

THE RESPONSE OF BISHOP DR. ABEDNEGO KESHOMSHAHARA TO THESIS NO.7

Thesis number 7 is about the inspiration given by congregations united in the International Church Convention of Rhineland-Westphalia with their lively worship services, their lived spirituality and with their missionary orientation. This is important in view of the richness that is a result of intercultural encounters that widen opportunities for Christian witness.

It is indeed true that intercultural encounters enrich both sides that meet and share their life experiences, their faith, challenges, and hope. Such encounters do not only touch daily human existential challenges but also transcendental Christian hope that is guaranteed by Jesus Christ who invites all people saying that “come to me, all of you who are tired from carrying heavy loads, and I will give you rest (Mathew 11:28). However, the blessings of this intercultural encounter cannot be realized unless there is a peaceful coexistence, harmony, love, tolerance, and readiness of learning together.

The richness of intercultural encounters is revealed many times in the Bible. Jesus himself meets a Samaritan woman who had gone to the well to fetch water. Jesus asks the woman to give him a drink. The woman says that the Jews and Samaritan never associate together, hence she cannot give him a drink. Jesus tells her that if she knew who Jesus was, she would have asked Jesus to give her the living water since he is more than ordinary water. At the end the woman asks Jesus to give her the living water (John 4:1-42). This encounter removes the traditional cultural and ethnical boundaries that were blocking communication, humanity, sisterhood, brotherhood and mission of God. Both sides have something to share and witness like sharing ordinary water for a drink (from a Samaritan woman) and extraordinary water of eternal life (from Jesus). This is a big challenge in Germany where cultural encounter is a daily reality. The church in Germany ought to fight racism and populism in order to realize the richness of intercultural encounter in the mission of God. This goes hand in hand with the challenge of all forms of prejudices, stereotypes, and terrorism on both sides, among Germans and migrants. Such human weaknesses ought to be addressed in thesis number 7 without mentioning only cultural constrictions.

In the other instance, Jesus meets a Canaanite woman who asks Jesus for help to heal her daughter who was demon-possessed. Jesus tells her that he came only for Israelites, hence he cannot give food of the children to the dogs. The Canaanite woman challenges Jesus that even dogs can survive on the leftovers that fall under their masters’ table. Immediately, Jesus was amazed to see the great faith of this Canaanite woman and he positively responded to her request. Again, each side is changed by the encounter. The Canaanite woman’s daughter is healed, and Jesus sees the faith in the gentile woman. Elements of tribalism or ethnic boundaries are removed for the sake of God’s mission that transcends human boundaries. In the same way, Paul says that in Jesus Christ there is no Jew nor Gentile, male nor female, all are one in Christ (Galatians 3:28). Paul goes on saying that he also became like a Jew to invite the Jews to Christ. He became like those who were under the law and those not under the law, he became weak like those who were weak to bring them to Christ (1 Cor. 9:20-22). In the same way, God’s mission in Germany where almost all nationals are found, there is a need of accepting each other and tolerating each other in order to be able to live together and witness Christ with unity in diversity. However, as Paul himself says in 2 Timothy 3:14-17, the truth of the Gospel should always be adhered to in the whole process of intercultural encounter and learning processes on both sides.