

# THEOLOGY: A TOOL FOR MISSION?

Probing the theology-praxis relationship

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by  
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## 0. Introductory remarks

In my little workshop back home I store a few tools which I use from time to time to try my hand at a bit of simple repair work around the house or to build a swing for the grandchildren. Tools are functional in relation to certain works to be done. Is it possible to compare theology in general and missiology in particular to the functionality of such a tool? My invitees placed a questionmark behind the heading for my talk. In what follows I want to explore the meaning of that questionmark. The paper will have five sections.

- First (1) I suggest that there are various ways of doing theology and that theologizing constitutes a praxis in its own right.
- From there (2) I move to the field of praxis. There is certainly more than one way to look at praxis. Can we place that ambiguity in a missiological perspective?
- Thirdly: While missiology may not be very helpful in providing models for mission, theology may - at a lower level of expectation - be helpful to identify a few key issues - among the many hundreds of concerns competing for our attention - a few key issues likely to stay at the top of our agenda - the missiological agenda and the agenda of missionary praxis. (3)
- From there I venture beyond the boundaries of my own discipline to make a few points suggesting that theology in fact be a much needed contributor to the well-being of (church and) society at large (4).
- Finally (5) a few concluding remarks regarding the status of missiology and the future of Christian mission.

I am fully aware that in what follows a West-European perspective prevails. Each and every point I am going to raise may have a different or possibly even no application at all in other parts of the world. If so, the paper still might serve the purpose of our discussions.

## 1. Various styles of doing theology

When I was a young pastor and tutor for the doctoral programme of the Academy of Missions at the University of Hamburg - this was in the late sixties/early seventies - liberation theologians insisted that praxis was the decisive, in fact the only reference point for any theological endeavour. Even more: In order that theology may serve the mission of Christ, theologians needed to leave the lecture hall, physically and metaphorically. They needed to 'cross over' into that unknown world of poor people's reality to learn a new perspective and to understand more radically the issues that 'really' were at stake. Theology is legitimate only as a reflexion growing out of an ongoing involvement with and commitment to the Gospel sponsored process of liberation.

All of us have heard and pondered this. Many of us have crossed boundaries, exploring the depth and the width of 'liberation'. Yet, we haven't dissolved our theological faculties. The library, the lecture halls, the campuses are still there. Inasmuch as we are theological teachers and researchers most of us continue to teach in faculties. So, does everything remain unchanged then? Not quite. What is acknowledged though is that

- no story of faith and salvation, no story of despair and disaster, no story of healing and liberation shall be told and interpreted without giving space to the voices of those concerned, the poor and the broken, the disadvantaged and the scapegoats - the victims to tell their version. As theology in general and missiology in particular take account of their witness they clarify where, with whom and for whom they themselves are theologizing.

While to me this seems to be the important outcome of the theory-praxis debate of those years I would like to suggest that there is more than a "one-way-only" approach to the theology-praxis issue - simply because there are different styles of doing theology. I sketchily mention a couple of approaches:

For one, 'people's theology' entails a specific notion regarding the theology-praxis relationship. People's theology is a theology of wisdom expressing itself in myths, stories, pictures, dreams, prophecies, songs, dances, rituals - in brief: a world of poesis and poetics. The irrefutable contribution of this style of theologizing is to insist that human reality cannot be reduced to a one-dimensional world of empiricism. □)

Praxis in this perspective is the praxis of people who re-member traditions. They are building jig-saw puzzles so-to-say - which symbolize (not so much how things have been but) who they are and who they want to be and then to put the interpretative power of such 'stories' to their test as they move along.

There may be creativity in such a way of theologizing. But there is no scholarly dimension in this form of reflexivity. A dimension of theological scholarship is added if the people concerned were to step back a little in order to evaluate the inner coherence of such story materials and to find out whether they may be considered a dialect of the language of Christian faith □) of which the Gospel is the fountain and Jesus the key-witness. In fact, wisdom-theology needs such exposure to explicit and critical self-reflexivity.

This then leads on to another style of theologizing - theology as a scholarly, academic endeavour. I suggest that a scholarly way of doing theology is endowed with a legitimacy of its own. Not each and every theological thought, essay, project needs to show an immediately self-evident 'applicability' on the level of praxis. Pursuing such a style of theologizing we are not necessarily forgetful of praxis. Academic theological work is needed and does have a value in itself.

Theology does not reflect on faith as truth first and then on real life situations as the area where truth insights will find 'application'. To imagine that in a first step one would reflect on truth claims of faith as such and then in a second step 'apply' insights of such reflections to real life issues would amount to a fundamental misunderstanding of the theological enterprise. At stake is rather the praxis of faith itself. Theology reflects the total human condition in the light of Faith and again Faith in Christ in view of the total human endeavour. □) In this perspective the theology-praxis issue lies at the very root of the theological enterprise as such.

Christianity is committed to give public account on the plausibility and inner coherence of the language of faith. This commitment dates back to early Christianity when the author of the Gospel of John decided to co-opt from popular Greek philosophy 'Logos' as a word and as a concept to interpret the meaning of Christ. Since that decision stuck, Christianity was committed to give public account of the plausibility of Christian faith, of the inner coherence of a Christian outlook on life. While the language of faith reigns on the level of praxis, theology is concerned with the grammar of faith. □) Such reflection needs its own time and space. It represents a praxis in its own right - the praxis of doing theology - regardless of whether or not any practical application is instantaneously obvious. Church (and society!) for their own well-being do need people, places and institutions where such self-reflexivity of Christianity flourishes. They will benefit in the long run and in ways which cannot easily be foreseen.

Different styles of 'doing' theology need not be mutually exclusive. At least the ones mentioned need not be. They represent legitimate theological styles which may well be pursued concurrently. In fact, in our individual biographies they are probably both represented and to a greater or lesser degree intertwined. □) In each of these styles the theology - praxis issue is acknowledged, yet differently accentuated.

Summarizing we may say, that the praxis of faith does need theology - just as much as theology which doesn't accept praxis of faith and the realities of the human condition as its horizon, will end up as a sterile and futile exercise.

A word may be in place about missiology as a theological discipline. Most of our present day theological training and reflection is shaped by a fair amount of disregard for mission and missiology. □) Main-stream Protestant churches and their respective training institutions seem to be shifting emphasis from missiology to religious studies as a separate discipline. Many theologians consider 'mission' as a dimension of the Gospel and of Christianity to be well taken care of by the classical five disciplines:

Old and New Testament studies, Church History, Systematics and Pastoral Theology. No need whatsoever for missiology as a sixth discipline. If one insists on missiology - the question will be in place: Is Missiology in a position to contribute something which other disciplines tend to by-pass?

## 2. Naming praxis - a missiological perspective

Praxis is ambiguous, just as ambiguous as life itself. You name it and it loses its ambiguity. Richard Sennett in his book 'The Corrosion of Character' (□) suggests that people who went through numerous and rapid transitions which society forced on them, and who are faced by seemingly endless demands on their flexibility eventually lose their capacity to tell their lives in a coherent story. The many ruptures, fractures and cleavages which the modern market society throws up are so wide and deep that to tell in a coherent story where people came from and who they are hoping to be is getting difficult if not impossible.

There is of course, an abundance of (sometimes scrap-) materials of which people could make use piecing together narratives of their lives, its moments of joy and laughter, of despair and destruction. A more urgent need in a strictly theological sense might be the need for a plausible frame of reference to accommodate those jig-saw materials in a way that human experiences are really being taken care of. What is needed then might be a counterstory (□), providing a setting for the human drama, a meta-story with a reservoir of meaning from which people struggling to name praxis in their common daily lives could draw. (□) Without getting involved in the construction of such counterstories people cannot survive. In fact, putting together from bits and pieces such stories is a means of protest against their death as individuals and as groups. (□)

The Gospelstory would suggest that people may face their past honestly without being destroyed and may discover a meaning in their lives transcending the wisdom of daily common-sense. As such a suggestion is being pondered, integrated into one's own perspective or rejected - the totality of a life's 'praxis' is being interpreted.

Yet, there is no guarantee of 'success'. Time and again it happens that the biblical narrative or parts of it remain elusive, dark and unintelligible. In fact, there may emerge some resistive power in bible stories refusing to be used as materials to fill up biographical potholes. In other words, the biblical narrative is not that easily coopted to construct a coherent and meaningful narrative of our lives. It is a double-edged thing: The narrative is meant to provide a framework for meaning and at the same time many people experience that the very meaning of the Jesus-story is escaping them. (□) The Gospel appears to be 'alien' (John 1,10-11.31.33) and there is no inculturation of the Gospel without is 'demythologizing' basic cultural assumptions.

If people looking for materials suitable to make sense of their lives don't find these materials in our Christian heritage they must and will find them elsewhere. Praxis is being named - either way. The real test for Christian mission is whether people will continue to draw on the Gospel narratives as they are putting together jig-saw puzzles to

symbolize meaning for their lives.□) The mission of Christianity is and will continue to be entering into such dialogical processes with people.

The praxis of such dialogical witness is not exhausted in an offer of words. Time and again it happens that people moved by an inner vision of a life renewed in the Spirit of Christ will cross boundaries for the sake of other people's life struggle - setting aside concerns about how they themselves are getting on in life. Whoever approaches the mystery of life in that manner has come close to the mystery of Christ, indeed has discovered the meaning of that prayer: 'Your Kingdom come, your Will be done...'

Such witness to Christ's Kingdom will be placed side by side with other stories which have a path of their own to suggest. Yet, the Christian story is being told not only as a story alongside many other stories; it is also - without any triumphalism - being told confident that the world has its proper place within this story.□)

Missiology deals with the fall-out of the intercultural dynamics of Christianity. Missiology would interpret those processes in which the Christian 'meta-story' inspires new responses, answers of faith, and new social configurations, processes of ecclesio-genesis just as well as those processes in which it loses or even forfeits its power to interpret people's life struggles.□) In this manner the missiological undertaking boils down to a new description of Christianity in the world and for the world. Attempts to systematize the interpretation of such processes into a form of intercultural hermeneutics have not been successful as yet. We always seem to end up with a narrative of multifaceted inculturations - documenting that Christ cannot be made the captive of any church or the property of any confessional book. The language of faith produces many Christian dialects.

Such diversity often leads to disputes - sometimes quite intense - as to what constitutes an 'authentic' response to the Christ-story. Such disputes are inevitable, in fact they are healthy as long as conducted in a spirit of mutual accountability. Only if such disputes would die out should we be worried - because the intercultural dynamics of Christianity might have tired out.

Praxis then can be defined as people commenting in their lives and with their lives inherited or newly offered 'stories of meaning'. The praxis of theology or missiology would be to decode the 'grammar', the inner coherence of such comments.

### 3. The infamous 'millennial threshold' - What do we know?

3.1 The infamous millennial threshold is clouded by a lot of fog. We certainly cannot look very far ahead. What do we really know regarding missiological challenges lying ahead? The history of Christian missions will continue to be a mixture of improvisations in unforeseen circumstances, "a series of responses to impromptu events"□), in which the relationship between theology and praxis remains ambiguous.

Not only are we uncertain as to what next will pop up on our missionary agenda; we are just as uncertain as to how long the lifespan of our theological frameworks will last. Quite obviously our frameworks for theological understanding, or should I say our theological 'paradigms' (□) last for ever shorter periods of time. Classical liberal theology reigned for a about a century; dialectic and kerygmatic theology of the Word for a little less than fifty years; then we witnessed a theology of revolution - just a flicker - after that a few years followed by theologies of development, theologies of liberation and other hyphenated theologies. They lasted for a couple of decades. An ever increasing pace of socio/cultural changes seems shorten the lifespan of our 'theological paradigms' or 'frames of reference'.

It's not very likely therefore that we will be able to come up with "an emerging ecumenical missionary paradigm" (□) valid for a few decades. This may not be all that tragic, after all. The history of Christian Mission has not been and will not be a field where 'models' or 'paradigms' of mission are implemented (□). But it may be possible to name a few key issues which are likely to stand out in terms of importance and may remain on top of an ecumenical and missionary agenda at least of European churches for a while. I name but a few - namely the issue of poverty, and in connection with that issue the relationship of pentecostal and conciliar churches, further the issue of violence. Once again: I am aware that my shortlisting of missiological concerns and the perspective in which to launch them reflect my own contextuality.

3.2 Can poverty be overcome? We don't know for certain. Can churches contribute in a decisive way to overcome violence? We don't know for certain.

But we do know with a fair amount of certainty that poverty will remain a problem on a global level for decades. And we do recognize that poverty and the poor constitute not just a moral but a theological and ecclesiological challenge.

We are uncertain whether poverty on a global scale can be overcome. (□) If our guess - or our sense of mission - however leads us to answer in the affirmative the next question would be: Are we certain that religion in general and Christianity in particular can play a decisive role in this? What do we really know about religion and 'development'? What do we know about Christianity and the poor?

We do know that the process of de-Westernization of Christianity went along with its pauperization. We may also suggest that Christianity in the West has for long periods of time drawn major support from lower class people or impoverished classes. The almost total disappearance of poverty in Western Europe may have been a major factor weakening a broadly based support for Christianity (□). At present churches in the North experience a financial crisis which is also a crisis of commitment on the side of its membership.

What do such contradictory developments entail with regard to our understanding of 'ecumenical solidarity' and 'holistic mission'? Churches in the South and churches in the

North confess to pursue a 'holistic' notion of mission□) and a praxis of 'comprehensive ministry'. Yet things are falling apart for us in the North and for others elsewhere.

What does 'holism' mean in the South and what in the North? Options of the poor in the South and options for the poor□) on the side of conciliar churches (both North and South) will remain an irksome problem in North-South and in East-West relationships.

What can missiology do? At this stage probably not more than trying to determine in what way religion in general and Christianity in particular tie in with the issue of poverty and try to help sorting out the subjects of these issues.

We do know that following the precedent set by Israel Christianity - however differently it may have been contextualized in various places - is quite firm in establishing a link between faith in God and love for one's fellow human beings. And this linkage may set Christianity apart if seen against the background of other religions. Anyway, in what way does the biblical precedent of such a firm linkage provide us with a guideline for a shared praxis of 'holistic' mission? The answer is far from clear.

### 3.3 Christianity - poor people's religion - in what way?

Many conciliar churches are irritated by those Christian renewal groups - be they charismatics or pentecostals - which at the moment form the most noticeable missionary power in Christianity.

Main-stream Churches in the South affiliated with ecumenical bodies like the World Council of Churches (WCC) or the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) appear to be a little upset at times, often because such phenomena do occur not only 'outside' but at times pop up within their own constituencies.

The Pentecostals are irritating, for sure! Sometimes they appear to be very naive, and at times prone to fall into the fundamentalist trap. What to do? A popular response would be to reemphasize borders and to design strategies which make bordercrossings difficult. 'You invade my garden - I raise my fence!'

It is precisely with reference to situations which appear disruptive in terms of social, moral, political 'wholeness' that at least two different dialects have emerged within Christian world mission. I do not claim that pentecostalism is caused by social and political deprivations and spread among poor people only. However, social and moral desorientation plus a few holes dotting inherited religious umbrellas may favour pentecostal responses.

Mid-line churches which have accepted the notion of 'progress' and emphasize the importance of 'consciousness raising' and 'learning' for those who want to share in progress. Education and social action are to provide the poor with new options for social and political participation. People in their God-given freedom are co-responsible for their

fate and for the fate of creation. The meaning of Christian mission is spelled out in a language of 'awareness building' or 'intercultural learning'. This type of response prevails in protestant mid-line churches both in the South and in the North.

Poor people's pentecostalism addresses the same problem in a different idiom. For those who simply can't see themselves or their children on a path leading to 'progress', for those throw-away-people who don't see a way out or a way-upwards in society there is literally only one way, namely an emotionally deep and symbolically mediated experience re-integrating them into a 'new family' - the family guided by the Spirit of Jesus.

It is this experience of reintegration restoring their sense of dignity and confidence which may lead to the formation of new patterns of relationships, of new clusters of belonging and new models of Christian mutuality which may have some cultural significance for society as a whole. But we are not sure whether things will be going this way.□)

If someone should ask whether the future holds better prospects for conciliar mid-line churches or for Pentecostalism - the response will be: It depends! It depends whether secularization will gain a footing in the non-Western world just as it did in Europe. Does the process of secularization which took place in Europe constitute the exception or a rule to go by?□) It may be possible that we are witnessing a transformation of Christianity on a world scale without quite knowing where we are heading for.

Missiology can try to identify the problem, locate centres of eruptions, interpret local particularities and place trends in an intercultural perspective. Missiology will point out the interdependence of developments in conciliar and non-conciliar churches. Missiology will explore how in either idiom the dual question - what may and should people expect of God and only of God? and: What may fellow human beings rightfully expect of Christians? - is being answered. Missiology will analyse both idioms in relation to the guiding 'sola principles' - no more and no less.

### 3.4 Faced by violence - a mission of reconciliation

In pre-modern times violence may have enjoyed a kind of unreflected acceptability. Yet in our days while eruptions of violence plaster the globe like strings of volcanoes, or rather like mines exploding on our footpaths, violence is rapidly losing its acceptability. In our days it is increasingly recognized as a missiological and ecumenical concern and being discussed as such. The Gospel places the issue of violence at centrestage. As far as we know violence lies at the root of every society and tends to explode as rapid social, economic and religious changes affect individuals and communities. Again my views are coloured by my context.

In Europe our grandparents started the 20th. century with some great optimism. Enlightenment, science, economy had brought much progress, the rivalry of European nation-states seemed domesticated. Churches tied their sense of mission in with the mission of Western civilization, of social and economic progress and Human Rights. As

we know this ended not only with the First World War. Its destruction consequently led to the establishment of enormously powerful terrorist ideologies like Fascism and Stalinism. Neither Nazism nor Communism could uphold their grip on societies without establishing terrible and gigantic scapegoat machineries. Churches were not in a position to unseat these. In many a case churches were even blinded, unable or unwilling to recognize the demonic power of these scapegoating processes.

If violence should continue to be with us on the scale we are witnessing now it is likely to make its way further up on the missionary agenda for a long time. Maybe, it will even claim a key position on our agenda so that missiology would need to develop a hermeneutics of violence and reconciliation - and in doing so discover foundation stones for a so far fairly evasive intercultural hermeneutics.

Four possible areas of concern may be mentioned:

- Violence erupts in many old and newly established nation-states trying to integrate traditional groups. In fact our globe seems peppered with outbreaks of violence in so called ethno-religious conflicts. Wherever boundaries are defined there is always a temptation to try and functionalize those religions which are in place. Yet is religion a causative factor or is religion drawn into what essentially are non-religious conflicts over control of political institutions and natural resources claimed by the national states? Who has the authority and power to define boundaries? What role do religions play in defining boundaries? What role did and do churches play vis-a-vis violence in ethnic conflicts? Whom do they speak for if they speak up in such conflicts?

- We do not know whether repressive and corrupt political systems - wherever - can eventually be transformed in a process of democratization which would adopt human rights as a frame of reference for living together. Likewise we don't know whether democratic processes where they seem firmly established can be maintained or are likely to be undermined by media manipulation (e.g. in the USA, Europe and elsewhere). We don't know whether it is really possible to universalize the human rights tradition which since the 60-ies has effectively provided a frame of reference for social ethics and social action both by LWF and by WCC and others.

- Finally, the issue of violence is an important dimension in the gender conflict. The gender conflict is likely to stay with us for quite some time. This conflict will concern us in more than one way. It does already concern us in the ordination debate. When the delegates attending the LWF Assembly in Curitiba 1990 overwhelmingly voted to introduce women's ordination within the next five years many of them overestimated their power of persuasion or underestimated their opponents back home. But, is ordination or non-ordination of women really still a theological debate or simply a human rights issue? Again, the question is who is authorized to establish boundaries regarding shares in power?

- Violence has been an issue in interreligious encounters in the past and it will continue to be a concern in future interreligious encounters. Usually, religions do not encounter each other on an equal footing. Asymmetrical relationships are the rule since religions are differently based on and backed by the social structures of any given society. Therefore religions are constantly tempted to take advantage of each other, to exploit advantages of influence where and when they are given. It is in this context that churches are challenged to reconsider their notions of and motivations for mission (□). I don't suggest that all religions are offering identical solutions to salvation. Rather they make proposals which differ. (□) This is why we will continue to talk with each other - not just about each other. Poverty and violence not only will be issues - though certainly not the only ones - they will be criteria for the relevancy of these encounters.

These were only four illustrations to underscore my suggestion that violence is going to be a missiological and ecumenical concern.

What ties these concerns together is whether our concern with violence can claim any missiological status. How does violence concern churches in their sense of mission?

First of all it concerns them in terms of social ethics. Is violence an unavoidable part of any cultural and civil process? Can violence be un-learned? Can violence be overcome or at least delegitimized, contained and pushed back?

Secondly it does concern them in terms of the substance of the Christian message. A polarity of violence and reconciliation lies at the very root of the Gospel. (□) What happens to churches and congregations who make struggle against violence a central focus of their preaching, their mission and their dealing with each other? (□)

Reconciliation, of course, cannot be enforced - just like truth cannot be enforced. People involved in violence will try to evade being faced with the truth of facts. Likewise Christians and churches. Yet the Gospel should continue to effectively remind churches not to lose sight of the fact that violence has not only social and political but also religious dimensions. As Václav Havel suggested the word 'reconciliation' has in recent years become a standard coinage in political and historical discourse. Politicians and journalists talk about reconciling nations, races, churches, religions. Such reconciliations will not be possible unless the truth of the past has been faced, forgiveness been asked and a trusting relationship has been restored again between people and groups (□). Where should that come from? As the word reconciliation is increasingly used in political discourse the Gospel reminds churches that the story of God taking the initiative to reconcile the world with Himself through Christ is even more central to the Gospel than the issue of violence. (2. Cor, 5,18 - 21).

Churches in general and theology in particular do contribute to the well-being of society at large by insisting that people who make 'reconciliation' the horizon of their historical stocktaking are tapping divine resources. (□) Saying this we have already addressed our next concern:

#### 4. What does Theology contribute to the well-being of society at large

4.1 First of all, I would like to suggest that theology contributes to the well-being both of church and society by making Christian faith as difficult as necessary. The responsibility of teachers in theological education is not to make faith as easy as possible nor to make it as difficult as possible - but make it as difficult as necessary - no more and no less.

What does that mean? I don't question that faith should help people to develop a sense of belonging, rootedness and direction. Yet the Gospel doesn't offer an easy way out for people who feel overchallenged by life's turmoils. Christianity doesn't request people to gamble away their intellect, their conscience or their accountability.

We contribute to the well-being of society by graduating students who have understood and internalized that our sense of vocation and service needs a dimension of self-reflexivity and of public accountability. Students of course, don't graduate with a rucksack full of ready made answers. They should graduate with a competency to interpret those 'stories of meaning' mentioned above. This needs involvement and the distance which goes along with a critical self-reflexivity. Along with a sense of vocation theological education has to cultivate such self-reflexivity.

If theological training centres succeed in achieving that, they are making an essential contribution to the well-being of church and (!) of society at large. In this sense theology and theological education are not only useful. They cannot be dispensed with without grave consequences.

As theology encourages an ever fresh inquisitiveness, helps to identify issues, as theology names the partners in conflict it helps to culture an atmosphere of openness in church and society.

If our graduates have internalized this they will graduate with a somewhat relaxed confidence that they can contribute not only in the context of village life but also on a level where decision makers and opinion leaders move.

4.2. I am aware that many decision makers and opinion leaders do not expect much if anything at all from the churches towards the well-being of society. But certainly there are other opinion leaders and decision makers who definitely and sometimes desperately do wait for the churches and their theologians to contribute to the well-being of society - not by adding to the inflationary output of moral appeals but by pointing out key issues concerning the welfare of people, by insisting that these issues be discussed freely and finally by putting their own cards on the table telling how the churches themselves are dealing with such issues. There are indeed decision makers and opinion leaders who do expect that churches have something to say on these issues.

In addition, theology renders a service to the well-being of society at large by reminding both church and society, that underneath the apparent pragmatism and widespread

cynicism people continue to be concerned with basic questions such as: Does the universe have a meaning? What does God have to do with the portion of ill-fate and suffering which 'we' are carrying as individuals or as groups? Do reconciliation and justice have any future in a world filled with violence, cynicism and mammonism? An irreplaceable contribution to the well-being not only of the church but in fact of society at large is being made if theology can effectively help churches and their workers to address these questions.

4.3. Theology contributes to the well-being of society by cultivating a sense of history: How do we deal with history which for good or for ill now is our common history - between North and South as well as between East and West?

How do we re-member history in general and church and mission history in particular? The study of history doesn't support that kind of moral one-upmanship which seems so very fashionable in our days. A careful study of history helps us to focus more sharply on questions like: How did things actually happen? How do Christians live with their awareness of how things happened in the past? How do Christians deal with accountability and forgiveness? How should the public deal with such questions? Churches discussing this honestly and frankly do a great service to the public. □)

5. Concluding remarks:

Two points to conclude with. One concerns the status of missiology. The other our sense of mission.

5.1 I did not suggest any plan of action. I did however suggest that theology in general may be indispensable for the well-being of church and society - even if theological faculties are no 'answering machines'.

In fact, I suggest that Missiology as a theological discipline should not be optional but established as a sixth theological discipline in all institutions of higher theological training. Missiology does contribute a specific perspective: Dealing with issues such as mentioned it tries to keep the particular and the global together. Churches in the North at the moment are discovering contextuality, churches in the South are confronted with globalization. Missiology helps us to de-provincialize our conscience while emphasizing at the same time our contextuality. Maybe we should start to develop something like a missiological curriculum, a missiological frame of reference for training institutions in North and South. □)

Missiology will remind the other disciplines that the Gospel concerns everyone and that whatever responses the Gospel has found elsewhere is of concern to the Oikumene.

## 5.2 A mission of love and service in the Spirit of Christ

Amid the missions of others Christians remain committed to a mission of love and service in the Spirit of Christ. The meaning of such mission is certainly not exhausted in dialogue, but just as certainly it cannot be lived apart from a dialogical existence. Missiology will work at a post-colonial understanding of mission. It is no longer acceptable to visualize Christian mission as a kind of spiritual warfare. Such form of religious violence should be excluded considering the very roots of Christian faith. Maybe we are entering a new phase of mission in which we do not place our visions and hopes above those of others, but alongside those of others. We will not exploit the weakness of others trying to conquer them in their vulnerability. As long as inter-religious relationships (and inter-church relationships!) are tainted by threats or even by violence we cannot talk of Christian mission in any meaningful sense.

Maybe we have already entered a new stage, entered a process of mutuality, in which we search not for the weak spots of the others, but for their strong points trusting that anyone faced with the Jesusstory may at some stage discover his or her truth. We seek the Jews in their Jewishness, the Greeks in their spirit of freedom, the Muslims in their commitment to God's will, the Buddhists in their search to uncover the root causes of suffering. Maybe our contribution in that mutuality would be no more than to suggest that in our perspective God appears to be like Christ. □) Christians believe, celebrate and acknowledge that the Jesusname has been given a place in God.

If in the past it was not only acceptable but in fact an expression of the missionary dynamics of Christianity to identify Jesus - not as another among the many - , but as the Son of Man, the Son of God, the Messiah, the Lord etc., it should appear just as legitimate to continue this process of intercultural translation and call him the Heliand, the Avatara, the Buddha, the Protoancestor, the First-born from the Dead etc. □)

Time and again the meaning of the Jesus figure is interpreted within the terms of reference provided by a 'pre-christian' language or a 'pre-christian' symbolic system. As this is being done local christologies emerge which seem to differ. Do contextual christologies have anything in common in formal terms and in terms of substance? Yes, I should think so. Each in their own way they suggest - and that then would be their common denominator - that in view of the Jesusstory any person, woman or man should be able to discover that we owe God nothing except faith and that even faith being granted is pure gratuity (!) and therefore cannot be a matter of indebtedness or obligation. Christian witness then would suggest that in the image of Christ people anywhere should be able to discover God as companion of their freedom and guardian of their dignity. Responding to the Jesusname and its story people may discover their liberation from the law of sacrificial services and thus be reconciled by a God who needs no sacrifices to secure their and his own future. What reconciliation means is impossible to exhaust or even to spell out without reference to the Jesusname □).

Common sense would expect that the future of Christian missions will depend on churches making the many adjustments which changing circumstances seem to ask for.

The church will change and must change, of course. But eventually the future of Christian missions will depend on whether in rapidly changing circumstances form will reign over substance, religious marketing over solidarity, morality over faith. □) What really will matter in future, I think, is whether we can cultivate a praxis of faith which points to Jesus as "the Way" and "the Life" in a mission of love and service (Marc 10,43).

□) Hermann Janssen, the founding father of the Melanesian Institute in Papua New Guinea and a true ecumenist to whose memory this paper is dedicated has always tried to draw our attention to this vital area of theological creativity.

cf. for instance Hermann Janssen, *Solidarität, Lebenseinheit und Basisgemeinschaften in Afrika*, in: *Religion und sozialer Wandel*. Ed. Hugo Bogensberger et al. Veritas, Linz-Passau 1986, 119-139.

□) Cf. George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine. Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*. SPCK, London 1984, 73ff. German translation: *Christliche Lehre als Grammatik des Glaubens. Religion und Theologie im postliberalen Zeitalter*. Mit einer Einleitung von Hans G. Ulrich und Thomas Hüter, aus dem Amerik.- Englischen von Markus Müller, Gütersloh 1994.

□) Cf. Gerhard Ebeling, *Studium der Theologie. Eine enzyklopädische Orientierung*. J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), Tübingen 1975, 118ff; idem, *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens I*, Tübingen 1979, 22f, 105ff.

□) Cf. George A. Lindbeck, 73ff.

□) Cf. Max L. Stackhouse, *Apologia. Contextualization, Globalization, and Mission in Theological Education*. Eerdmans, Michigan 1988, 29ff., 84ff.

6) Generally speaking Evangelicals and Roman Catholics are more articulate emphasizing a need for missiology as a theological concern in its own right and as a theological discipline. Recently, the Vatican, preparing for the Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops of Asia, strongly suggested: "A truly Catholic theology of mission needs to be fostered in all seminaries and formation centres of religions in Asia. This is vital for the future of mission in Asia. Lineamenta for the Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops of Asia, origins, CNS Documentary Service, Jan. 23, 1997, Vol. 26, No. 31, 516.

□) Richard Sennett, *The Corrosion of Character*. W.W. Norton, New York 1998. I used the German edition: *Der flexible Mensch. Die Kultur des neuen Kapitalismus*, Berlin 1988, 2. Aufl., cf. p. 18

□) Cf. George A. Lindbeck, 62ff, 82ff. For further discussion on Lindbeck see John Milbank, *Theology as Social Theory, Beyond Secular Reason*. Blackwell, London 1995 (1990), 382ff. 392ff.

□) Cf. Kenelm Burridge, *In the Way, A Study of Christian Missionary Endeavours*. UBC Press, Vancouver 1991; Dietrich Ritschl, *Zur Logik der Theologie. Kurze Darstellung der Zusammenhänge theologischer Grundgedanken*. Chr. Kaiser, München 1988, 39ff, 72ff, 142f, 286ff.

□) Ina-Maria Greverus, *Neues Zeitalter oder Verkehrte Welt, Anthropologie als Kritik*. Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt 1990, 222ff.

- ) Hans Visser's observations and reflections in this regard are helpful, Reflections on Mission in the Post-Modern Context. IRM 345, April 1988 257-263
- ) Cf. Theodor Ahrens, Christianity in a Multiplicity of Cultures, The European Context, in: LWF Documentation No. 37, Geneva 1995, 53-81, also in: Jahrbuch für Kontextuelle Theologie, IKO Verlag für interkulturelle Kommunikation, Missionswissenschaftliches Institut Missio e.V., Aachen 1995, 52-76.
- ) Cf. John Milbank, 385.
- ) for details see: Theodor Ahrens, Mission unter Missionen. Die 'Jesusstory' im Spannungsfeld von Regionalität und Globalisierung - eine Standortbestimmung, in: idem (ed.), Zwischen Regionalität und Globalisierung, Verlag an der Lottbek, Ammersbek 1997, 15-51; English version forthcoming in: Mission Studies.
- ) John V. Taylor, The Future of Christianity, in: John McManners (ed.), The Oxford Illustrated History of Christianity. Oxford University Press, Oxford-New York 1992, 628-665, *ibid.* 628.
- ) Hans Küng was among the first to adopt the term to identify theological models and he further used it to come to terms with the obvious pluriformity within Roman-Catholicism. See Hans Küng, Theology for the Third Millennium, An Ecumenical View. Doubleday New York et al. 1987, 123ff. For Missiology see David J. Bosch, Transforming Mission, Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission. Orbis Books, New York 1991, 181ff. Critical comments on such terminology from Dietrich Ritschl are noted in: *Ökumenische Theologie*, in: idem/ W. Ustorf *Ökumenische Theologie/Missionswissenschaft*. W. Kohlhammer, Stuttgart 1994, 28ff. Cf. also Marc Spindler's review of David Bosch's work, in: Exchange, 20, (1991) 2, 156-158.
- ) David Bosch, Transforming Mission, 368ff, summarizes in a great 'summa missionum' under such a heading each and every previous 'paradigm' of mission.
- ) In fact 'models for mission' more often than not may have been 'models of mission'. Cf. Marc Spindler's observation regarding D. Bosch's presentation of historical paradigms of mission. Cf. Marc Spindler's review of Bosch's opus magnum, in: Exchange 20 (1991) 2, 156-158
- ) At the beginning of the 19th century poverty in Europe seemed to be a fate almost inescapable for those with whom poverty had caught up. At that time it was still hard to imagine that poverty could be overcome at all. Yet, in our society poverty had been almost completely eradicated till recently it returned and reestablished itself - even if in a much reduced form (compared to my greatgrandparents' times).
- ) cf. A.J. Wichers, Some Reflections on the Position of the Christian Religion in a Situation of Affluence. The Welfare State, in: Pieter H. Vrijhof and Jacques Waardenburg (eds.), Official and Popular Religion. Analysis of a Theme for Religious Studies, Mouton, The Hague 1979, 200-217.
- ) Cf. Michael Taylor, "Not a Penny for the Missionaries": The Debate about Holism, in: Not Angels but Agencies, The Ecumenical Response to Poverty - A Primer. WCC, Geneva 1995, 21-45.
- ) Cf. Felix Winfred: Die Option für die Armen und die Option der Armen, ZMR 4, 1991, 257-273
- ) Regarding this uncertainty cf. Juan Sepúlveda, Future Perspectives for Latin American Protestantism, IRM 345, April 1998, 189-203, particularly p. 193; cf. also

David Martin, *Tongues of Fire, The Explosion of Protestantism in Latin America*. Basil Blackwell, London 1990, 271ff.

□) David Martin, *Europa und Amerika. S.,kularisierung oder Verfielf.,ltigung der Christenheit - Zwei Ausnahmen und keine Regel*, in: Otto Kallscheuer (Hg.) *Das Europa der Religionen*, S. Fischer, Frankfurt/M. 1996, 161-180; cf. also Jos, Casanova, *Chancen und Gefahren "ffentlicher Religion*, in the same book pp. 181-210.

□) For details see Theodor Ahrens, *Mission and Dialogue: Contradictory or Complementary*, *The Irish Theological Quarterly* Vol. 62, No. 4, 1996/77, 314-320.

□) Cf. S. Mark Heim, *Salvations. Truth and Difference in Religion*, Orbis Books, N.Y. 1995.

□) Ren, Girard: *Der S□ndenbock*, Benzinger, Z□rich 1988; French: *Le Bouc ,missaire"*, Paris 1982; cf. Robert G. Hamerton-Kelly: *The Gospel and the Sacred, Poetics of Violence in Mark*. Fortress Press Minneapolis 1994; Robert R. Beck, *Nonviolent Story. Narrative Conflict Resolution in the Gospel of Mark*. Orbis Books, Maryknoll N.Y. 1996; Tho Tschuy, *Ethnic Conflict and Religion, Challenge to the Churches*. WCC, Geneva 1997.

□) The World Council of Churches (WCC) has done its member churches a great service placing this in the centre of our ecumenical agenda. Cf. *Overcome Violence, A Programme of the World Council of Churches*, WCC, Geneva 1997.

□) V clav Havel, *Vorwort zum Themenheft "Vers"hnung" der <sup>TM</sup>kumenischen Rundschau*, April 1997, 46. Jg., H. 2, 132f.

□) Cf. Walter Wink, *When the Powers Fall, Reconciliation in the Healing of Nations*. Fortress Press, Minneapolis 1998, 26ff.

□) Cf. Klaus-M. Kodalle, *Verzeihung nach Wendezeiten? šber Unnachsichtigkeit und miālingende Selbstentschuldung*, Verlag Palm und Ende, Erlangen und Jena 1994; cf. also Gerhard Besier/Gerhard Sauter, *Wie Christen ihre Schuld bekennen, Die Stuttgarter Erkl.,rung 1945*. Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, G"ttingen 1985.

□) A documentation of missiology as a fully grown academic discipline and an important tool for future missiological teaching and research has been provided by Jan A.B. Jongeneel, *Philosophy, science and Theology of Mission in the 19th and 20th Centuries. Studies in the Intercultural History of Christianity* No. 92 and No. 106. Peter Lang, Frankfurt/M. 1995 (Vol. 1) and 1997 (Vol. 2).

□) John V. Taylor, *The Future of Christianity*.

□) Cf. John D'Arcy May, *Synkretismus oder Synthese? Eine antizipatorische Skizze des religi"sen Wandels im Pazifik*, in: Hermann P. Siller (ed.), *Suchbewegungen. Synkretismus - Kulturelle Identit,t und kirchliches Bekenntnis*, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt 1991, 185-192.

□) On 'Reconciliation' as the key issue of Christian mission cf. Robert J. Schreiter C.P.P.S., *Reconciliation, Mission and Ministry in a Changing Social Order*. Orbis Books, New York 1992; also Gerard M. Goldman, *Reconciliation - an urgent Task, A Review of Literature*, *Nelen Yubu* No. 66, 1997, No. 2, 1-23.

□) "So the division that matters most for the church today and tomorrow is not that between Catholic and Evangelical, or political right and left, but whether in any matter the form or the content is of prior importance." John V. Taylor, *op. cit.*, p. 660.