its unity from God in a new way.

Unlike international sporting events that are funded through advertising and unlike commercially marketed global product identities, the universal Church eludes any exploitation for worldly purposes. There is something about it which is both incalculable and unpredictable. The dynamics of faith stubbornly refuse to bow to the manifold political and socio-economic tendencies to appropriate everything. Following the logic of faith, any authentic experiences of solidarity, prayer and learning within the universal Church are perceived as gifts.<sup>453</sup> God’s

<sup>451</sup> Schaller, Hans, *Gebet – IV. Systematisch-theologisch*, in: *Lexikon Theologie und Kirche*, op.cit., 313f., especially 313.

<sup>452</sup> An emphasis on the importance of prayer is by no means intended to negate the close link between contemplation and action, which has repeatedly been highlighted in the history of spirituality since Isidore of Seville. Cf. *Differentiarum Liber II*, 34, 133: PL 83, col. 91 A.

<sup>453</sup> Quite a few people have, for instance, been to World Youth Days, taken a gap year to do voluntary service, travelled on a pilgrimage aboard or visited a partner church in a different region and then interacted with people on a personal level. They often return with a feeling of

grace can be neither scheduled or prescribed. It is never subject to human control.

It is truly amazing how the Catholic Church unites people from different backgrounds and does so in a continuity of the experience of the early Christians at Pentecost. It is, of course, true that Church history must also be told as a history of violence which, both visibly and covertly, has continued to the present day. Yet in all its heterogeneity the universal Church also excels in its very clear tolerance of ambiguity – a phenomenon which is surprising enough in itself. The model of “unity in diversity” thus opens up a horizon of experiences that is ambivalent on several levels: culturally, socially, liturgically and pastorally. This horizon manifests itself in a wide range of places where Christians meet as the universal Church. Wherever the universal Church cares for and identifies with refugees, the poor, the oppressed and the sick, wherever it humbly accepts its own powerlessness and displays kenotic altruism, wherever Christians are united in prayer and wherever the Church communicates its message with an attitude of openness and willingness to listen, meetings between individuals can become existential encounters with God and, therefore, occasions for amazement.

Miracles cannot be enforced or planned. However, the heterogeneous map of the universal Church provides a multi-faceted experiential space in which God wishes to reveal himself powerfully, creatively and often impressively. Encounters with God usually require an attitude that can only grow through prayer. Where such an attitude prevails, the universal Church – described in *Lumen Gentium* in the metaphor of the pilgrimage – is characterised by a longing for God and the greatest possible openness to His unexpected ways and signposts.<sup>454</sup> It is only by developing a spiritual culture of wonderment that we can receive such a wondrous gift from God. Both the world and the universal Church wonder at Pope Francis’s charisma, words, gestures and deeds. But what should receive much greater attention than his personality is his ecclesiological vision of miracles, likening a kenotic Church to “a field hospital after a battle”,<sup>455</sup> a Church that

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profound enrichment and report that they enjoyed great hospitality, made good friends and experienced powerful liturgical worship and times of spiritual renewal.

<sup>454</sup> Second Vatican Council, op.cit., 126 ff., no. 6, 130 ff., no. 8 f., 139 f., no. 14, 146f., no. 21.

<sup>455</sup> Spadaro, Antonio, Antonio Spadaro interviews Francis, in: [http://vaticaninsider.lastampa.it/en/the-vatican/detail/articolo/27968/retrieved 27. May 2014](http://vaticaninsider.lastampa.it/en/the-vatican/detail/articolo/27968/retrieved%2027.%20May%202014).

has developed the ability to “heal wounds and to warm the hearts of the people”.<sup>456</sup> If the many parts of the universal Body of Christ were to join together in prayer, “jointly working miracles, joining with others in their suffering, presenting a joint narrative and jointly sharing with others”,<sup>457</sup> it would be extremely easy to say that the very fact of the universal Church is a miracle.

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<sup>456</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>457</sup> Sölle, Dorothee, *Warum ich Christin bin*, in: Jens, Walter, *Warum ich Christ bin*, Munich 1982, 348.

# Appendix



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**List of recently published titles in the  
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