



Dokumentation

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REBUILDING MISSIONARY COMMUNITIES

**A common learning process between
Latin American and European churches**

**Bad Segeberg
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PREFACE

In May 2002 the European Churches received an invitation from the *World Council of Churches* in Geneva to consider the mission of the churches today together with the *Latin American Council of Churches*. The invitation was at the same time an appeal by the Latin American churches to the European churches to find new ways of working together and co-operating with their continent. Whereas in the Seventies and the Eighties European Christians were very involved in the political and theological developments in Latin America, at present there is a great danger of losing interest in each other.

Since 1989 Europe as a continent has begun to reshape itself. The sweeping political and economic changes have also radically transformed the religious scene and forced the Europeans to concentrate more on themselves. On the other hand, recent global developments are challenging the Europeans to take a credible stand on democracy, tolerance and overcoming violence both within their own countries and in their inter-continental relations. This means that Europe is now facing the task of re-defining and re-organising its relations to the USA and also towards Central and South America.

Many European churches are making efforts to structure these processes responsibly in solidarity with society as a whole. But there are also some religious groups and even churches, whose main concern seems to be how to retain their own identity in a secular environment where they face competition from many different religious trends. In many places social and material changes to the disadvantage of the majority of the population seem to have a negative and crippling effect on the individual churches.

Is it possible to intensify ecumenical cooperation with Christians in Latin America in this European context nowadays? It will certainly not become a priority for the European churches. Nevertheless the *Conference of European Churches* and representatives from several European countries met together with a large delegation from Latin America in the Evangelical Academy in Bad Segeberg. There at the invitation of the *WCC* and in co-operation with the *Protestant Association of Churches and Missions in Germany* (EMW) an intensive consultation took place, both at a personal level and at a theological and spiritual level.

This documentation brings together most of the contributions made at the consultation including the final document, "A letter from Bad Segeberg" and two summaries of the consultation, one by Dr. Viorel Ionita and one by Dr. Dietrich Werner. It also includes a theological reflection from a Latin American point of view (Pastor Juan Abelardo Schvindt) and one from an European point of view (Dr. Sabine Plonz) both written several months later.

However a documentation can in no way mirror what really played such an outstanding role in Bad Segeberg: the ecumenical breadth of the meeting. From both continents there were members there ranging from the Orthodox Church to the Pentecostal Church and from the Anglican Church to the Reformed Church, and the great interest of all participants *to live "Mission"* as Christian communities rooted and actively involved in a local context.

May our texts act as an invitation to both Latin American and European Christians to look beyond your own horizons and may they strengthen you, support you and encourage you in this task.

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I. MISSION AND COOPERATION - LATIN AMERICAN AND EUROPEAN APPROACHES

Towards cooperation with a sense of mission

Perspectives from the churches in Latin America

Consejo Latinoamericano de Iglesias (CLAI)

I. Let us talk as churches

1.1. Our conversation on mission and cooperation is inspired in the Gospel and is animated by a deep pastoral significance. In this, we intend to have in mind the voices of anguish, pain, despair and impotence of our people, as well as their voices of protest and hope, of joy, willingness to work and commitment. As churches, we are part of the life experiences of millions of men and women, children, adolescents, young adults and the elderly. Our conversation attempts to responsibly represent this “cloud of witnesses” that urges and encourages us.

2. Where we talk from

2.1. In Latin America, the end of the millenium has been marked by a profound paradox, which may be expressive of an endemic fracture of our societies. On the one hand, the images of culmination, of the threshold, of the closing of an old time and the opening of a new time made us apparently participants of an unique event, of an unrepeatable moment. On the other hand, expectations of change were dras-

tically denied by the serious and increasing economic, political, social and cultural deterioration of our societies. If anything has characterized these first years of the new century, it has been the recurrence of poverty, unemployment, exclusion, corruption and the emptying of political and social institutions.

2.2. In this sense, the new images cannot escape the persistence of the old. Poverty constitutes a systematic and endemic reality that the present global economic model not only reproduces but also extends and aggravates. The violence established during the Spanish and Portuguese conquest and colonization once again becomes war (Colombia), becomes a frustrated Coup d’etat (Venezuela), and becomes an open protest to vandalism and pillage (Argentina and Peru). In all these cases, governability, credibility and the legitimacy of political, economic and social institutions is practically null or in a rapid deterioration process. In our region there exists the extended perception that something is changing in the depths of our societies. We are losing sensibility towards the daily images of poverty, pain and despair. In order to survi-

ve, many persons and social groups end up building shells to protect and shield themselves. This is evident in the proliferation of neighborhoods and urban sectors isolated and protected as ghettos and also in the unusual expansion of the private security industry. Our societies deeply experiment an extended perception of risk, exposition to hazards, insecurity, uncertainty and loss.

2.3. Therefore, if the beginning of the new millennium appears as an opening of time, globalization appears now as the opening of space. Nevertheless, the naive image of the global village, increasingly gives way to the drastic experience of the global market. Structural adjustments, modernization of institutions, liberalization of markets, especially in the labor market, seem to constitute announcements of what will be our permanent participation in the global market.

Until now the real effects of these processes have been translated into growing social exclusion, impoverishment, and most of all in a great loss of our sustainable economic growth. In the same way, it is translated into the increment of the concentration of wealth in the northern countries, and similarly in our societies, benefiting small privileged minorities with a concentration of wealth.

In this respect, our IV General Assembly expressed the following:

“Globalization - in its social, economic and technological dimensions - amplified its predominance over the life of our people. Globalization was presented to us as a great panacea. We were told that by means of it, technology and market would make this a better world. Actually, globalization reinstalls in social relations with new vigor the law of “the fittest,” making possible the welfare of minorities and condemning millions to be sacrificed on the altar of market, this contemporary idol, avid of human sacrifices.”¹

2.4. Nevertheless, we realize that globalization, like all social phenomenon, may be interpreted from other perspectives. From the reality of the churches in northern societies, it is possible for many to interpret neo-liberal globalization as a viable project, able to be renewed and readapted. But from our own reality, it is a project that must be substituted from its roots. Parti-

cularly because we have evidenced that neo-liberal economy has been installed more as an economic paradigm than as a religious manifestation to which no one can or should oppose.

2.5. Consequently, in relation to globalization, we believe that at least three important differences must be made:

2.5.1. In the first place, the overcoming of national borders and the opening of human interchange to all the richness and variety of experiences, goods and services that God has permitted to be created and made available to each person, each region and each locality of our planet. From this point of view, globalization constitutes a field of profound reflection and ecumenical action.

2.5.2. In the second place, the development and creation of new technologies is God’s gift that permits effectively magnifying the capacities and opportunities of individual and collective action and is able to notably improve the quality of life of persons and human groups. The ample and global circulation of these technologies may actively help us to overcome many of the iniquities, differences and injustices made throughout history. And, in the second place, the development and creation of new technologies is God’s gift that permits effectively magnifying the capacities and opportunities of individual and collective action and is able to notably improve the quality of life of persons and human groups. The ample and global circulation of these technologies may actively help us to overcome many of the iniquities, differences and injustices made along history.

2.5.3. In the third place, relations between countries, between social groups and between persons tend to be experienced and influenced by a distinct new scale that can make us feel co-responsible for the planet.

A metaphor of this is known as the “butterfly effect”² that reminds us that we all are part of the same ecosystem, with relations and connections that although at present we are not able to see, influence and determine our daily life.

2.6. This can be one of the starting points for a joint

meditation and quest with the northern churches. Furthermore, it may be the starting point for reflection that permits finding the means and the ways to influence such an overwhelming, dominant, expansive and inevitable phenomenon as it is globalization.

3. Society and religion in Latin America

- 3.1. In addition, let us remember that Latin American societies were formed in an act of appropriation, imposition and compulsion of colonial power. Swords cut deeply into the human, political social and cultural entirety of the pre-Columbian societies. Portuguese and Spanish Catholicism was an integral part of the conquest and subjection process. The cross was imposed on the symbols and rites of the original religions. The cross and the sword, the sword and the cross in the Spanish and Portuguese manner, deeply marked the historic development of our nations. Somehow they are in their deep ethos, shaping their cultures, bringing meaning to their individual and collective experiences. Native and Afro-American heritage are part of this ethos, as well as the various popular traditions assimilated throughout the republican histories, especially those brought by European immigrants during the second half of the XIX and through the XX centuries.
- 3.2. This painful but opulent past has planted the utopia of liberation, redemption and full significance as genuine searches for restoration in the histories and cultures of Latin American Societies. In an important measure, it has propelled many of the moments, episodes and experiences of resistance, of protest and of subversion along with revolutionary processes in many places of the region. Also, it has been present in a significant degree in experiences and in the religious searches of our people. Many times and in many senses the great political, social and cultural events of the region have had an intense religious, mystic and sacrificial character. Especially important modernization and secularization processes throughout the 20th century have not altered this situation. Moreover, they had to coexist with it.
- 3.3. The above implies that religious institutions have an ample space to influence in practically all aspects of the life of our societies.

Until now, the only religious institution having the effective capacity and legitimacy to do this has been the Catholic Church. It has been historically associated with the exertion of power in Latin American Societies. In many occasions, part of the leadership of the Catholic Church has been part of the dreams, of the searches and of the collective action of the people of the region, especially in the decades following the II Vatican Council. In many countries, during dictatorial regimes and in spite of the Official Church, these sectors, together with the clear leadership of many Protestant churches, decisively assumed the defense of human rights, becoming "the voice of the voiceless." Also, in many countries, many of their dignitaries kept silent or condoned violations of human rights, and the solitary testimony of a number of courageous priests and nuns was the exception.

4. The evangelical churches

- 4.1. During the XX century, a progressive religious and cultural transformation has taken place. In many countries in the region, the Protestant or Evangelical population presents a notable tendency for expansion and growth. The Latin American evangelical development appears particularly marked by a notable and extended presence of the Pentecostal churches which have succeeded in inserting themselves and growing in the world of the poor. In many senses, the great majority of the evangelical churches in the region have developed a notable capacity for expansion within excluded, marginal groups and social sectors. God has honored us in permitting that, while evangelizing the poor, He has also assigned us the enormous responsibility of accompanying them in their efforts, searches and in their hopes.
- 4.2. The evangelical churches in Latin America have historically been built upon a strong sense of community. In this, the experience of developing as a religious minority has taken place in frequently hostile social, cultural and institutional contexts. Also, the intense affective and therapeutic role of the primary evangelical groups has influenced this. In general, evangelical churches in the region, are conformed as communities that grant identity and a sense of belonging to the poor and the excluded from society, and constitute a network, or

a social weaving, made up of multiple primary groups at the local level that integrate, socialize and model people's daily life.

- 4.3. This type of presence that has been achieved by the evangelical and Protestant churches is particularly meaningful in societies like the Latin American that are in a constant situation of crisis and frequently confront serious emergency episodes or catastrophes, these being caused by natural or social causes. In this sense, in recent decades the appearance of the threat of drugs, violence and criminality is remarkable. In many places, criminal associations connected with drug trafficking have truly replaced the political, social or local organizations of the communities. This makes a person's daily life take place under conditions of great risk, insecurity, precariousness and vulnerability. In many ways, poor communities are increasingly menaced by alienation, distrust and suspicion. In many places in the city, you never know who to trust! In this context, evangelical churches present themselves as a network of primary groups, in which it is possible to experience encounters, solidarity and mutual trust. But most specially, it is possible to nurture hope and, because of this, trust that it is possible to do something, to take some type of significant collective action in order to change local situations. From this perspective, churches in many places in the region offer themselves as communities of hope and local action.
- 4.4. For an outside observer, it may result surprising to notice that practically all evangelical churches in the region coincide in their concerns, social and community action are evangelical mandates. This contrasts notable with tendencies prevailing only a few decades ago. This can be explained in relation to a decline in politics (of institutions and political agents), as well as in relation to their imcovenant on the societies of the region that have produced the globalization processes and the generalization of the strategies of neo-liberal development.

5. Religious equality, evangelical identity, citizenship and unity

- 5.1. It is clear that the churches in Latin America constitute an emergent reality searching for its own place in the institutional and social configuration of each national society. This not only presents a vindication towards the privile-

ged status of the Catholic Church, but -and above all- a sign of the increasing consciousness of the enormous responsibility its growth and development implies.

- 5.2. From this point of view, the themes of religious equality, evangelical identity and unity along with those of citizenship, the struggle for justice, peace and creation are key elements for an evangelical agenda that progressively questions both society as well as the churches themselves. Churches and evangelical leaders are increasingly called to formulate public opinion regarding the topics that imply taking a stand, becoming involved in transcendental debates and assuming the complexity of contemporary ethical dilemmas. In the same way, the leaders and the evangelical churches are increasingly challenged by the dramatic urgency of the political, economic and social crisis, which have emerged again in the region (Argentina, Brazil, Peru, among others).
- 5.3. As evangelical churches grow and develop, they are also increasingly under the pressure to enter the public ambit. That means taking charge of matters that concern the social realm, the state or the society.

6. Formal and informal ecumenism

- 6.1. Because of historical, social and cultural reasons, many evangelical churches present dispositions and attitudes markedly excluding and contradictory towards the dominant religion: Roman Catholicism. This distance is even greater in regard to the religions of the original aborigines and afro-descendants, frequently observed simply as expressions of idolatry, witchcraft or paganism. In the same way, processes of fragmentation and division into the same denominational families have frequently accompanied the process of evangelical development in the region. It is worth mentioning that the evangelical presence not only brought its fragmentation to the continent and islands of the Caribbean, but also generated a division in their very interior. We are therefore aware that the evangelical churches of Latin America still have pending the task of unification.
- 6.2. Nevertheless, the increasing evangelical participation in social problems and public matters of the societies necessarily brings a profound modification in the relations among the evan-

gical churches and in the relations they have with other creeds, especially Catholicism, and the original religions of the native aborigines and afro-descendants. This seems to constitute a deep learning process that took place during recent decades. At least it is possible to observe a growing search for opportunities, encounter and unity among the evangelical churches in their different families, traditions and theological and doctrinal currents.

- 6.3. Although this is a restricted form of ecumenism, that does not mean it is not a form of ecumenism that opens itself to social aspects and the public and is understood as a concern for the poverty and misery present in the societies in the region. In some places it also is a form of ecumenism open to the dimension of gender and the ethnic complexity. Furthermore, they are ecumenical experiences built on each country's singularities, each historical situation, each challenge to be undertaken, each task to be carried out and each problem to be solved.

7. Mission

- 7.1. But the ecumenical dimension would never be complete if it did not imply an understanding of the mission. Hence we affirm that there is not a church without missionary vocation, because mission is not related to our preferences and likes, or cost calculations and benefit, with strategies of control and competition or with coexisting alliances. Our fidelity to the mission will at times imply costs that we must be ready to pay and, on other occasions, blessings that we must be ready to receive by the grace of God.
- 7.2. Therefore, we can affirm that the changes occurring in the continent lead us to rethink the mission from a new perspective or ecumenism of the Latin American church. The encounter between our different ecclesiastic traditions, theological currents and pastoral emphasis takes place in a continent punished by empty promises in the perspectives of improvement in the situation of our people. Not taking into account 1492, we can affirm without error that in recent decades the transference of financial resources and raw material to the so-called "central" economies has been constant. In such a context, we are challenged to rethink hope, because we know that when hope is nur-

tured by faith it is not just any hope. As we said in Barranquilla, Colombia, in the final message of the General Assembly of CLAI January 8-19, 2001, "Christian hope for the future has nothing to do with apocalyptic solutions but with the beginning of the kingdom of God. (Revelation 22:1)."³ Hope that has the Kingdom as its horizon has the virtue of not succumbing to crisis and not becoming part of the calm of times without conflicts. Because as its anticipation it has the life of Jesus who did not deem Himself as special⁴ and that based on that common anthropology, summons us to walk together. "Living your life, your dispossession, creating a new prophetic perspective, a perspective that does not dwell on what is partial but that in what is partial discovers the whole and the future the whole indicates... See the butterfly in the larva, the saint, the prostitute, the eagle in the egg, the brother in my neighbor and in a stranger, and in the ephemeral smile of the jasmine, the eternal resurrection of spring. Such is Jesus' way of looking on the world. But He played the flute and we did not dance! (Matthew 11:16-17)."⁵

8. Cooperation

- 8.1. It is then obvious that in a context of imposed globalization, it is imperative to consider cooperation between North and South based on a new comprehension of the Kingdom and evaluate with gratitude but also with broad criteria, our past and paradigms that have marked and given meaning to our relation. Particularly in relation to our comprehension of this so-called "globalization", prophetic stewardship and those specific elements that give meaning to our mission in context and significant to international cooperation. As churches, we should ask ourselves about the specific character of our faith in relation to cooperation, since our own agencies of cooperation receive part of their resources mainly from the specificity of faith. We thank God for the mission agencies and in some cases of cooperation cases that have tried to impulse solidarity as part of the common mission to which we have been convoked.

However, we are sometimes concerned to perceive segregation or ignorance when valuing our churches' work among the poor. Today, any basic study of the reality of poverty in Latin America shows that wherever poor people

exist an evangelical temple is built. Furthermore, the work of these churches is socially appreciated with its limitations in generating hopes, ethic values and human dignity. Sometimes some members of these agencies and some of their policies attempt projecting a secularized vision of mission, ignoring the commitment and action of our communities in the promotion of solidarity and better living conditions. We do not want to question the work of our cooperation agencies, but we believe that as churches it is important to define, along with a common comprehension of the mission, ecclesiastic specific character and the ecumenical frame that at this level the new situation demands from international cooperation.

- 8.2. As mentioned before, an important aspect to keep in mind as part of our dialogue on missions is a reflection on the sense of mission and the identity of our faith in cooperation. Even more, specifically the place of our churches, in both contexts as communities of prophetic stewardship. We are not asking that the churches be administrators of large economic projects, but that they define the sense of mission, the identity of our faith and the work of our churches in cooperation.
- 8.3. The Edinburgh Conference in 1910 attempted doing something similar that marked the beginning of the modern ecumenical movement, having as its central core the mission of the churches. The XXI century surprises us with unimaginable challenges demanded by the search of new paradigms that grant sustainability to the mission and to cooperation in the construction of a new "oikoumene." We cannot "entrench" ourselves in our specific characteristics or in closed scheme; we are called to support ourselves mutually in order to affirm our mission while in the midst of a context of pluralities, with its identities and differences.
- 8.4. Similarly, we believe in the importance of recovering from history the process called Ecumenical Sharing of Resources that we have written together inspired by the World Council of Churches (WCC), especially those lessons that we cannot forget and that are necessary to update the new challenges we face. Systematization of what has been achieved and also of the things we have not wanted or could not implement is needed.

9. Principles for cooperation with sense of mission

- 9.1. We have theological visions that we believe important to keep in mind for defining a cooperation with sense of mission. These are some of them:
 - 9.1.1. Not accepting many of the lifestyles of the present order places us "in and out" of this world when affirming a project of life that is above every project: God's plan for abundant life for all (John. 10:10). The disciples of Emmaus returned to Jerusalem, the place from where they had been rejected. But retracing their steps did not imply going along the same road, but rather to travel the road of a vision fed by hope. Resurrection is possible and is real when we celebrate it in the communion of sharing bread in solidarity!
 - 9.1.2. We live the time of the spirit that surprises and confounds us. It is the time to open us to our dreams and to creativity. The Holy Spirit invites us and convokes us to a renovation of our discernment and to allow us be motivated for an adventure of faith.
 - 9.1.3. In spite of sufferings, uncertainties and present sorrows, this is an opportune time for faith. It is the moment for fellowship and celebration, resisting the present order, feeding our hopes, and being announcers of the Kingdom of God. These theological themes speak of visions to be built. When we walk without predetermined final schemes, we need our mutual company to help define criteria and principles. In this process, we propose the following principles for cooperation with a sense of mission:

Communities of the covenant. Societies and families are fragmenting. Individualism isolates us in a way that makes relations between human beings difficult. It is difficult for us to relate in the task of constructing communities. In the Bible the concept of covenant brings a basis to our social and community relations. Covenant is the capacity to relate among human beings, one with another and go in pursuit of an encounter with your fellow brother or sister, feeling as members of the same family. This sense of covenant, that joins us as family, qualifies our relations in church and in society in a different way.

Reserves of ethical sense. Churches are and have to be ethical communities. This ethical character of the church, has not only practical implications but also implications in the sense of mission. They are related to integrity, credibility and the ethic and moral life of our churches. In a moment when people are losing credibility in social, political and economical institutions, that should maintain the social cohesion of our societies. The absence or the perversion of our moral values erode the social weaving of our societies, and the meaning of the political institutions. For us, there is no other alternative than to proclaim an “ethic defiance” against the criteria and procedures of the globalization project that dehumanizes us. We are beckoned to promote in our mission a “culture of solidarity” and “a new ethic covenant”.

Renovation of our spirituality. Today we are debating between an accelerated secularization and a search for spirituality. Our preoccupation for spirituality is important. But, what kind of spirituality are we speaking about?

Spiritual renewal begins with the pastoral activities and the celebrational and liturgical communities as constitutive part of the Church’s mission. Accompanying our members, praying for one another, visiting the sick, celebrating in adoration, serving the community, loving your neighbor. The transformation of our institutions, of the quality and orientation of our activities and ministry, of the mystic of our spirituality, and of the renewal of our personal and communitary lives, these are the central and constitutive elements for the renewal of our spirituality.

In this effort, the right of life constitutes a central topic of concern, specially when confronting the phenomenon of exclusion: being discriminated from their right to live. Our people are forced to simply survive in their daily fight. We concernedly observe, in such sense, that until now, the cooperation has become a palliative without final solutions. We have to bet for the right of life and the search of alternatives of life.

10. A proposal for actions and initiatives

From our understanding of the cooperation with ecclesiastical face, we propound the following priorities and alternatives.

10.1. PRIORITIES

Unity: Cooperation must contribute to affirm the unity of the Body of Christ. The construction of an oikumene, as an alternative to ruling globalism disguised as globalization. The catholicity of the church is constructed starting from the local congregation. The universality of the church gives sense to the local community of faith. The main objective is to invigorate the net of churches concept, facing testimony, in relation with the specific contribution for construction of the civil society.

Congregational life: It is a disposition for privileging the life of our local congregations. Various actions are possible: The exchange of experiences, praying networks, the reinforcement of evangelical work, the sharing of pastoral practices, a deep emphasis on biblical, theological and liturgical qualities.

Training and Formation: Expedite human development, training and qualification processes, this means defining a long and middle term training policy, both for Europe as well as for Latin America.

Economic viability: The system of cooperation has contributed to dependency. The churches that depended the most from abroad have not necessarily been the ones that have achieved the greater missionary dynamism. Our region lives a growing impoverishment that makes difficult the viability of our churches. However, it is necessary to accompany and promote initiatives and profound studies that contribute to the economic viability of the prophetic stewardship works in our churches in a context of foreign indebtedness, unemployment and scaling social marginality.

Lobbying and advocacy: In the global world, interconnections are decisive. In Latin America we have a lot to learn in the

field of lobbying and advocacy, in societies where the credibility of the social institutions and even the state itself, are destroyed daily. In this field we can and we should mutually grow and support us.

Reorientation of cooperation with sense of mission: The policies for development have failed and the international cooperation has not produced the expected changes. Levels of poverty increase without hope for solutions, differences are unsolvable and the concentrations of power make participation almost impossible. When confronting new challenges, we must ask ourselves for a place for our cooperation with sense of mission in this world of globalization. It would appear as if our cooperation only repeats worn out schemes already exhausted, or that it finds difficulties to define its specificity. It is not only to define the aggregate value of our cooperation, but the capacity or incapacity to achieve different results, meaning the missiological role of our cooperation that allows the fulfillment of dreams to construct realities, different from the reality that we must confront daily.

10.2. INITIATIVES

Ecumenical networks for social action: Support existing and new experiences in the church's communitary and social service. It is intended to build national networks in which the churches take part having as vision the stewardship and the public participation. Important examples are, among other, the process being implemented in Chile in search of self sustentation of the stewardship's task and of the human promotion of the churches, the „round table“ experience in Argentina, that attempts to confront the accelerated impoverishment, and in Brazil, where an evangelical solidarity network was created recently. These national or local world networks involve:

□ A network of churches/organizations that can perform or have performed communitary actions of social, cultural or economic nature.

□ A network of evangelical-professional, technical, specialists, human resources, able to cooperate with time and capacities. A universal priesthood of the believers for the communitary wellbeing.

□ A funding system combining its own resources and international cooperation.

□ Specific areas of work: Prevention of the psychosocial damage, culture of peace, overcoming of poverty, protection of the environment.

□ Attention of the alimentary and sanitary emergency.

Proposal of pilot mission studies at local/national levels. Rather than working in individual projects, we must work in several national/local proposals (limited number, as initial experience) in which we approach the missiology's theme with the churches of the specific country in an inclusive way.

Defining topics for lobbying and advocacy: There are a limited number of topics, in our churches, in both regions, which can inconvenience our societies with specific results. The agenda as well as the results would have to be coordinately processed.

Exchange of personnel: Jointly design a system of exchange of personnel, North-South and South-South, so contributing to the human development with a mechanism that helps sharing human resources in the region and among regions.

Economic viability study: Expedite a study to improve the indexes of economic viability of our churches and of the ecumenical movement.

Forum about Mission: To establish an occasional space using different dynamics to expedite the study, the specialization and the exchange of the nature and significance of our mission in context.

Communication network: To promote the interactive and formative communication among the churches of our regions. Providing economic resources to consolidate efficient communication networks at churches and ecumenical movement's levels.

When we look into the past, and in spite of our errors, we cannot less than thank God for having blessed us in the accomplishment of our mission. When we look towards the future, we discover new challenges. Hence, the present document invites us

to progress while discerning and building new paradigms of faith for the mission and cooperation, as churches of Jesus Christ.

Mission and Cooperation Consultation Latin American Council of Churches

Footnotes

- ¹ Final Document of the IV CLAI's General Assembly, Barranquilla, Colombia, January 8 -19 of 2001, page 2
- ² That suggests that if a butterfly flaps its wings in Hong Kong, this can start a storm in New York.
- ³ Dias, Zwinglio: "Ele tocou a flauta e nós não dançamos" – Notas para a formulação de um novo paradigma missionário, p.12.
- ⁴ Fil. 2, 1 ss.
- ⁵ Documento Final de la IV Asamblea General del CLAI ... pág. 1

Common Mission in different contexts

Presentation of the European Working Paper

Karl Appl, Switzerland

Introduction

It fell to us, Juan Abelardo Schvindt and yours truly, to open the first session of our consultation with a short flash of the contexts within which we are developing what we understand as „our mission as Christians and Churches“.

I will present to you a draft document which for the organisation group is still a draft concerning what it means to do „Mission“ or to fulfil God's Mission in the European context – of course, this whole issue can not be covered in its entirety.

A year ago, in May 2002, representatives of CEC, the World Council of Churches, the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands, the Lutheran Church of Sweden, the Federation of Reformed Churches in Switzerland, the EMW and CLAI, came together to reflect on the challenges of mission and co-operation for the European Churches, and to identify the issues which for their respective organisations were to be proposed for discussion with the sister churches in LA and Europe. The starting point was CLAI's preoccupation that there is a growing distance between Latin America and Europe.

The idea was to highlight the mutual enrichment between the churches in the two continents and to search for ways to strengthen the existing ties. With the purpose of giving a more complete image of the churches' mission and facing the (new) challenges for our churches and the ecumenical movement.

Just like the churches in Latin America who through CLAI have embarked on a process of this kind, there were conferences on the issue within CEC and its member churches.

For example, a consultation organised by CEC took place with the theme: „Giving an account of the Hope within us - the common call for the European Churches to mission.“

The initiative that came to us from the Regional Desk of the WCC was welcomed by the representatives, most of all because in many evangelical and orthodox churches in our continent there is a feeling that the concept of Mission should be renewed and adopted to the challenges the churches are facing. After an extensive discussion, it was concluded that a document would be drafted that would draw up the big lines of the context and the challenges of the mission of the churches in the beginning of the 21st century.

The document, which is far from a complete vision of the reality and challenges for our churches to fulfil their role within God's mission, was sent out for discussion to more than 50 different leaders of evangelical and orthodox churches in Europe. It should be underlined that it obviously does not deal with the greatest challenge of all that the world is now facing, that of war or peace, - we discussed at that time the issue of globalisation, its threat to the peoples, and we discussed forms of reacting to it.

Nor did we touch the problem of religious fundamentalism which is jeopardising the good relations of the European countries and the religious peace within some countries of our continent – this is even more relevant now, when religious language is being instrumentalised for war purposes.

Still I would like to present this document to you as it was elaborated – with a few brief observations – so that this might help us and direct us in some issues that we may discuss during this conference.

THE DOCUMENT:

Mission and Co-operation

A Dialogue between Christians of Latin America and Europe, initiated by CLAI, WCC, CEC and EMW

Draft Paper

I Purpose of this Paper

Although there exist on different levels long term relationships between churches, mission councils, church organisations, and Christian networks between Latin America and Europe today, there is a strong feeling that our concept of mission should be reconsidered, renewed and adapted to the challenges the churches are facing in the 21st century.

The idea of organising a process of reflection on mission and international co-operation arose during the meeting of the Latin-American Forum on the Ecumenical Sharing of Resources (FOCER), in the year 2000, given that the concept of mission is essential to ecumenical resource sharing.

CLAI organised a consultation on Mission and International Co-operation in June 2001 in Geneva and proposed to begin a dialogue in the common understanding of mission from a Protestant perspective with the European Churches. This idea was communicated with the help of WCC to CEC and to several European Church and Mission representatives, where it was welcomed warmly and with certain enthusiasm. The working group established on the European side not only discussed the contemporary issues around mission as central commitment of every single Christian person and the church as a whole but also elaborated a methodology of how to organise an intercontinental discussion process.

The main purpose of this draft paper is therefore to invite churches and everybody concerned with mission to a broader discussion process which shall lead to a Latin-American-European Consultation on the subject in March 2003 and take place probably in Hamburg. (Note: Finally the Consultation took place in Bad Segeberg from the 3-6 April 2003).

II The context of Mission in Europe

- Due to the radical changes which Europe has experienced in the last 15 years the societies and

the churches are facing challenges which also affect deeply our concept and practise of mission. We would like to mention:

- awakening of nationalism
- the erection of new economic barriers between Western Europe and the countries in the East and the South
- barriers through racist policies against immigrants, migrants and refugees
- a growing division between rich and poor sectors within the same country
- deep changes in gender relationship
- secularisation processes and simultaneously the instrumentalisation of religion
- the growth of new and not institutionally linked/bounded forms of spirituality in many sectors of the population
- the development of multicultural societies which confront the churches with a shift in their role from minority to majority churches and vice versa or even to a Diaspora situation of some historical churches
- lack of participation of the younger generation in some churches
- the constant change in our society which does not leave time for new initiatives to develop
- the presence of Islam and other large religions in Europe. Which consequences does this have for the relationship between religions?
- the trauma of colonial mission in past centuries seem to paralyse some churches when they would like to talk about mission.

This list is not complete and we invite our partners in dialogue to add further points of discussion according to their own experience. We suggest to enter in deeper analysis of our perception of the contemporary context in Europe.

III Issues for discussion between Latin American and European Churches and Institutions

With respect to the context described above, we

would like to suggest a preliminary list of issues for the further discussion on our common concept of mission:

- mission of church in society
- ecumenical mission
- community as a subject of mission
- evangelisation as an expression of mission
- Pentecostal trends in different churches
- changes between minority and majority role of churches and the implications for citizenship and civil rights
- globalisation and the call for economic justice as the global framework of mission in both continents
- co-operation and partnership as instruments to strengthen the commitment in mission
- growing political and religious fundamentalism questioning the role of the churches announcing the Good News

IV Lifting awareness to action

Due to the importance of these issues we intend to come to practical recommendations for churches, missionary councils and grassroots level at the end of the consultation with the desire to continue the intercontinental project of mission and cooperation.

We invite all institutions, communities and concerned Christians to react to this draft paper with comments and suggestions which will be taken into account in the further redaction. The result of your feedback and following discussions in the intercontinental preparation committee shall serve as a basis for the planned consultation. CLAI on their behalf are elaborating a document on mission in the Latinamerican context which will be presented and distributed as a second key document in preparing the consultation.

Final remarks:

Regrettably I must confess that on the European side, there weren't many who responded. I personally ask myself if the moment for our initiative

was right, and if we put sufficient importance into it?

We do not have any information as to which extent the issues were discussed. We received a letter from Spain in which the sender suggested the theme of South-South mission and the issue of the Latin migrants in Europe, which seem to me very important issues.

Other issues I have mentioned above. The war was a remote issue then, and I would say that it is not only a challenge for our churches, but rather a vital issue for the whole of humanity. Isn't it time, - once again - that the churches put more emphasis on the issue of peace and insist that war kills, even in times of peace.

Coming back to the preparation of this conference:

When I think of my cantonal church in Switzerland which was also invited to participate in the process, I have the feeling that we discuss and are discussing so many things that time is too short to reflect on the more important issues; the word of God and our mission as church. My personal observation from Switzerland is that many churches and communities have fallen into „actionism“ a while ago in order to respond to present challenges and do not remember the basis for their actions. Not only for that reason I find it very important to reflect together as brothers and sisters of all continents on what are our common challenges in a world which is still far from what God has promised: His Kingdom of Peace and Justice.

2. THEOLOGICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Righteousness and peace will kiss each other

(Psalm 85, 10)

Sermon given by
Rev. Humberto Ramos Salazar, Bolivia

“Free to build peace”, this was the slogan at the Latin American Council of Churches (CLAI) Fourth Assembly held from 12-19 January 2001 in Barranquilla (Colombia). At the time our thoughts were focussed on the situation in Colombia, a situation of internal conflict, violence and death; it is important, however, to remember that we underlined the prophetic role as an advocate for peace in the face of the Somoza regime that the Latin American Council of Churches has played since its beginnings¹.

This afternoon we are gathered here as leaders of the Christian churches of Europe and Latin America to reflect on the invasion of Iraq by one of the countries dominating the planet and, let us face it, humanity.

In recent days CLAI issued a document based on Habakkuk 2,12: “*Woe to him who builds a city with bloodshed and establishes a town by crime*”. Brothers and sisters, we cannot ignore the images brought to us by the mass media, despite of the restrictions imposed. We see cities being destroyed and men, women and children struggling to survive. We see soldiers equipped with modern weapons worth thousands of dollars on the one hand, and defenceless barefoot homeless children anxiously waiting for a piece of bread on the other. Powerless, we watch death prevail over life and we cannot keep from reflecting on or expressing an opinion on the matter.

The reading from Isaiah (32, 15-20) shows how closely “righteousness and peace” are related to one another, (v.17: “*The fruit of righteousness will be peace; the effect of righteousness will be quietness and confidence for ever*”).

Likewise, Psalm 85.10 “*Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss*

each other” describes the close relationship between righteousness and peace.

Living in a globalized world, a world that claims to be uni-polar, we witness in our daily life how righteousness is relegated to second place, this righteousness which is the foundation for human liberty, sovereignty and human rights. Every day righteousness is undermined by a system of death which is manipulated a minority.

The terms liberty, sovereignty, righteousness, human rights, truth, peace and so forth take on new meanings, that is, those in power impose the meanings that they want us to accept. Our basic principle that we are human beings made in the image of God is being challenged and, just as occurred in Isaiah’s time, a new “god” is being raised, “*who relies on horses, who trusts in the multitude of their chariots and in the great strength of its horsemen*” (Is.31,1). However, neither missiles, tanks, nor the most recent weapons can change the importance of the human values which constitute life.

There is no need for in-depth analyses, nor to be an expert on the subject, in order to see how a small number of people, a group, in the name of the nation, are building a strategic geo-political globalizing network of economic and political domination; a new Empire aiming to dominate while seeking to convince the whole world that it is the “liberator of peoples”. Just look into the eyes of a little girl with her mother mourning her father, whose life was viciously taken away by the invading tank that had advanced without permission, destroying their dreams, family and aspirations as a people and nation, as creatures of the God of life. The scenes of destroyed buildings, of dead children, of massacred women, of smoke covering a city devastated by bombs, show us a reality in which death prevails, a reality which goes barriers of language and dis-

tance. We do not need to analyze this reality in order to understand it. The pictures speak for themselves, whether they are from Germany, China, South Africa, Argentina, Mexico and/or Washington.

The basis of our faith is to defend life. From Genesis to the Apocalypse, the Word of God teaches us to defend life in the face of the negative values that humans may create through sinfulness. Therefore, we are called to proclaim life, we are called to declare the message of Jesus Christ, a message of hope in the face of death, a message of righteousness in the face of injustice, a message of peace in the face of violence.

My country, Bolivia, battered by natural disasters, battered by neo-liberal economic policies, battered by corruption, battered by poverty, marginalization and the domination of the great majority by a small group, has not given up its principles of righteousness, nor lost its hope for a full life according to the words of the Apostle John "...I came that they may have life and have it abundantly"(10,10). Repeated demonstrations by pensioners from various social classes, the street children's march, the voice of the indigenous peoples cannot be silenced by the firepower of the authorities. The blood of the innocent victims is like water falling on the seeds which makes hope germinate as in the words of Rev. 21, 1: "*Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth.*" This is what the Latin American people hope. That, without losing sight of their own context, they may see their daily lives in the wider general context and live completely trusting in the God of life.

Because:

We firmly believe that it is the generous spirit of the Lord of the universe which gave birth to this world; that it was God's creative hand which with great artistry created beauty, the moon and the stars, the houses, the lakes, the boats on the river heading for the sea, the immense coffee groves, the white cotton plantations and the forests which are being desecrated by the axes of criminals.

We believe in Jesus,
who is architect, engineer, craftsman,
carpenter, mason and ship builder;
We believe in Christ,
Who is a builder of thoughts, music and wind,
of peace and love.

For we believe in Christ the worker,
light of light and the only true Son of God,
who in order to save the world was incarnated
in the humble and pure womb of Mary.
We believe he was beaten, mocked, tortured
and made a martyr on the cross,
under Praetor Pilate, the Roman imperialist,
the merciless scoundrel and invader who,
washing his hands of the matter,
tried to avoid taking the blame.

Because we believe in Jesus, as a friend,
a human Christ, a worker, and winner over death.
Who with his enormous sacrifice created a
new humanity for salvation.
We believe he is being resurrected
in every action undertaken to defend people
from the domination of the abuser;
because he is alive on farms, in factories,
in schools,
we believe in his tireless struggle,
we believe in his resurrection in Latin America
and in the whole world.²

The thousands of voices, the peaceful marches, the lighted candles, the prayers and moments of silence are symbols of solidarity for a people subjected to the blasting of machine-guns and to bombing by an empire that uses Christianity to claim legitimacy.

We Christian men and women, followers of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, who was crucified and resurrected, are fighting for life and are called to proclaim the peace of God, the peace of Jesus Christ. Peace achieved through freedom as sons and daughters of God created in His image of a "*great God, mighty and awesome, who is not partial and takes no bribe, who executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and who loves the strangers, giving them food and clothing*" (Dt. 10, 17-18). It is our duty to express our solidarity, to accompany our brothers and sisters who have been denied a voice and to express opposition on their behalf.

During these days together we will share our experiences as God's people, experiences which probably differ greatly, with contrasting realities, like our languages, our cultures and aspirations. Nevertheless, we are gathered here in response to the same message, united by the same demands, united in our large cities, in our small villages lost in the mountains or in the luxuriant woods of the lowlands, by our faith in Jesus Christ, the only begotten son of God who is in unity with the Holy Spirit.

When we talk about our mission, one of our common missions is undoubtedly the proclamation of peace, the peace of Jesus Christ, the peace Christ gave us.

Brothers and sisters, let us proclaim peace for humanity, let us be messengers of peace, in particular in areas such as the one mentioned earlier, let us pray and take concrete actions so that peace may reach the men, women and children of the world.

Let us encourage righteousness and peace to kiss each other and, *“Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid”* (John 14, 27), because the Holy Spirit is our comforter and will accompany us wherever we are and *“May our faith and our hope not fail”*.

MAY THE PEACE OF GOD BE WITH US. AMEN.

Footnotes

¹ Nicaraguan dictator who was overturned by revolution. CLAI letter of 1978.

² Paraphrased from the „Nicaraguan Credo“ (Credo Nicaragüense)

Introduction to the Latin American document

Lic. Juan Abelardo Schvindt, Argentina

1. Introduction

No one is unaware of the fact that the war instigated by the U.S and its allies against Iraq is not a secondary matter in relation with mission and cooperation. While I am writing these introductory lines to our work document, I cannot but feel insulted as a human being, as a Protestant, and as a Latin American. Many others have the same feeling.

But the war is not the main issue of our meeting. I just wanted to indicate it as an aspect which will be with us a lot in the future and of whose consequences we will not be able to escape while trying to answer in a serious and mature way the question of mission and cooperation.

Without, therefore, opening judgment on the details of the armed invasion that the Iraqi people are suffering, and in spite of how that unfortunate facts move us, here we are. We have taken the time to meet, even though we come from different contexts, from different ministerial experiences, and from different mission and cooperation experiences. We feel part of this world, and that is the reason precisely why we do not avoid our responsibility for its future.

2. From Geneva to Bad Segeberg

Some of us who are present here will remember that when we met in Geneva in November last year, the international scene did not show the frailty and, paradoxically, the threat which it now represents. At that time we were confronting the unavoidability of the one-way thought and globalization going hand-in-hand with the neo-liberal model. We then said that we should go over our historic bonds, detect common challenges and establish new criteria and paradigms for cooperation in the face of mission. Today, we are witnesses to a deeper knowledge of that unavoidability, where to the unavoidability of the economy is added that of the military.

3. Prominent aspects of the document

Our expectations for this meeting are based, mainly, on sustaining the dialogues that we will be doing. We then, in the first place, expect that the same will be based on the diversity that motivates us and enriches our encounter, on the celebration, on the sharing of visions and tasks and the fact that we belong to the same people of God.

Basically because, as churches, “we are part of the life experiences of millions of men and women, children, adolescents and young people, adults and the elderly. Our conversation tries to represent that vast ‘cloud of witnesses’ that urges and encourages us.”

In second place, we would like to share clearly from what place we are speaking. We are speaking in the name of a continent where, in the last decades, there has been a recurring pattern of depth of poverty caused by unemployment, corruption and total lack of sense of the political, social and economic institutions. As Eduardo Galeano, years ago, already expressed so well “We are not, in these lands (Latin America), watching the infancy of the savage capitalism, but its cruel decrepitude. Underdevelopment is not a stage of development. It is the consequence.”

Latin America has been that since its beginning: A continent of a constant of exportation of economic excesses, without its being able to change the imposed direction of the commercial exchange politics and the politics of international finance. We are witnesses to the awakening of the first globalization of the planet: As of 1492 we were annexed to Europe leaving not much left to be found after that. In spite of the fact that there were moments of euphoria and agreement of utopias (especially in the 70’s decade), the direction that history took left May 1968 far behind. The dream of a ‘global village’ culminated in its replacement, the ‘global mar-

ket'. How much of this could be changed, is still to be written. At the moment, we have only our hopes and dreams. We are conscious of the groaning of creation and our groaning with it. As Paul says, "We know that the creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first-fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we await eagerly for our adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all; who hopes for what he already has? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently." (Rom 8,22-25)

The context we are living demands of us a strong dose of hope. If we want to 'be able to see above' what is happening it is necessary that the foundation of our dreams and visions not decline. The future will have the size of our dreams. Precisely this ability to recreate the imagination is what has made Christians of all times strong. It was their behaviour towards adversity that allowed for the emergence of communities of resistance to any intents of hegemony by the ones in power.

By the above said, the document presented last November emphasizes not only an ecclesial and ecumenical reality of the continent, but it also emphasizes the necessity of procuring through diagnose, tasks and goals in common, from a perspective of new phenomena started by globalization.

4. Neo-liberalism and Globalization

As we said in the IV General Assembly of the CLAI: "Globalization - in its social, economical and technological dimensions - amplified its predominance in the life of our people. Globalization was presented to us as the great panacea; we were told that, through it, technology and the market would make this world a better one. The truth is that globalization established with new spirit the law of the strongest in social relations, allowing for the well-being of the minorities and condemning millions to be sacrificed at the altar of the market, that contemporary idol eager for human sacrifices".

Neo-liberalism as the supporting means of globalization, is not a subject that might be debated as one simple economical variable among others.

Neo-liberalism, thus installed defies our own Christian identity by demanding by this idol, an attitude of total submittal and sacrifice. The first commandment of the law as also the complement

that Jesus himself gives, is under questioning before this beast that devours persons, societies and cultures. It is a subject that has to do, aside from ideologies, with the Christian faith. In Latin America it was presented as the panacea that would solve all of societies problems, and it actually generated quite the contrary: A process of cultural and economic accumulation in the hands of a few and the exclusion of millions of human beings of the dignity of labor and the benefits of economy. In this sense, therefore, behind globalization, there is a globalization being installed based on the principal or a totalitarian ideology with pretensions to a one-way of thought. And in spite of the fact that neo-liberalism is associated with the imposing globalization, this should be seen as a phenomenon that allows us to distinguish three aspects of it to find our place in this globalization.

When the frontiers were opened, globalization became a field of profound reflection and ecumenical action.

New technologies, introduced as a panacea, are now seen in the light of the incorporation to the military forces of the north and the significance of its contribution to the improvement of the quality of life of our people must be again discussed.

Relationships between nations and continents, far from getting closer, are being more and more suspected of forming a hegemony through the allies that attack Iraq. This fact places under judgment even those organisms in which humanity has bestowed its trust towards ending war and the peaceful resolution of conflicts such as the UN.

We are standing before a vast field trying to continue this joint project between Europe and Latin America. This is the same for the study of the diagnose made of as well as the action taken keeping in mind a comprehension in common with the mission. The question would really be, deep down, the same question we were asking last November in the sense of 'how to make an influence on a phenomenon that is so overcoming, so dominant, so expansive, an so inevitable as it is globalization'.

5. The church and society

Our churches are always 'churches in a context', and therefore are 'on their way'. We say that in them, "throughout the 20th century a progressive religious and cultural transformation has taken place. In many countries of this region the Protes-

tant and Evangelical population has presented a notable tendency to expand”.

To make this affirmation clearer, it is necessary to say that, on the one hand, the development of Pentecostal churches in the marginal and poorer areas have marked our society with a new identity of which it will now not be able to detach itself from. As much because of its magnitude as because of the meaning that it gives the people that they summon. On the other hand the churches of Protestant tradition and European root, formed originally by the migratory waves that came to the continent during the last half of the 19th century and the beginnings of the 20th century, are confronted with economic and cultural impoverishment of vast sectors of its membership, together with the secularization of a good other part. The combination of these phenomena (poverty and secularization) raises a question to the former, the one of mission and growth applicable to their own ecclesiastical identities. Facing a neo-liberal model which presents itself as an idol, and where other religious expressions are sustained by a questionable combination of neo-liberalism and gospel, being a church in Latin America puts us against a situation similar to that of the Reformation, we are facing the question of the landmarks of the ‘true’ church, and, therefore, our fidelity, the Gospel and the Kingdom.

By the before said, in Latin America, more than being an established culture of ‘emerging groups’, our churches are focal points where a new culture is recreated and based on solidarity and contention. This is why we state that “in general, the evangelical churches in the region are conformed as communities that bestow identity and a sense of belonging to the poor and excluded of society and make up a social network or pattern conformed of multiple primary groups on a local level that integrates, socializes and models the life of the people on a day to day basis.”

As in the primitive church, we are promoting unity and transforming peoples that were before enemies into spaces for unity, service and the promotion of human dignity. Forecasts of the Kingdom. That is a possibility that defies the one-way thought towards a one-with-God thought who in Christ has overcome all powers to liberate diversity towards coexistence and not towards confrontation.

This way of ‘being a church’, confronted, on the one hand by poverty and exclusion, and, on the other, by impoverishment and secularization, demands vision to preserve it in the midst of the pres-

ures of a fragmenting society, where politics becomes corrupt, economy declines and the life expectancies are diminishing. This is why we insist on the fact that: “more and more, churches and evangelical leaders are called to formulate public opinion on issues that imply taking a stand, getting involved in transcendent debates, and assuming the complications of the contemporary ethical dilemmas. In the same way, the leaders and evangelical churches are being more and more challenged by the dramatic urgency of the political, economic and social problems that have emerged again in the region, (Argentina, Brazil, Peru, among others)”.

In other words, the evangelical and Protestant agenda would be under considerable pressure as much as by the direction of the events as the search for its own means of support. To attend to the demands of the context of the time in Latin America demands for, basically, social sensibility, ministerial zeal, and ecumenical aperture. These three aspects are distinctive of a church that serves, accompanies and maintains a dialogue. Especially since they protect us from the messianic auto-sufficiency that so many groups claim to have, and which, in little time, reality shows them the limits of their own pride. As we said in our IV General Assembly: “the hope of the future for the Christian has nothing to do with Apocalyptic solutions, but with the beginning of the Kingdom of God (Apoc.22)”.

And we stated in our document: The hope that has the Kingdom as their horizon, possesses the virtue of not caving in during crisis and does not assimilate the calm of times without conflicts. Because he has a foretaste of the life of Jesus who made no show of his condition and from that common anthropology he invites us to walk together. “To live his life his aloofness, generates a new view, a prophetic one, a view that is not attached to partiality, that, rather, discovers the wholeness in partiality (...) To see the butterfly in the caterpillar, the saint in the prostitute, the eagle in the egg, the brother in the neighbor and distant neighbor, and in the ephemeral smile of the jazmin, the resurrection of spring. That is the view of Jesus on the world. But he played the flute and we did not dance! (Mt.11, 16-17)”

6. Being churches on a road... open to mission

Being a church in its context, demands an aperture towards mission. This, taking into account the

particularity of the limited amount of mission that each church is able to do and without pretending to be the only and true mission possible and at who's service it is possible to work for, and, which is their own 'Missio Dei'. What God wants, expects and does in the midst of our complex present situation. Free from the patrons of a colonial imposed mission and open to the certainty that God does not abandon its creation and that He summons his people to give witness and to announce new things in the midst of all it.

We are called to the building of communities of faith; the opening towards cooperation; the critical and responsible participation in the construction of our societies and the forming of new leaderships.

On the other hand, and in spite of all said, we try to learn from the past. In this sense, we affirm that dimension of ecumenical aperture has not always been a natural phenomenon. That is why we confess that "the process of evangelical development in the region has been frequently accompanied by processes of fragmentation and division in its own denominational families. This would mean to say that the evangelical presences not only brought with it, their fragmentation to the Continent and the Caribbean Islands, but also generated schisms inwardly. We are, therefore, conscious that the evangelical churches of Latin America still have a pending task towards unity.

Pending task, even though there have been many advances in that aspect: In theological education, in initiatives towards mission, in the building of Church Federations which mean public opinion of the evangelical point of view in an articulate manner in various countries and in different inter-confessional and ecumenical organizations. We must deal with our situation in a context of enormous efforts to work together in order to give witness to the 'multiform grace of God'

7. Mission as an occasion for cooperation and ecumenism of the churches

Julio of Santa Ana sustains that "while reflecting on the waves that lead to the creation of that organization, so important in the ecumenical movement, as is the WCC, the task and the reflection of the missionary movement should made clear in the first place".

This important movement went through an enriching process by which it "began realizing that the problem of unity could not be raised simply as an internal problem of church life, but as an affair that concerned all the events in the life of the people to whom the gospel should be preached".

This is why, in Edinburgh in 1910, while celebrating the first World Missionary Conference, Europe had incorporated Asia and Africa to its debating table to walk together in the missionary comprehension of Asia and Africa. Even if, up to then the terminology of the missionary comprehension of the churches was evangelical, the presence of other non-occidental delegations in Edinburgh raised the necessity of an aperture towards cooperation in a diverse context where the meaning of mission must be defined.

While that was happening, Latin America was not taking part in this Conference, because it was considered to be already a Christian continent. The bottom line was that Latin America was never considered by Europe to be an open area for mission

but as a continent open to receive enormous migratory contingents that its wars and crisis could not contain. The debate on mission (although the question raised was really evangelization) in Latin America took place some years later, en February 1916, when the Congress on the Christian Task in Latin America was held in the city of Panama. That initiative dealt with the problems of mission, but rather with the view of differentiation from Catholicism, than precisely with cooperation. Those were evidently other times.

In spite of all said, the relation with Europe was bilateral between the groups that had immigrated and their root churches. These were, in very few cases sustained by a common mission principle but were of cooperation and support and the necessity to secure the presence and identity of these groups in the continent. As time went by, this cooperation culminated in the emergence of the 'national churches' independent but still maintaining a contractual relationship with their 'elder sisters'. This relationship helped to waken the emergence of ecumenical spaces in different parts of the continent. It also helped to define the starting lines of liberation theology during the last half of the 60's decade and the beginnings of the 70's.

Later, during key moments of the defense and promotion of human dignity and when 'other one-way thoughts' installed themselves in the countries of the continent, the aperture and the solidarity of

the countries in Europe were more strongly felt. So we speak of a confessional memory, where the essential to faith speaks with 'clamor and groans' of this unique creation of God. As from the articulation of the language of faith and through the martyrdom of so brothers and sisters, we now share this counsel and try to achieve dialogue as churches standing face to face to the mission that challenges it. Although we are speaking from a different time in history, we trust that with the same passion that faith charisma gives us.

Note of the editor:

The original article closes with reference to the "Proposals of actions and initiatives" made in the CLAI-paper (cf. chapter I, "Perspectives from the churches" in Latin America).

Biblical, Pastoral and Theological Reflections

Manuel Quintero Perez, Ecuador

In baseball slang, a sport little known in Europe with the exception of Italy, the term “warming-up pitcher” is used for a pitcher who is warming up his arm outside the field in case he may need to relieve the pitcher responsible for initiating the game. I currently have the role of “warm-up pitcher”, but I have not had time to warm up my arm, therefore some of my “pitches” may be way off.

Ideas on mission

Christian faith is a missionary faith. Crossing geographical, cultural and ethnic borders is an essential aspect of the Christian faith. Mission cannot be considered or expressed merely in terms of strategy or resources, but must be thought also as a continuation of God’s expansion throughout history, manifested in Jesus and his followers.

We have not come to the end of mission but to the end of a period or era of particular form of Christian mission. The missionary movement in recent centuries appeared to be intimately linked to a particular *ethos*: that of Western civilization. Converting people to Christianity was often confused with converting them to the values of Western civilization, if necessary through coercion, and missionaries did not hesitate to call on the power of their home countries for this purpose.

In Latin America, the most recent efforts of certain Roman Catholic sectors, especially since the Conference of Bishops in Santo Domingo (1992), to found a type of neo-Christianity by restoring the religious and spiritual hegemony of Catholicism, have failed on several fronts, particularly in the fields of education and religious equality. Latin American countries are no longer homogeneous Catholic states; all, without exception, are experiencing the impact of pluralism, secularity and evangelism.

Today many churches in the West have realized that mission is not exclusively about crossing more borders, but also about allowing one’s own borders

to be crossed by practices and forms of churches from other regions. These churches no longer consider mission to be the dissemination of the Gospel from a “Christian” centre to distant “pagan” countries but a task belonging to a universal and extremely diverse church with a common mission.

Biblical perspectives

Acts 1, 8: *“But you will receive the power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”*

This text tells us that mission is the result of a community’s witness to a faith which is filled with the Holy Spirit. Likewise in John 20, 21-22: *“As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” And with that he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit.”* Both passages emphasize the presence of the Holy Spirit in the community as a prerequisite for undertaking a mission. The text according to John adds another element: the mission must, as Saint Anthony said, be “according to Christ”, emulating his ministry of love and service. The powerful accomplishments of Jesus and of his church, demonstrate the liberating power of the kingdom of God and are symbols and signs of the kingdom *which is already among us*.

The third important biblical point is found in the sending forth of the twelve and the seventy, as recounted in Luke 9, 1-10 and 10, 1-9. Those sent by the Lord went equipped only with the power to heal, and were dependent for their sustenance on those to whom they were sent. The expansion of the Gospel during the first century was not the result of a situation of wealth but one of dependence on the communities to whom the Good News was being preached. In later centuries this paradigm was abandoned.

Those sent by Jesus had as their mission to heal the sick and proclaim: “The kingdom of God is near you.” This drawing together of the kingdom resul-

ted in a dynamic process of liberation. (Luke 4, 1-20; 7, 18-23). As Moltmann asserted, "mission includes all the activities which, in God's presence, serve to liberate people from slavery, from economic destitution and even from proof of being abandoned by God."¹

Today, as then, the fundamental task of the church is to proclaim and promote the kingdom of God, through its testimony as an inclusive, worshipping, healing and hope-giving community. In proclaiming Jesus our Saviour, the church proclaims the kingdom of God because, as Origen noted, Jesus is the "*autobasileo*", the personification of the true kingdom of God.²

We know that preaching the kingdom preceded the creation of the Church; and Jesus taught his disciples, who were the mortar of the early church, that the first petition in the model prayer should be for the advent of God's kingdom.

Naturally we cannot restrict God's activities to the scope of the church, but, although the church is only part of a broader mission, which is the "*Missio Dei*", in so far as it brings the Good News and the living testimony of the Easter mystery of Jesus Christ, it has a special responsibility for facilitating peoples' communion with their Saviour.

The church was privileged with special knowledge of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. The church, in a perceptible manner and through the celebration of the Eucharist, draws the attention of humankind to communion with God. When we celebrate the Eucharist we confirm our conviction that we are a community founded by and in Christ. Through the Eucharist the church experiences the communion of love symbolized by gathering around one table, and is inspired to also share material goods in a spirit of fellowship. (Acts 2, 42-45).

Some important aspects of the non-Roman Catholic ecclesiastical world

A number of recent analyses indicate: i) the birth of a new dimension in the evangelical church³; ii) a dynamic sharing of gifts between churches of different traditions⁴; iii) the growing influence of what Bernardo Campos calls the Pentecostalism of the church⁵.

Pentecostalism is, in Latin America as in other regions of the world, the most dynamic Christian movement. In our continent, it is the one that is

closest to the poor, although this is not a deliberately established strategy.

In addition to its particular symbols and doctrine, Pentecostalism has other particular characteristics such as an autonomous financial structure which is not dependent on aid from the churches and ecumenical cooperation agencies of Europe or North America. Its activities in the community encourage the socialization, personalization and social participation of its followers. Furthermore, it works in a holistic manner for the common good in the least privileged sectors of society⁶.

Pentecostal worship services take into account the holistic nature of human beings, that is, in all aspects of their existence and in particular all of their feelings. The warm welcome of the Pentecostal worship service with its emphasis on intercession and joint prayer, and the opportunity it provides each of its members to express themselves and be heard is a very gratifying experience for people living in conditions of oppression and the anonymity and alienation of large cities⁷.

Pentecostalism offers a new *life style*. Not just as an intellectual statement but as a way of following Christ (*imitatio Christi*).

Independent churches

An important phenomenon in the spectrum of Latin American faith is the proliferation so-called independent churches, one of the characteristics of which is the absence of a traditional confessional or denominational identity and the refusal to associate with other evangelical churches. A survey carried out in Guatemala at the beginning of 2002, involving 20,000 persons in 42 municipalities revealed that evangelical Christians made up 25 per cent of the population, comprising of more than 25 denominations and an infinite number of independent churches⁸.

The exponential development of these types of churches took place in the last two decades. They do not emphasize the gift of tongues, but instead mainly stress the „powers of the Spirit“, „anointing“, „healing powers“, „prodigies and miracles“, „the evangelism of power“ etc. A number of them stress exorcism and the doctrine and practice of „spiritual war“.

One of the spokespeople of this movement describes their viewpoints on the efforts to unify

churches in the following terms: „The ecumenical movement is preparing the way for the antichrist. Moreover, can you imagine the Levites „having a conversation“ with the Baal priests? We must realize that the Church is not the structure, title or right of one denomination. A church includes all those who gather together and constitute in spirit the mystical body of Christ. We should oppose the unification of churches under a single authority. History has shown that decentralization is preferable; the world does not need one large church but instead thousands of independent churches which unanimously proclaim the kingdom’s Gospel.“⁹

Historical churches

In societies in which there is a declining middle class, the „historical“ Latin American churches are increasingly experiencing poverty in their communities. This gives more credibility and coherence to their theological sermons which prophetically denounce social and economic injustice. The cultural adaptation of the liturgy also enabled these historical churches to gradually overcome their condition of bodies considered „foreign“ or alien to Latin American cultures.

The historical churches uphold the fundamental principles of the Reformation (grace alone, faith alone, scripture alone), two of which are, in my view, particularly relevant to our context.

The affirmation that we are redeemed through God’s grace and that God’s grace cannot be purchased is a fundamental bulwark in the face of a theology of prosperity which reduces conversion to the Gospel to achieving economic prosperity, and which promises the covenant of grace in exchange for economic investment.

Furthermore, the affirmation that the scriptures are the word of God and that God reveals Christ to us through the scriptures also affirms the central importance of the word in the life of the church. The historical churches adopt such statements as: „The holy scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the word of God, the only rule of faith and obedience“⁽¹⁰⁾; „we affirm and declare that the authority of the scriptures come from God“¹¹; and „we believe and confess that the canonical scriptures are the true word of God“¹². Many evangelical churches on the other hand, in an increasingly forthright manner, fail to make a serious exegesis of the Bible or limit the study of the Bible to a series of rigid moral standards.

Risks and challenges

The changes in the evangelical religious panorama are not without considerable risks and challenges. A Colombian Baptist theologian pointed out the „acceleration in the development of new pseudo-evangelical pseudo-protestant religious statements“ which according to him „are taking root in long-established evangelical congregations.“ These statements are characterized by „a type of religion full of extravagant, effervescent, authoritative, verbalistic, in short, exotic terms.“ This leads us to the question: „Are we dealing with a new religion disguised as evangelicalism and appearing to be Christian, but which is very far from Christianity or evangelicalism?“

According to the above author, this phenomenon shows that there has been „an imbalance in classical Pentecostalism in so far as it takes the socially popular image of a world ruled by good and evil spirits and proposes a way of controlling the world of spirits by a limited number of persons who have magical powers. Evangelical content is thus displaced.“ In this new version of the gospel he adds, „sin becomes a satanic possession and exorcism no longer uses the power of Jesus the Saviour but the anointed instruments designated by the clergy in power at the time: sacred keys, holy water, sacred cloths“. And he goes on: „This should be of concern to Pentecostalism of both ancient and classical extraction and to other evangelicals from the reformed tradition.“¹³

Missionary communities

Therefore, if we use the above as a reference, in building our missionary communities in Latin America, churches should consider the following elements.

1. Overcoming any illusions of neo-Christianity whether evangelical or Protestant. This implies resisting the temptation to seek a share of political power in order to further the institutional or personal interests of their leaders.
2. Recognizing the content of the churches’ mission as the proclamation and promotion of the kingdom of God through its testimony as an inclusive, healing, worshipping and hope-giving community.
3. Recognizing the importance of holy baptism as the starting point for mission. The Holy Spirit is

the source of a hope which will not disappoint us (Romans 5,5) and the agent of transformation in our lives. As the Heidelberg Catechism points out: „Christ by his Spirit is also renewing us to be like himself....so that by our godly living our neighbours may be won over to Christ.“

4. Recognizing and affirming the values and practices of Pentecostalism as well as those of historical churches and encouraging mutual dialogue and enrichment between these expressions of Christianity, so that a true overlapping of spiritual gifts occurs. Strengthening the fullness of the Church by stimulating communication and cooperation and promoting relations that encourage joint testimony.
5. Emphasizing the meaning of evangelical conversion as a radical change, the ineffable nature of which cannot be expressed in purely rational terms, and as an event which opens the way to emulating Christ, that is, a life of service and sharing in people's suffering and hopes.
6. Incorporating an eschatological significance to missionary practice: mission aims for a future in which all things are reconciled in Christ (II Cor. 5, 18) and a hope for our salvation, which is introduced in time and in the history of humanity by God.
7. Strengthening the culture and ethics of pluralism, inclusion and participation in ecclesiastical communities, in the face of the many kinds of authoritarianism and discrimination confronting our societies, as a specific contribution in creating more democratic societies.
8. Ensuring the transparency and accountability of ecclesiastical communities in the face of the corruption and favouritism which characterizes public administration in the continent.
9. Promoting holiness (II Cor. 7, 1; I Thess 3, 13; Hebrews 12, 10-14) in obedience to the Lord's commandments at both the social and personal levels. Recalling, as Wesley noted, that personal holiness implies charitable acts and social holiness implies acts of mercy.
10. Conducting and strengthening a serious and contextualized reading of the scriptures in church communities as the source of inspiration and authority for the life and mission of God's people.

Footnotes:

¹ Moltmann, Jürgen: *The Church in the power of the Spirit*, London, SCM 1992 p.24.

² Käsemann, Ernst: *The Eschatological Royal Reign of God*, in *Venga tu Reino*. Perspectivas Misioneras, Ediciones Sigueme, Salamanca, 1982, p. 97.

³ José Miguez Bonino: *Rostros del Protestantismo Latinoamericano*, Buenos Aires, Nueva Creación, 1995.

⁴ Batista, Israel: *Comunidades de Jubileo. Las iglesias evangélicas en el nuevo milenario*, Ediciones CLAI, Quito, Ecuador, 2000, p. 23-24.

⁵ Campos supported the theory that, deep down in every church which professes to be Christian "there is some form of latent or evident Pentecostalism". This Pentecostalism is "the impact of the Spirit which leads to the existence of the Church as a body of Christ". See, Campos Bernardo: *De la Reforma Protestante a la Pentecostalidad de la Iglesia*, Ediciones CLAI, Quito, Ecuador, 1997, p. 90-91.

⁶ See Campos, Bernardo: *Experiencia del Espíritu. Claves para una interpretación del pentecostalismo*, Ediciones CLAI, Quito, 2002, p. 23.

⁷ Some studies explain the response of the suburban poor to Pentecostal movements by "the situation of anonymity, that is, the loss of values and bearings of their situation". Pentecostalism therefore would help the marginalized to rebuild their world, a world of salvation and their congregation, on the sidelines of what they perceive to be "the world" which is a society considered to be a place of corruption and perdition. See Bastian, Jean-Pierre: *La mutación religiosa de America Latina*, Fondo de Cultura Económica, Mexico, 1997, p. 140.

⁸ InfoPress Centroamérica, 1 February 2002, www.infopress.com

⁹ Sen, Frederik: *The True Church of God*, Chap. I,

¹⁰ Westminster Larger Catechism, A3 www.reformed.org

¹¹ The Scottish Confession, Chapter XIX. www.swrb.com

¹² The Second Helvetic Confession, Chapter I. www.ccel.org

¹³ Segura, Harold: *El movimiento pentecostal-carismatico: evaluación desde una perspectiva pastoral*, in www.pentecostalidad.org/articulos.

¹⁴ The Heidelberg Catechism, Answer to question 86, www.carm.org

Building new missionary communities, shared mission

Biblical, Theological and Pastoral Reflections with a Gender Perspective

Beatriz Ferrari, Uruguay

I. THEOLOGICAL-MISSIOLOGICAL REFLECTION

1. Missio Dei

One of the most revolutionary concepts, from its first formulation by Karl Barth was the concept of “*Missio Dei*”. The center of mission is not the church but God, a missionary God, a sending God. This concept of “God’s Mission” has been embraced by all the branches of Christianity: Protestantism, the Eastern Orthodoxy, many Evangelical Churches and the Vatican II.

The theological basis for mission is not ecclesiology or soteriology but the Triune God. God the Father, creating the world, sending the Son; the Father and the Son, sending the Spirit; the Spirit of God sending the church to the world...¹

A missiologist from India, Dr. M. Thomas Thangaraj, has taken up and developed the *Missio Dei* concept. He begins by saying,

The Bible opens with the missionary act of God in Creation (1:1ff.)... God’s creative act is a missionary act... God goes out in a missionary trip... and God’s creative act moves on to a sharing act... sharing creation with humanity, a humanity created in God’s image... to participate in God’s mission in the world... God’s mission is shared mission... shared with men and women, because “male and female God created them...”²

Here, already it appears an inclusive gender perspective: God created us male and female, as

images to reflect the Creator’s love to creatures and to fulfill a mission in history.

From here, Thangaraj detects five forms of mission in the Scriptures: God’s mission, the mission of Israel, the mission of Jesus, the mission of the disciples, and the mission of the church.

What is, then, the mission of the church?

2. Church Mission: An Integral Mission

There is, as well, a growing understanding of Church mission “as integral mission”: “the whole gospel, the whole church, the whole of society”.

This concept has been developed along the XX century. During the XIX century (“*the missionary century*”) missionary societies of Europe and the USA understood mission as “saving souls” or “church extension and growth” (*ecclesia plantatio*)³. Mission was based on soteriology and ecclesiology.

The V Assembly of the World Council of Churches, in Nairobi 1975, was clear about integral mission and evangelization: everything the church does and the WCC has been doing has an evangelistic dimension.

“The whole gospel, for the whole person, and for the whole world means that we cannot live any area of human life and suffering without the witness of hope... In the total witness of our lives and of our confessing communities we work with passionate love for the liberation of people and anticipate the coming Kingdom of God”⁴.

The Latin American Council of Churches (CLAI), since its inception in 1978, has been driven by a holistic approach to mission, which was reaffirmed in its IV Assembly in 2001⁵. On a parallel way, the Latin American Congress on Evangelization (particularly CLADE III and IV) has been increasingly articulating the implications of “integral mission” and “holistic evangelism”⁶.

God’s mission, then, is global, holistic, inclusive – shared mission.

3. Missio Humanitatis

David J. Bosch, in his analysis of church and world relationship in mission, suggests that instead of speaking of the “church *for* others” we should speak of “the church *with* others”.

This seems to be the perspective of the Dr. M. Thomas Thangaraj in what he calls *Missio humanitatis*.⁷

M. Thomas Thangaraj believes that times have changed so radically that the shape of mission has also to be changed. One obvious fact is religious pluralism in our world⁸. Another is the inter-relationship and the inter-dependence of humans in such a way that we need to reformulate the concept of mission.

In spite of different religions or philosophies of life, all humans are engaged in a “conversation” to face problems and needs which are common to all human beings. This is a “conversation” that goes around the world in the “global village”, and takes place in our own communities and neighborhoods. We are forced into this “conversation”, as if we were in a “bottle neck.”

The essential meaning of mission is “to go” and “to be sent”, consequently, mission is not something we do in solitude but “with others”. “Mission is relational”. Starting with this understanding of a common mission, a relational mission, the Methodist missiologist points to three attitudes or proper responses to *missio humanitatis*: responsibility, solidarity and mutuality⁹.

“According to this vision” – concludes Thangaraj–, “the mission of humanity is an act of taking responsibility, in a mode of solidarity, shot through with a spirit of mutuality”¹⁰.

And yet, this has to be done from the specificity

of our Christian mission, in theological terms of God, Christ and the Church, as Thangaraj himself does in the following chapters on the “*missio ecclesiae*”, and “*a cruciform mission*”.

As I see it, an inclusive concept of mission, as *missio humanitatis*, has to be a shared mission for women and men. To be global and holistic, mission has to be gender-conscious, gender-inclusive, *shared mission*¹¹.

II. BIBLICAL PARADIGMS FOR MISSIONARY COMMUNITIES

Let’s look at shared mission in the Scripture. The original human mission is gender inclusive, for men and women, participating in God’s mission in God’s creation together with other God’s creatures. In the Old Testament, women are part of the “history of salvation” as subjects of mission. This is evident in the matriarchal participation through successive generations of the people of the Covenant, in the Exodus story, and through all the stages in and around the Promised Land¹².

In the New Testament, this participation becomes particularly visible in Jesus’ own mission, in a real “discipleship of equals”, as it has been demonstrated by the feminist hermeneutics in recent years¹³. The Gospel of Luke, opens a window to the role of women not only as the object and the companions of Jesus Kingdom mission, but as the sponsors of that mission! (as it says in Luke 8:1-3: “many other women who provided for them out of their own means”).

I have selected for this occasion two paradigms coming from the records of Jesus’ mission.

1. The Seventy’s mission

Let’s take the Seventy’s Mission in Luke 10:1-12, in which I have found a true paradigm for shared mission. The text says that

“Jesus appointed seventy (-two) others¹⁴ and sent them two by two ahead of him into every town and place where he himself was about to come, and he said to them... go your way... whatever house you enter, say first, ‘peace be to this house’... whenever they receive you ... heal the sick and say to them ‘the Kingdom of God has come near to you...’”.

What is most significant is that the mission of

this group, and the concrete tasks are the same entrusted to the Twelve: “to announce the Reign of God and to heal the sick”.

Who were the seventy(two)? Where did Jesus get such a bunch of disciples to send them, two by two, as part of his mission? Were them all Galileans? Were they all males? The entourage of disciples accompanying Jesus, announcing the Kingdom of God, shows a mixed sample of them: “*he was accompanied by the twelve, and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and illnesses...*” I ask, Were all these women included or left out of the mission of the Seventy?

According to Luke account in 8:1-3 it was a heterogeneous group, persons from different social contexts who not only shared in announcing the Kingdom but who were the supporting basis for the whole apostolic company of Jesus, out of their own talents and means. One might suspect that probably there was a women connection along the way of Jesus, wherever he went!¹⁵

Those women had one thing in common: they had been healed by Jesus. This is not casual. They became co-missionaries, helpers and sponsors of Jesus’ mission because they received healing and life from him. This is not said of the Twelve¹⁶, but Jesus was clear about his mission: “I have not come to seek for the healthy but the sick”, “not the righteous, but the sinners”. And yet, who can be a missionary of Jesus but those who have been healed from their sins and their diseases by him?

At this point there is no gender difference in mission. Any true missionary is a “wounded healer”, to use the famous Henry Nouwen’s description of pastoral work. Missionary communities cannot be but communities of the wounded healers and forgiven sinners.

2. The Betania Home a mission center

Let’s look at the Betania Home, or better the Betania Inn, as a center of Jesus’ mission. Both Luke and John have something special to say about the home of Lazarus, Martha and Mary in Betania, on the way of Jesus, to and from Jerusalem. In Luke 10:38-42, we have a picture of Mary sitting “at the feet of the Master”, “listening to his teaching”, which is a clear indication that a woman can be a disciple, whose “good portion will be not taken away from her” (cf. Acts 22:3).

We don’t know if these Betania disciples were among the Seventy but it is clear that this friendly and familiar home was a center for Jesus and his disciples. In John 11, a chapter that goes around Jesus’ friends, the evangelist uses two Greek verbs (*fileo, agapao*) to express Jesus friendship, companionship and love for Martha, Mary and Lazarus. We have no details about other family members but it appears that this was a gender inclusive home. The two women are both friends of Jesus, besides being his disciples and believers (John 11:27), and they were the instruments for others to believe in Jesus: “After this - says John - many of the Jews who had accompanied Mary and observed what Jesus did believed in him” (11:45).

It was in the same Betania Inn, at a supper given in honour of Jesus (a farewell dinner?), that he was anointed by Mary in a final profession of faith and commitment, just before his passion (John 12:1-3). In the synoptic gospels the anointment of Jesus by a woman becomes a royal anointment, by which she will be remembered in the whole world for ages to come (Matt. 26:2-16; Mk 14:1-11; Lk 22:1-6).

John Dominic Crossan has underlined the importance of table companionship as the missionary strategy for Jesus’ disciples and future missionaries, according to the detailed instructions about how to receive hospitality and to use it as the occasion to share the good news of the Kingdom and the message of peace (Mk 6:10; Lk 10:5,7; Mth. 10:11-12). In this sense the Betania Home was a paradigm for mission. And table companionship a paradigm of shared mission.

In our days, we cannot miss the strategical importance of hospitality, and the give and take of table fellowship, as the locus for mission, the expression of shared mission gender-inclusive.

III. MISSION IN A GENDER PERSPECTIVE

With our eyes tended towards the horizon of the New Creation, we may look again at theology, the Bible, the church, liturgy, and mission from a gender vantage point, and maybe it can help us to visualize the profile of a shared mission, for women and men.

A gender perspective goes transversally across any other dimension, be it anthropological, sociolo-

gical, theological, biblical, ecclesial or missiological dimension.

For instance, anthropologically, from a gender perspective, it is important to take into account our corporality, our bodily condition. We are bodies, as persons, as families, as communities. Integral mission has to include our whole being, as missionaries of the major event of God's incarnation in a human being.

From a psico-social point of view, shared mission in a gender perspective means co-responsibility. Mission, from its origin and execution, cannot be seen and conducted in a unidirectional way -paternally or patriarchally- without participation of others and with others. Shared mission is inclusive and participative.

Structurally, the question of power in the church has to be seen genderwise. It is important to distinguish between "*power upon*" and "*power for*". The latter is what can be properly called "empowerment": to enable the other to exercise his/her own power. Shared mission means a true ecclesial gender democracy.

At the sociological and ecological level, shared mission in a gender perspective would mean "mission with the community" and "for the community", as summarized by M. Thomas Thangaraj, "*mission is the act of assuming responsibility in the mode of solidarity and impelled by the spirit of mutuality*".¹⁷

In the theological field, the gender perspective means the appropriation by men and women of the theological word as subjects in their own right. In the last years there has been a qualitative leap by women, accompanied by some males in the theological world, that made possible "a new intelligence and experience of faith in the midst of a conflictive historical and social reality"¹⁸.

In the field of hermeneutics, a gender perspective means adopting the hermeneutics of suspicion and expectancy, such as we have mentioned in relation to the History of Salvation and Jesus Mission, making visible the invisible. However, this is not only feminist hermeneutics, but gender hermeneutics, with the masculine and feminine questions and perspectives in the reading of the text and its context. Although, originally, this hermeneutics started as a questioning of patriarchal models of reading.

Worship from a gender perspective is celebrative, assuming and enriching the church liturgy as

the celebration of life, bringing to the community worship joys and sufferings, gestures and colours, flowers and fruits of creation, the word preached and enacted, prayers and songs, in a holistic and integrating offering.

Missiologically speaking, then, a gender perspective aims at making effective a discipleship of equals, in companionship and mutuality, "at the feet of the Master", "sent two by two" in a continually renovated shared mission of men and women. As equals, but sharing, in one body, the differences and specific characteristics of each gender.

CONCLUSION: SHARED MISSION IN LATIN AMERICA TODAY

Latin America and the Caribbean are part of the global context. For us, "globalization" is experienced as disintegration of life. This is particularly true for the family, in a process of disintegration or atomization. Not only the "extended family" has disappeared long ago, but the replacing model of the "nuclear family" is going through radical changes.

In some of our countries we have more divorces than new marriages; unwedded couples are common and accepted across all the ages spectrum; one-parent family -usually mothers substituting for both parents- affects more than fifty percent of the families. This impinges heavy on women, affecting both men and women.

In a situation of atomization of the family, women are the glue to keep the pieces together. Women remain as the overall substitute of former safety networks in society, as in other times of history.

Poverty, suffering, unemployment, violence are gender-inclusive. But by far the burden falls on women's laps and women's backs. And women are the majority in the churches...

After working for more than a decade with women of all countries and many churches, I have come to the conclusion that there are some things that we have to do ecumenically, such as concientizing and training for mission, in a gender perspective. But I am also convinced that there are other tasks, such as specific mission in a given place, that have to be done locally and denominationally. To quote a known slogan: "We have to think globally and to act locally".

Shared mission is our paradigm for mission. Shared mission in the global context, shared mission in Latin America and the Caribbean today.

Footnotes

- ¹ David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Shift of Paradigms in Mission Theology* (Spanish translation pp. 475ff.)
- ² M. Thomas Thangaraj, *The Common Task: A theology of Christian Mission*, Nashville: Abingdon, 1999, pñp. 38ff.
- ³ Kenneth Scott Latourette, *Historia del Cristianismo, Vol. II.*
- ⁴ Report Sec. I, *Confessing Christ Today*, Geneva: WCC, 1976, pp. 47-48.
- ⁵ See documents of CLAI IV Asamblea General and documents from the previous Consultation on Missiology, Barranquilla 2001.
- ⁶ C. René Padilla, ed., *CLADE III: Tercer Congreso Latinoamericano de Evangelización*, Quito: FTL, 1993, pp. 855-61; "Guía para Escritores" (*Bases Bíblicas de la Misión Integral*), Buenos Aires: Kairós, Feb. 2001.
- ⁷ M. Thomas Thangaraj, *The Common Task: A Theology of Christian Mission*, Nashville: Abingdon, 1999, pp. 38 ff.
- ⁸ "If you lived in a representative world village of 1,000, there would be 300 Christians (183 Catholics, 84 Protestants, 33 Orthodox) 175 Moslems, 128 Hindus, 55 Buddhists, 47 Animists, 210 Atheists or without religion, 85 from smaller religious groups", figures of 1994, quoted by Thangaraj, *op. cit.*, p. 22.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 47f.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.* pp. 56ff. This vision is quite close to what Bishop Casaldáliga from Brazil has called "macro-ecumenism".
- ¹¹ Beatriz Ferrari, *Misión Compartida desde la Mujer: Perspectiva Histórica y Proyecto Regional*, San José, Costa Rica, Universidad Bíblica Latinoamericana (Tesis inédita de Licenciatura en Ciencias Teológicas), Setiembre 2001.
- ¹² For instance, in the Age of the Patriarchs (the role of women in the lineage of the Promise), in the Exodus (women in the preservation of the life of Moses, a true "sorority for life"), in the Desert Pilgrimage (particularly Miriam, Moses' and Aaron's sister), in the Pre-Monarchic times (Ana, Débora the judge, Ruth the Moabite), in the Monarchic Period (Hulda the prophetess), and the Wisdom Woman of Proverbs and Ecclesiasticus. In all these instances we can see women as the links in the chain of salvation history. See Carol A. Renshaw & Sharon Ringe, Eds. *Women Bible Commentary*, Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1992; Alice L. Laffey, *An Introduction to the Old Testament: A Feminist Perspective*, Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988. Beatriz Ferrari, "Participación de las Mujeres en la Historia de la Salvación", Monograph, San José: Universidad Bíblica Latinoamericana, 2001.
- ¹³ Elizabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, New York: Crossroad, 1984; *Discipleship of Equals*, New York: Crossroad, 1993; Louise Schottroff, *Mulheres no Novo Testamento: Exegese Numa Perspectiva Feminista*, São Paulo: Paulinas, 1995; Suzanne Tunc, *También las Mujeres seguían a Jesús*, Bilbao: Sal Terrae, 1999.
- ¹⁴ Phillips Modern English version puts the editorial subtitle "Jesus now dispatches thirty-five couples to preach and heal the sick".
- ¹⁵ For instance, How did the "public sinner" woman know that Jesus would accept her and her tribute to him? See again Luke 8:1-3, cf. Luke 19:1-10 on the underlying tax-collectors connection, alerting Zaccheus to anticipate his entrance into Jericho.
- ¹⁶ Catherine Gunsalus and Justo L. González, *Sus Alamas Engrandecieron al Señor*, Miami: Caribe, 1977.
- ¹⁷ *Op. cit.*, p. 61.
- ¹⁸ Dora Canales, "Importancia de una Aproximación de Género para la Misión y el Trabajo Pastoral con y desde la mujer", Unpublished paper, CLAI Assembly, Barranquilla, Colombia, January 2001.

3. MISSION AS CHALLENGE AND CHANCE

EXAMPLES OF DIFFERENT CHURCHES

Theological reflection on (re-)building missionary communities in Germany (Western Europe)

Dietrich Werner, Germany

1. The application and use of the term mission to the context of Germany and/or the European continent is far from being historically self-evident. For the fathers of Protestant Reformation the fact and dynamics of mission was confined and limited to the apostolic age in Early Christianity. Even Gustav Warneck, the founder of Protestant missiology, defined mission as a deliberate effort for planting and building Christian churches in non-Christian territories and would not use this term for the situation in Germany. In Germany an ongoing process of evangelization (Volkschristianisierung) was called for. Most of the mission societies in the 19th century were founded by committed individual Christians shaped by the experiences of pietism and awakening and standing in tension or even opposition to the reluctant church hierarchy at that time. These historical preconditions and settings still have their subtle effect until today where mission abroad (i.e. in partnership with churches from other continents) and mission at home (i.e. programmes for reappropriating and learning about Christian faith in our own context) are seen as essentially belonging together, enriching each other and complementing each other (at least theoretically and also often practically).
2. Using the term mission in contemporary conversations about the task of the church still meets scepticism and reluctance with both younger and older pastors or parish members because the process for redefining and rereading the notion and the content of mission which certainly had begun already in the sixties has only reached those committed to ecumenism and is not yet communicated sufficiently to the wider sectors of church membership. It is still easy to get away and reject any commitment to mission which is misconceived as an act of introducing Christian values by force or coercion and violating other religious or cultural traditions. The longterm effects of privatization of Christian faith in post-modern society and individualization of religious experiences are adding to the ongoing weakening of Christian identity and lack of self-confidence of being a Christian in public life for many. A certain popular assumption that whoever is for dialogue and religious tolerance must be against mission or: the era of mission has passed and is restricted to the 19th century whereas the era of dialogue and ecumenism has begun in the 20th century is still wider spread.
3. On the other hand since about 15 years there has been a remarkable process of rediscovering a missionary understanding of the church and the congregation and many attempts for trying to re-evangelize people who have lost contacts with the churches tradition. The term mission really and to surprise of many who had declared it doomed to death has reappeared again and nowadays is a recognized and central term in the vocabulary of the Protestant Churches as well as the Catholic Church. There is ample evidence that almost all church traditions have developed a fresh appreciation of the understanding changed (particularly after the collapse of the Eastern German regime) that it can truly be understood as a missionary situation (with often less than ten per cent nominal members of the population in a Protestant church). The EKD synod in Leip-

zig 1999 focussed on the theme “Speaking of God in the world – the missionary calling of the church at the threshold of the Third Millennium”. It made the following remarkable statement with regards to the centrality of the task of mission: “There was a time in which one could have the impression that the missionary orientation had been the specific mark of only one particular tradition in our church. Today we say together: The passing on of faith and the growth of the congregations are our predominant task and therefore from this convention here goes forth the signal: The evangelical church sets the theme of faith and the missionary calling in first place.” It is remarkable that in both major studies on the understanding of mission EKD: (Das Evangelium unter die Leute bringen, Zum missionarischen Dienst der Kirche in unserem Land 2000; Römisch-Katholische Kirche: Zeit zur Aussaat. Missionarisch Kirche sein 2000) a thorough and broadbased approach to the understanding of mission is shared in principal which is not falling back behind the insight of the ecumenical debate on mission (integrating mission as evangelization, as social witness, as holistic worship and an inviting new language of faith) while at the same time the emphasis shifted from the socio-political contextualization of mission which has dominated the sixties and the seventies to the religious and spiritual contextualization of faith. In other words, not the diaconal or political but the evangelistic, the catechumenical and educational aspects of mission tend to be placed in first priority today.

4. What is in the background of this new emphasis on mission can be described as the culminating longterm-effects of rapid and still ongoing decline in church membership, a stagnant low tendency in worship attendance (around 2-3% of church members), a severe crisis of the financial means of the churches caused by economic recession, unemployment, changes in state taxation policies and demographic predictions for the future for the church which are not at all favorable. If one is adding the decreasing numbers of students enrolling for theological studies to become ministers (whereas very few years ago the church could not cope with too many candidates and even excluded some from church ministries because they could not pay them) and on ongoing trend for the marginalization of churches and Christian values in public life one can easily understand that today for the majority it has become clear irreversibly that cultural Protestantism and self-granted mechanism of

transmitting Christian faith from one generation to the other are not any more functioning. Instead we need new and fresh methods and approaches for re-learning what it means to become and to remain a Christian in German society.

5. Despite all financial hardship and scarcity the new awareness of a missionary urgency is accompanied by an overwhelming variety of creative ways and new models of learning to become a missionary congregation. The situation is very complex and it is not easy to draw a holistic and comprehensive picture. Efforts range from adults education courses offered to regain a basic understanding of Christian faith (Glaubenskurse für Erwachsene), new forms of worship offered as a “second programme” during Sundays or Saturdays (seeker-services, Gottesdienste für Suchende), ways of revitalizing ancient Christian virtues and customs in a post-modern secular setting like fasting and meditation (7 Wochen ohne, fasting in the period of lent), opening of churches for arts exhibitions of special music events, campaigns for bringing the Bible into the arena of public attention again (Year of the Bible 2003), new ways of “church-pedagogy” introducing church buildings and their heritage as a way of encountering Christian faith, evangelistic campaigns using modern mass-media (like Pro Christ, an evangelistic campaign simultaneously transmitted into many local places) or the installation of special services for stimulating congregational renewal and more effectiveness in pastoral work (a growing influence of marketing and managing techniques borrowed from secular fields of competence in society). Some of the regional churches (Landeskirchen) in their attempts of coping with increased pressures have agreed on concise strategic plans for church renewal and reform (like Westfalia and Berlin-Brandenburg) whereas with others there still is an extremely difficult process of defining priorities, agreeing on an overall missionary vision (missionarisches Leitbild) and strategic goals which can be controlled and evaluated after a certain period.
6. It also is a positive sign that the Association of Christian Churches in Germany (ACK on national level) had initiated a broad learning process “Towards a new understanding of mission and evangelism in Germany” in 1999. For the first time after the Second World War all Christian churches including Roman Catholic, Orthodox and free churches have participated in this com-

mon learning process which is well documented by EMW publications. But apart from joint declarations on the top levels and a very good climate for ecumenical cooperation in many regional levels little has followed in terms of practical implementation in many growing ecumenical convergence in the understanding of mission. The multiplication of good statements on rebuilding missionary communities has not automatically led to a general missional renewal of the church which never comes from top but usually comes from the bottom. The forthcoming ecumenical church gathering in Berlin in May/June 2003 which for the first time will be jointly held by Roman Catholic, Protestant and also representatives of many other Christian churches and will be major practical test and mass event in which some of the missionary consensus grown can take up concrete shape – an event associated with many hopes for a common advance in missionary witness and ecumenical worship.

7. It is becoming increasingly clear that the current discourse on mission in Germany often still lacks a deeper exploration of the specific context and cultural as well as religious situation in Germany in which a new process for rebuilding missionary communities has to take place. It is here that we also need our partners both from other European settings and also partners from churches of other continents to learn from their other points of view. Regional mission agencies and ecumenical agencies have a vital role in enabling for this mutual learning process for missionary renewal of the church (for instance to programmes like “Mission to the North” in the Northelbian Church). Ecumenical co-workers from other churches in our own context present an indispensable contribution for facilitating a mutual process of missionary re-orientation and should be available at least in each major church district (Sprenge). There is no central research institute of research network in Germany dealing with issues like the relevance of the changing religious picture in Germany for the understanding and practise of mission or the growing relevance of non-belonging and dissociation with any Christian church (Konfessionslosigkeit) as a mass-phenomenon. Besides the regional agencies for word mission and the services for home mission (Volksmissionarische Ämter) there is a certain number of institutes and chairs for missiology in German theological faculties. Increasingly it will be important for them to relate missiological issues in other countries and on

global level to issues of missionary renewal of churches withing our own context.

8. There have been several important attempts to deepen the understanding of the missionary challenge in our own context and it might be helpful at the end to list crucial themes for further discussions in reviewing their final reports (one is the European Forum on Gospel and Cultures, organized by CEC in Hamburg 1996, the other the Conference on Mission in Secular and Postmodern Contexts, organized by WCC and IAMS in Breklum in 2002, IRM January 2003):

a) We are in urgent need of dealing with the missiological issue of the dominance of economic values and the ideological presupposition of the life-model of the consumer society in forming much of our daily routines. Values of private gain and financial calculation increasingly replace high moral values and are creeping into all spheres of public, political and media activities and often are leading to corruption, neglect of environmental and justice issues, shortsighted political populism and an economization of all spheres of life. How can churches contribute to a genuine spiritual renewal which is needed for avoiding a cultural catastrophe to come if the present course is not changed?

b) We are in urgent need for fresh attempts for inculturation of liturgy and music in our churches. Evangelizing by music and arts is a key issue in many partner churches but neglected in our own settings. Many have the feeling that we need to do more than borrowing and copying from new liturgical and musical creativity which is at work in other continents – which in itself is and remains an important factor of renewal – but we need to seek more dialogue with other forms of music and arts usually not present in the dominant cultural code of our worship services. How can we encourage and facilitate intercultural learning in music and liturgies with our partnerchurches and simultaneously increase our own young talents for authentic new hymns and a poetic language of worship?

c) We need to more seriously explore and nurture the interaction and learning between mainline historical churches and immigrant churches in our contexts many of which represent large sectors of Christianity in the Southern sphere though remaining small

communities in the European context. It has been estimated and studied that the numbers for regular church attendance in a city like Düsseldorf is just about the same between all mainline historical churches and the African and Asian immigrant churches around in that area. What does this imply for our learning for rebuilding missionary communities and also the allocation of our resources?

- d) In a culture dominated by visual communication instead of communication by words we need more deliberate attempts for developing and nurturing a new holistic language of religious communication in which elements both of the churches of the word (protestantism), the churches of the sacrament (catholicism), the churches of the liturgical celebration and icons (orthodoxy) and the churches of charismatic forms and gestures are complementing and benefit from each other treasures. What criteria are appropriate for communicating Christian faith in modern mass media, in TV and the Internet?
- e) Both churches in Europe and in Latinamerica are to a different extend challenged by the rapid growth of charismatic and pentecostal forms of Christianity. What can we learn from each other both with regard to improved ways of participation in worship and witness but also with regard to the increasing commercialization of religion and political instrumentalization of Christian faith?
- f) The issue of developing holistic forms of Christian healing seems to point to one of the key missiological paradigms in post-modern societies. Healing both is a prominent issue in charismatic circles as well as a subtle theme for religious meaning in the esoteric and health movement. What kind of language and liturgical forms do we have to rediscover as Christian churches to be both relevant to our social and cultural context and authentic with regard to the Christian heritage?
- g) Bridging the possible generation gap between those serving as agents of change in churches, mission boards and ecumenical circles at present and in the years to come is a crucial theme for both our contexts. How do we prepare for future ecumenical leadership and what forms of theological education will safeguard a continuation of the churches ministry in times of shrinking financial resour-

ces? We are far from having appropriate answers to these questions in Western Europe.

- h) Suffering from an ongoing financial crisis: What can churches in Europe and Latinamerica explore and experiment in terms of innovative and responsible ways of securing a financial stability and stewardship for the work of the churches?

New mission strategy for the third millennium

Bishop David R. J. Evans, England

1. The reverse migration of post colonial people

After 500 years since the 'discovery of Latin America', there are Latin Americans pouring into Spain. There are Portuguese-speaking Angolans from Africa in Portugal, and of course for a long time there have been Africans and Asians in Great Britain. But together with this, we are experiencing the huge movement of political and economic refugees seeking a better way of life in more stable and more prosperous countries. Millions of people are involved in this process, which loosens traditional cultures and religious links and opens people to a reconsideration of what life is for, once immediate financial emergencies are sorted. This movement of people can be within a country in a rural to urban process, or within a continent, with an exodus of people from a poorer to a richer neighbouring country or inter-continental, to a former colonial power or just to a prosperous democratic regime where streets are believed to be paved with gold. Third Millennium mission strategy must be up to date with these people movements and active in compassionate care and evangelism. (According to the Economist of the 12th March, 2002, 600,000 Colombians have left Colombia in the last three years. Ecuador lost 500,000 of its population between 1999 and 2001.)

2. There is no supracultural panacea for evangelism

Care must be taken with evangelistic or missional methodologies that promise global solutions. Alpha has been wonderfully successful and used by the God of mission in many different cultural settings. However, it would be dangerous to assume that in itself it is the panacea, the answer to every evangelistic challenge around the world. No methodological plan should be so elevated that the translatability needed for effective transcultural communication is downplayed. Languages, cultures and socio-political-economic situations are very diverse globally. A diversity of methodologies will al-

ways be needed to reach different people groups. It would be wrong and short-sighted to put all our 'eggs into one basket'.

3. Electronic homogeneity danger

The wired world of the Internet, e-mail communication and cyberspace in general are posing genuinely new and challenging frontiers for mission. We have a world where people relate along the lines of affinity rather than geography – be it ethnic, doctrinal, lifestyle or hobby. This is a new and more radical version of the homogeneous versus heterogeneous debate of past decades. More radical because it creates virtual community cutting out face to face encounter in meaningful interpersonal relationships. Technology enables undreamed of communication to be achieved and this must be harnessed to the extension of God's Kingdom without losing out on the human interaction. This is vital to any idea of church which takes seriously the metaphors of the Body of Christ, the family of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

4. Discipling people for world mission challenge

Mission agencies have a gadfly role (a devil's advocacy role) to point beyond institutional structures both of the first world and the two thirds' world countries to the Kingdom priority of making disciples of all nations. This means communicating and practising that mission is not just about securing the maximum number of conversion decisions in any particular group, neither is it about discipling converts into maturity until we all have PhDs in missiology and scores of certificates on the walls of our studies as testimony to our academic qualifications. Nor is it about planting churches as such, and then moving on to plant others elsewhere in a manner not too dissimilar to that of the branches of a commercial business. It is in one sense all of these, but the vital final stage must not be missed. Mission in God's Kingdom is about ensuring the

proliferation of multiplying churches – not just planting churches but planting churches that naturally will plant others, having captured the global vision as well as the local vision. In the early years of the European Reformation, for all the return to the teaching of the Bible, it is evident that there was no particular upsurge in global mission outreach. The planting of a national church in a two thirds' world country has not always led to cross-cultural missionary outreach. To have been a long time on the receiving end of mission seems to deaden the sense of responsibility to reach to the ends of the earth, especially if the foreign missionary effort has just come from the ends of the earth!

5. Principled creativity

Certainly in the northern hemisphere, the declining state of the Christian church is opening doors to innovating creativity. People are feeling freer from ecclesiastical buildings as meeting places. Pubs, cinemas, concert halls, football stadiums are in, even with the so-called historic churches. Creativity in all forms of the arts is encouraged though the greatest impact is made through the medium of music. General Booth, the founder of the Salvation Army's celebrated dictum "why should the devil have all the good tunes" is being reapplied to the popular and contemporary music scene. At the same time, other secular styles are being utilised, which need to be treated with care. I refer to the use of Christian celebrities especially from the world of sport, to draw media attention to the Gospel message. The 'success syndrome' may militate against the necessary self-denying aspect of the Gospel message, which must not be overlooked by its life affirming aspect, the full and abundant life promised by Jesus, which does not intrinsically have anything to do with material prosperity, worldly success, Olympic medals or even winning the World Cup.

6. Confronting the dangers of proliferating "viruses"

With all the advantages created by global communications, we live in the Third Millennium, when dangerous viruses can also be propagated with alarming and devastating speed. Not just on our computer screens, but heresy and unorthodox teachings can spread like wildfire. Heresy in past millennia took decades to spread. Insularity protected the teaching of the church. In the Third Millennium, the latest explorations of trust or deviations from

the truth travel in milliseconds around the world and of course nearly always receive wide publicity for their curiosity or polemical value in the mass media. If orthodoxy is under threat, pluralism also undermines many people's minds about the uniqueness of Christ and erodes a correct confidence in the truth of the Gospel. Therefore in a number of forums around the world Christian apologetics in the style of Paul in 1st century Greek Athens are needed in order to make real contact with confused and heretical mindsets. The modern versions of ancient Gnosticism in New Age spiritualities need to be understood and related to as springboards for the Gospel. What is new is not false teachings as such: "there is nothing new under the sun," but the speed with which false teachings can spread in the modern world and the speed with which they need to be dealt with in the propagation and defence of the Gospel in the Third Millennium.

Conclusion

Our responsibility is to reach our own generation with the full message of the Gospel of God, ensuring that it will also be passed on intact to the next generation. We need to respond to the six contemporary challenging opportunities I have mentioned. But also we need to face the three underlying challenges of contemporary incarnational mission.

- ❖ Is the hugely diverse modern mission operation truly under divine orders?
- ❖ Are we ready for the sacrificial service of long-term vulnerability?
- ❖ Do we give due place to spiritual holiness as God's own peculiar people in 2002?

Missionary tasks of local congregations

Nidia Fonseca, Costa Rica

I would like first of all to congratulate all those who listened to God and put their faith to work by organizing this consultation. Secondly, I would like to thank them for this invitation.

I have been asked to speak about the missionary tasks of local congregations, and to begin with, my feeling is that they are no different from the tasks that each and every one of us must carry out as Christian men and women. Because missionary work is the first mandate Jesus gave the Christian church, consisting of going to every corner of the earth to preach the Good News and baptise all those who believe. Its challenge is threefold:

1. Travelling the world over implies knowing the world, recognizing its cultures, customs, traditions, languages and ways of life.
2. Teaching the Good News implies understanding the Good News, believing, witnessing, being living examples of this Good News. It also implies having the didactic and pedagogical abilities to teach all kinds of people. This means having a good understanding of people, knowing them in the actual circumstances of their personal and social lives.
3. Baptizing also implies leaving recognizable and recognized symbols that bear witness to the missionary having lived and worked in a particular community.

We can therefore set out some of the steps to carry out this task:

1. First we must identify the context in which we are immersed. This context has several dimensions or levels:
 - Firstly, the personal context in which I develop as a messenger and the development of the personal context of the person to whom I am bringing the message.
 - Secondly, the family setting in which we both develop as persons.

➤ Thirdly, the geographical setting in which we both evolve as neighbours and as active and productive persons.

➤ In the fourth place, the context in which I exercise my citizenship as an individual belonging to a particular national territory.

➤ In the fifth place, the regional context of the territory and finally the global context of the region.

Therefore the first task of the mission is of a geopolitical nature. Today we find ourselves in a very bleak situation: the social order in which we are immersed is that of a power structure, hierarchy and set of values which ensures the supremacy of rich white Western men over women and peoples and cultures with feminine qualities. This is a situation in which men dominate others based on their social class, ethnicity and religion and the alienation of women.

2. The second step is to identify in these settings the opportunities for action which enable the Good News to be announced. Today the possible settings appear to be those that are small scale, including the intimate, family, local and community levels.
3. The third step is to take up some of the actions taking place on the geopolitical scene which are analogous to the Good News and can serve as examples, similes or metaphors for bringing the Good News. This ensures that we follow a pedagogical process as we seek to bring the Good News.
4. The fourth step is to envisage the possibility of carrying out the mission.

How can we recognize the appropriate geopolitical scene and visualize the opportunities for action? I believe that this is not possible without the Spirit of God. Living according to the Holy Spirit gives Christian men and women the ability to prevail over death through righteousness. According to Pauline

theology, life according to the Holy Spirit is expressed in practice as peace, righteousness and life itself. According to Elsa Tamez, those who lead their lives according to Holy Spirit are free men and women with a conscience of their own. They are in control of their destiny, have a sense of belonging and have interpersonal relationships which seek good material quality of life for all and the dignity that all the sons and daughters of God are entitled to.

Therefore the missionary task is to testify to a life according to the Spirit of God, which enables people and congregations to confront the reality in which they are immersed in order to transform it, so that instead of taking life away, it reinforces it and gives it meaning.

The missionary task reflects a relationship in harmony with God and others, oneself and the natural environment of which we are part. What makes this harmonious relationship possible is its expression in the framework of righteousness and the values of the kingdom of God as revealed by Jesus Christ.

This conception of the missionary task makes us value diversity because it is this diversity which makes possible the diversity of expression of the missionary task by the different individuals, ethnic groups and cultures in the world. In other words, the missionary task is individual, collective and diverse.

The missionary task requires the Good News to be incarnated in a life style which bears witness to God's purpose for humanity and His Creation as a whole. This life style finds practical expression through ways of thinking, feeling and acting which are consistent with the example of Jesus Christ. Accordingly, although expressed in many ways, the missionary task has a number of common characteristics:

- a. It makes common cause.
Its paradigm is solidarity with God and God's people. The missionary task aims to build a community and rebuild it there where it no longer exists.
- b. It is biblical.
The Scriptures and the proclamation of the Good News of Jesus Christ in particular are recognized as the fundamental bases of the missionary task. As part of this task, the reading of the Scriptures leads to the transformation of personal, social and ecclesiastical life.

c. It is ecumenical.

The missionary task unites and reunites men and women from all the different expressions of faith as brothers and sisters; this task goes beyond doctrinal, cultural, racial and social differences towards a common goal: to live and undertake actions to alleviate suffering and counter everything that goes against life.

d. It is Christ-centred.

It is based on following Jesus and his proclamation of the kingdom of God. We could say, to paraphrase Gustavo Gutierrez, that the missionary task is the "welcome urgency to be like Jesus" (Gutierrez, in "Espeja" 1986, 53)

How then should local congregations carry out the missionary task?

1. First by *developing spiritually in their faith*. Congregations develop community life to confront pain and disease, poverty and injustice through both spiritual and material means. The resources they use in their struggle are related to missionary work in such aspects as:
 - a. Reinforcement of a realistic sense of hope.
 - b. Self acceptance and forgiveness.
 - c. The celebration of personal life accomplishments.
 - d. Raising awareness of feasible projects.
 - e. Spiritual preparation to deal with loss.
 - f. Acceptance of our mortality.
 - g. Analysis of our ideas and images of God and the search for new images, metaphors, symbols and expressions of God.
 - h. Assessment of the congregation's work in all of its dimensions: worship, prophetic action, bearing witness and diaconal service.
 - i. Setting out the time frame of our missionary task.
 - j. Strengthening of one's own spirituality with others.
2. Secondly, *developing the missionary task as a prophetic task* which joins with other humanitarian bodies to denounce injustice, whether poli-

tical or economic, and makes concrete proposals for political and social life.

3. Thirdly, *developing the missionary task by training its members* to exercise their citizenship so they will think critically as a body of Christ about the ethics and testimony of being a Christian.
4. Fourthly, *developing its missionary task through the creation of a oasis of hope*, by means of specific projects: support for women victims of violence, the creation of solidarity and survival networks for national populations and foreigners, the creation of support structures for abandoned children, structures in which to recover physical health whether by means of methods officially accepted by society or involving alternative low-cost health care alternatives and the sharing of knowledge.

Founding and shaping new congregations

An experience from the Igreja Evangélica da Confissão Luterana no Brasil

Revd Huberto Kirchheim, Brazil

1. The Mission of God aims at life in congregations
 - ❑ Jesus Christ is the Beginning and the End of Gods Mission.
 - ❑ The congregation is first aim and instrument of Gods Mission. God is there, before we arrive.
 - ❑ What God has achieved in and with congregations, has to be recognized.

2. The congregation needs to be newly structured

The congregation is in need of constant mission with regard to its Missionary presence and according action (*semper reformanda*). Evangelisation has to have priority and its aim has to be the realisation of the priesthood of all believers and shall enable them for this. This priesthood shows in social service and in all areas of life. Faith has to be linked with time, gifts, talents, goods, money, with life in the family and at work. This has to happen in social, as well as in economical, in cultural and in political perspectives. The participating and integrating, solidaric and therapeutic, precisely: the missionary spirit of the congregation must show in every new situation. In this sense it crosses all borders. The new structure of the congregation is a never-ending task/challenge.

3. "Ministry as participation" in service of the general priesthood of all believers

To achieve an awareness of the general priesthood of all believers and to enable them for prophetic, priestly and social service in mission, there are four different ministries within the IECLB, which are to be realised in a way that all of them are part of the one ministry.

Specified ministries are not able to do what has to be realised within the congregation, but they should give the priority to educate leading personal and co-workers. These people need to be appreciated to be able to work together with pastors in congregations and so they participate with specified ministries in the general ministry of the church.

Administration is part of mission, because it creates and supports structures which make mission-work easier and possible. By no means should we support a separation of mission-work and administration. Because we value both in the same way, we talk of sharing in ministry or of mutual responsibility on different levels, this means between clergy and lay members in the synod, president of the church council executive of the church council.

4. Gods missions requires strategic planning

To create congregations and to structure them, the different segments on its according levels are required to join in planning missionary action, do constant evaluation, define goals, to find didactic and financial resources as well as employ the required personnel. Strategic planning requires a time-table for its implementation, evaluation and new orientation. This is how a quantity and quality growth can be achieved.

5. To found congregations in unison requires working together as partners

Such a congregation needs to build up internal partnerships and sponsorships to found new congregation at places where the IECLB has not been present before (Suggestion of Plano de Asaõ Misionaria da IECLB, point 3.6, page 24)

The following suggestions have the same intention:

the missionday on Pentecost and the collection for the mission-fonds (PAMI (Plano de Açaõ – Action Plan) 3.8, page 24), the founding of mission groups on national level as the example of GAW shows (PAMI, 3.10).

Working together with foreign partners, i.e. working together with institutions from abroad, is still necessary and possible. At present this includes exchange of co-workers well as didactic and financial resources. Such projects must be proposed by the according Synod via IECLB. This requires a substantial, planning and schedule to lead to self-reliance in the future.

With regard to the founding of new congregations in places where the IECLB is not represented, we will have to learn from our own experiences as well as from experiences made in other churches.

I would like to remind you of our own roots. Congregations were founded, to cover basic needs like schooling, assistance at birth, support for medical aid and death. I also remember the formation of congregations in beach-villages or towns without a Lutheran tradition, where *Missão Zero* is working.

To built and renew church requires working together as partners. The mission plan of the IECLB, (PAMI) is a clear and certain sign of true Partnership and co-operation. Different gifts, talents and contributions had an integrating and participating influence on the process of this. We have realised, that Mission today can only happen, if we reach out to one another and act and react together. Mission, in a wider sense, requires this kind of co-operation.

6. To learn from the experiences of other churches

Before I close, I would like to report a personal experience. One day I was taking part in the Diaconic-Seminar with the subject of "Christian social services in the Northeast Area of Brazil" the Subtitle was " (Con-) text/ with text – contrast/ with witness – contradiction/ with tradition".

In the original Portuguese it was a play on words to differentiate context, witness, contrast, tradition and contradiction, set them in relation to one another and thus to give them a new meaning.

So it was tried to answer the question: "Churches – good news in the context of the Northeast?"

I would like to stress some aspects, which in my point of view are relevant for our search:

1. In the Northeast of Brazil and in other cultural contexts our mission will only have a chance, if we are aware of three conditions: a.) the necessity of Enculturation, the acceptance of local history and culture, b.) the necessity to contextualise the gospel, i.e. faith and life have to be related to other, and c.) courage and liberty, to allow the appearance of autochthon congregations or

churches, which correspond with their context and culture and to be different from our tradition.

2. Our mission surrounded by poverty will only get a chance to be successful, if it is accepted for its social engagement, that means for its diaconal work. For a person, who suffers of hunger, the word of our Lord "One does not live by bread alone" is almost unbearable. The parable of the good Samaritan shows the importance of Christian social services and diaconal work.
3. This insight has to be supplemented by another that the intention of our diaconal work has be clear and the motivation for it has to be made transparent.

The ministry of diaconal service has to give witness, because even though the people are hungry they still look for an answer to the last questions, so for eg. how to deal with guilt, with conflicts in living together, with lethal sickness and death; they ask for strength, to forgive and to reconcile, and to die in peace and with hope.

4. The Independent Presbyterian Church (Igreja Presbiteriana Independente) refers in its mission to the following aspects: education, sport/ leisure, participation of citizens/ awareness of citizen, health, and the small farms, were they train how faith, life and farmwork can be combined. The last mentioned experiences seems closest to what we try to do in the centre of support to small farmers.
5. Finally I quote an example, how the 11 congregational churches found new congregations:

"We swept with 100 persons into the town, which was not to large. Bricklayer built a community centre, where a dentist, a doctor, a teacher, a social-worker and a psychologist work in a multidisciplinary way to treat the most urgent needs of people. We went from house to house and paid visits. We collected statistics about the situation of the families and in cases of urgent need we handed out emergency rations of food. All are invited to use the social service centre and the worship-service."

These my thoughts can serve as Preludium or the Preamble and show that the main part still comes, which we will create together.

May God enlighten us for it.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND PERSPECTIVES

“Towards meaningful co-operation in mission“

*Letter from
Bad Segeberg*

To the churches of Latin America and Europe

“As my Father sent me, so I send you.“
John 20:21.

Sisters and brothers,

From 3-6 April 2003 some fifty of us, men and women from churches, missionary bodies and councils of churches in Latin America and Europe have met in the middle of Lent in the Evangelical Academy of Nordelbien, in Bad Segeberg, Germany. We were convened by the Latin American Council of Churches (CLAI), the Conference of European Churches (CEC) the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Association of Protestant Churches and Missions in Germany (EMW).

For the first time in the history of our councils, representatives of different Protestant churches and of Orthodox Churches in 24 countries have met in order to respond to a new awareness of the importance of the mission of the Church. We have been especially motivated by the slogan of one of the churches represented among us: “No congregation without mission - No mission without congregation.“

In these days we have shared our spiritual wealth, our anxieties and concerns, but also our hope, and have strengthened our spirituality through prayer, worship and in study of God’s word.

Our meeting took place in a time when the world feels threatened and impotent in the face of war in Iraq: a sad manifestation of human arrogance.

We met in this consultation about mission and co-operation motivated by the changes that have occurred in the world, in our regions, and in the realities of the churches, mission agencies and church councils that we represent. We have come together in order to identify the challenges that this new situation poses to churches called to be participants in God’s mission and in the hope that together we may build new forums of co-operation, sharing and mutual support.

What we reaffirm with respect to co-operation

The hope we have among us in this effort comes from the words of Jesus and the announcement of his Kingdom. (Romans 14:17). This is at the heart of our motivation and is the driving force of our pastoral and missionary practice.

- ☐ We believe that the diversity of contexts and cultures from which we come can be utilised for God’s mission. It is out of that diversity that He calls us and sends us to announce the Kingdom in *word and work*;
- ☐ in the world which is becoming more and more globalised, in the process of which many values are being threatened if not destroyed, cultures, peoples and individuals are being fragmented, we affirm our unity in Christ and seek common ways toward co-operation in God’s mission;
- ☐ though there are tendencies to separate diakonia and mission we have encouraged one another to continue efforts to keep together both aspects as inseparable in God’s mission. No diaconal initiative should be taken without contemplating the mission dimension and no missionary effort can be called such if it does not take into account diaconal work;
- ☐ as we have shared the diverse tasks which have brought us together in mission, we have discovered four common and central aspects: Spirituality, healing and reconciliation, prophetic witness and sharing. These areas of pastoral work are fundamental to be able to identify the challenges and to move together for mission in our local communities, through our churches, ecumenical bodies and co-operative agencies.

What we have discovered in the process

- That sharing our experiences and sincere dialogue among members of the churches in LA and Europe has enriched us;
- that the churches in both continents need to intensify their missionary practise and the concepts that define it in order to be able to live out it as an integral part of the day to day life of their memberships;
- that the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ shows clearly God's concern for the holistic good of the human being;
- that the catholicity we have experienced in our meeting revealed the wealth of the gifts available for mission. The universality of the Church enriches the witness of the church both at the local and universal level. The local church in its living faith shows forth the universality of the Church, being transformed as a result into a meaningful and unique space for God's mission.

We are concerned about the lack of a living *spirituality* in some of our churches. Some European churches are concerned about their numerical decrease. Others of us found ourselves faced with the great challenge of carrying out mission in a context of extreme poverty and the exclusion of large groups. We need God's Spirit to inspire us through the testimony and wisdom of persons from diverse continents.

We affirm that *Healing and Reconciliation* are necessary on both continents. Painful memories of a coercive and oppressive form of mission that still persists in some places need to be healed and reconciled. The brothers and sisters of Europe can be assured of the sincere appreciation - though sometimes critical of their missionary work - on the part of many Latin American Churches. The brothers and sisters from Latin America shared testimonies of the importance of healing and reconciliation in their context. Jesus' healing and reconciliation inspired us to become agents of reconciliation at a personal level, in our local congregations and in the whole of society.

We acknowledge that the *public testimony* of our congregations has not always been appropriate. We need the analysis and the contribution of brothers and sisters from other contexts to clarify our positions and improve our understanding of mission. Our

witness may then bring us into suffering but only then will it deserve to be called prophetic.

The *Sharing of our resources* has not always reached the level of a true communion in Christ. The institutional structures of our churches, missionary bodies, agencies and councils of churches have often made it difficult for us to share in an egalitarian way. (II Cor. 8, 13-15)

In our difficulties to acknowledge our membership of the Body of Christ, the quality of our mutual co-operation has been damaged. In the encounter with other members of that Body, we learn to share our gifts.

What we can do as churches, congregations and bodies

- Inform one another about the life of our churches, with their joys and needs, worries and achievements;
- pray together for faithfulness to God's mission;
- share knowledge, reflections, and experiences in the field of mission, strengthening our awareness that we are one in the body of Christ;
- engage in intercultural Bible studies, using existing resources in our various places and taking advantage of international ecumenical contacts;
- collaborate with the Christian Diaspora in Europe and Latin America in serving migrants and in their contribution to mission in both continents;
- encourage the creation of ecumenical forums for mission at all levels;
- encourage the inclusion of holistic mission as a crucial element in the theological education of ministers;
- encourage especially ministries to and with children and youth;
- work on the development of new and creative forms of sharing our resources which are not only financial ones.

We place ourselves at the service of God's mission and invite all the churches to join in this effort of renewal.

Bad Segeberg, 5 April 2003

Report on the Consultation

Viorel Ionita, Switzerland

The joint consultation of CEC (Conference of European Churches) – CLAI (Council of Churches in Latin America) – WCC (World Council of Churches) and EMW (Association of Protestant Churches and Missions in Germany) was prepared by two planning committees, one from Latin America and another one from Europe. At their joint meeting in Geneva (November 2002) these two committees identified the following objectives to be reached through the consultation in the year 2003:

1. To facilitate a common space for biblical and theological reflection on mission;
2. To exchange and reflect on the present challenges concerning mission co-operation in both regions;
3. To revitalise the common witness of the churches in the area of mission.

The joint preparatory committees further proposed the theme: „Rebuilding missionary communities. A common learning process between European and Latin American churches“ for the 2003 consultation. This consultation took place at the Evangelical Academy Bad Segeberg, Germany, from 3 – 6 April, 2003. The 60 participants came as follows: 18 from Latin America and 32 from Europe.

1. Opening session and introduction

On behalf of the joint planning committee, Viorel Ionita and Anivaldo Padilha moderated the opening session greeting all participants and in particular, Rev. Emilio Castro, former General Secretary of WCC, and Marta Palma, representing the WCC from Geneva; Bishop Julio César Holguín and Israel Batista, respectively President and General Secretary of CLAI; Sabine Plonz, representative of the EMW; and Keith Clements, General Secretary of CEC. The two moderators presented the time table and the agenda, which were adopted. They further informed the participants about the preparatory process leading towards this consultations in their respective continents. In both cases a draft text on the challenges on Mission was sent to all member churches of both regional ecumenical organisations. In this

way the churches from Latin America and from Europe have been participating in the preparatory process.

The opening worship prepared by CLAI followed the opening session. Bishop Julio César Holguín presided the worship and preached. He greeted the consultation on behalf of CLAI. Israel Batista invited all participants to introduce themselves as an integral part of the worship. Emilio Castro addressed the gathering on behalf of the WCC; Keith Clements did the same on behalf of the CEC.

2. Presentation on the two preparatory documents

The two working documents, which have been shared with the churches separately in the two regions were introduced by Karl Appl (Europe) and Juan Abelardo Schvindt (Latin America). The first one presented the draft paper of the European preparatory group from Summer 2002, which was sent to the Churches and Missionary Councils in Europe. Karl Appl mentioned that there were not many responses from the European churches and he wondered whether „the moment for our initiative was right, and if we put sufficient importance into it?“. Taking as an example the situation in his own congregation in Switzerland, the speaker considered that „many churches and communities have fallen into activism a while ago in order to respond to present challenges and do not remember the basis for their action. Not only for that reason I find it very important to reflect together as brothers and sisters of all continents on what are our common challenges in a world which is still far from what God has promised: His Kingdom of Peace and Justice“.

Juan Abelardo Schvindt introduced the preparatory document from Latin America by underlining that „we are speaking in the name of a continent where, in the last decades, there has been a recurring pattern of depth of poverty caused by unemployment, corruption and total lack of sense of the political, social and economic institutions“. The speaker focussed on the following issues:

- 1) Neo-liberalism and Globalisation;
- 2) The church and society;
- 3) Being church on a road ... open to mission;
- 4) Mission as an occasion for cooperation and ecumenism of the churches.

In his presentation Juan Abelardo pointed to the historical development of the Mission in Latin America in relationship to the churches in Europe.

3. Biblical-pastoral-theological reflections

The keynote speeches at the consultation in Bad-Segeberg were addressed by Rev. Dr. Dietrich Werner from Europe and Lic. Manuel Quintero and Mrs Beatrice Ferrari from Latin America. In his presentation under the title: „Theological Reflection on (Re)-Building missionary communities in Germany (Western Europe)“, Dietrich Werner offered a very large perspective on the European situation. He stressed that „in a culture dominated by visual communication instead of communication by words we need more deliberate attempts for developing and nurturing a new holistic language of religious communication in which elements both of the churches of the word (Protestantism), the churches of the sacrament (Catholicism), the churches of liturgical celebrations and icons (Orthodoxy) and the churches of charismatic forms and gestures are complementing and benefit from each others treasures“.

Lic. Manuel Quintero, co-ordinator of the public issues Department of the CLAI, underlined that the goal of the missionary task is to fortify the local communities through ecumenical exchange and contacts. The panorama of the evangelical churches in Latin America includes the historical, the independent and the Pentecostal oriented churches. About three quarters of the evangelical churches in Latin America are Pentecostal and their liturgy is welcomed by almost all people.

Beatriz Ferrari presented a contribution on „Building new missionary communities. Shared Mission: Biblical, Theological and Pastoral Reflections with a Gender Perspective“. Concluding her paper, the speaker underlined the following: „After working for more than a decade with women of all countries and many churches, I have come to the conclusion that there are some things that we have to do ecumenically,

such as consciousness raising and training for mission, in a gender perspective. But I am also convinced that there are other tasks, such as specific mission in a given place, that have to be done locally and denominationally. To quote a known slogan: ‘We have to think globally and to act locally’“.

4. Panel on the missionary task of local communities

In a panel focussing on concrete experience and projects in relation to the missionary task of the local communities, contributions were presented from Latin America by Rev. Huberto Kirchheim and Mrs. Nidia Fonseca. Rev. Wout van Laar and Bishop David Evans presented some aspects of cooperation between Europe and Latin America. Finally Rev. Jairo Monteiro shared some experiences of a Latin American congregation in Europe, concrete in Geneva.

Huberto Kirchheim, pastor of the Lutheran Church in Brazil, presented the Mission concept of the Evangelical Lutheran Church (IECLB) in Brazil. Important in this plan, among others things, is that the personnel management, the administration of the church and the training are structures and activities oriented towards effective Mission.

Nidia Fonseca, pastor in the Autochthonous Wesleyan Church in Costa Rica, introduced the concept of the „Oasis of Hope“. The life of the community is structured according to this concept, in terms that the people can speak in the community about their needs and organise practical help.

Wout van Laar, General Secretary of the Netherlands Missionary Council of Churches, talked about networks of intercultural bible reading. Such a project has existed around the world since 1996. The readings of the same bible text in different cultural contexts helps people to better understand their own situation and opens new ecumenical perspectives.

David Evans, former General Secretary of the South American Mission Society, underlined the cooperation in Mission. In the post colonial period Mission should go in both directions. The transparency in financial matters on both sides must be reciprocal. In this perspective the local communities should have priority.

Jairo Monteiro, Methodist Pastor from Brazil, responsible for a congregation in Geneva, shared his experience from an immigrant community from Latin America in Europe. The issue of Healing is in this context very important. Latin American communities in Europe are very much influenced by the charismatic movements.

5. Working groups

The main inputs in the consultation were discussed in-depth by four working groups, two in English and two in Spanish. A summary of the discussion in the working groups was presented and further discussed in the plenary. In the reports of the working groups was mentioned among others:

5.1 Why is the interaction between church congregations in Europe and diaspora congregations (with people from other parts of the world) so difficult?

The diaspora congregations are often far more dynamic and spiritually lively compared to the local ones. Why are they not able to influence the local congregations with this spirit? There may be various reasons, e.g. that the diaspora congregations prefer their cultural identity and serve, in their way, the people far from home. But it would require a rather skilled kind of pastoring to bring congregations of such differences together in a sensitive way. Local congregations are often not at all aware of the diaspora congregations. What happens when people in the diaspora congregations get socially advanced, will they not leave their original congregation and get adapted to the European type congregation? Opinions from Latin America: in general the charismatic Christians remain in that type of congregation; for them their allegiance is not a matter influenced by social advancement.

5.2 The role of spirituality in a congregation with deprived and vulnerable people had been described from the Costa Rican background in an impressive way. How can such a spirit of comforting and total reliance on God be transferred to people in Europe where many people look out in vain for something like this in their churches? But they often hide their problems, pains and failures whilst in Latin America it is openly expressed in the worshipping family

and God is praised for His caring. The reason for the different attitude in Europe is the individualism which hinders such openness, whilst in Latin America the strong community life carries the individual.

5.3 The value of a congregation as all-embracing life experience is not encountered by many people in Europe as it is in Latin America. This leads to the sad fact that a split occurs between church in worship and evangelisation and church in development work and social service. The technocrats in development have, many times, very little to do with church life in worship - to the bewilderment of ordinary people in the Latin American churches.

5.4 How can the academic training of pastors be linked with the spirituality in congregational life? This is a worrisome question in Europe, but increasingly also in Latin America. A close relationship must be kept between college life and the experience and practice in the local congregations.

5.5 International patterns of sharing: the Bible-sharing method was discussed with appreciation. But not all cultures are geared towards the written word and writing down thoughts. Therefore the Bible-sharing by mutual visits may be more advisable. Such visits should be more than 'mission tourism', but be understood as 'pilgrimages' with certain spiritual emphases like mutual opening of the Scripture, joint prayer, comforting in personal or natural tragedies, etc. This gives a deeper meaning to travelling and something will in this sense be brought back from a visit abroad.

5.6 The term Mission was discussed in view of its relevance today. It was encouraging to hear that this term, in the context of its biblical meaning, is well and increasingly used in Europe as well as in Latin America despite the earlier tragic history in connection with colonial missions. But Christians in the South are concerned about the developments of Christians in Europe and they see that South and North need each other in terms of Christian life and witness. However, the spiritual situation in Central and Western Europe is in many areas so weak that one can talk of 'spiritual/biblical illiteracy'! A new missionary approach in Europe is a tough task as many people see themselves as religiously immunised and (openly stating) as living in post-Christian times, not at all out of

antagonism, but all the more difficult to reach. (Here the discussion had to stop, but was not at all completed).

5.7. An other group identified some instruments for improving the cooperation in Mission: Meeting between leaders, also between European communities among themselves. Communities in Europe and Latin America as (co)agents of Mission; exchange of personnel at different levels; strengthen networks of brotherhood; accompaniment from agencies with volunteers and/or personnel in Latin America; intercultural re-reading of the Bible.

5.8. Finally another group identified the challenges for the Mission today and formulated the concerns as follow:

- How can we play as churches an intermediate role between our concerns today and our life and work?
- How to create a fermentation that could mobilise the Mission actions of our churches?
- We need to revive the concept of the church as koinonia (a centre of meaning).
- We need to look to the teaching and commitment efforts of our churches, because sometimes the Vision of the Kingdom of God is not present in their efforts.
- Sometimes the agencies, while they are playing their role tend to diminish the role of the churches.
- We need to listen and have a fruitful exchange of attitudes in the encounter with other cultures.
- We need to involve the agencies and the churches into a process of dialogue and cooperation.

Some comments and recommendations from the working groups were given to the drafting committee for the final statement.

6. Missionary communities in sharing

Rev. Ofelia Ortega, Director of the Evangelical Seminary in Matanzas, Cuba, presented an evalua-

tion study on the Ecumenical Sharing of Resources. She underlined the growing of the institutional dimension of sharing, which is damaging the profound mystical sense of the Mission. In this perspective achievements and knowledge of the Ecumenical movement, like the holistic image of the human being, the principal of reciprocity, of the joint responsibility, the commitment for Justice, Reconciliation and the prophetic voice of the church are getting lost. In facing this challenge the churches should cooperate closer in relation to the Mission of God in the world.

7. Bible study, worship and celebrations

The work of the consultation at Bad-Segeberg was accompanied by Bible Study and worship. The first Bible Study was prepared by Rev. Dr. Wolfgang Teichert, Director of the Evangelical Academy Bad Segeberg. Dr. Teichert proposed a very interesting pantomime on Acts 8, 26-40. The second Bible Study was prepared by Mr. Anivaldo Padilha on Matthew 22, 15-22. The orders of worship were prepared by Rev. Viorel Ionita from CEC, Bishop Soares from Portugal, Rev. Marianne Wagner from Germany, and Tirsia Perreira from Latin America. The Bible Studies and the moments of praying together helped to build up the spiritual community between the participants from Latin America and from Europe. Sunday, 6 April, all participants visited the city of Lübeck and participated in the worship at the Evangelical Lutheran Cathedral from this city.

8. Conclusions and recommendations

At the end of this consultation a common statement was adopted under the title: „Letter from Bad Segeberg“. This letter is intended to enable sharing of the experience from the consultation in Bad-Segeberg beyond the circle of the participants with the churches in Europe and Latin America. The participants in this consultation addressed, through their letter, some concrete recommendations for a closer cooperation between the churches from Europe and from Latin America in the field of Mission. The planning group suggested continuing the process initiated by CLAI, first by evaluation of the experience from Bad Segeberg and second to see what the next step will be.

Theological ideas for further consideration

Sabine Plonz, Germany

1. In retrospect

The conference demonstrated just how diverse the Latin American and European churches are.

We heard reports of experience in various fields of work:

- ❑ congregational work under conditions of extreme poverty, in situations of migration, under the premise of becoming more open culturally, socially and ethnically for the majority of the population or for the immigrant minorities etc.
- ❑ attempts to study the same bible texts and exchange ideas about them across continents
- ❑ one church's attempt to understand all its work as missionary work, thereby going beyond its own ethnic, social and cultural borders
- ❑ theological and biblical ideas, and a study on the challenges of mission in the German context.
- ❑ in group discussions pastors, theologians and lay people shared their personal experience within their local churches, and negative incidents in the Latin America churches' dealings with the agencies and developing departments of the churches in Europe were also talked about.
- ❑ in the plenary session we talked about how important it is to understand ecumenical sharing of resources as an integral part of the mission of the churches.

The liturgical celebrations, devotions and sermons were just as varied as the colours and clothes that people wore. How can we possibly bring it all together theologically in a way acceptable to all?

The letter from Bad Segeberg offers far-reaching ideas in this direction and is well-worth studying. However – it was clear to all of us that even this document is really only a very small part of our great diversity. Furthermore, it is not a text for use at the grassroots level in congregations. But it was

this level of work that was the main focus of so many of the participants' experience and their contributions, and also the predominant focus in the title of the conference. The letter gives only a few practical examples of such work – many others could be added, and the idea is that on both continents such examples should be collected and above all put into practice. Many of them have developed through the process and history of ecumenical partnerships.

What follows are some ideas that we think can contribute towards making the European-Latin American partnership theologically fruitful and thereby relevant for our churches here in Germany. They neither represent a plan of action nor a theological outline. In view of the complexity and diversity facing us we could not achieve this. Rather they are suggestions for topics and methods, which we consider to have decided theological quality. We are concerned that sufficient space is given to the context of all these subjects. We offer suggestions how this can be done, but in the end it is up to each individual to put it into effect.

When reading these texts it is important to remember that they were written in Germany. Although the German churches have many of the same experiences and share the same theological questions as their neighbours in Europe, we nevertheless feel sure that it was not possible to adequately consider certain perspectives of other European churches.

2. Further considerations – Which questions should the churches in Europe be asking themselves?

1. Tasks that remain after the Segeberg Consultation:
 1. **Mission:** What are missionary communities/congregations, if we regard the community as the relevant context for every (local) church? This

question was raised frequently by the Latin American churches while the European partners were more reserved on this issue. They were more sceptical about the use of the word community for their context. But in our individualistic and pluralistic context it would be all the more important to try to define community in more concrete and helpful terms without romanticising it or thinking of it only in authoritarian terms.

2. **Ecumenism:** How can the institutional and conceptual links between mission, ecumenism and development co-operation or Christian service to society be justified today in an understandable way, and how can we ensure that conceptually they remain an integral part of church activities – or move towards that once again? The task becomes apparent when we consider the rather quantitative growth approach of mission concepts of many churches, which whilst greater in number have often been drained of content and become more clerical. Also when we see how the church departments are specialising more and more and orientating towards very different norms and different ways of financing themselves. The task is demanding because we do not want just to continue following historic paternalistic models nor do we wish to limit our ecumenical missionary cooperation to the countries from our colonial past. But we are also experiencing how the churches in Europe are turning inwards and allowing ecumenical involvement to be pushed out to the fringes.
3. **Co-operation:** Is it possible for rich and poor to share resources as is necessary in an exchange relationship that is just and respects human dignity on both sides? What kind of church structures do we need for this? What changes in society are we going to stand up for? What ways can we find to strengthen people in the free development of their personality, their creativity and their ability to form relationships and take on responsibility? In our opinion the sequence of these questions reflects how the question of co-operation can be worked on step by step and then answered in concrete terms. It sets priorities based on experience of the deficits and strengths of ecumenical cooperation at a material level and at a relationship level.

These topics were not discovered for the first time in and after Segeberg but rather strengthened by the experiences made at the conference and the contacts arising from it. Some of the subjects have

a long history. It could have been a frustrating experience to discover more setbacks than progress. But we preferred to see it as a source of new inspiration, reassurance and drive to go on searching. In order to make real progress it will be necessary to become clear about the opportunities and possibilities facing the church, and to realise in which framework of society it operates at present.

2. The Shape of the Church – Inheritance and Commission. Ecclesiological perspectives

First of all I would like to consider a few ecclesiological perspectives. These arise particularly from a consideration of the common yet diverse history of the Protestant Church on both continents. At the same time I understand them as an up-to-date selection of aspects that could have special relevance for the future.

1. The Church on the Move

Mission and migration are closely linked and this also has theological significance. Biblically it refers us to the creed of redemptive history, “Heilsgeschichte”, that tells about Abraham’s journeys and about the Exodus as the founding date of the people of Israel. The subjects of migration and flight are to be found throughout Scripture: as a critical analysis of discrimination in Israel itself (Hagar, Ruth); as a justification for social legislation (commandment to keep the Sabbath and the Jubilee year, the commandment to love one’s neighbour); and as a reason for calling for salvation and for giving thanks in the worship of God (psalms). Jesus and his disciples moved restlessly through the country as did many other socially uprooted people, Paul and the other apostles founded congregations whilst moving around, making use of the infrastructure of a modern empire. Finally the letter to the Hebrews stylizes the Christian community as the wandering people of God.

Since ancient times the church has been influenced by the fact that people were either unwillingly or voluntarily on the move. This leads to constant change, to gaining and losing identity, to separation from others and to a backwards orientation, but also to the integration of new cultural and religious elements into a living faith and theology. As a consequence, if they are honest, the churches cannot cling to any theology as if it were their own, but rather they are challenged constantly to re-define their task and to re-develop their focus in relation to where they

are. This means they have continually to ask themselves where exactly they are at present. What kind of society do we live in? This cannot define itself just in terms of a nation, but needs to use more concrete and inclusive terms.

A church that remains conscious of being on the move must be able to integrate new groups and to qualify traditional church structures for the sake of renewal. In Europe, where some churches are in the process of implementing structural reforms, they are also challenged to develop intelligent and flexible organisational models that do justice to the substance of their profile and to their responsibility as a large employer.

2. The Church as a Minority

The “Christian West” has long understood itself as the majority and accepted as a matter of course that church and culture more or less coincide. This was a problematic view of things even in the past. Today we recognise that being a Christian means living as a minority – Christian life as an alternative to society. This is sometimes experienced as a burden, sometimes as a privilege, sometimes responded to by remaining transfixed in the traditions of the past, sometimes seen as a chance for practical politics. We plead the case for emphasising the chance of being the salt of the earth and a sign for the people. Thirty years ago Helmut Gollwitzer described the task of the congregation as being a “vanguard for life”. To understand the existence of Christian congregations or groups quite consciously as a minority existence in a pluralistic, multi-religious and also secular environment, offers us an opportunity. It demands a sharpening of profile, an ecumenical openness and convincing practice.

If the churches understand themselves as a minority then their aim is not just an increase in membership or the growth and closer commitment of their members. Mission of churches without any hegemonial claims rather means praying and working for an improvement in the lives of all the people around them. The only meaningful way of gaining conviction about „Christian identity” then leads into the reality of life in that region.

The large denominational churches are required to acknowledge people’s different motives for their church membership, but also to set priorities and to critically analyse the religious concepts that have remained unquestioned for so

long. The Church cannot allow itself just to be satisfied with being the largest religious institution in the country. For religion is of no value in itself, and “Christian religion” no better than any other religion “by nature”.

Can the churches succeed in rooting themselves in present-day reality? And can they succeed in putting the question, which special aspects of our denominational churches are particularly helpful for people today here in this context, and how can we live them in good ecumenical contact? Then the anxious question of a visible profile so often heard will no longer be of importance, for history and the present day will become a source of strength for every missionary existence in the light of the biblical Gospel of liberation.

3. The Church of the People

Throughout European church history new Christian movements have come into existence, which later themselves became churches or Orders. These have particularly emphasised certain aspects that had been neglected in the majority church. Among other things these are:

- the tradition of non-violence
- the orientation towards the poor
- “the laity”(the people of God) as agents of mission and builders of the congregation
- detachment from state structures and the dominant culture

Later there were added to these:

- ecumenical openness and work for peace
- involvement in social movements and for democracy

These renewal movements were able to refer back to early Christianity and to the witness of the Bible on the life of Jesus, as one of the people of Israel based on the Old Testament ethics of justice. As a rule therefore, together with their criticism, they included a call to accept the Bible as binding.

Today it is worth understanding this inheritance as an inheritance on the way to becoming a true church of the people. In European churches such as in Germany, where the “Volkskirche” is such a strong tradition but is being forced to change, this could be an exciting experiment. Their character as a movement of living and changeable communities would then be in the forefront of interest, not the retention of structures nor the understanding of themselves as an institution.

3. Fields of action and the framework of society Sociological characteristics

I would now like to demonstrate in which environment we work with our task of mission and ecumenical cooperation. This also represents an up-to-date choice directed particularly towards the opportunities for action for a church:

- that understands itself as ecumenical
- that claims to be a missionary church
- and that should be won over to more intensive relations with Latin America.

It is helpful to try to understand this in sociological categories, as common aspects of church reality can be described in this way without already giving them a theological or denominational interpretation and thereby limiting their meaning too quickly.

1. Interaction and corresponding relations between different levels of action in the Church and Christian groupings within society

We should recall the different levels of activity: congregations (local and functional), groups, church departments and functional services, regional churches (local/national), church councils. At each of these levels, different processes can be analysed and reacted to. This is also the case when considering the question of a missionary church that is internationally and ecumenically committed.

2. Social framework: fields of tension between minority and dominant culture

It should be recognised that we have different forms and experiences of churches in relation to their social environment: majority churches, minority churches, majority churches in minority situations, minority churches in majority situations. For every type it would be possible (in Germany, Europe, Latin America) to give specific examples. And each example is integrated in the power and dominance structures of their societies and among each other. Any discussion about identity, profile and inculturation should look openly at this and reflect upon it in a self-critical way. We are convinced that concrete and exciting perspectives of action will develop from this - even some rich in conflict.

3. The challenge of fundamentalism and uncommitted religiousness in society, among the general public, in churches and quasi-religious groupings

For quite some time now several forms of fundamentalism have been in conflict with each other both nationally and internationally: Christian majority church fundamentalism, evangelical fundamentalism, Roman restorative fundamentalism, national fundamentalism, Islamic fundamentalism, fundamentalism of the market-economy, individualistic fundamentalism and many others. They must be recognised and named before it is possible to carry out an honest and progressive debate on the "missionary existence of the churches". In each context it is important to establish which fundamentalism has the greater effect on society and most endangers peaceful living together, democracy and a just development for the people.

These points may sound abstract, but they are not. They are rather intended to be methodical. They offer a relatively clear framework for all those concerned to implement in the place where they live, as exactly as they can and with as little prejudice as possible. This should prove the simplest way to define an „Agenda of Bad Segeberg“ that takes all the relevant levels of action and local/ regional conditions into consideration (see appendix Matrix).

3. Theology

It would be interesting to take up the text of the Latin American Theological Commission (CTL) on the subject of "Grace, the Cross and Hope" in a process of ecumenical theological dialogue.

In our opinion this text re-visits Reformation theology over and against the current context of a merciless globalisation and the dominance of a religious fundamentalist proclamation of salvation as a theology of wealth. We are however not talking about the theology of the 16th Century itself, but rather a form that it took in the church, and the history of its theological effect in Latin America through mission and migration.

In the same way, the theology of the 16th Century is no longer alive in Europe today, but only its consequences re-shaped and changed throughout history (see the film "Luther"!) This also must be continually related to the current context

and developed further. Karl Barth did this for example over and against National Socialism by adding to the Protestant emphasis of justification that of justice, and by opposing the political ethics resulting from Romans 13 with an ethic resulting from Apc 13.

A new re-visiting against the background of the Segeberg questions and in an inter-continental dia-

logue could take up the old subjects “Grace, the Cross and Hope” and relate them point by point to the tasks named (1), the ecclesiological perspectives (2) and the sociological framework (3). It would in that way be able to offer a very contextual and up-to-date ecumenical Reformation theology. Other processes such as the discussions and publications of the LWF on the subject of globalisation could be meaningfully included in this process.

Matrix of levels of church action (Germany, Europe and Latin America)

Forms of church organisation: internal interaction

Congregations

Groups – in action

Mission Societies,
Church Mission Departments,
Functional Church Services

Regional / Local / National Churches

Church Councils

.....



Interaction with Movements – religious dynamics:

(Neo-) Penticostalists, esotericism, interaction between historical churches in certain regions: Catholics, Lutherans, Mennonites and others



.....

Relation between social context and church type: migration and dominant culture

Majority churches	Catholics in Latin America; „Volkskirche“ in Germany, ...
Minority churches	Methodists in Germany, Waldenser in both continents ...
Majority churches in minority situations	Lutherans in Brazil, Orthodox in Western Europe, ...
Minority churches in Majority situations	Moravians in Surinam, ...

After the Consultation of Bad Segeberg

Lic. Juan Abelardo Schvindt, Argentina

**„Experiencing grace, is an experience of
repose in God and the
church has called upon us to celebrate
the good Will of God.**

**Therefore this celebration is a part of God and His daily life.
The celebration expresses the irrepressible joy from those who know that
no matter what occurs in the world,
it is still in His hands.**

**The tenderness and the fraternal support harvested from
the incorporation in the community of faith
are all a part of Gods redeeming love for us,
that he accepts us and restores us.**

**The praise and celebration are meant to make us aware
of Gods gratuitous love for each and everyone of us.**

**The churches are not only communities consisting of Law or
discipline, but are indeed a place of joy, happiness, hope and celebration.¹**

**„Theology is the church reflection upon Gods Will for the world
and the Churches task is to be at the service of that Will.
It is a reflection upon the mission and the journey to that mission“²**

I. Introduction

Time after the Consultation in April 2003, which congregated European and Latin American people, to jointly reflect upon the mission and cooperation, we can only look back on the Consultation with an immense spirit of gratitude. But at the same time we should also look towards the future with the same degree of concern as when we arrived to that beautiful place where we congregated. I speak of gratitude because the Bible studies, workshops, moreover conferences and challenges were pertinent in being presented by both continents and each offered a sufficient amount of materials (regarding these contents, I will not speak of them at length here). These materials aid us in deepening the subject matters within a context. I talk about concern, because the world has not changed in either its globalized dynamics, protected by the impunity of wealthy people, nor in the hope of a prompt restoration of all needs which our churches through their mission are in charge of. Mutual strengthening from each other for this task is one of the most laudatory results arisen from the Consultation of Bad Segeberg, because we now live in a world that has become dramatically hostile (as if

that ever changed!). How and in what way is still to be revealed, but as long as we share and discover this task together it will be certainly possible.

Up until now, we not only have a view of historical aspects, comprehension of new paradigms for the mission, but also a series of suggestions aside from all the many different aspects. These are very significant pieces in the piecing together of this puzzle that within an environment of trust and mutual commitment begins to shape into its proper form.

2. Mission within the context

In Latin America there are certain similarities between the beginning of Jesus' ministry³ and what occurs in the social issues and nature. Such as those individuals who feel completely abandoned; an overwhelming amount of people that are deprived from their rights, which we thought were ensured, for example: having the right to work and the sense of belonging. The never ending devastation of na-

tive forests... which destroy hundreds of thousand of acres per year, in order to enlarge the farming boundaries and thus to ensure exportable food for the cattle consumption in central countries. The infinite contamination of rivers and watercourses. Children who die due to diseases that had already been declared curable and could have been maintained under control.

Residents who are forced to leave their own countries and enter into others illegally due to the poor living conditions, and not to mention, the fraudulent and usurious debt which seems to become eternal.... We live within the context of daily violence, just as in the beginning of Jesus' ministry. We are far from the paradise that God dreamed of in the Book of Genesis for all humanity, and an act of Jesus Christ, brought upon by God, ensures our renewal of the long sought after paradise. It seems as though Latin America has never grown out of Modernism, moreover, we do not know when it entered into Modernism if it ever did. I talk about Modernism as a constitutional state. A clear example of that is the fragility and weakness in its political, economical and social institutions.

Meanwhile Europe suffers its expansion towards the east; which is easily perceptible in several countries because of the crisis inside the social security and employment systems. Furthermore the migrational pressures over their economies and the institutional consolidation of the European Community through their final steps in their formation. The churches, principally those that are more committed to the international missionary cooperation such, as those from: Holland, Germany and Nordic countries, are suffering changes in their structures and most of them reducing their budgets significantly. Europe begins to look at itself with concern.

Historical relationships begin to be questioned by the weight of current circumstances. A new map expects to be designed as a result of present situation. While Latin America asks itself how to be a church in a context of exclusion and imposed globalization, Europe asks itself about the sense of the Christian faith in a no longer secular, but rather postmodern framework. Different questions for a common task that fundamentally seeks to rediscover; such as in other times; common paths to be travelled in that fascinating call as are the ones of the mission in different worlds.

3. The Consultation of Bad Segeberg – Some marks to take into account

Although the letter of Bad Segeberg contains some elements that allow us to place ourselves in the moment of the Consultation, it offers certain approaches not only of diagnosis, but also for continuing the task started by both Councils of Churches. I want to emphasize here the importance of four aspects mentioned as “*discovered*” issues which help us to interpret the signals of the provoking, irrepressible and supportive presence of God among his faith communities:

a) Spirituality

Spirituality based on the Word and guided by the Holy Spirit leads us to an active relationship with Jesus Christ. This simple affirmation, in all its magnitude and depth reflected, becomes always again an enormous challenge for the being and task of the church. In Latin America we have been inspired by various comprehensions of this relation: First from liberation theology or later from captivity. And due to that inspiration we have felt and sensed that; in the middle of changes - at times dramatic, as like in the dictatorships, in others not as much, as in the democracies recently recovered-; God has maintained us with his hand and consoled us with his presence. But taking a look at the time that is called on to us to live, we perceive not only a lack of spirituality, but in addition we are confronted with the new conflict of “*spiritualities*” that claim and demand submission. The new millenium has brought upon us the great task of re-thinking, such as in other times, about the assumptions of our spirituality, so that the same one is effective in the life and work of our communities of faith, in the service to our nations and in the vision that encourage us. That is the reason why we emphasize the need to return to an “*incarnated spirituality*”. That is to say, historically located and confronted with the daily routine. A spirituality that allows us to resist re-creating communities and where the hope has a sense.

b) Healing and reconciliation

But spirituality is not only a condition for the faith and the testimonial practice. An incarnated spirituality is above all an alternative for a hurt, fragmented and violent world, because it not only allows us to experience a deep sense of inclusion, but also, to feel that we are a part of this world, as well as we are being permanently called for the proclamation and promotion of the

healing and reconciliation message; particularly in the task of testimony and participation in the mission of God which “includes” us and not “excludes” us. Because we believe exactly in a God who cares about his creation and who does not exclude us from his actions, we confess He continues his act through his sons and daughters. It is this conviction then, which encourages us for the mission in promoting healing and reconciling communities. A community that experiences the healing and has deep experiences of reconciliation, will be – certainly – able to face and transform positively a context of illness and fragmentation such as the one that we inhabit.

c) Prophetic testimony

But a community that sustains itself in a spirituality full of resistance orientated to a testimony of healing and reconciliation, is not fully complete, if it dispenses with the prophetic testimony – understanding it as a permanent call to the search of justice and peace. The urgency of this task has two sources: on the one hand we are urged for the so-called “unique thought” that proclaims the end of the history and does not accept a dissent. And on the other hand, due to the facts and judging by its results, the unique thought, as an ideological basis for the “unique system” that it tries to defend has failed. This is clear if we agree that human condition has not improved at all, as it was promised, rather quite the opposite.

In view of this reality, we can affirm that without a prophetic testimony history is irrelevant and the presence of God is poor and distant. The history has a sense because we believe in a God that, in Christ, he admonishes us and consoles us; he summons and he sends; he judges and he forgives. The beats of history can also be the clamor of God himself, who yearns for redemption waiting the answer of their own sons, as Paul said⁴.

d) Sharing

But as much the *spirituality*, as thus also the *healing, reconciliation* and the *prophetic testimony*, are possible if, they are based on genuinely sharing, inspired by the very action of Jesus⁵, sustained in the Eucharist, where eating and drinking are signals of His presence among the human history *until its end*⁶ and when everything will be in plenitude. Meanwhile the Eucharist itself must hold us during this journey and share in the middle of the conflicts and hopes of our times: with the social and base organizations

in our localities; with the groups that fight for their place and recognition inside the society: women, young people, migrants and indigenous people; working for a new structure in the fight for a sustained and sustainable environment; defying the models that concentrate on wealth so that they are transformed into models of sharing in justice, the result of all human activity and finally, in that effort by a new understanding of sharing, to promote open-handed communities, generous in giving and open to new communion gestures.

The debates of the past decades inside the ecumenical movement and specially inside the ecumenical and ecclesiastical cooperation agencies have produced many results in the matter of “the ecumenical sharing of resources”. The origin of these debates comes from a world where the human needs are increasingly growing and the available resources of the Agencies, Churches and Governments are becoming scarcer. And this is not precisely because there are no more resources, but because the production and accumulation model of the international financial system has changed. Enormous masses of population have been left to their fate and at the same time enormous volumes of money will be received by fewer hands. In this context, we should proclaim the cooperation with a sense of mission. In the middle of a more and more intense and irrational exploitation of natural resources, which future generations will demand for the sake of their own existence, and the distinctive irrationality that the financial accumulation system has carried out, sharing adopts not only the character of prophetic denunciation, but also an urgent task in order to achieve a change which allow the humanity to recover: the confidence in justice, the sense of the work, the economy and the value of the celebration in the “day of repose”. The repose has sense exactly for whom indeed it works and is part, with it, of the very action and mission of God. To cooperate for the mission, it encourages us to share what one is, more than what one possesses.

These four inspiring “marks” for the life and action of the church, not only allow us to accompany the missionary action, but mainly to detect the integrality of the same one and where *diaconia* (service) is not dissociated of *kerigma* (proclamation), nor *koinonia* (sharing) of *martiria* (testimony). These four dimensions must be visualized so much in their simultaneousness as thus also in their own specifications. A church, then, that tries to be the

announcement and signal of the mission of God, must oppose to the marks of its context, a resolute action in the name of who has called upon the church to proclaim the Gospel, developing communities of faith and service with their “own marks and signals”. Like restoration and announcement of “the good things that God gives to those He loves”.

4. Between the mission of God and the human construction

But the consultation not only helped us to notice the context where it takes place, the mission of God and the marks that are necessary to detect his presence, but it also helped us to understand how God himself has been seeding throughout history expressions of faith that through its dialogue and common enrichment have founded a task that out of its own transcends in the common search of the sense of its true existence. In both contexts, whether in Europe or in Latin America, we live immersed in cultures that are dominated by the mass media. We need to develop, as we mentioned, a holistic language where the churches of the word (Protestantism), the sacramental churches (Catholicism), the churches of the liturgical celebrations and icons (Orthodoxism) and churches of gestures and charismatic forms of adoration are complemented and benefited mutually. Although we already have many of these forms, specially in Latin America, we still do not have a common holistic language. Specially when it comes down to facing important issues in our societies; we experience difficulties to articulate a thought, and as a consequence, a common language. The task before us is not only to ask ourselves which are the challenges that come from our societies, but, fundamentally, and avoiding all kind of messianism or integrism, to ask ourselves what kind of societies are we helping to build. It is clear that in Latin America there are several manifestations of messianism and integrism when we have to face the source of the questions that come from our contexts. It is certainly that fragmentation in the theological vision of the reality, the one that makes difficult a genuine and complete language of the diversities of Christianity present in our continent. The urgent challenge is how to transform “dissent” into “consensus”. There are several tasks dealing with social, political and economical issues that must be reviewed and treated. This must be done not only among Europe and Latin America, but specially inside the Latin American continent.

5. Between the ecclesiastical and the ecumenical mission

As we already mentioned, the ecumenical task we must face could not be separated of the missiological task and vice versa. Moreover, the mission could only be ecumenical if it is understood as God himself defines it taking, the “world” as a horizon for his saving action⁷ and making us assured in Him, that he is present. Even in the middle of small and big obstacles that could happen⁸. This action demands a church able to be heard and with a voice that does not speak “on behalf of” but rather “from” those it summons to constitute it and to accompany it in the mission. The church only can exist if it is able to continuously refuse to be in itself and to point out who calls, summons and sends it. If their signs coincide with the marks of the Cross, surely it could be announcing possible resurrections, like an oasis in the middle of the desert, miracle that allows the continuity of the life, place of rest, an obligatory repose; but never a place of definitive establishment.

Biblically speaking and if we take the concept of the Kingdom of God as a horizon for the mission, the settlement is denied to us. To go to the encounter of the promise of “new heavens and new earth” it is what gives sense to the provisory time of our life. In this act, marked by the fragility and provisory we find sense and sustenance to the necessary and permanent tension between “ecclesia” and “oecumene”. Those are not two different orders, but rather two faces of a same coin, avoiding assimilating our social ethics with the same Kingdom of God. When that effort takes place, the question about the sense of the life in a world where the only possible thing is the daily negation of the life, is inevitable. It does not mean, then, to be a church in contraposition to the world or vice versa, but rather to be a church located in the world and from world. No other possible geography or space for the mission exists.

As we said, we are defied to develop a coherence marked by the radicalism of the Gospel, avoiding the tepidity of the coexistence and compliance with those who feel indebted to the will of God. Our time demands us to gather forces and efforts for the construction of “another possible world” where the marks⁹ of the exclusion and the negation of the life lose their sense and importance and we can contrapose it the true marks of what we consider an advance of the Kingdom and appetizers of the future, as Rubem Alves says. And in that path, it is forbidden to us, to serve two Lords.

6. After Bad Segeberg towards where?

Finally, I think that the questions that are emphasized by Dr. Sabine Plonz in her theological reflections (Tasks suggested for the follow-up of the consultation of Bad Segeberg: Mission, Ecumenism and Cooperation), will help us to deepen in such sense and to give continuity to the process of cooperation initiated among the European Conference of Churches and the Latin American Council of Churches. To walk together in cooperation, promoting the mission in a context that deserves to be reconsidered in order to understand its sense and relevance for the mission is what has called us. Now it would be matter of “opening paths while we walk”, as Machado says.

Footnotes

- ¹ Latin American Theological Commission- „Gracia, Cruz y Esperanza“ – Edited by the Media Department of CLAI, Quito, Ecuador, p. 28.
- ² Ibid Page 5.
- ³ See The Holy Gospel of Jesus Christ according to Saint Matthew.
- ⁴ See Romans 8, 19 (regarding to this, I recommend the reading of the whole chapter)
- ⁵ See Philippians 2, 5 - 8
- ⁶ See the diverse stories of the Holy Communion in the Gospels. Specially Luke, 22, 7 -20.
- ⁷ See The Holy Gospel of Jesus Christ according to St. John 3, 16
- ⁸ See he Holy Gospel of Jesus Christ according to St. John 16, 33
- ⁹ Confer 3. The Consultation of Bad Segeberg – Some Marks to take into account

Dokumentation



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