

Mission today – Facing the challenges of the 21st century in Africa

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I will start by referring to various challenges and concerns in Africa, a word on mission, a word on prophetic mission, then on priestly mission and conclude with a word on royal servant mission.

Some challenges and concerns in Africa today

We have to journey on our continent between the Skylla of absolutism and Charybdis of relativism. Absolutism is manifested in a culture (*Zeitgeist*), in practices of fundamentalism, of intolerance, of entire intellectualism, of stereotyping and stigmatizing of those who differ, even of demonization and analysis of those who differ from me.

But there is beside absolutism than also relativism that we have continuously to take into consideration. Relativism I define as the fact that you feel that you live without foundation. Many people feel disoriented. Many feel there are not really principles to stand for. There is not really anything to stand for. Nihilism, despair is a result of relativism, different forms of relativism, different forms of absolutism covering all walks of life.

So when I talk about absolutism and relativism I speak about abroaded *Zeitgeist*. That is a challenge for us.

We struggle to deal with diversity and I will respond to diversity of opinions and perspectives and backgrounds and persons and even personalities and temperaments, than one of it is either absolutism or relativism. We have to learn a lot about living life together in a context of diversity.

A second deed of the challenge is discrimination. Discrimination persists on our continent also in various forms. We still struggle with racism, with classism. Classism even in the same extended familiar way where some have a lot and other stone heavy much. Sexism, homophobia, patriarchy, gender based violence, ageism, ableism, xenophobia, eco-sight on our continent.

Another deed is dehumanization. We experience on our continent still the many faces of dehumanization, of the violence of dignity, poverty, inequality, unemployment in various social pathologies.

Another deed we struggle with is democracy. Democracy is for some no longer a beautiful dream. But it becomes for so many a nightmare. Various African countries experience capture of the state, corruption. And I want to say, even capture of the three generations or I mention of rights. We have to embody the first generation political and several rights, second generation socio-economic and cultural rights and the third generation environmental and developmental rights. And we struggle to really make human rights at reality for all.

The last deed I refer to is disease. We are the continent where we struggle so much with HIV Aids. And Ulrich and I work all together also in addressing this specific challenge. We have Malaria, we have Tuberculosis, we have calm a cancel growing. And now we have to go with nineteen. We live in pandemic time. And we know that in a time of pandemic we experience: the intensification of existing challenges in the surfacing new challenges. So we struggle with diversity, with discrimination, with dehumanization, democracy, that becomes a nightmare, and also with disease to mention some.

In this context we are called to mission, to practice this classic imperative of the Church. Mission in South Africa we understand in terms of one of the great missiologies of the world - of David Bosch, a son of Africa. He helped us to look afresh again at Karl Barth's rediscovery of mission as the *missio dei*. He helped us to rediscover John Calvin's emphasis that mission has to do with God at work in the world, in all spheres of the world.

And as the World Council of Churches the Division of Mission and Evangelism has helped us to rediscover that human beings participate in God's word in the world. Growing upon the ecumenical tradition I would like to say that the mission of God is the mission of Jesus Christ. It is Christ as prophet, Christ as priest, Christ as royal servant. So the mission that we strive to practice is the threefold mission, prophetic mission, priestly mission and royal servant mission as once called by Christ, as once baptized into Christ, united with Christ. We practice the prophetic mission.

And I will briefly say something on what we mean, when we talk about prophetic mission. Here I border from work that the American theologian James Gustafson has done. He was mandated by the World Council of Churches in the 1980th. You look at the various ways that the World Council of Churches speak about public matters. And I adjusted his work which is published under the title "Varieties of moral discourse". I adapted it to say, when we say we speak prophetically, we speak in at least five modes.

- We envision a new reality, reality of the reign of God, the kingdom of God.

We envision that reality, we criticize ourselves and we offer public criticism, where we don't live up to the vision.

- We do story telling. We tell the wonderful stories of where we are faithful to that mission and that vision, but also the stories of betrayal, also the stories of vulnerability and pain in the world.

- We thirdly do technical analysis. Yes, in South Africa we have to learn it's not enough to spell out the vision and criticize. If we criticize the Government about poverty, we must do it in an informed way. The President would invite you to say "Come, tell me what we can do about poverty." So we need to talk scientifically about it. I am so glad that the Archbishop of the Anglican Church in Southern Africa attended with me sessions in Germany, also in Hong Kong, where we worked together and how we can speak in a more sophisticated way about economic challenges of our pretending we are economists.

But then we need to do also prophetic mission in the form policy making. Going to the point we also ask "How do we practice prophecy as policy? Policy making policy implementation?"

- And in this sense I think it's important that we do revive the practices of polemics that we in the church debate with each other, seek the best ways forward, that we revive the practice of apologetics, seek new ways to give a count in the modern world of the hope that lives within us.

And thirdly the classic practice of rhetoric, finding the right language to use, learning to speak.

Keith Clements, a British ecumenical theologian, wrote the book with the title "Learning to speak" and trying to seek with us. How do we go public in a pluralistic context in a credible way?

- Next and close to the end, Ulrich: priestly mission. We need to develop theology not so vulnerability, anthropology not so vulnerability, Christology not so vulnerability. We need to stop the flag from vulnerability. Yes, we are free children. And yes, we are predisposed to suffering on the continent of Africa in a special way and we need to stand next to people with the type of theology and the cliché we embody. We need to be engaged in healing, but healing in a comprehensive sense. That's our priestly mission. Healing as caring, as being automate curing and as ultimate curing eventually.

Physical healing, psychological, political healing, economical and ecological healing, social healing, gender healing, racial healing, moral healing, spiritual healing.

And lastly our priestly mission. We do minister reconciliation. And I really think we need to talk more about what does it mean to live as hybrids in the world, as people who mingle, not mix but mingle, with each other. And through this close living with each other osmoses take place and we remain, who we are particularly. But we transcend ourselves also and we don't live with minimalistic, threatened, anxious identities anymore, but with maximalistic self-transcending identities, which say because of our mingling with each other over all types of boundaries.

Yes, I'm African, but because of my mingling overtake cage with them, Ulrich, I am also more than African.

I conclude with royal servant mission. Here we refer to the fact that we confess Jesus Christ is Lord. And that is, we can live Africally as the disciples in the world, as citizens in the world. So, we are engaged in the formation of ethical citizenship and leadership in the world. Yes, we live with responsibility and we are involved with the formation of responsible citizenship and leadership in the world. And yes, people like Dietrich Bonhoeffer informs us so much to say so much to say, we need to get concretely involved and responsibility is to say, we need to seek solution, even as Bonhoeffer says "Our best aims can be described as a humanly hiking solution in the face of the comprehensiveness of our challenge." But responsibility is to say, care for it, even the who it seems embarrassing and humanly hiking. And Reinhold Niebuhr shows in his reflections ongoing public with our faith, that the best we can achieve is approximately, there is no full victory but we need to build this type of responsible citizenship and leadership.

And when we talk the royal servant mission, then indeed we talk, how then we'll engage in a mission that brings realistic hope, hope that's no daydreaming and walled with trawl.

But hope that is realistic rests in the biggest reality of all. The present right now here with us in South Africa and there in Germany and worldwide the presence of the crucify intruderated Jesus Christ. And it's response of hope that says "Yes", David Bosch in his book says. It's hope in action and action in hope. We concretely get involved.

And lastly besides the realistic hope and the response of hope we love with realism hope. Hope that says, you can stress and stretch me, but you cannot break me. And as I speak to you daily now here and elsewhere in the world, especially in India, we see, how we need this resilience to go on, to experience by God's grace.

Yes, we are stretched, but we shall not be destroyed and we shall not be broken. We sing just now "We shall overcome".

Thank you, Ulrich!