

## God's Mission: Understanding of Mission Today

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Prof. Dr. Johannes Zimmermann, Marburg

Dear synod members, dear brothers and sisters,

In the short time available, I will limit myself to two aspects on the understanding of mission today.

1. It is about God's mission. The "Missio Dei", the mission of the triune God, was one of the great mission-theological reorientations of the 20th century. Church does not have a mission; it *is* part of God's mission. The "mission of God", his loving attention to the world and to people, is to be understood comprehensively. This includes everything that serves a flourishing humanity: the healing of relationships, the various areas of diakonia, the commitment to peace, justice and the preservation of creation.

In this impressive abundance of church commitment, one dimension is in danger of getting lost. It is about evangelization. In the theses, evangelism stands next to mission, but their relationship is not defined in detail. However, a clear assignment of mission and evangelization is indispensable. The South African mission theologian David Bosch calls evangelization the "core, heart and center" of mission. If evangelization is the heart, the vital center, then mission is not viable without evangelization. It may have good intentions and do good, but it loses its profile and contours. Conversely, evangelization does not stand alone. It is part of mission. Like a heart needs a body, evangelization needs to be integrated into the breadth of God's mission. Without this integration, without this breadth, evangelization becomes too narrow.

A reconsideration of mission therefore includes a refocusing on evangelization.

Evangelization as communication, as proclamation, as testimony of the Gospel, which aims at the resonance of faith. God's mission aims at relationship. On relationship with the people who have turned away from him and whom he wants to bring back into his community.

Mission remains incomplete without evangelization as the proclamation of Christ, as a call to faith, as a plea: "Be reconciled to God!" (2 Cor. 5:21). This is my first emphasis: the assignment of evangelization and mission, evangelization as "core, heart and center of mission".

2. Mission means being sent. God dignifies us to be part of his mission. The understanding of mission for the West as being sent to the rest of the world is history. Since the World Missiological Conference in Mexico in 1963, we talk about "mission in six continents". Yes, Europe also needs God's mission. Westphalia is also a mission land. This is not a deficit, it is a distinction: Westphalia, too, is worthy of being the recipient of God's grace. Even more: God's mission, is no one-way street. It is a common mission. It does not only connect us with Christians and churches in other countries and parts of the world, it also connects us with Christians who came to Germany from other countries, with congregations they established here.

The common mission requires a new understanding of "People's church". People's church cannot mean a restriction to the indigenous Westphalian population. This would degrade

the Evangelical Church of Westphalia to a tribal church. People's church as a church in cultural diversity becomes inevitable. A first step is fellowship with congregations of other languages and origins, with congregations in the context of migration.

But this is only a first step. Something is happening in our days that probably none of us would have guessed ten years ago: People with other mother tongues and cultures are not only forming their own congregations but are finding their way into our congregations. Former Muslims, especially from Iran, get baptized. They become members of Protestant congregations and want to remain there. This is happening in Bielefeld, in Münster and in other cities in Westphalia.

How will the development go on? I don't know. But one thing is clear: If it is to remain a common path, it will only be possible if the German part of the congregations is prepared to make enormous changes. Congregations must become culturally diverse and strike new paths.

It is my vision for a Pentecost 2.0: God's Spirit creates a community of people from different cultures and languages: Men and women from Iran and Eastern Europe, Africans and Russian-Germans, Westphalians and East Germans do not only live in partnership in different congregations. In intercultural and transcultural congregations of the Evangelical Church of Westphalia, they are part of the common mission, the mission of God. The common praise of God gives us a foretaste of what is promised for the end of all times.

*Thank you for your attention.*

*johannes.zimmermann@eh-tabor.de*