

God's Mission: Understanding of mission today

Mission today / 28.05.2021

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1. Mission models of the 19. Century

The fact that the United Evangelical Mission (UEM) is still an independent association and not a specialized working field of a church has its origin in that century when the idea of sending missionaries into the world did not fall on fertile soil in the Protestant national churches. So they organized themselves in associations. The Basel Mission was the only missionary society in continental Europe for a long time before the Gossner Mission, the North German Mission and the Leipzig Mission were founded in Germany in 1836.

Roughly, the approaches to mission in this century can be divided into four models.

A **soteriological** model, which focused on the commitment to save individuals from eternal damnation.

An **ecclesiological** model focused primarily on founding new churches, although the churches in Germany did not support them. Thus, denominationalism also entered the world.

This was also associated with a **model of salvation history**, which assumed that the kingdom of God would come into the world with the worldwide spread of the Christian faith.

A **cultural** model that was dedicated to the idea of bringing European achievements (medicine, crafts, agriculture, education, politics) to the world was also characteristic of this time.

Incidentally, all four approaches still exist today and can be assigned to different Christian groupings and imprints.

Remarkably, then, the missionaries who did not slavishly adhere to these paradigms, but rather experienced a personal process of inculturation sustainably, promoted positive effects. In addition to the aforementioned Ziegenbalg and Kittel, Bruno Gutmann (1876-1966), whose great-grandson, the newspaper editor Tilmann Prüfer, followed in his great-grandfather's footsteps, should also be mentioned at this point.

Their great success in the late 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th century in India and Tanzania was based on the fact that they succeeded in combining indigenous traditions with an invitation to the Christian faith without losing the identity of both sides, although changes are possible and necessary. In such a communication process, the outcome of the process cannot be determined in advance. Even today we do not know where the living confrontation with the cultures in which the Gospel is proclaimed will lead.

2 Reorientation of mission as Missio Dei.

With the mission conference in Willigen (1952) the concept of Missio Dei prevailed, in which God himself is understood as a missionary God. The origin of mission is not in the church, not

in missionary associations, but in God himself, as the source of love. It is about God's action in the world, is not activity of the church.

With this paradigm shift, mission was understood as cooperation with the brothers and sisters in the South. An attempt is made to anticipate the Kingdom of God breaking in and through the church and congregation. Justice, peace, preservation of creation as a church for others become the theme. Mission is also understood as partnership. Still relevant today are terms like "eye level", "give and take", "learning from each other" and many more.

For a while, the focus was on understanding mission as liberation. The origin lies in Latin America and the theology of liberation. In view of mission, a church for others becomes a church of the others, namely the poor. This is a political-prophetic mission. Mission themes are therefore liberation themes (women's rights, protection of minorities, land rights, apartheid...).

All these approaches are rightly about the realization of the kingdom of God, not about more influence for the church. This finally led the way away from a church-centered mission to service for the kingdom of God. Mission was now understood as a mission of the whole church and thus also found its way into the church constitutions.

However, Eberhard Jüngel described at the EKD Synod in 1999 that the claim and reality have so far diverged: *"If the church had a heart, a heart that still beats, then evangelism and mission would determine the rhythm of the church's heart to a great extent. And deficiencies in the missionary activity of the Christian church, deficiencies in its evangelizesthai would immediately lead to severe cardiac arrhythmia. The cycle of church life would become hypotonic. Whoever is interested in a healthy cycle of church life must therefore also be interested in mission and evangelization. To a large extent, outspoken missionary work has become the specialty of a very particular style of piety. Nothing against the groups that have been particularly engaged in this field, nothing against truly charismatic preachers! But if mission and evangelism is not a matter for the whole church, or is becoming one again, then something is wrong with the heartbeat of the church."*

3 On "Konvivenz" [living together] and "Mission from the Margins

The model of the theologian Theo Sundermeier describes mission as conviviality (1986). From the root word con-vivere, mission is understood as a living together of church and community with others and strangers. In contrast to the other models, this is not in any way about the preservation or expansion of the church, but about a living and learning community of all peo-

ple. In this learning, I understand myself better because I seek to understand the other. Conceptually, the great closeness to the Ubuntu philosophy of Southern Africa becomes clear, in which the individual is always understood as part of the whole. (I am because you are.)

If we briefly consider that almost all of the described concepts originated in the north of our hemisphere, it becomes clear why the last declaration of the WCC states in different places that it must come to an awareness of this centering and to a rethinking. For example, the 2012 statement "Together toward life," adopted by the Busan Assembly in 2013, states in Article 41: *"41. In the past as in the present, prevailing forms of mission have often been oriented toward a model of service to those on the margins of society. In this, the marginalized have often been or are seen as recipients rather than as agents of missionary work in their own right. This kind of mission has all too often been complicit with oppressive and anti-life systems. It has generally claimed privilege at the center of society and has largely failed to critically challenge economic, social, cultural, and political systems that have marginalized peoples. Mission from the center is driven from a paternalistic mindset and by a superiority complex. Historically, this has led to Christianity being equated with Western culture. This has had negative effects, such as often denying the victims of this exclusion their own dignity as a person."*

This is the challenge we face today when we talk about mission and practice mission. What is perceived as problematic by many people today, the change of whole societies to multicultural realities, could almost be seen as an opportunity for the church if we bring together the two inquiries and suggestions from the Konvivenz Model and the Mission Statement. We have the almost historic opportunity to understand ourselves as a church in the encounter with the marginalized of most different situations and to become a common learning and living community. The power for this lies in the Gospel. In the UEM we are developing a concept of global learning in ecumenical perspective (GLEP).

4 Global Learning in Ecumenical Perspective/Praxis (GLEP)

Missionary work and life in the sense of GLEP requires some basic agreements. For example, it is essential to ensure a setting of diversity.

GLEP is based on diversity and heterogeneity. In the UEM, different groups, religions, nationalities, age groups, genders, professions, etc. work together in GLEP processes. The coming together of different groups, the breaking of homogeneities, is a basic prerequisite to start GLEP.

This can also be practiced in other educational settings outside the UEM, it can be practiced internationally (different churches plan programs together) or locally (different groups of the population in a local setting are involved).

It is important to identify issues together and to ensure that goals are developed together.

GLEP does not set learning objectives in advance.

The various groups implementing GLEP programs must agree on accepted values and attitudes, as well as the limits of acceptance. If these are not clarified in advance, conflicts may arise during the learning process.

GLEP respects differences. There are concerns of particular regions or groups that differ from one region or group to another. In GLEP, safe spaces exist where necessary to ensure that all voices are heard in all their diversity.

Rather than targeting specific groups within a region for global learning programs, such as Indonesian students or German pastors, GLEP ensures that groups are diverse and international in composition, and thus their work is understood as a shared learning. Therefore, resource persons, experts for the respective topic, teachers or trainers should come from different regions, disciplines, professions, etc.

In our German society, especially in the metropolitan areas, but increasingly also in remote regions, we have today the opportunity to implement such a common learning and living concept without having to travel to the wide world, because the wide world is already here. What matters is to see it and to appreciate it. The basic prerequisite is that I am willing to change myself in these encounter processes.