

MISSION – GLOBALIZATION WITH A DIFFERENCE*

by Theodor Ahrens

1. Some observations concerning Christianity and globalization

The word ›globalization‹ has made a remarkable career in recent years because worldwide processes of exchange in the fields of economics, communication, transport of ideas, and migration of religions have gained such an enormous speed that in many people's consciousness it appears as if our globe were ›shrinking‹. Globalization as such may not be all that new. Globalization may represent a new phase in the process of modernization which began in Western Europe and North America and consequently affected the whole world.¹ But it is certain, now that the global and the local have come closer to each other, that the impact which globalization makes on our consciousness *is* new.

Some effects of globalization surprise us because they seem to enlarge and to intensify our possibilities to interact, to make ourselves part of the global network of exchange of ideas and goods. Just a few decades ago, such possibilities were beyond common man's imagination. We know more, we see more, we hear more, we communicate with greater speed and larger radius, but do we also gain a more precise understanding and a clearer vision of how different people may live together with their differences in future? It is far from obvious what globalization and regional counter-movements entail in terms of missiological and ecumenical imperatives.

We do know that globalization does affect both churches, in the North and in the South, in fact, the whole network of ecumenical relationships. What follows are no more than a few sketchy hints:

First, Christianity has always been on both sides: For a very long time it has been involved in the process of globalization. Luke tells us that early Christian missionaries were accused of ›turning the whole world (oikoumene) upside down‹ (Acts 17,6).

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¹ Robert Robertson emphasizes the continuity between globalization and modernity as it emerged in the 18th and 19th century cf. Roland Robertson as quoted in BEYER, PETER: *Religion and Globalization*, Sage Publications/London 1997 (1994), 26ff. From a different perspective, but the same point is made by MCNEILL, WILLIAM: *The Rise of the West. A History of the Human Community with a retrospective essay*, University of Chicago Press/Chicago-London 1991, pp. XVff.; cf. GIDDENS, ANTHONY: *Der Dritte Weg. Die Erneuerung der sozialen Demokratie*, Suhrkamp/Frankfurt a.M. 1998, 152ff. (engl.: *The Third Way. The Renewal of Social Democracy*) and BECK, ULRICH: *Was ist Globalisierung?* Suhrkamp/Frankfurt a.M. 1997, 48ff.

Concurrently, Christianity has been involved in many a counter-initiative by which people sought to reassert themselves in their particularity over against the forces of globalization.

In fact, the modern missionary movement and the resulting Ecumenical movement of the 20th century were both a response to and a product of a new phase of globality brought about by Western colonialism and imperialism.

If many a missionary during the imperial era of the West imagined Christianity should and would replace other religions, the balance sheet on that account suggests that these missions were a bit of a failure. Counted in absolute figures the number of Christians has increased considerably during the last century from approx. 521 million to approx 2.5 billion adherents. When we look at the percentage, we get a different perspective. David Barrett, in his statistics of world Christianity, estimates that at the beginning of the 20th century, for instance, about 34,4 percent of the world population claimed membership in one church or another. As the century drew to its close, about 33,4 percent of the population claimed membership in a church at least.² The only group which registered a disproportionately big rise in numbers is the group Barrett refers to as »atheists«. It may be possible that they are just agnostics – people who state that they are not religious and don't need religion. They may be the most interesting group.

While Christianity grew very much in the South – and mostly among poor people – it suffered disproportionately high losses in the North, particularly in Western Europe, not only in traditionally Protestant countries like Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Northern Germany and the Netherlands, but also in places where traditionally the Roman-Catholic Church was strong or even dominant, e.g. in Italy, Spain, Portugal, the Czech Republic, Poland, further in Canada, the U.S. Also in Russia Christianity suffered great losses. Nowhere has Christianity been weakened as much as in those regions where it is still moving in the shade of its former »state-church« relationships, in fact was constituted as a state church, i.e. Scandinavia, Germany, Italy, Spain, Portugal. While these churches are financially still very powerful – which gives them a disproportionately great weight in ecumenical relationships – they are fighting a losing battle for the allegiance of their constituency.

I point out only a few implications of such developments: While Christianity unfolds its missionary dynamics mostly in the South and especially among poor people, World Christianity has become mostly a religion of the poor. Further: Churches in Western Europe have been fighting embittered battles for two Centuries trying to come to terms with Enlightenment and to make a stance in an increasingly secularized society. As yet we do not know whether Europe's secularization will also be globalized and thus give an indication as to what the rest of the world may expect for its own religious future or whether secularization in Europe viewed against developments in the rest of the world is

² BARRETT, DAVID B. AND JOHNSON, TODD M.: *Annual Statistical Table on Global Mission: 2000*, IBMR, Vol 24, No. 1, January 2000, p. 25.

nothing but an exception, an European particularity.³ We simply do not know that. If secularization in one form or the other will catch up with the rest of the world, it might be interesting to take a closer look at those battles which Christianity in Western Europe fought with Enlightenment in general and with pragmatic rationalism in particular.

On the positive side, Protestantism seeks to be answerable to modern secular man. While liberal Protestantism insists that pragmatic rationalism is wrong if it denies the value of spiritual life, Christian theology agrees with Enlightenment that truth claims should be unfolded in such a way that they may make sense to people who consider religion non-sense.

On the negative side, Western Christianity found itself caught up in continuous, and at times bitter battles which have resulted in a slow but continuous withdrawal and loss of influence in society at large. I observe three types of withdrawal (– outsiders may view them as West-European forms of inculturation): 1. A withdrawal into a fully privatized, individualistic spirituality. The current wave of mysticism is an *epiphenomenon* of that development. 2. A withdrawal to the field of ethics – since secular society has no use for religion except for its contribution in the field of ethics and social ethics. With such expectations there is always ›a sweet temptation‹, particularly in a church which as a matter of fact still lives and works with privileges of the former state-church arrangement. 3. The third form of withdrawal can be met in that ›give me back my old-time religion‹ mentality. Carried to the extreme, this withdrawal might end in fundamentalism.

After having zeroed in for a moment on a fairly parochial West-European perspective, let us draw a few more general conclusions:

While the modern missionary movement was not successful in terms of ›winning the world for Christ in this generation‹⁴, not successful in its attempts to conquer the world, it was indeed successful in making Christianity a world religion. Christianity, being ecumenical from its very beginnings, became ecumenical worldwide only during the last two hundred years. In fact, what emerged is a polycentric pluralistic world-religion. No version of Christianity, no Lutheranism, Anglicanism, Methodism or any other Christian dialect, not even Roman-Catholicism (how can something be Catholic which means ecumenical and Roman, which is of course parochial, at the same time?), is any longer in a position to present itself as if it were the normative model and as if it should be made dominant⁵.

³ MARTIN, DAVID: *A General Theory of Secularisation*, Basil Blackwell/ Oxford 1978; more recently: MARTIN, DAVID: ›Europa und Amerika. Säkularisierung oder Vervielfältigung der Christenheit – Zwei Ausnahmen und keine Regel‹, in: KALLSCHEUER, OTTO (ed.): *Das Europa der Religionen*, Fischer/Frankfurt a.M. 1996, 161–180.

⁴ A film documentation ›Missionare bis ans Ende der Welt‹ broadcast on ARTE TV Channel in Germany (20th April 2000) suggests that currently 70–80 multibillion Dollar projects are under way which still exploit the vision to christianize the world in this generation.

⁵ This seems to be the main outcome of the Papal conflict with Latin American liberation theology during the 80ies: I have only the German texts to refer to: *Instruktion der Kongregation für die Glaubenslehre über einige Aspekte der ›Theologie der Befreiung‹*, Sekretariat der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz Bonn 1984; and *Instruktion der Kongregation für die Glaubenslehre über die christliche Freiheit und die Befreiung*, Sekretariat der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz, Bonn 1986.

Roman-Catholicism has tried for centuries to officialize and universalize its version of Christianity. Likewise did Lutherans, Anglicans, Methodists. Now Pentecostalism does it. The mainline churches did not merely export their version of Christianity, universalized it and officialised it as the model to be followed in their mission fields. Perhaps more important was that the mainline churches as they had taken up their responsibility in global mission allied themselves with the idea of progress, in fact, also of Human Rights and of Enlightenment. It was this – let us say – Anglo-Saxon version of Protestant Christianity which was globalized during the 19th and 20th century. And it was this type of Christianity which was officialised in the Ecumenical movement and which dominated the debate in its various forums right up to the 60ies of the 20th century through the international missionary movement. Since then representatives of the Churches from the South have questioned and challenged the dominance and normative nature of this Anglo-Saxon version of Christianity. They use these forums trying to push and to officialize *their* versions of Christianity⁶. As a result, a power struggle is going on in the Ecumenical movement.

Lesslie Newbigin and David Bosch have argued⁷ that the modern missionary movement drew much of its strength and much of its convincing power from being tied in so closely with the western project of progress and Enlightenment. As a result they argued that the crisis of Christian mission must to a large degree be attributed to the loss of credibility of the western model of Christianity. Western progress and Enlightenment have become objects of sceptical scrutiny. If one would accept these conclusions or not, L. Newbigin and David Bosch are raising a critical question as to whether the Christian mission offers more globalization of the same kind or rather globalization with a difference.

The question becomes increasingly urgent. As Christianity unfolds its intercultural dynamics amid the multifaceted processes which we refer to as 'globalization', as Christianity continues to take root in every and any possible context, relations between churches are getting more and more complex. In fact, relations between churches are no less complicated than are relationships between societies or nation states. Relationships between Christian Protestants in Germany and Russian Orthodox Christians are no less complicated than relationships between their societies and their governments. Relationships between Protestants in USA and Protestants in China are no less complex than are relationships between their governments.

As Christianity unfolds its intercultural dynamics and establishes itself in a multitude of local Christian dialects, the ecumenical debate as to what constitutes an 'authentic', proper response to the Christ event is heating up. In fact, the identity of Christianity remains a contested concept as long as the intercultural dynamics of Christianity are well and alive. The debate as to what constitutes Christian identity is spurred by the missionary dynamics

⁶ STAPLES, P.: »Official and Popular Religion in an Ecumenical Perspective«, in: VRIJHOF, PIETER H. / WAARDENBURG, JACQUES (eds.): *Official and Popular Christianity. Analysis of a Theme for Religious Studies*, Mouton Press/The Hague–Paris–London 1979, 293–294.

⁷ BOSCH, DAVID: *Transforming Mission. Paradigm shifts in theology of mission*, Orbis / Maryknoll NY 1991, 262ff; for LESSLIE NEWBIGIN cf. *Foolishness to the Greeks*, Eerdmanns Grand Rapids 1986. I used the German translation: »Den Griechen eine Torheit«. *Das Evangelium und die westliche Kultur*. Neukirchen 1989, 7ff.

of Christianity and it is dealt with in the Ecumenical Movement. The debate involves many Christian dialects all relating to Christianity as a metacultural system of symbols⁸. If this is so, missionary Christianity must be accounted for as a secularizing force in world events.

2. Mission – Globalization with a difference!

In what follows, I shall suggest that the Gospel itself calls for – globalization *with a difference*. The difference lies in the notion of the Gospel itself.

The strict theological meaning of the term ›Gospel‹ was determined when the first Christians connected their prayer for the Kingdom to come with the story of Jesus who had come. For Christians therefore it is impossible to pray for the coming of the Kingdom of God as if it were completely outstanding – a vague vision – open to be filled with any wild fantasies. Praying for the Kingdom they look back to the figure of Jesus preaching and healing, teaching and forgiving, walking from Galilee to Jerusalem, united with his Father in the Holy Spirit, yet vulnerable and weak. A weak God provokes protest and persecution.

This was the reason why after the crucifixion the disciples were terrified – in spite of visions and words which assured them that Jesus was not with the dead but alive with God and in God (Luke 24,5). They hid themselves away in their closed upper room trying to work through their memories, their sadness, their disappointment. It was the Holy Spirit who released them from their hiding place in the upper chambers (Acts 1,13) and lead them into the open. They come to understand that a life in the Spirit of Christ is a real possibility for every and any human person. The promise of the Gospel is that each and any person shall be united with God in the same way as Jesus was – under the conditions of human existence – vulnerable and weak. The Gospel is communicable worldwide to any human being because God voluntarily made himself available under such limitations of human existence.

What the disciples come to realize then is that that pagan officer, of whom Mark tells in his account of the crucifixion, was right when he said looking at Christ crucified: This man was truly the Son of God (Mk 15,39 cf. 38). It is at the foot of the cross that the God of Israel, who introduced himself at Mount Sinai as a God of mercy, a God of grace, a God of patience (Jonah 4,2), is fully revealed, recognized and adored as such. For that reason Christians insist that they are not violating the 1st commandment having given the Jesus name a place in the godhead.

The fact that Christianity is both local and global then has its roots in the Gospel itself. The Gospel Story refers both to a unique event, Jesus' free obedience, his faithful

⁸ Cf. BURRIDGE, KENELM: *In the Way. A Study of Christian Missionary Endeavours*, UBC Press/Vancouver 1991, 71ff. Burrige is of the opinion that Christianity as a metaculture by provoking a response in different milieus does influence the situations in direction of secularization; cf. 168ff.

commitment to fulfill the will of his Father (John 4,34), ›sacrificing‹ his life – not to appease his father's wrath – but to live out his mission of God's love. At the same time the Gospel story reveals a pattern of human existence. In short, his manifestation in the flesh, his vindication in the Spirit, his being taken up in glory (Romans 1,3; 1st Timothy 3,16) refer both to a unique story at a particular place, and at the same time these words refer to universal truth and reality. This happened once and for all, and this is how things happen time and again everywhere. Everyone anywhere is involved in the mystery of God's passion. However, without this unique event we would never have known. Now we know once and for all and we shall look for it everywhere. The pouring out of the Spirit at Pentecost makes possible and facilitates a universal communication which up to that point could not be imagined. People can relate to that story, and as they do so they can search and find that pattern in every event.⁹

It is in this sense that the mission of Christianity stands for a different kind of globalization. Because in spite of the tensions, misunderstandings and non-communication of which we have more than we really need, it remains a fact that Christianity is a community in the Spirit, a community of faith, a community under one calling, a community celebrating around the Lord's table anticipating that the Kingdom of God will come to the earth in the shape of the passion story only.

3. What is due? To rediscover our mission we need to ask ourselves a few tough questions and avoid soft answers!

To rediscover its mission is not a matter of advocating additional church activities, which because they are ›additional‹ might just as well be dispensed with. A rediscovery of its mission concerns foremost the churches themselves and the self-awareness of the church workers and their perception of the Gospel. Thus, a church rediscovering its mission is engaged in a foundational probe.

The top priority of a missionary church will be to keep the Christian notion of God alive and in sharp focus. There are others who are concerned about food, shelter, justice, sustenance of creation. The church is, for very valid reasons also committed to such important causes just as others are – coming from the background of their motivations. However, the Church is irreplaceable and in fact, unique only as a worldwide lobby for the language of faith of which Jesus Christ is the key witness and foundation stone.¹⁰

A missionary Church places its notion of God in an intercultural and interreligious perspective. It starts doing so in its own vicinity. The Church will discover that the language

⁹ I am indebted to JOHN V. TAYLOR's missiology ›*The Go-Between God. The Holy Spirit and the Christian Message*‹, SCM Press/London 1972. I used the German translation: *Der Heilige Geist und sein Wirken in der Welt*, Patmos/Düsseldorf 1977, cf. p. 197ff.

¹⁰ Faith here is taken in its strict theological sense of the word and not as a simply formal term meaning something like ›being more or less vaguely religious‹.

of faith has become a foreign language for many people even if they continue to be members of the church. This holds true at least for our society here in Germany and in particular in an urban setting like Hamburg. People are simply unable to link whatever good or grave experience they may have in their everyday life with the Gospel and vice versa. A group of vicars came for a one-week course to the Mission Academy in Hamburg to discuss ›Salvation and Liberation‹ placing these words in an interreligious perspective. They visited a Buddhist monk in his shrine to learn the Buddhist notions of awakening and deliverance. After a discussion, the Buddhist monk asked them the question: ›What is the meaning of these big words in your tradition, in your hearts and minds?‹ This turn-around of the question-answer situation took them by surprise; in fact it caused a bit of consternation. The vicars – as they later informed me – discovered that they were unable to respond both on a conceptual level and from a background of personal experience.

When we discuss mission, it is certainly not enough to let words like ›convivenzia‹ and ›dialogue‹ carry the load of the word and let social work legitimize the being of the church – leaving the rest to a fully privatized vague spirituality.

What is at stake is, of course, a mission in the Spirit of Christ, a mission from within, and yet not just a spiritual mission! Usually we discuss the dialectics of such a statement under the label ›holistic mission‹. But what is holistic mission? This is far from clear, and in fact, quite controversial between mainline conciliar churches and the Pentecostals, between orthodox and liberation theologies, maybe even between mainline Churches in the North and in the South. I suggest that the decisive perspective on holistic mission is opened once people come to believe that to live a life in the Spirit of Christ is a real possibility. It is in this way that human existence in its totality and mankind in its totality are addressed by the Gospel. The Gospel places every and any human existence with all its ambiguities, its ruptures, its frictions within the horizon of this divine promise.

It is in this way that the Gospel corresponds with three basic human needs. The Gospel corresponds with a basic human need for dignity and self-respect. It further corresponds with a basic human need to be rooted somewhere and yet have a sense of belonging which transcends the commitments of clan and neighbourhood. Thirdly, it responds to the need for a future which is neither void nor empty, but certainly different.

Having said this, two implications should be made explicit. First, in a final analysis the Gospel will always be compatible with any culturally conditioned sense of self-esteem. Secondly, the Gospel will always be more than just a confirmation of social, cultural and economic claims.

So much for my basic sense of direction. Though it is nowadays a common place, let me add that the praxis of mission to which we now turn has been de-territorialized. Yet, mission remains a move of faith towards the boundary, a walk of faith along the boundary-line, an endeavour of faith which can, and in fact should bring the Church off balance time and again.¹¹

¹¹ Cf. MOOREN, THOMAS: *Auf der Grenze – Die Andersheit Gottes und die Vielfalt der Religionen*, Peter Lang/Frankfurt et al. 1990, 72ff.

In a Church which shares among its workers and its constituency a broad consensus regarding the missionary nature of the Gospel will – instead of calling for additional activities – actualize this basic sense of direction within those forms and structures in which Christian faith and life have found their place:

- in the lives and life-stories of individuals;
- in congregational and family worship;
- in pastoral care and family counselling;
- in care and attention for people who are weak, distressed or without recognition.

Further,

- in groups and in group networking;
- in all the work which is properly and well done *ad intra* such as in church committees, in synods and administrative services;
- in Churches media work – both in Church run media and *ad extra* in secular media.

A missionary Church will be an interlocutor in civil society.

A church guided by such notion of mission will not place its mission above the missions which others pursue – be it other religions or ideologies. It will place its mission alongside the legitimate missions of others who follow their calling. However, a church in mission will not ›duck‹ the issue of truth. ›Couldn't my truth be also your truth?‹ No more and no less. The question works both ways, of course. But the question as such cannot be suspended.

Further, a Church in mission will cultivate a ›disinterested benevolence‹, serve the weak and the downtrodden and build supportive alliances with every person and group which takes care of the weak and downtrodden, not to show them the other heaven, but to help them because we are debtors of grace and as such can easily afford to attend to them. Mission is, of course, life-centred. However, the question ›what makes for a good or a poor life?‹, produces controversy. Regarding this controversy, a missionary church will put its cognitive cards on the table and allow itself to be held accountable for its witness of faith and for its praxis of ›disinterested benevolence‹. In doing so, the church works on the reciprocity of witness and service, mission and diakonia.¹² She opens new worlds for the Gospel and the Gospel for new worlds. Faith gains its experience as it sets out to protect the body, the freedom, the dignity of fellow human beings. And such commitment will discover that it needs faith as a motivational resource.

A Church committed to such mission will not presuppose that the Gospel is likely to gain majority support; the Church is also not worried to represent the concerns of a minority. On the contrary, a missionary church will re-examine its involvement for voluntary ›inappropriate conformities‹. ›Inappropriate conformities‹ can take different forms:

¹² Cf. NORDSTOKKE, KJELL: ›Mission as Diaconia‹, in: *LWF Consultation on Churches in Mission Nairobi*, Kenya Oct. 1988, ed. Lutheran World Federation Study Department, 1999, 131–138.

- The church modernizes its outward appearance, introduces new means of communication and considers such steps to be the fulfilment of its missionary mandate.
- Another ›inappropriate conformity‹ would be those nostalgic desires for a restoration of ›glorious‹ past - ›Give me back my old time religion!‹ Evangelistic campaigns as that of Billy Graham tend to produce only short-term results. They neither bring back those people who already left the church nor those who while continuing membership in the Church have gone into an ›inner exile‹ within the Church.

›Inappropriate conformity‹ takes place also in many a sermon that employs the great old words of Christian tradition, mercy and grace, law and Gospel, faith and forgiveness. But apparently many a pastor hands them around with some sense of embarrassment. Though the words pop up at the right places in the course of a worship, nobody is quite sure what they are standing for and what, in fact, they conceal. If we don't know what to do with these words, if we are unable to liberate these ›pearls‹ from their medieval ›encrustment‹, then in fact, we are gambling away the most central concerns of our faith heritage to the humanistic disciplines such as psychotherapy, medicine, social action, the arts, cultural anthropology etc. — where people also struggle with the meaning of these great concepts.

In brief, the question is not whether Christian mission in spite of its past, in spite of its history on record still has a future. The question rather is whether conciliar Churches still have a future unless they allow themselves to be confronted with the challenge, the foundational contents — and the ambiguities (!) of mission. Whoever believes that after much remorse and soul searching an ›authentic and credible‹ Christian mission can be established may go ahead and do so. I prefer to assume that it will be impossible to lift the fog of ambiguity from Christian mission just as much as it is impossible to move human existence beyond the shade of ambiguity into the clear light of Christian authenticity. *Simul iustus et peccator*.

4. A few objectives for Christian mission in a globalized world

While modern communication networks offer many people opportunities to articulate their own interests and to communicate with each other, they also conceal that uncounted numbers of people are not in a position to articulate their interests in and through those networks and are even not represented there.

In our ecumenical networks which are networks of global communication these ›others‹ do have a place. At least they should have a place there.

I am not fully convinced that every theologian who claims that proper theology can only grow out of a praxis of solidarity with the poor is really speaking from the side of the poor. There remains a difference between an option for the poor and options which the poor may have. Within the Ecumenical Movement the poor who now form a majority, do have a place. At times they even take centre stage and are even listened to. If this happens then I take such events in all their ambiguity as a witness to the fact, that the world

Christian fellowship is not guided by the rationale of share-holder values, but by the Spirit of Christ. Our partnership forums, our ›Ecumenical multinationals‹ may show obvious weaknesses. In spite of those they are indispensable because they offer time and space for those to speak who have no forum anywhere else. In fact, they offer structures and forums where mutual accountability may be exercised. How do you, how do we account for our handling the Gospel in our context? The praxis of mutual accountability is important, simply because no version of Christianity as I have mentioned can claim dominance and normative power. Ecumenical debates may at times be tough; at least they display that kind of honesty which can be afforded only in family circles.

Christians stand by each other in spite of their differences, in fact, they meet each other in their differences. What we have come to refer to as ecumenical or intercultural learning will at its best be nothing else than an exercise in Christian fellowship, a praxis of mutual encounter. As far as possible both sides try to look at their own situation through the spectacles of the other. We try to distance ourselves a little bit from our own plausibility structure trying to appreciate the inner coherence and the sense of priorities of someone else's world view. At least, we may learn to appreciate with a somewhat improved sensitivity the view, priorities and hierarchy of commitments of others. A slightly improved understanding and appreciation do not automatically lead to deeper mutual love. Certainly, they are no substitutes for one's own commitments. Since misunderstandings tend to grow like weeds, it is of paramount importance that we nurture ecumenical forums where we meet each other as persons, where we may question and encourage each other in the Spirit of Christ. There is no substitute for personal encounters – and their emotionality!

Sometimes an impression is created as if the globalization of the market would provide more people than ever before with more and better opportunities to improve their lives. Perhaps this might be so. However, the word ›globalization‹ does conceal that the market simply by-passes many people and countries. In addition, the market tends to look at other people, at other countries' natural resources as if they were at the market's disposal for whatever profit may be gained out of their exploitation.

Viewed in the context of market forces, Churches and the whole Ecumenical Movement are certainly just marginal realities. However, the churches and their networks of groups are not without influence. We can be fairly certain that poverty and violence will continue to make their way up on the agenda of churches in mission.

A church in mission need not produce utopian ideologies about a world without exploitation and/or a culture without violence. A church in mission which accepts the ambiguities, the tough, conflictual issues within its own context and beyond and lets itself be drawn into the discussion of these controversies will achieve at least one thing: It will be more difficult for those in power to sidestep the tough issues. It will be more difficult for those in power to ignore the question of what really contributes to collective good life in a word-wide relatedness. Yet, for the churches there is no solidarity with a clean slate. They ask themselves the same questions and re-examine their own praxis.

Churches and Christians in mission will time and again experience that faith in God opens possibilities to act, possibilities which make sense and which are close to reality. We are quite aware of our own limitations and yet we trust that God does act within these limitations and in spite of these limitations. So he acts globally. The reason why the faithful should believe just that is because they cling to a God who out of his own free will became completely involved in the human drama of Jesus on his way from Nazareth via Galilee to Jerusalem, and who again as Holy Spirit continues his commitment in a world of destruction, deceit and violence, in short, in a world of sinfulness. Within the limitations which already characterized the mission of Jesus, God continues his presence in the world. In fact, his future as the Creator of this world depends on the future which the stories of faith, of love and confidence have in this world. Mission then as the lobby of faith participates in the limitations which God accepted out of his own free will for himself and for his mission. Christian missionary commitment participates in the weakness of God in this world, a weakness, however, we trust which will not fall prey to the power of evil. And for this simple reason evil has lost its authority, yet not its power.