

Mission Today

Evangelische Kirche von Westfalen
Listener Group: Rev Ian Alexander, Church of Scotland

These two half days have been wonderfully rich, and I feel intersect with work in Scotland.

Volker Dally launched our conference with insights into the international context of mission and led us to think of everything as mission if we are showing God's love through our work or supporting migrants or doing pastoral care. My fellow Scot, James Brown in Bochum, asked if everything is mission, what actually do we mean by mission?

The Church of Scotland has appropriated the Anglican Communion's Five Marks of Mission to guide us (this is not an hierarchical model, and these are not to be thought of as in a specific order, this is how they developed in the Anglican Communion over many years):

- To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom
- To teach, baptise and nurture new believers
- To respond to human need by loving service
- To seek to transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation
- To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth.

For the Church of Scotland, the key will be in the application of the Five Marks of Mission, "imaginatively, intentionally and decisively across the life and witness of our Church".

Nico Koopman asked how we might "practice prophecy as policy?" A very nice way of seeking action from our faith. It rephrases the idea that we can only love God if we also love our neighbour. I also see a connection with Jean-Gottfried Mutombo's Jesus as Liberator, and John Dorhauer's emphasis on including liberation theologies in challenging history and seeking to act in living out God's love for the whole people of God, and the whole created order.

Coming from Scotland where the missionary imagination was fired up by people like David Livingstone and Mary Slessor, and that whole missionary movement of the mid-19th century, which started a movement of Scots to places around the world to seed the gospel in other lands, it is interesting to hear John Dorhauer offer a model of accompaniment which is very much what the Church of Scotland might say today. We seek to accompany churches around the world. To partner with others, to walk the Emmaus road, the WCC's pilgrimage of justice and peace, with each other.

But I wondered if we were missing something in our language of accompaniment. From Eberhard Jüngel's words, we ask: What does it take to make this mission heart beat?

Hubertus Schönemann took us to the World Missionary Conference at Edinburgh in 1910. There, some might know, V. S. Azariah, a young, newly ordained Anglican priest from South India, identified racism and missionary paternalism as chief barriers to Christian life. Azariah said, "Through all the ages to come the Indian Church will rise up in gratitude to attest the heroism and self-denying labours of the missionary body. You have given your goods to feed the poor. You have given your bodies to be burned. We also ask for love. Give us FRIENDS!"

Dana Roberts, in her 2010 Alexander Duff Missionary lecture (Duff was the first Scottish missionary to go to India) asserts, Christian community depends upon personal relationships. Azariah's plea

“Give us FRIENDS!” was prophetic because, “Cross-cultural friendships deepened sympathy for multiple cultures and religious practices on the part of missionaries... Friendship stood as a bold witness against the racism of the age of Western colonialism.”

Might mission be more than accompaniment? Is it more than listening and praying and talking and eating – essential as these are? Could it be that what makes the mission heart beat is to become friends – whether locally in our village, or city neighbourhood, or internationally with people around the world. Telling our story and listening to the story of the other – really listening – and hearing and responding. Something like Barry Hughes work in Raploch in meeting the community where they are -even in the supermarket - and sharing God’s love in practical ways. Or the work noted by Hubertus Schönemann of Fresh Expressions - here in Scotland, and we are pleased to have on loan from the Bavarian Church, Philipp Roß, who has focussed on this area over the past two years of accompanying us in Scotland, and who can bring this work back into the German Churches when he returns this summer.

Volker Dally cautions us to be careful, and I feel a power in his words, of the dangers of bilateral rather than multi-lateral relationships. Friends need not be only one-to-one, but can be wider and more inclusive, indeed Mr Dally persuasively argues for the necessity of such broader collaboration if our global friendships are to flourish in the future.

Romesh Modayil’s comments on the cultural challenges of being Christian in an India of resurgent Hinduism is important in addressing the reality of specific situations. Cultural milieu is important. Christians in India need to be careful how they talk. Perhaps similar to Pakistan where the misuse of the blasphemy law is sometimes targeted at Christians.

Listening is one of the key elements of the Westphalian Church’s new mission strategy. Chris Davies sensitivity to how people hear the word mission, because of some of its disastrous uses in history, alongside Eleanor McCormick’s experience with the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe speaks volumes about how essential it is to listen carefully to each other, to consider carefully our language. I might add a further element, Kwame Bediako’s moment of revelation when it dawned upon him, who had always read the bible and prayed in English, that not only did God understand his native Twi, **God had always** understood Twi. In that moment, Bediako said, "my faith did not just find its African voice, it found its African heart and soul too." Bishop Abednego Keshomshahara emphasised that we are all changed by our encounters with the other - as we cross borders, and these borders can be anything - gender, sexuality, class, status, wealth, ethnicity, religion, and more.

And we might tie these back in with the five marks of mission, which are about sharing in God’s plans, about being actively involved in parish and nation and throughout the world to share God’s love, seek transformation and justice for all human beings, and the whole created order.

It is about each one of us being the beating heart of Christ in our everyday lives and our everyday places. It is an ongoing journey that connects us all. It has been an honour to be involved in these days, and I look forward to journeying together as friends into the future.