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- SVD Founding Generation, Anthropos Tradition, and Interculturality
- Towards a Theology of Mission in a Secularized World Searching for Justice, Peace – and Love
- Prophetic Dialogue Based on *Missio Dei Triunius*. A Chance for Ecumenical Cooperation in Advanced Missiology and Ecological Ethics
- “Quarter Hour Prayer”. Spirituality of Saint Arnold Janssen and the Founding Generation
- Exemplary Biography of Conrado Balweg: The Case of Filipino Rebel Priests Within the Society of the Divine Word



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*Wilhelm Richebächer\**

**PROPHETIC DIALOGUE BASED ON *MISSIO DEI TRIUNIUS*  
A Chance for Ecumenical Cooperation in Advanced  
Missiology and Ecological Ethics**

*Christian mission is tasked with the recognition of God's Spirit present in creation, cultures and religions, and with relating it to the unique witness of hope and life in Christ. The concept of a "prophetic dialogue" as developed over the last two decades offers perspectives for this task. The understanding of mission flowing from the mystery of the Triune God and a missio Dei offers the backdrop and grounding for this concept of prophetic dialogue.*

***Introduction***<sup>1</sup>

In recent decades, be it in Western European churches or around the globe, many ecumenically active Christians and promoters of

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<sup>1</sup> The horizon of my presentation is marked by the old question of intercultural and interreligious hermeneutics, namely: How can a confessional religious conviction and stance go along with an open-minded and fair negotiation of religious and cultural positions? Do both positions eventually exclude each other or are they compoundable? – This work is an attempt to find some responding aspects to these questions in connection with recent experiments in renewing ecumenical Christian missiology in interreligious contexts. The central systematic sections of this article 1, 2 and 3 are

intercultural theology have shared the criticism that Christian Mission cannot any longer follow an imperial paradigm, but has to build on a new paradigm, asking (1) where is God's Spirit universally at work in Creation, Human Relations, Cultures and Religions? And (2) how can Christians deliver their unique witness to hope and life in Christ in cooperation with churches world-wide and with respect to other faiths?

To answer these two questions, I consider the hermeneutical model of a "*Prophetic Dialogue*" as developed among leading Roman Catholic missiologists mainly in the run of the last decade being helpful.<sup>2</sup> Therefore in this article, I will first of all (part 1) roughly circumscribe the still emerging paradigm change in Christian missiology, before (part 2) introducing the concept of Prophetic Dialogue. Afterwards (part 3) I will argue why and how this concept can properly be based on a conception of *Missio Dei Triunius*. And in a last step (part 4) I will demonstrate the ecumenical applicability of this sustainable practical equivalent of "mission" with the example of one of the most vital ethical demands of our days in one area of theological ecology.

### ***1 Off to New Shores in Missiology***

A huge number of scholars as well as ecumenical assemblies from denominational origin and in common ecumenical efforts in recent decades have tried to give Christian mission a new and more convincing paradigm compared to the old colonial one.<sup>3</sup>

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revised parts of a presentation delivered to the community of the University of Applied Sciences for Intercultural Theology in honor of our late Pastoral Theological colleague Prof. Dr. Andrea Fröchtling during a Memorial symposium in Hermannsburg (Germany) on May 3-5, 2023, under the title "Prophetic dialogue – A chance for Intercultural Ecumenical Cooperation and the Reform of Missiology".

<sup>2</sup> Besides the academic and general ecumenical purposes of this article I want to use this opportunity to thank the Missionaries of the Divine Word/SVD for inviting me to a highly inspiring "Workshop on *missio Dei*" last autumn (Nov. 2-5, 2022) where I had the honor to participate.

<sup>3</sup> See David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission. Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2011), 377ff. For the later ecumenical discussion on the state of missiology see the comprehensive article of Giancarlo Collet and Ludger Weckel, *Auf dem Weg zu einer solidarischen Missionswissenschaft. Ein Diskussionsbeitrag*, in Mariano Delgado and Michael Sievernich, *Mission und Prophetie in Zeiten der Interkulturalität, FS zum hundertjährigen Bestehen des IIMF 1911–2011*. ZMR 95 (2011) 378-399.

Most of these reformers of missiology in one way saw themselves in the tradition of two historically very momentous conferences:

- A. The World Mission Conference (WMC) in Willingen 1952,<sup>4</sup> at which a great step was taken to shift from a merely geographical and colonial misconception of mission as a human or ecclesial act of expansion to one signifying God's salvific and transforming communication with the whole of creation through and beyond the church.
- B. On quite similar theological paths, during its groundbreaking Second Vatican Council (1962–1965),<sup>5</sup> the Roman Catholic Church found that her status was not the only institution to mediate eternal salvation, but rather was one—albeit preeminent—instrument of God's saving act.

Both of these landmark events in modern ecumenism make a common declaration despite using different words: only by going beyond itself (e.g., into society) in the engagement for the future Kingdom of God, and not by what it epitomizes here and now, the church can live up to her destiny.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, there was a turn in missiology and ecclesiology at the middle of the twentieth century in both historical denominations, as far as the historical goals of mission work are concerned.

<sup>4</sup> The final statement of the Conference says: "There is no participation in Christ without participation in His mission to the world. That by which the Church receives its existence is that by which it is also given its world-mission." Norman Goodall, ed., *Missions under the Cross. Addresses delivered at the Enlarged Meeting of the Committee of the International Missionary Council at Willingen, in Germany, 1952*; with statements issued by the meeting (London: Edinburgh House Press, 1953), 190.

<sup>5</sup> Vatican Council II, *Ad Gentes, Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church* (1965) No. 2 formulated as follows: "The pilgrim Church is missionary by her very nature, since it is from the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit that she draws her origin, in accordance with the decree of God the Father."

<sup>6</sup> Concretely, Robert Schreiter, *Reconciliation and Prophetic Dialogue*, in Cathy Ross and Stephen B. Bevans, eds., *Mission on the Road to Emmaus. Constants, Context and Prophetic Dialogue* (London: SCM Press, 2015), 123-135, 124 [No. 8 (2<sup>nd</sup> page), <<http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/fh-hermannsburg/detail.action?docID=6189993>>, accessed 1 March 2023], names two major shifts in concepts of mission in the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: (1) Shift from one-sided perspective of missionary proclaimers toward mutual communication; and (2) shift from the *a priori* idea of saving souls and planting churches (though they were not ruled out) to contextually relevant communal changes and improvements in the perspective of the Kingdom of God.

From this time at the middle of the last century onward, Christian missiologies were determined—more than ever before—by a rather prophetic focusing on central issues of social and economic justice (1968: WMC Uppsala as well as Latin American Episcopal Council at Medellin), the coexistence and common witness of churches worldwide as partners and not any longer as centers and satellites, and by the slowly growing sense for inter-contextual and inter-religious themes and theologies.<sup>7</sup>

Therefore, contouring a viable and responsible concept of mission for the present time one can say that mission principally does not stand for a unilateral communication or even a kind of “invasion into another’s religious home”. Rather, it represents the opening of a new conversation between the Creator and the creatures, embedded in the creatures’ mutual communication, and heading towards the transformation from creation to new creation.

This communication does not seize up in the power games and atrocities of human interaction between Christians and so-called “Non-Christians”.<sup>8</sup> Mission, instead, includes the invitation to a border-crossing view of trust in God and of religion. Roger Schroeder compares it metaphorically with a friendly “entering in someone else’s garden”<sup>9</sup> in order to exchange wisdom among different gardeners. In an ultimate sense: Not human success of any binding initiative shall be on focus, but the way of letting God address creatures and oneself just humbly assisting to give space to proper encounter.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Roger Schroeder, Prophetic Dialogue and Interculturality, in Ross and Bevans, *Mission*, 215-226 [No. 4 (p. 1-3)]. Stephen B. Bevans, Becoming a Global Theologian: A Personal Journey, in Dale T. Irvin and Peter C. Phan, *Christian Mission, Contextual Theology, Prophetic Dialogue. Essays in Honor of Stephen B. Bevans, SVD* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2018), 249-257, 252 can even hypothesize that Vatican II was “from start to finish ... a missionary council.” For the whole process, cf. also Jacques Matthey, Mission im Ökumenischen Rat der Kirchen und in internationalen ökumenischen Organisationen, in C. Dahling-Sander et al., eds., *Leitfaden Ökumenische Missionstheologie* (Gütersloh: Chr. Kaiser/Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2003), 220-244.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Karl Barth’s motif for mission in the humble witness to God’s Self-revelation by the church rather than in any ecclesial imposing of a new faith onto “Non-Christians” in 1922 as analyzed in Wilhelm Richebächer, Deutsche Evangelische Weltmission nach 1945 im Spannungsfeld von Schuldbekennnis, Existenzkrise und theologischer Vergewisserung, in *ZMiss* 48 (1.2022) 210-228 (especially point 3.2: 217-219).

<sup>9</sup> Stephen B. Bevans and Roger P. Schroeder, eds., *Prophetic Dialogue. Reflections on Christian Mission Today* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2011), 72ff.



Taking this point of departure, one rediscovers a fundamental aporia involved in all missionary witness: being a responsible part in a really ground-breaking Divine campaign for life and against death—as well as to the contrary: depending and relying on the conditions and will and treasures of the addressed in this communication. One could give plenty of concrete examples for this aporia as for instance: (a) Being authorized by the Creator of Life—and yet functioning in this world only as servant of all [even under conditions of persecution], or: (b) Testifying to the Son of God’s own Spirit endowment “onto” the community—and yet: communicating Jesus Christ only in local language and under certain discourse-structures lying beyond the control of the witnessing Christian.<sup>10</sup>

With this ecumenically agreeable definition, one follows honorable traditions, first of all, the guiding tradition of NT narratives (e.g., Acts 8; 10). Here, missional encounters reveal the initially aporetic position of being authorized to proclaim a message regarding life and death and yet depending on the preconditions and appreciation of the counterparts for reaching a point of adequate understanding, even of vivid exchange of wisdom and mutual enrichment. Secondly, that pattern reappears in the history of World Christianity up to present models of translating the Gospel giving it lingual and physical embodiment in local religious and new and (different from “American-Western” rational ways) theological formats as taught for West African contexts by Lamin Sanneh and Kwame Bediako.<sup>11</sup> This, in accompaniment with Andrew Walls, Lesslie Newbigin and others in northern and western sections of the missiological academia. And thirdly, this tradition, slightly modified, has been continued in recent postcolonial models of

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Kirsteen Kim’s argument in favor of the specific character of dialogical prophetism by referring to the work of John Levison: Kirsteen Kim, *Jesus, Mission and the Holy Spirit in Luke–Acts: Dialogue, Prophecy and Life*, in Ross and Bevans, *Mission*, 34-47 [No. 3]. Kim talks about dichotomies instead of aporias. For an analogous argumentation on behalf of a mission that is fully aware of its powerlessness in terms of using pressure against people of other convictions such as “Either you believe this, or ...!” cf. the well reflected practical missiology of the Roman Catholic Pastoral Theologian Ottmar Fuchs, *Die Selbstabschaffung einer bestimmten Notwendigkeitsvorstellung macht christliche Mission notwendig*, in *Beiheft zur Ökumenischen Rundschau* (BÖR) 115 (2017) 39-64.

<sup>11</sup> Regarding the variety of different and equally valuable theologies including practical, such as liturgical formats already Walter Hollenweger talked about the need of the dialogue between different cultural shapes from inside and outside the church in order to come to a common listening of Christians and people of other faiths on the word of God Spirit; cf. Walter Hollenweger, *Umgang mit Mythen: Interkulturelle Theologie II* (München: Kaiser, 1982), 175.

missiology, like that of the Catholic colleague from Osnabrück University, Margit Eckholt: on the basis of the twentieth-century Jesuit Michel de Certeau's work she considers mission to stand for the "mystical search process"<sup>12</sup> seeking a "new language" for expressing the experience of God in faith and life. This language is emerging among people of different cultures and religions.<sup>13</sup> And in this field on the Protestant side, I would name our American-German colleague Marion Grau: mission according to Grau cannot continue being built on universalist theories of theology that would quickly work out as self-defending in an imperial indoctrination method. Instead, theological concepts need to respect the basic aporias of mission and seek a dialogical way out. She states: "The question is not whether or not this [sc. the culturization impact on people and their lives] occurs but how! Does the gospel function to compel us to become more disciplined members of our own ... cultures, or subvert the very terms of these cultures?"<sup>14</sup> And she answers: the gospel is to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable. That implies a silent ruling of capacities as that of Jesus in terms of a divine surprise re-defining general value-systems, a trickster.<sup>15</sup> Mission represents a process of interaction of people with different religious resources recognizing losses of interaction, but then turning to a common path of "discernment" between "patterns we may want to affirm from those we need to resist and discourage".<sup>16</sup> Such

polydox sense of mission avoids talk of an essence ... of mission, it resists aggressive absolutisms and defeatist dissolutions. It resists the progressive tendency of being "ashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ" in reaction ... to

<sup>12</sup> Margit Eckholt, *Gast eines Anderen werden. Glaubensanalyse mit Michel de Certeau in Zeiten interkultureller und interreligiöser Begegnungen* (Ostfildern: Matthias Grünewald Verlag, 2020), 39f. (translated by the author).

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 39f., 55, passim. Similarly, Anh Q. Tran, *Experience Seeking Faith: From Theology of Religions to Interreligious Theology*, in Irvin and Phan, *Christian Mission*, 209-227, 210, with his definition for present-day relevant Contextual Theology as an "experience seeking understanding that leads to faith".

<sup>14</sup> Marion Grau, *Rethinking Mission in the Postcolony. Salvation, Society and Subversion* (London: T&T Clark International, 2011), 284; cf. also Bevans and Schroeder, *Prophetic Dialogue*, 12f.

<sup>15</sup> Grau, *Rethinking Mission*, 12, 18, 45, passim. Cf. to this charming imagination of Christ's work as juggler, dancer or comedian in many Asian artistic formats of Christology, as e.g., the "Dancing Jesus" with Theo Sundermeier and Jürgen Moltmann, *Totentänze – Tanz des Lebens* (Frankfurt/M.: Lembeck, 2006).

<sup>16</sup> Grau, *Rethinking Mission*, 287.

conservative imperial missions ... It resists the reduction of mission to development work and affirms the careful, holistic, embodiment of polydox Christianities that can affirm the truths and gifts of other religions.<sup>17</sup>

Thus, mission is neither reserved to those who embark on a strategy of expansion nor is it appropriate to bash it off as a kind of shameful annoyance for people of other faiths. At present, indeed the study of religions at German universities sometimes suffers from a tendency to go with a witness-less account of the Christian faith as well as of other faiths and vice versa only the conservative Evangelical universities are seen as taking the issue of witnessing their faith seriously; according to my view, this represents the continuation of a counterproductive and painful diastasis between theology and religious studies.

## ***2 Prophetic Dialogue – Learning from Contexts and Witnessing to the Gospel Closely Intertwined***

On the backdrop of this prehistory, at least in its early periods until about 2010, Stephen Bevans and Roger Schroeder have been looking for a contemporary way to conceive “mission”<sup>18</sup> by keeping together two dimensions, that of *dialogue*—in terms of being open for and learning from a context—as well as that of *witnessing* to the Gospel of God’s transformative presence for the world in Jesus Christ and its vitality of the generally culturally-receptive, but often also counter-cultural

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. Cf. the basic declarations on the (a) fundamental-theological as well as on the (b) ecumenical and together with these on (c) interreligious dimensions of adequate mission studies today and in the future with Mariano Delgado, *Wo steht die Missionswissenschaft?* (Editorial), in *ZMR* 107 (1-2.2023) 5f.; as well as the article of Franz Gmainer-Pranzl, *Missionstheologie postsäkular*, in *ibid.*, 7-12, and the one of Judith Gruber, *Decolonizing Theology?*, *ibid.*, 13-19. With their works Delgado, Gmainer-Pranzl and Gruber, in an ecumenical spirit, have taken up and reconfirmed guiding missiological documents of the recent past such as: Wissenschaftliche Gesellschaft für Theologie (WGTh) and Verwaltungsrat der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Missionswissenschaft (DGMW), *Missionswissenschaft als Interkulturelle Theologie und ihr Verhältnis zur Religionswissenschaft*, in *ZMiss* 31 (2005) 376-382.

<sup>18</sup> See Stephen B. Bevans and Roger P. Schroeder, *Constants in Context. A Theology of Mission for Today* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2004), 35-72. This was not a “rehash of the idea of interreligious dialogue ... as prophetic dialogue” (so Michael Biehl writes in *ÖR* 70 [4.2021] 433); it rather aimed at a re-conception of mission in a fundamental manner.

speech and act against all kinds of death-bringing forces.<sup>19</sup> How did they go about it?

Like many Christians, the Catholic Congregation of the *Missionaries of the Divine Word* (SVD) searched for new ways in mission at the end of the twentieth century. They talked about the need of “passing over to” [in a sense of “opening up to”] new strands and methods beyond the traditional ministries of church services, schools, diaconal services. A credible witness in the future should consist of the witnessing persons being present with the people in terms of making a difference in their life situations.<sup>20</sup> In this search for a format of “life witness”—i. e., a person who leads by example and thereby becomes a witness for their faith—the brotherhood basically followed the “action-scientific” methodical triad of “Seeing – Judging – Acting”,<sup>21</sup> marking a spiritual, social, and political act that moves between theological reflection and practice. So, one can describe their new practical missiological concept focusing on three categories of (i) emphatic gospel communication, (ii) judgment and self-recognition as well as (iii) acting in accordance with these guidelines.

### 2.1 A Holistic and Dialogical Type of Communication

The gospel shall not be bluntly shouted out and thrown before the people, but rather proclaimed by ways of a living witness. Such proclamation calls for a broader word-of-God-conception too. Here “word” does not just imply an oral or written articulation, but rather the eternal *promise* of the gracious God doing what it says in the Creative dialogue between the Speaker-Creator and the creatures (Isa 55:10f.). It is a *Word of God in word and deed* as a basis for “doing theology” at its

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Dawn Nothwehr, The Church’s Mission of Ecojustice: A Prophetic Dialogue Approach, in Ross and Bevans, *Mission*, 87-105 [No. 6 (p. 3)]; Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2002).

<sup>20</sup> Bevans and Schroeder, *Constants in Context*, 361ff., as well as Bevans and Schroeder, *Prophetic Dialogue*, 19ff.

<sup>21</sup> According to Norbert Brieden and Johannes Heger, Handlungswissenschaft, in *Das wissenschaftlich-religionspädagogische Lexikon im Internet* (2018), 5f., <<http://www.bibelwissenschaft.de/stichwort/200258/>>, accessed 3 April 2023, this triple action-scientific paradigm goes back to the Belgian priest Joseph Cardijn (1920s) and was used in the papal instruction of John XXIII, *Mater et magistra* (15.05.1961), 236, for the first time. Today it is a stable factor in practical theological research. Another methodical basic thesis of the SVD missionaries says that they always follow the four dimensions of (i) communication; (ii) the biblical apostolate; (iii) missionary awareness-building; and (iv) the campaign of “Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation” (JPIC).

best, namely a practiced theology. Or in ecclesiological terms: The church as an allegedly saving institution does not possess (in a sense of “owning”) this word of God and the exclusive authority to interpret it, but in the best possible case caused by the Spirit’s breath, the Word emerges as a socially-incarnated personal format of God’s word in dialogue with the addressees.<sup>22</sup> The function of a missional church, then, is that of an attentively-listening conversation partner or go-between, quite often acting by the authority of a beggar (2 Cor 5:20).

### 2.2 *A Judgment in Dialogical Respect and Self-Recognition*

Biblical lessons and liturgies in this new conception are not only activating internal suppositions and truths, just inside the soul or inside the church, but rather suppositions “aligning oneself with God’s purposes in the world”<sup>23</sup> in transformative speech and aspiration. Here theological judgments are not prefabricated truths but emerging in sharing the Word with others.

### 2.3 *A Holistic and Dialogical Acting*

Dialogical acting as third step in this circle does not exhaust itself in common ethical investment and action in resolutions of social ethical campaigns. Rather, it involves the respectful welcoming of intercultural theological research communities at best leading to reconciliatory co-operations between social, political, cultural, ideological, generational,<sup>24</sup> generic and surely also religious counterparts.

<sup>22</sup> Hans Waldenfels, *Mission und Prophetie*, in Delgado and Sievernich, *Mission und Prophetie*, 23-35, especially 25-29, building on the E. Schillebeeckx quotation from 1999: “A small boy is said to once have remarked, ‘People are the words with which God tells his story’” (ibid., 25) expresses this effective and prophetic character of God’s word which at the same time includes a personal and dialogical conception of revelation in a compact and exemplary form. Waldenfels (ibid., 30) even refers to the apostle Paul’s theology as a proto-example of a Theology of Witness by successive “self-transcending” of the witness into the communication between God and the world by expecting everything that can ensue from God’s wisdom alone.

<sup>23</sup> Bevans and Schroeder, *Constants in Context*, 367. At this point we are reminded of the headline by which mission has been reflected.’ in recent WCC world conferences such as in the last WMC at Arusha 2018: *Transforming discipleship*.

<sup>24</sup> This specific dimension occurs for instance between baby boomers and millennials. Andrew F. Bush and Carolyn C. Wason, *Millennials and the mission of God: a prophetic dialogue*, <<http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/fh-hermannsburg/detail.action?docID=5220493>>, accessed 18 February 2023, present a dialogue showing how baby boomers were much more confident

Altogether, the SVD brothers pointed out four partner-situations in specific for the present age: (a) dialogue with people who have no faith community, (b) dialogue with people impoverished for a variety of reasons, (c) dialogue with the people of other faiths,<sup>25</sup> and (d) dialogue with believers and nonbelievers of different cultural backgrounds.

When after that the question came up how the dialogical dimensions in all witnessing go together with counter-cultural critique from the gospel perspective the SVD society in their General Chapter meeting in June 2000 discussed and characteristically amended their equivalent conception of mission to be “Prophetic Dialogue” (PD).<sup>26</sup> Of course, one argument against this conceptual pair has been an apparent contradiction between the intentions of prophecy on the one and a dialogue on the other hand. At the same time there have been attempts in Roman Catholic missiology as well as in the ecumenical negotiations on a renewed missiology to give more profile to a holistic conception of mission, as e. g., for advocacy as a crucial transformative section of

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that their religion would make a difference in world and politics compared to the millennials who are not as confident. Yet, both of them trust in the Gospel—the baby boomers more in a sense of “knowing the truth” and the millennials by respecting various positions in dialogue and relying on the Spirit’s power.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. José A. da Silva, *Prophetic Dialogue. Identity and Mission of the Divine Word Missionaries* (Siegburg: Franz Schmitt Verlag, 2021), 154. The former threefold dialogue practice (1) of life, (2) of action, and (3) of theology in the 1980s under the presupposition of *convivence* of religions in societies of a globalized world was complemented by the fourth type (4) of religious experience [rituals] by Theo Sundermeier; cf. for that Andreas Renz, *Interreligiöser Dialog*, <[https://www.staatslexikon-online.de/Lexikon/Interreligiöser\\_Dialog](https://www.staatslexikon-online.de/Lexikon/Interreligiöser_Dialog)>, accessed 7 August 2023. Unfortunately, the fourth type has been neglected and still lacks adequate reflection in its theology. Regarding the basic attitudes and reflections needed for a fair dialogue, I side with Klaus von Stosch, *Zur Möglichkeit und Unmöglichkeit des interreligiösen Dialogs. Untersuchungen im Anschluss an Catherine Cornille*, in *Ethik und Gesellschaft* (2.2011): Religionsprojektionen, 1-24. He (ibid., 3-17) has pointed out five basic attitudes: (1) doctrinal and epistemological humbleness, (2) confessional connectedness with one’s own tradition, (3) assumption of commensurability and difference, (4) empathy and kind attention towards each other, (5) hospitality for the possible truth of the “other.” Da Silva, *Prophetic Dialogue*, 179, refers especially to No. (2) by saying: “True interreligious dialogue demands that each religion—and each believer of that religion—assumes that which identifies it, even those elements which separate it from other beliefs or contradict them.”

<sup>26</sup> Christian Tauchner, *The Basis for Prophetic Dialogue – Remembering the SVD General Chapter 2000*, in *Verbum SVD* 63 (2022) 356-378, 365; cf. da Silva, *Prophetic Dialogue*, 270-300.

theology in public witness in terms of “Prophetic mission”.<sup>27</sup> But besides the arguments in favor of PD as equivalent for mission brought by Stephen Bevans himself as well as by Christian Tauchner<sup>28</sup> the above mentioned basic *dialogical* foundation of all witnessing theologizing on the background of recent insights of postcolonial critique<sup>29</sup>—at least on the level of theological hermeneutics as “production of knowledge”—according to the author’s view speaks in favor of the equivalent of PD for mission as the more convincing variant. Interestingly, the discussion of PD among missiologists and scholars of Intercultural Theology and Religious Studies has grown into an ecumenical discourse<sup>30</sup> especially during the recent decade. Unfortunately, until today German missiologists have not reacted in specific manners to this proposal.<sup>31</sup>

More on the specific historic theological rationale for that will follow immediately in the next section of this article.

As for myself, after reviewing the conditions of communication and intercultural participation in a new conception of mission I now turn to the very central question constantly at stake in missiologies of today: when speaking about God’s salvific communication with and

<sup>27</sup> Cf. especially the impressive ecumenical collocation of missiologists’ thoughts on “Mission and Prophecy”, in Delgado and Sievernich, *Mission und Prophetie*, in which a prophetic emphasis of mission is made plausible, but not yet seen in its irrefutable connectedness to a dialogical proclamation and witness, as then more and more made plausible by Stephen Bevans and colleagues from the SVD during the last decade. For a similar attempt to strengthen the life transforming and prophetic aspects of Christian mission in the field of Protestant missiology see recent volume *ÖR* 70 (4.2021) on “Prophetic mission”.

<sup>28</sup> Tauchner as in fn 21; for Bevans see his comment on “Together towards Life” in *Verbum SVD* 56 (2015) 146-159, especially 156f.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Judith Gruber, *Heil/-ung dekolonisieren. Grenzgänge zwischen Theologie und Postkolonialer Theorie*, in *ÖR* 70 (1.2021) 7-27, 27.

<sup>30</sup> The clearest proof for that one can see in the ecumenically co-edited volume of Ross and Bevans, *Mission*, in which at least six theologians from Protestant denominational background cooperate with the Roman Catholic sisters and brothers.

<sup>31</sup> The most prolific recent German-speaking survey on mission theologies just marginally mentions PD as an example for the “search for the ‘lowest common denominator’ in present missiology”, Henning Wrogemann, *Missionstheologien der Gegenwart. Globale Entwicklungen, kontextuelle Profile und ökumenische Herausforderungen*, Lehrbuch Interkulturelle Theologie/ Missionswissenschaft, Vol. 2 (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2013), 411 [English edition: *Theologies of Mission*. Translated by Karl E. Böhmer, Intercultural Theology Vol. Two, Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2018]. Others do not refer to it at all or in a misconceived manner, cf. footnote 18.

transformation of the creation, which concept of God molds mission? Is it a philosophical interpretation of God such as, for example, Anselm's *aliquid quo nihil maius cogitari possit* (something than which nothing greater can be conceived) or any conception based on a concrete revelatory experience and expressed in confessional terms?

Such a contemporary conception of God must offer an opportunity to keep to the basic conviction of Christians that God has decisively revealed Godself in and through the preexisting and in the Spirit-fulfilled *Word of Life* in Christ Jesus, and yet that this revelation and its eschatological recognition cannot be bound to an historical-ecclesial adherence alone.

This brings us to the question: what does salvation—or more specifically “communion in salvation”—mean; who determines what it means; and how do the anthropological and cultural values of an individual affect this judgement? In connection with this, “culture” surely can comprise more than a set of information, values or habits. According to Rosalia Meza, referring to Paulo Freire, it involves “a systematic acquisition of human experience but as creative assimilation, not as information storing.”<sup>32</sup>

This complex carries us on to the inevitable question: who actually is the authorizing and acting subject of mission? And: which role does the church play in this?

### ***3 The Conception of Missio Dei Triunius as Theological Corrective to Wrong Ways and Fertile Ground for Prophetic Dialogue as Equivalent to Mission***

Like many around the globe, the SVD have tried to anchor their concept of “Prophetic Dialogue” in the renowned formula *Missio Dei* (MD) stating as follows: “Because mission is the work of the Triune God, and the Spirit blows where it wills, the Church carries out its service to the Kingdom in collaboration with other faith communities and all people of good will.”<sup>33</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Rosalia Meza, *Toward a New, Praxis-Oriented Missiology: Rediscovering Paulo Freire's Concept of Conscientização and Enhancing Christian Mission as Prophetic Dialogue*, 2020, 50, <<http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/fh-hermannsburg/detail.action?docID=6318572>>, accessed 2 March 2023.

<sup>33</sup> Statement of the SVD 15<sup>th</sup> General Chapter (GC) 2000: *Listening to the Spirit: Our Missionary Response Today*, July 14, 2000, No. 44, quoted after Tauchner, Basis, 371. Christian Tauchner (ibid., 356) speaks of *Missio Dei* as “the hidden and forgotten pearl” of Roman Catholic missiology. And yet, he doubts that the anchoring of the PD conception of the SVD in MD theol-



Yet, such and similarly habitual referencing to MD in academic as well as popular texts in many cases implies that the speakers who make MD into a kind of *mantra* of all and any kind of social and cultural “improvement” (sometimes in an almost neo-colonial attitude vis-à-vis people of the *Global South*) are not fully aware of the specific theological implications of their utilization of a conception that only appears to be generally agreeable.<sup>34</sup> In reality, one will find neither a broad agreement on the Trinitarian mode of MD,<sup>35</sup> nor is it clear how the goal of the Kingdom of God shall be interpreted or how the “Spirit’s blowing” and the salvation through Christ could come together for people of different faiths. On top of that: in too many of the cases of people referring to the formula, it “may induce [one] to believe that if God is doing whatever mission is supposed to achieve, then missionaries are sidelined and have nothing to do”.<sup>36</sup> At the end of the day they consider this worn-out narrative as a mere abstraction shifted “to the God who can be interpreted along transcendental lines. Mission ... is no longer seen as a human act of discipleship in *response* to God in space–time...”<sup>37</sup> and in the consequence liable to any deliberate meanings. This state of affairs approves that church has been understood as a holy inner circle instead of a witnessing community on behalf of the creatures’ salvation, rather than seeing the church as offering the

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ogy has been successful. Cf. Christian Tauchner, Dialog in weitem Horizont. *Missio Dei* im Grund des Steyler Missionsengagements, in *ZMR* 107 (1-2.2023) 50-55.

<sup>34</sup> Thus, again recently observed by Dorottya Nagy, Behind *Missio Dei*. Reflections on the International Missionary Council’s 1952, Willingen, Germany, Conference – One Possible Way of Commemorating after Seventy Years, in *Verbum SVD* 63 (2022) 161-188, 162ff., as already stated by Philip L. Wickeri, The End of *Missio Dei*, in Volker Küster, ed., *Mission Revisited. Between Mission History and Intercultural Theology* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2010), 27-43, 41, and by myself frequently, too, cf. Wilhelm Richebächer, *Missio Dei: The Basis of Mission Theology or a Wrong Path?*, in *IRM* 92, No. 367 (Oct. 2003) 588-605, 591f.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Jean-Daniel Plüss, Called to God’s Mission. Notes on the Third Document of the International Reformed-Pentecostal Dialogue, in *Pneuma* 42 (2.2020); or: Perry Schmidt-Leukel, Eine christliche und pluralistische Theologie der Religionen, in Polykarp Ulin Agan, ed., *Pluralistische Religionstheologie und Mission* (Nettetal: Steyler Verlag, 2011), 31-54, 51ff.

<sup>36</sup> Tauchner, Basis, 374. Cf. John Flett, *The Witness of God. The Trinity, Missio Dei, Karl Barth, and the Nature of Christian Community* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2010), 9f.

<sup>37</sup> Michael N.-C. Poon, Mission Is Antitheoretical: Listening and the Disclosing of the Primal Vision, in Philip Groves, ed., *The Anglican Communion and Homosexuality. A Resource to Enable Listening and Dialogue* (London: Anglican Consultative Council, 2008), 38f.

mobile word of the reconciling God and understanding the Triune God as a God on the way with God's creatures in history.

This deliberate and nebulous usage of the MD formula frequently goes along either with an attitude of self-protection of MD-ideologizers, to bolster themselves against criticism or any format of self-empowerment in the shade of MD.<sup>38</sup> Obviously, the MD formula tries to shift all responsibility for the "dirty mission business" throughout history away from oneself and from the church onto God, thereby diluting any constructive-critical missiology. This turn in mission theology was not only abrupt but a step in the direction of a self-abandonment of mission theology, as a solid Trinitarian foundation of MD is heading towards a dialogical, encounter-related understanding of mission. Therefore, the most urgent task is to sensitize the church and theology for its theological grounding.<sup>39</sup>

In agreement with Dorottya Nagy, to me that means, instead of just engaging in further "historiography of *missio Dei*",<sup>40</sup> or instead of avoiding or even ruling out its usage altogether,<sup>41</sup> one has to clarify why and how the Trinitarian concept of God and the interconnection between the divine and the ecclesial communication can best serve as a fertile and vitalizing ground of a prophetic dialogue. In my mind, the key lies in a pneumatologically-focused understanding of *Missio Dei Triunius* (MDT).<sup>42</sup> In order to activate such an understanding one

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Sarosh Koshy, *Beyond Missio Dei. Contesting Mission, Rethinking Witness*, Postcolonialism and Religions (Cham: Springer/Palgrave Macmillan, 2022).

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Wickeri, *End of Missio Dei*, 42f. Cf. Wilhelm Richebächer, *Deutsche Evangelische Weltmission nach 1945 im Spannungsfeld von Schuldbekenntnis, Existenzkrise und theologischer Vergewisserung* [highlighted here!], in *ZMiss* 48 (1.2022) 210-228.

<sup>40</sup> Nagy, *Behind Missio Dei*, 163. I basically agree with her, though certain conceptual derivations, often denominationally standardized (cf. Bevans and Schroeder, *Constants in Context*, 289f., referring to Augustine as point of departure) are important instruments against most volatile and arbitrary later usages.

<sup>41</sup> So finally, Wickeri, *End of Missio Dei*, 42f.

<sup>42</sup> Following the work of the Council for World Mission/WCC since Athens WMC of 2005, I think this procedure is on the way already, but not yet sufficiently elaborated. In this direction, Dorottya Nagy in her analysis of the chances of the MD concept proves to have a good theological flair assuming that in Willingen there was also a trace to a pneumatological interpretation of the formula as "Missio Spiritus": the Anglican participant Frederick William Dillistone's contribution to the assembly "The dispensation of the Spirit" (in Goodall, *Missions under the Cross*, 81-92) implies the idea in prospects like that: "Just as the reformation of the sixteenth century

must not play a “Spirit-card” against a “Christ-card”, which happened when in the 1960s, in many ecumenical circles, the originally Christological focus was replaced by a diffuse interpretation such as “God is at work wherever some social and developmental progress is underway”.<sup>43</sup> So, in all re-conceptions of both perspectives, the Christological as well as the pneumatological must be interpreted as complementary. Yet, in the following presentation of a pneumatologically-focused MDT I strictly keep to the Holy Spirit perspective, as from this junction the full spectrum of the Triune God’s working as a humanly *and* creaturely-experienced God is coming into the picture.

The two proponents of “Prophetic Dialogue”, Stephen Bevans and Roger Schroeder, in their own creative language address the same matter by saying: we have to describe God “as a verb”.<sup>44</sup> I would rather say “in verbal terms”, in a sense of activity-based terms. Meaning<sup>45</sup> that the Holy Spirit is enabling humans to empirically realize God’s active presence in coming to trust in Christ, being “called”, “collected” in a new community and saved and glorified in hope for eternal life. And even more than that: This Spirit works in and through them so that God’s redeeming love can be shared with others by those who have received it.<sup>46</sup> The Holy Spirit as “God empirically encountered” in three processes of God-encounters can be traced thus,

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had turned upon Justification by the Son, so that of our own day [sc. 1952] might be centred upon the activity of the Spirit...”, Dillistone, *ibid.*, 87.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Richebächer, *Missio Dei*, 592f. Such unfortunate one-sided interpretation of MD continues still, as one can learn from the controversial discussion reported in *Christliches Glaubenszeugnis in der Begegnung mit Muslimen* (Akademische Fachtagung an der Kirchlichen Hochschule Wuppertal/Bethel am 21.6.2016), in *epd-Dokumentation* 30 (2016).

<sup>44</sup> Bevans and Schroeder, *Prophetic Dialogue*, 4, 9ff. Of course, when talking about the three different functions of the fatherly-creating, filially-liberating and spiritually-revealing MDT, we do not speak about three different essential dimensions of God, but about three human designations of the three works of the Holy Trinity that are fundamentally always works of the Whole Trinity in interrelation.

<sup>45</sup> With reference to Martin Luther’s explanation of the third article of faith in the Large Catechism 1529.

<sup>46</sup> One of the first modern theologians who strictly tied the theological themes of Holy Spirit and Mission together was the Anglican missionary and missiologist Roland Allen talking about the Holy Spirit as subject or actor of mission; cf. on this Jan A. B. Jongeneel, *Ecumenical, Evangelical and Pentecostal/Charismatic Views on Mission as a Movement of the Holy Spirit*, in Jan A. B. Jongeneel et al., eds., *Pentecost, Mission and Ecumenism. Essays on Intercultural Theology*. FS W. Hollenweger (Frankfurt/M.: Peter Lang, 1992), 231-246.

- (1) In the first “Original Encounter with God” the Triune God’s *universal* mission was and is awaking creatures to life by God’s self-giving spirit-breath and through God’s imprinting filial word of promise<sup>47</sup>: “I want to live with you: be there!” Creatures become themselves with the surprise of a breath of relational warmth, instead of being constructed by a cold force or stepping out of themselves just by themselves. This “person-” or “creature-constituting act” of Creation is accomplished by the infusion of the life-breath into all living beings (Gen 1:30; soul-constitution and breath-finding as one process in terms of the Hebrew word *nêfeš*), so that intimate correspondence, but also estrangement, is possible, as indeed in human *hybris* (“sin”). Thus, God’s creative acts are missional events of surprising Spiritual nearness, as well as of critical reassessment. This applies to manifold religious value systems. They are considered to be not just preparatory stages of a specific Salvation history,<sup>48</sup> but God’s creation, universally re-presenting the Triune God in all that is.
- (2) This universal experience of God’s mission in all Creation, so Christians in togetherness with their mother religion Judaism confess, in the second and “Redemptive God-Encounter” was deepened and reviewed in historical particularity, i. e., in the Triune God’s *historical* mission, beginning with God’s faith covenant to Abraham and his descendants. So, Israel’s prophets and kings were spiritually anointed and Israel as a whole became the primary example of God’s grace for all people. And the conception of God was fundamentally reimagined in the encounter with Jesus of Nazareth as the human imbued with the Spirit. Here, one person opened a new humanity for God and divinity for humans in his life, ministry and crucifixion,

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Amos Yong, *Primed for the Spirit: Creation, Redemption and the Missio Spiritus*, in *IRM* 100 (2.2011) 355-366, 356ff.; and earlier Jürgen Moltmann, *Gott in der Schöpfung. Ökologische Schöpfungslehre* (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1985), 106-115. With both of them, Creation equiprimordially is happening *through* the eternal Logos and *in* the Spirit.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Timothy Tennent, *Invitation to World Missions. A Trinitarian Missiology for the Twenty-first Century* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2010), 70f., referring to Kwame Bediako’s view of Primal African religious tradition.

instead of juxtaposing both [later named Christ's "priestly office" (Matt 3:4)]. The filial spirit opened them to the experience of healing, freedom and forgiveness and also revolutionized their thinking about God away from being simply a boring "super human" detached from the world to a loving counterpart [all later summarized under Christ's "prophetic office" (Luke 4)]. And it broke down all cultural walls for a border-crossing peace [(Matt 8; 5:15) later taken under Christ's "royal office" (Phil 2:5ff.)], endorsing in a specific manner the "salvific value"<sup>49</sup> of cultures.

- (3) Thirdly, in the "consummatory God-encounter", the Fatherly-Motherly Spirit—operating on Christ's behalf and in pentecostal joy as the Triune God's "*accomplishing* mission"—enabled any human heart and any creature's longing to freely (as communally and individually reconciled persons) move towards a new heaven and a new world by giving their lives to the transformation [Rom 12:1f.] from the "old rule" of hatred and violence to a new rule of justice. Those called into Christ Jesus' discipleship could not any longer leave the world just as it was, but had to spiritually discern its values. And even in all that, believers must symbolically anticipate the reign of the new heaven<sup>50</sup> through plenty of personal, socio- as well as eco-political acts of penance and re-construction and in strongest hope of the salvation to come [Col 1; 1 Cor 15; Rom 11].<sup>51</sup>

Approaching the MD conception from such a circular Trinitarian encounter in God's Spirit, the most compact theological support I have found on the side of Pentecostal systematics comes from Amos Yong,

<sup>49</sup> Lamin Sanneh, The horizontal and the vertical in mission: an African perspective, in *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 7 (4.1983) 165-171, 170. Tennent, Invitation, 179, 181, uses similar attributes in connection with his Trinitarian missiological modification of all theology. His otherwise impressive work yet seems to carry the weakness that the three persons of the Trinity are functioning in an almost modalistic manner with a tendency to subordinate God Spirit to become an agent only in the works of creation, redemption and consummation. Yong, Primed, 357, rightly detects in such an approach a tendency to "interiorize or subjectivize the Spirit's presence and activity".

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Yong, Primed, 359-361.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 362-364.

and on the more traditional missiological side from John Flett's excellent doctoral dissertation.<sup>52</sup>

Comprehensively, I would say: this concept of an MDT includes a three-fold dialogical enablement of trust and confession as well as action in solidarity: first, a "Christology of mutual devotedness" as well as of "Immiscibility of the Human/Creaturely and the Divine"<sup>53</sup>: God in order to be Godself reaches beyond Godself to the Creation as beloved counterpart. Second, a pneumatology of "Mutual Encounter between the manifestations of the Spirit of creation and accomplishment and the decisive witness of the Spirit of Christ for salvation". And by this, third, an ecclesiology of preparing a community of Christians world-wide to relate to people of other faiths accordingly with a hope for overcoming all splits, implanting the truth that the church in order to be itself is to reach beyond itself by sharing the gospel and life in solidarity with all.<sup>54</sup>

After all, for the future use of the formula of *Missio Dei* I summarize: the concept of an MDT should not be taken as a strategic key to shifting the origin and responsibility of all mission to a transcendental beyond, nor as a release for believers from any and all activity. Rather it can serve:

<sup>52</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 365f.; Flett, *Witness of God*, 196-239; cf. also the support from my home university's emeritus systematic theologian Hans-Martin Barth (Mission trinitarisch. Die Mission des dreieinen Gottes im Kontext nicht-christlicher Religionen, Unpublished presentation, 2011). I correspond to all of them in my hypothesis of today by building a bridge to the practical concept of "Prophetic Dialogue".

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Amos Yong, Christological Constants in Shifting Contexts: Jesus Christ, Prophetic Dialogue and the Missio Spiritus in a Pluralistic World, in Ross and Bevans, *Mission*, 19-33 [No. 2].

<sup>54</sup> So Flett, *Witness of God*, 196-236, especially 206. Quite near to these (basically Barthian) arguments is the theological reasoning of Flett; also Stephen Bevans, *Missio Dei and Missio Ecclesiae: Trinitarian Mission, Theosis, and the Missionary Nature of the Church*, in Jacob Kavunkal and Christian Tauchner, *Mission beyond Ad Gentes. A Symposium* (Siegburg: Franz Schmitt Verlag, 2016), 17-30, 27, circumscribes the unequal but yet existing equivalence between God's self-transcendence in the God Spirit's creation, salvation and accomplishment with the church's way of sharing itself by being itself: "Only by reaching beyond ourselves toward God do we attain our full potential as human beings. This 'reaching beyond', which we follow as Christians in our community and sacramental life and in our lives of service, is a way of sharing the very life of God, who is communion and self-giving as such in Trinitarian *perichoresis*."

- (1) first, as a *regulative concept* of missiological hermeneutics reminding<sup>55</sup> human witnesses of their dependence on the Triune God who revealed Godself as Spirit Power in the midst of diverse creaturely encounters;
- (2) secondly, to properly *discern the role of the church in God's mission* of being mandated with evangelistic and prophetic tasks and yet being herself transitory in character into an interculturally-oriented community of humble seekers of new experience with the gracious God and with attention toward justice. And inseparably
- (3) thirdly, this conception of MDT *adequately widens the area of God's mission's goal-setting*, namely salvation and reconciliation of all Creation with the creator and a relationship of justice and mutual respect between the creatures [not church-planting alone] while following the Spirit's transforming power toward the Kingdom of God.

After looking at this result, I almost fully agree with the recent research on future usage of the concept *Missio Dei* by Andreas Jansson.<sup>56</sup> As visible from my former work, I join his attempt to find a middle way between an emphatic use of the formula and its complete abolition. What I welcome most in his article is the strengthening of the theological foundation of the formula in terms of *Missio Dei Triunius* as well

<sup>55</sup> Wickeri, *End of Missio Dei*, 41, speaks of "at its best when understood as a heuristic device", but finally foresees the end of *Missio Dei* as the "last grand narrative" (ibid.). The SVD workshop on *missio Dei* (Nov. 2<sup>nd</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> 2022) at Siegburg made the participants see the need to discern the Holy Spirit's work within human strategizing (cf. Acts 16:6), taking in the insights on God's Holy Spirit's work in Luke and Acts. Cf. to this again Kim, *Jesus, Mission and the Holy Spirit*. She shows that the authentic guidance by "the Holy Spirit" in Acts can be identified with the Risen Christ's guidance causing an attitude of (1) receptiveness to the Spirit as "God in dialogue" with Creation here and now, as well as humbleness with regard to one's own power to convince, as well as (2) respect for people's life situations as a corresponding context to God's speech, as well as trust in God's foregoing presence among the religious traditions, and brave and joyful engagement in a process of proclamation. But at the same time, (3) a confident awareness of the witnessing task only in the midst of this world, rather than only in the chamber of their church communities.

<sup>56</sup> Andreas Jansson, *Zwischen kopernikanischer Wende und trojanischem Pferd*, in *ZMiss* 46 (2020) 401-419.

as—in common with Jacques Matthey—his rehabilitation of the “non-derogable Ecclesiological and Evangelistic dimension”<sup>57</sup> of the concept.

#### ***4 Embodied Intercultural Hermeneutics and Witness as Prophetic Dialogue in Practice***

In my last part I am going to present a field where the previously acknowledged category of Prophetic Dialogue can prove successful, that of ecological ethics. But before turning to that, I must re-visit how rapidly changing contexts of theological dialogues, all comprised under the catchall term “globalization”, notoriously affect the system and goals of advanced intercultural communication.

##### *4.1 Changing Presuppositions of Intercultural Theological Understanding*

We first briefly reconsider what the multifaceted and controversially discussed context of globalization implies now, in spring 2023: previously held cultural political hopes for a more just world economy, a better communication system for more and more people or an increase of democratically-structured governments have been disillusioned:

1. *Politically*, the Russian war against Ukraine beginning in February 2022 publicly unmasked the long emerging return of brutal violence into the range of globally established and leading political toolboxes, where fighting for elementary resources and keeping one’s own wealth against others is worth more than millions of human lives. But let us not end up in an error of cheap one-sidedness: it is not only Russian rulers who opt for violence and autocracy; if one sees how in Western societies democratic participation is being disorganized,<sup>58</sup> one must assume that a badly-practiced democracy can produce violence just as well as violent autocracy does.
2. *Economically*, the world’s production, trading as well as financial markets move away from the aforementioned free dominance of multinational companies,

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 418 (translated by the author).

<sup>58</sup> It seems that urgent reforms of democratic discourse and procedures of decision making are due and one cannot just go on relying on occasionally raising “majority votes”.



back to the bipolar ideology of the Cold War period before 1989. Observing the development on this year's conference of the BRICS states in Johannesburg in August one could even assume that a very strong bipolar economic structure of politically and culturally quite diverse, but anti-capitalistically oriented "BRICS plus" states on the one hand and the until now so-called "G7" Industrial Western states—at least on the Economic level—is awaiting us.

3. *Ecologically*, the most urgent needs for international co-action in working against global warming, water shortages, food insecurity and lack of sustainable energy are steadily falling off the international agenda (mainly due to numbers 1 and 2).
4. *Technologically*<sup>59</sup> and concerning the use and misuse of mass media, the tendency toward 100% political control and steady observation of independent journalism in many authoritarian states seems to become stronger every month.
5. *Culturally and religiously*, some still would agree with Manfred Ernst and Peter Berger who, as recently as 2002, opined that, "evangelical Protestantism, especially in its pentecostal version, is the most popular movement serving as a vehicle of cultural globalization".<sup>60</sup> But there can be no doubt about the attempts of cultural-political ideologies around the globe to counter all emancipating effects by a return to totalitarian and ethnocentric "remedies" against the allegedly pernicious ethical value systems in more egalitarian societies.

With this backdrop we have to realize that any universally applicable system of cultural values such as the canons of public international law [in German *Völkerrecht*] or human rights throughout history have mainly been born out of necessity (after cruel war experiences) and did not spring from the rational considerations of most people. Again,

<sup>59</sup> Cf. the article of Andrian Kreye "Kontrollverlust", in *Süddeutsche Zeitung* 17.04.2023, p. 3 on the rapid development of AI.

<sup>60</sup> Peter Berger, The Cultural Dynamics of Globalization, in Peter Berger and Samuel Huntington, eds., *Many Globalizations – Cultural Diversity in the Contemporary World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 8; quoted after Philip Gibbs, Globalization, in Lazar T. Stanislaus and vanThanh Nguyen, eds., *Missionary Discipleship in Global Contexts* (Siegburg: Franz Schmitt Verlag, 2018), 13-27, 24.

presently such systems of reliability are losing majority appeal, at least on the levels of widely shared convictions and of international diplomacy.<sup>61</sup> Of course, besides this, a sound ecumenism never only just tries to build on international diplomacy. Rather it believes that it lives from intercultural sisterhoods and friendships preparing people to search for common faith values in acts of “glocal” verification.<sup>62</sup> Whether this great ecumenical goal of building spiritual and mental bridges between people living in once again rising rival political blocks (as stated above under No. 2) will rise again among those carrying the World Council of Churches or many existing platforms of interreligious dialogue will materialize, or whether a scenario like that predicted by the American political scientist Samuel Huntington in the 1990s, namely a kind of new “Clash of Civilizations”, might reappear is a hotly discussed question as it was on the agenda about twenty years ago.

However, on the basis of my experience in intercultural theological lecturing and academic formation (between 2012 and 2022 at FIT) I know how complicated, but worthwhile a search for transcultural understanding and communion is. At the end of the day, engaging in this implies: Though we were heading for the goal of consensual understanding and reconciliation and step by step internalize the principle “listen and learn before you judge”,<sup>63</sup> our mutual understanding for

<sup>61</sup> This has been well analyzed by Hans Joas, *The Sacredness of the Person: A New Genealogy of Human Rights* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2013).

<sup>62</sup> In this I agree with Gibbs, *Globalization*, 26f. It is unnecessary to restate that, when we at the Faculty of the University of Applied Sciences for Intercultural Theology Hermannsburg (FIT) are talking about *interculturality*, we never just talk with the essentialist static concepts of culture, but rather a dynamic, dialogical judgement finding and movement in order “to emphasize and make more explicit the essential mutuality of the process of cultural interaction on both the personal and social level”. So Robert Kisala, Formation for Intercultural Life and Mission, in *Verbum SVD* 50 (3.2009) 331-345, 335.

<sup>63</sup> On this basis the author of this contribution together with the Faculty of the University of Applied Sciences for Intercultural Theology Hermannsburg (FIT) since its foundation in the year 2012 have been building a practical model of ecumenical and interreligious theological education. Simply speaking, the basis can be called a hermeneutics of “Coming together” instead of “Mutual downgrading”; cf. Wilhelm Richebächer, “Sprachfähigkeit”. Ausbildungsziel in interkulturell-theologischer Perspektive, in Bernd Schröder, ed., *Pfarrer oder Pfarrerin werden und sein. Herausforderungen für Beruf und theologische Bildung in Studium, Vikariat und Fortbildung*, Veröffentlichungen der Wissenschaftlichen Gesellschaft für Theologie 61 (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2020), 527-543. Unfortunately, this model of practically oriented and new professional formats envisaging theological and diaconal education terminates in the year 2025 for

fundamental reasons never takes place in full objectivity. Therefore, in intercultural theology as well as missiology it is not the task to avoid subjective positional truth claims, but rather to balance them with the fostering of dialogues on eye-level.

Because any process of cultural interaction demands an appreciation of personal, social, creaturely, gender, economic, religious relational differences instead of their simple levelling, but also not falling into the trap of overrating them. Johannes Weth offers a well elaborated spectrum of at least four major “Spaces of Experiencing Cultural Difference”<sup>64</sup> “and Convergence” (I would add here) as a hermeneutical blueprint for describing a balanced intercultural communication for the time being. He speaks of the four spaces in terms of “naturally encountered diversity”, “historically ascribed ethnicity”, “relationally assumed identity” and “societally assigned dispositives” between the (human!) partners involved in dialogues respectively glocal encounters.<sup>65</sup> Such elaborations are specifically needed when it comes to the theme of intercultural ecclesiology, as the *church*, more than being an institution represents a dynamic *process of people bringing their convictions and goals in acting for Justice and Human as well as Creaturely rights into line with the greater gift of the Messianic parrhesia*—while finding them sacramentally anticipated in worships and meals of life.<sup>66</sup> The

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financial reasons; cf. Brauchen die Kirchen Interkulturelle Theologie? Ein offener Brief der Fachhochschule für Interkulturelle Theologie Hermannsburg (FIT) an die Leitungen von Trägerstiftung und Trägerkirchen zum Schließungsbeschluss vom 9.3.2021, in *ÖR* 70 (3.2021) 393-398.

<sup>64</sup> Johannes Weth, *Weltweite Kirche vor Ort. Interkulturelle Ekklesiologie im Anschluss an Wolfhart Pannenberg und Jürgen Moltmann* [Doctoral Thesis, Philipps-Universität Marburg 2021] (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2022), 357-363. Cf. Carolyn Chau, *The Church: Mission-Led Ecclesiology for Today*, in: Irvin and Phan, *Christian Mission*, 229-245, 239.

<sup>65</sup> Compared to this broader spectrum of spaces needed for future investigations, most studies on “interculturality” often just focus their attention on one specific dimension (in majority: the ethnic as historical dimension of traditional cultures or descent or upbringing) or the interspace of two of them (e. g., personality & culture) or at best relational manners of self-assignment in identities and their experiences in “intercultural communities” (such as religious ones). This regular usage is well presented in the recent volume Lazar T. Stanislaus and Christian Tauchner, eds., *Becoming Intercultural. Perspectives on Mission* (New Delhi/Sankt Augustin: ISPC/K/ Steyler Missionswissenschaftliches Institut, 2021). In the Introduction (ibid. xiii-xvii), one encounters the focus on the historical dimension of cultural difference, and e. g., in Crystal Taylor-Dietz, *Culture, Personality and Interculturality* (ibid. 59-74) a reflection on intersections between identity traits and historical traits of cultururation.

<sup>66</sup> This type for many people much more than the traditional folk-church type and another rather anonymous (somehow even cultural-sedimentary) type

church in such understanding marks the embodied witness to the Gospel in and also on behalf of the human society and created life as a whole. But this line of theological reflection I have to elaborate on in other connections. Here instead, I am concentrating on the following application.

*4.2 A Dialogue of “Eco-justice” and “Eco-prophetic Diakonia” based on a Hybrid Model of Intercultural Ethics and Inculturation in Asian and African Theologies*

The realm of ecological responsibility in our days marks a very special, most urgent concern.<sup>67</sup> Both dimensions here under discussion, the dialogical (people hear and see, and yet do not take notice!) and the prophetic (scientists approve, but economy and wide-spread convenience make us all act as if we had two planets stored away!) are by far receiving too little attention in Theological Ethics.

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of silent cultural-denominational remnant marks a real alternative in the overstimulated world of mass communication today. Here the motives like longing for independence and personal active participation and engagement are coming together. Communities grow locally partly because of sharing one type of spirituality, but also often in connection with diverse spiritualities in house circles or concerned about specific services of visiting and caring for gender balance or creational integrity, etc. One can specify further: (a) questions of daily life and existential concerns in these churches are more in the center of a communal attention, as e. g., in their weekly meetings (especially if the groups are opening up to refugees); (b) practiced faith seems to be one of the specific strengths of these communities; (c) in these communities people do not “join the club”, but rather cling to a call, not only viable for theologians but for all believers; (d) in these communities people stand together and fight for a more just togetherness in the overall society, having become very sensitive to more than traditional cultural traits, which are still very dominant, but rather to dispositions of power, status, and wealth to be critically dealt with and overcome. Such church communities in Germany (compared to other countries in Europe or in the Southern hemisphere) are rather rare until now, but steadily multiplying in number. And this does not happen incidentally as they authentically resemble the original antique Christian communities; there—not to forget—the name “ecclesia” (church) belonged to the regional (e. g., Roman) congregation and not to any huge or supra-regional institution. It is important to see that in such communities the intercultural opening in many times is a normality and not an exception—and even the number of engaged young people to go for studies and a profession in the realm of spirituality and diakonia is remarkably higher in these communities. They are engaged in a rather experimental up to basis democratic format of local Christianity.

<sup>67</sup> Cf. e. g., to other crises such as the pandemic or just peace/military concerns, and for different reasons, such as not being sufficiently manifest to human senses(!).

This fatal state of affairs has much to do with a *perennial weakness of Western Christian theologies*, where Creation has been degraded into a forlorn status.<sup>68</sup> This weakness one finds exemplarily expressed in a statement from *Pope Paul VI* in his development Encyclical *Populorum Progressio* (1967), typical for his period of reign (yet similarly to be found in contemporary Protestant statements) stating: "... Gen 1:28 ... teaches us that the whole of creation is for man, that he has been charged to give it meaning by his intelligent activity."<sup>69</sup> No wonder that, in the somewhat earlier church confessions and mission documents such as Willingen 1952 and *Ad Gentes* 1965 ecological matters were never ever referred to. Worse, "Christians and Christian missionaries have frequently been complicit of such idolatry".<sup>70</sup> But even if this has changed meanwhile to the better,<sup>71</sup> it is by far not enough in order to get away from old self-produced myths of the *anthropocentric world-view* in theology including a devastating—I would dare to say "heretical"—format of teaching on human stewardship:<sup>72</sup> Still, most of us

<sup>68</sup> And from there carried through colonial spread and liberal capitalism on the one and through nature neglecting varieties of socialism on the other hand. – A meanwhile renowned counter-philosophy we have in the ethno- and popular-cultural movement of *Buen Vivir*; cf. Thomas Fatheuer, *Buen Vivir. A brief introduction to Latin America's new concepts for the good life and the rights of nature* (Berlin: Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung 2011).

<sup>69</sup> Quoted after Christian Tauchner, *Mission and Ecology*, in Kavunkal and Tauchner, *Mission beyond Ad Gentes*, 178-193, 180, fn 11.

<sup>70</sup> Nothwehr, *The Church's Mission to Ecojustice*, 1.

<sup>71</sup> Theological and ecumenical programs [as the *Conciliar process of JPIC* after the VI<sup>th</sup> GA of WCC 1983 (Vancouver) with the two initial European conferences in Basel 1989 and Graz 1997] and single writings [as from the German systematic theologian Jürgen Moltmann or Elizabeth Johnson, *Ask the Beasts. Darwin and the God of Love* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015), the Encyclical *Laudato si'* of Pope Francis (2015) or the WCC mission statement *Together towards Life* (2013) have helped to raise more awareness, but could not yet turn the basic destructive religious attitude of most Christians (at least in the West) to a holistic and planet-sparing thinking and acting.

<sup>72</sup> The blasphemous character is approved by Nothwehr's reminder of Herman Daly's fate as World Bank environmentalist, see Nothwehr, *The Church's Mission to Ecojustice*, 1, who—sadly—also proves (*ibid.*, fn 262) that the two protagonists of PD, Bevans and Schroeder, from time to time favor talking about Jesus' God as "anthropocentric God". Indeed, it needs more of the basic "retrieval" of theological and philosophical resources, before a proper judgment and also a constructive creation protecting action is possible, as Anthony Le Duc, *Ecological Concerns*, in Stanislaus and Nguyen, *Missionary Discipleship*, 90-117, 114 says. Gemma Tulud Cruz, *Christianity Interrupted: Liberation Theology's Past, Present, and Future through the Lens of Rupture*, in Irvin and Phan, *Christian Mission*, 175-190, 187f., too talks of a "rupture between Humanity and the Created

silently hope that “some little efforts to balance for past shortcomings” in matters of “environmental care” will “do enough”, just as we continuously thought taking care of the poor just needs a well-organized state social system or a somehow socially sensitive capitalist production system,<sup>73</sup> ... a big mistake, as it needs a concern even of the rich people for avoiding their own de-humanization!

To say it bluntly, what is needed in reality, in order to become participants in God’s own witness to a conversion process “from Creation to recreation in the horizon of the Kingdom of God” will be a real penance starting with a discernment where and how the Spirit is working for creatures’ protection as well as for a creative implementation of human rights as mentioned above, as it is more than obvious today why and how basic human rights (take the example of sufficient supply of potable water) are interdependent with creation’s integrity.<sup>74</sup> Demanded today is, one can say indeed, a turn towards a “new civilization”. And I am skeptical enough not to expect this being reached by one or two theological writings alone (which of course must come for inspirational reasons!). It rather will—so I state below referring to my Roman Catholic colleague Christian Tauchner<sup>75</sup>—

1. *be a major theme of intercultural communication in theologies, religions, ethics and philosophies*, as by reviving vital traditions like that of the Sabbath year (Lev 25:7-18; Luke 4); as well as by building on the understanding of a Triune Divine reality which in self-diffusive goodness keeps all goodness by granting life to others, including the idea of a “deep incarnation” undergone by God who became creature too when becoming human;<sup>76</sup>

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World” when focusing on new types of ecologically motivated liberation theology.

<sup>73</sup> Indeed, the two matters of suppressing ecological (see Cruz, *ibid.*, 187: litter to the South!) as well as human injustices (*ibid.*: damaged environment means more poverty!) are practically proven.

<sup>74</sup> Cf. Nothwehr, *The Church’s Mission to Ecojustice*, 8 (fn 321).

<sup>75</sup> See the well composed list of consequences and demands of a “new civilization” with Christian Tauchner, *Mission and Ecology*, 190-192; here reproduced and slightly added to.

<sup>76</sup> See the Noble Forethoughts for this with Franciscan tradition (see the kinship-related language on humans and nature in the “Canticle of Creatures”) and Bonaventura’s theology in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> century with Nothwehr, *The Church’s Mission to Ecojustice*, 5.

2. *oblige all involved* in that witness to be *personally coherent* in limiting our energy consumption to a much lower yet still healthy level;<sup>77</sup>
3. *bring church people in reliable contact and cooperation with new partners* of political scenery and other faiths as e. g., with the Cambodian monks in their successful civil resistance against a land-grabbing American palm-oil producing company.<sup>78</sup> Such alliances for the sake of life might become more important and reliable than former church allegiances are; besides that
4. *affect our communication and convivence in Christian communities* (not necessarily blindly following into all new technologies, but critically weighing their pros against their partly devastating damages in terms of human relationships); and surely also
5. *offer Christians and their communities as alternative formats* of practiced communal ethics in political struggles for sustainable livelihoods.

All in all, in most Western European societies like Germany theoretically the need for integrity of creation is being acknowledged by all generations, but no consequence for daily behavior is taken seriously. This points us to excellent opportunities of intercultural ethical learning; for Europeans to learn from societies in which a respect for natural resources is intact and a stable factor of people's collective philosophy. To such standards social and religious scientists as well as theologians (as we at FIT have exercised meanwhile for 11 years) need to build bridges. Exemplarily, I finally refer to specific models of Ecologically branded Local Christology from the Enga people in Papua and Tanzania:

The model of *Jesus Christ as "Kamongo saka katao katenge"* (= "*the Lord of Life*") as an equivalent of a New as well as Traditional type of Regional Leader in Enga society according to Miriam Dlugosz<sup>79</sup> can serve us as excellent example. It is marking Christ as the one who represents the guardian of all life relationships, mental, social, spiritual as well as creaturely, marking a *transcendental Divine Given and at*

<sup>77</sup> Including policies propagating the same as the "steady state economy" of Herman E. Daly a few decades ago.

<sup>78</sup> See the CD video "Landraub" of Kurt Langbein and Christian Brüser, Austrian Radio ORF (2015).

<sup>79</sup> Miriam Dlugosz, Christ as Kamongo saka katao katenge – the Lord of Life, in the Context of Enga Culture, in: Stanislaus and Tauchner, *Becoming Intercultural*, 327-346, esp. 342ff.

*the same time keeping all life in abundance* through a vivid communication with the Divine.<sup>80</sup> Such type of ecumenically sound Christology, also found in many an African context, opens a spectrum of wholistic and ethical preconditions to care for life and environment. – Here, prophecy in the Christological meaning of a “messianic and therefore fulfilling prophecy” speaks to people from God as from and in the midst of their life situations.

Similarly, the Tanzanian Bishop and Moderator of the International United Evangelical Mission/Wuppertal *Abednego Keshomshahara* talks, of course on the background of an appreciated traditional African material-spiritually earthed religiosity, about an “*Eco-Prophetic Diakonia* ... (that) must include speaking out ... against the structures that cause miseries. Such structures include local and national governments which make policies in favour of economic players and ... do not take environmental concerns seriously.”<sup>81</sup> With this he touches a common ethical responsibility of intercultural Christian and interreligious communities—in South, East, North and West, that are both engaged in a solid Prophetic Dialogue.

Hopefully, all efforts of Intercultural Theology in terms of an advanced missiology and specified with the handsome concept of Prophetic Dialogue will be a contribution to a lively, ecumenical and Eco-just church communion as well as to international peace and ethics.

#### ABSTRACTS

Aufgabe der christlichen Mission ist es, den in der Schöpfung, den Kulturen und den Religionen gegenwärtigen Geist Gottes zu erkennen und diese Einsicht mit dem einzigartigen Zeugnis der Hoffnung und des Lebens in Christus zu verbinden. Das Konzept des „prophetischen Dialogs“, das in den letzten zwei Jahrzehnten entwickelt wurde, bietet Perspektiven für diese Aufgabe. Das Verständnis von Mission, das sich aus dem Geheimnis des dreieinigen Gottes und einer *missio Dei* ergibt, bietet den Hintergrund und die Grundlage für dieses Konzept des prophetischen Dialogs.

La misión cristiana tiene la tarea de reconocer el Espíritu de Dios presente en la creación, las culturas y las religiones, y relacionar esta intuición con el testimonio singular de esperanza y vida en Cristo. El concepto de “diálogo

<sup>80</sup> See da Silva and the SVD Chapter statement in da Silva, *Prophetic Dialogue*, 275.

<sup>81</sup> Abednego Keshomshahara, *The Ecclesial Mandate of Eco-Diakonia in the Mission of God: An African Lutheran Perspective*, in Werner et al., eds., *International Handbook on Creation Care and Eco-Diakonia. Concepts and Perspectives from the Churches of the Global South* (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2022), 25-34, 33.



profético” desarrollado en las dos últimas décadas ofrece perspectivas para esta tarea. La comprensión de la misión que fluye del misterio del Dios Trino y una *missio Dei* ofrece el telón de fondo y la base para este concepto de diálogo profético.

La tâche de la mission chrétienne est de reconnaître l’Esprit de Dieu présent dans la création, les cultures et les religions, et de relier cela au témoignage d’espérance et de vie en Christ. Le concept de « dialogue prophétique », tel qu’il a été développé ces deux dernières décennies, offre des perspectives pour cette tâche. La compréhension de la mission comme découlant du mystère du Dieu Trinité et comme *missio Dei* offre la toile de fond et le fondement du dialogue prophétique.