

VERBUM SVD

Herausgeber – Publisher: © Steyler Missionswissenschaftliches Institut,
Sankt Augustin

Redaktion – Editor: Christian Tauchner
Steyler Missionswissenschaftliches Institut

Anschrift – Address: Arnold-Janssen-Str. 32
53757 Sankt Augustin
Deutschland – Germany
Tel: [00 49] (0 22 41) 23 73 64
E-mail: missionswissenschaft@steyler.eu
www.missionswissenschaft.eu

ISSN 0042-3696

Desktop Publishing: Martina Ludwig, Steyler Missions-
wissenschaftliches Institut
Sankt Augustin

Druck – Printing: Verlag Franz Schmitt, Siegburg

Verbum SVD erscheint viermal jährlich mit etwa 450 Seiten.
Jahrespreis EUR 25,00 zzgl. Porto.

Verbum SVD appears four times a year with a total of about 450 pages.
Annual subscription rate EUR 25,00 plus postage.

Franz Schmitt Verlag, Postfach 1831, 53708 Siegburg, Deutschland – Germany.
Fax: [00 49] (0 22 41) 5 38 91, E-mail: mis@verlagfranzschmitt.de

VERBUM SVD

Volumen 63	2022	Fasciculus 2-3
------------	------	----------------

Editorial / Vorwort	141-145
 REMEMBERING THE WILLINGEN CONFERENCE	
Two Documents from Willingen	146-160
<i>Dorottya Nagy</i>	
Behind <i>Missio Dei</i> . Reflections on the International Missionary Council's 1952, Willingen, Germany, Conference – One Possible Way of Commemorating after Seventy Years	161-188
<i>Christian Tauchner, SVD</i>	
A Brief History of God's Mission	189-205
 HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES FROM CHINA	
<i>Claudia von Collani</i>	
Mission to China: From the Rites Controversy to Figurism	206-237
<i>Elisa Giunipero</i>	
The Historical Roots of the Expulsion of Catholic Missionaries from Mao's China	238-265
 ASPECTS OF GOD'S MISSION TODAY	
<i>vănThanh Nguyễn, SVD</i>	
<i>Missio Dei</i> as the Hermeneutical Lens for Reading the Bible	266-275
<i>Peter C. Phan</i>	
Social Justice and Passion for Mission	276-287
<i>José Boeing, SVD</i>	
<i>Missio Dei</i> in the Amazon	288-312
<i>Eberhard Tiefensee</i>	
Rethinking "Mission": "Ecumenism of the Third Kind" with God's "Other" People	313-330

ACTUAL SVD PERSPECTIVES ON GOD’S MISSION

Lazar Stanislaus, SVD

SVD and *Missio Dei*: Progress and Prospectives 331-355

Christian Tauchner, SVD

The Basis for Prophetic Dialogue—Remembering the SVD
General Chapter 2000 356-378

Eberhard Tiefensee*

RETHINKING “MISSION”: “ECUMENISM OF THE THIRD KIND” WITH GOD’S “OTHER” PEOPLE¹

Western societies in general and Eastern Germany in particular are characterised by an advanced and at times even forced secularity which assigns roles to religions and churches that differ from the traditional systems. This article suggests perspectives to approach the changes and actual situation as a new paradigm. It is necessary to accept a fundamental alteration in the manner of thinking, a Copernican turn. This is not entirely new, as the reference to the parable of the Good Samaritan and the position of the neighbour in it shows. In the new paradigm it must be accepted that mission means sending, not attracting to the church in the first place. By contrast to ecclesio-centric views, the point is to “propose the faith” and to change to an alterity model in approaching the others in the manner of an ecumenism of the third kind, where the faithful accept hospitality and offer their services.

New Challenge: The “Supernova”

“Forced secularity”—this is how the Leipzig sociologist of religion Monika Wohlrab-Sahr described the situation in Eastern Germany.²

* Prof. Dr. Eberhard Tiefensee grew up in Leipzig, Germany. After training as chemical laboratory assistant he studied philosophy and theology in Erfurt. In 1979 he was ordained a priest. In 1987, he obtained a doctorate in theology and undertook post-doctoral studies in Bonn and Tübingen. From 1997 until his retirement in 2018, he held a chair of philosophy at the University of Erfurt. © All rights reserved by the author.

¹ Revised version of my presentation at a conference on future pastoral care in the Catholic diaspora of eastern Germany (“die pastorale!”) in Magdeburg in September 2019. The original version can be found as video (<https://youtu.be/rvJHBLhC8PA>) and as text (https://kamp-erfurt.de/fileadmin/user_upload/kamp_kompakt/Kirche_in_der_Diaspora_-_KAMP_kompakt_8.pdf [accessed 1.6.2022]). Republished here with kind permission of the Katholische Arbeitsstelle für missionarische Pastoral (KAMP) in Erfurt (Germany). The spoken style of presentation has been retained.

² Cf. Monika Wohlrab-Sahr/Uta Karsten/Thomas Schmidt-Lux (eds.), *Forcierte Säkularität. Religiöser Wandel und Generationendynamik im Osten Deutschlands*, Frankfurt: Campus-Verlag 2009. Cf. also Eberhard Tiefensee, *More than just de-Christianization: Christian mission in face of reli-*

To this day, this region differs from the western and southern parts of Germany: It is the area with the most advanced religious decline. 70 to 80 percent of the population, in both urban and rural areas, do not feel they belong to any denomination, and this has often been the case for several generations. They are considered non-denominational or—as the experts say—religiously indifferent. This distinguishes them on the one hand from atheists, whose answer to the question of God is “no,” and on the other from agnostics, who abstain from this question with reference to the limits of reason, among other things. Religiously indifferent people, in contrast, do not understand the question as such or consider it irrelevant. According to a pun by Karl Rahner, they have forgotten that they have forgotten God.³ They are not alienated from the church because they have never had close contact with it, but simply untouched by it, as a Czech pastoral theologian once aptly characterised it.⁴ They know about religions and churches, which are omnipresent in the media in East Germany, but they are as little affected by them existentially as young people are by an advertisement for stairlifts.

“Forced” is the term used to describe secularism in East Germany because it is the result of two waves of secularisation: on the one hand, there is the cultural secularisation coming from the West, which can be described succinctly as simply the *Zeitgeist*, which causes difficulties for religion in general and Christianity in particular, and, on the other, political pressure coming from the East, which, beginning as

gious indifference in East Germany, in: Paul S. Peterson (ed.), *The Decline of Established Christianity in the Western World. Interpretations and Responses* (Studies in World Christianity and Interreligious Relations), New York: Routledge 2017, 129–144.

³ Karl Rahner, Meditation über das Wort “Gott”, in: Hans Jürgen Schultz (ed.), *Wer ist das eigentlich – Gott?*, Munich: Kösel 1969, 13–21, here: 17 and 18: “... hätte das Ganze und seinen Grund vergessen und zugleich vergessen (wenn man noch so sagen könnte), dass er vergessen hat. Was wäre dann? Wir können nur sagen: Er würde aufhören, ein Mensch zu sein. Er hätte sich zurückgekreuzt zum findigen Tier” (“... would have forgotten the whole and its reason and at the same time forgotten (if one could still say so) that he has forgotten. What would be then? We can only say: He would cease to be a human being. He would have crossbred back to being a resourceful animal”). Rahner (1904–1984) was a theologian at the Jesuitenkolleg Innsbruck and is held to be one of the most important Catholic theologians of the 20th century.

⁴ Cf. Michal Kaplánek, Entfremdete oder vom christlichen Glauben unberührte Jugend?, in: id./Maria Widl (eds.), *Jugend – Kirche – Atheismus. Brückenschläge zwischen Ostdeutschland und Tschechien*, České Budějovice/Erfurt (University of South Bohemia in cooperation with Erfurt University) 2006, 88–98, here: 88f.

early as the Nazi era but then especially under the aegis of Marxism-Leninism, additionally harassed and decimated Christians in this region. This toxic mixture has led to the situation described above.

However, the other regions of Germany are catching up: Whereas shortly after reunification (1990) the ratio of non-denominational persons was 73 % (East) to 11 % (West) of the respective total population, 20 years later it was 78 % (East) to 31 % (West)—with a continuing upward trend on both sides.⁵ It is difficult to predict whether the German East anticipates the future of the West European church (similar conditions can be found in Bohemia). But with good reasons the American sociologist Peter L. Berger once called Western Europe as a whole a “disaster area for the churches.”⁶

This situation is new for Christian evangelisation. Never before in its 2000-year history has it encountered a culture largely devoid of religion or religiosity. Religious ideas have always been widespread, which have then been purified or fought against, but which also offered points of contact for this message. In the 8th century, Saint Boniface was able to cut down a sacred oak tree in the centre of Germany to demonstrate the victory of Christianity. But what, pray tell, is there to cut down in eastern Germany?

Moreover, in the meantime, such a diversity of attitudes to life has become established that the Canadian religious scholar Charles Taylor compares it to a stellar explosion, a nova.⁷ What began in the 19th century among the elites – there were materialists, traditionalists, nihilists, romantics and monarchists, socialists, etc., while the basis of the mainstream churches remained largely intact and homogeneous – has now spread to kitchen tables and family gatherings: a supernova. Parents are often no longer able to understand their children’s attitudes toward faith, image of the family, leisure preferences, etc. Grandchildren no longer understand the world of their grandparents. How to eat

⁵ Cf. Sozialreport 2010: Angleichung der Lebensverhältnisse – DDR/neue Länder/früheres Bundesgebiet/alte Länder: „Religion – konfessionslos“ (<https://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/tabelle-lebensverhaeltnisse-in-ost-und-west-a-714702.html> [accessed 1.6.2022]).

⁶ Peter L. Berger, An die Stelle von Gewissheiten sind Meinungen getreten. Der Taumel der Befreiung und das wachsende Unbehagen darüber: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 7.5.1998, No. 105, 14.

⁷ Cf. Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*, Cambridge, MA et al.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press 2007, 297-419 (“The Nova Effect”), here: 411f.

and live? Children yes or no? How to live or die? Experts speak of a variety of “existential cultures.”⁸

And this development cannot be reversed; on the contrary, it is now even taking place in each and every one of us: The others are always present. For everything that is important and sacred to me, I know that others see it differently. Thus, in the meantime, a little atheist also lives in every Christian. One switches between different attitudes to life – depending on circumstances and even depending on the stage of life. In the past, this was not the case in the regions shaped by the “folk-church” tradition where people were—and remained—Catholic or Protestant as a matter of course. And: The supernova is now also taking hold of other religious cultures, such as Islamic ones.

Therefore, a ban on nostalgia is advisable. Sure, it used to be nicer and more orderly when all children were married in church and all grandchildren were baptised, when the youth group flourished, the church was full and every village had a priest. But that’s past and gone and, in all likelihood, won’t come back! This does not mean that we should suppress these memories and cut off the tradition. Such a thing would be fatal for the people of God, who are based on at least three and a half thousand years of history, a very old Bible included. But woe betide us if we try to settle back into the past. Those who put their hand to the plough and look back wistfully are not fit for the kingdom of God (Luke 9:62). “We are ready without hesitation,” the French bishops wrote to their faithful in 1996, “to involve ourselves as Catholics in the cultural and institutional fabric of the present, characterised above all by individualism and secularism. We reject any nostalgia for past eras in which the principle of authority was supposedly unchallenged. We do not dream of an impossible return to so-called ‘Christendom’.”⁹ One can also put it the way the pastoral theologian Rainer Bucher did:

⁸ Cf. Lois Lee, *Recognizing the Non-religious: Reimagining the Secular*, Oxford/N.Y.: Oxford University Press 2015, 159-184.

⁹ Les Évêques de France, *Lettre aux catholiques de France: « Proposer la foi dans la société actuelle »* (Lourdes, 9 novembre 1996) (<https://ec.cef.fr/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2014/05/dagens.pdf> [accessed 1.6.2022]): « Face à la tentation du ressentiment, qui conduit à chercher et à dénoncer des responsables de cette crise, nous tenons à réaffirmer ce que le rapport sur la proposition de la foi a déjà manifesté: nous acceptons sans hésiter de nous situer, comme catholiques, dans le contexte culturel et institutionnel d’aujourd’hui, marqué notamment par l’émergence de l’individualisme et par le principe de la laïcité. Nous refusons toute nostalgie pour des époques passées où le principe d’autorité semblait s’imposer de façon indiscutable. Nous ne rêvons pas d’un impossible retour à ce que l’on appelait la chrétienté. »

“No wishful thinking helps against reality. Rather, it confronts us with tasks.”¹⁰

*Thesis 1: We are Facing an Upheaval Comparable
to that of the Reformation*

I am not so much referring to the current structural reforms in the church or all the discussions related to the “Synodal Path”¹¹ in Germany (as important as all that may be), but above all to the following: The church has to find its way in this new, largely religion-free environment, and it will have to change in the process. Because if we are honest: The situation creates a lot of perplexity, although the initial situation of forced secularity has been known for a long time. Never before has so much intellectual, personal and institutional manpower been invested in church proclamation, including religious education, and in liturgical renewal as in Western Europe in the last 150 years. The theological institutes and the bishops were and are not lazy after all! But the results have never been as meagre as in the last 150 years. That does give you pause!

*Thesis 2: We Are Perhaps Called to a “Copernican Turn”—
or with Kant: An “Alteration in the Manner of Thinking”*

The philosopher Immanuel Kant was confronted with the situation that metaphysics did not really advance in the decisive questions and therefore, he propagated an “alteration in the manner of thinking.”¹² Thus he founded the so-called transcendental philosophy. It is not necessary to elaborate on this here. He compared his idea of a “change of the manner of thinking” with the Copernican turn. When in the 16th century (in the age of the Reformation by the way) the Ptolemaic world view did not advance any further due to the many cycles and epicycles, Copernicus suggested to simply trade places: Not the Earth is fixed and the Sun moves, but the Sun is fixed and the Earth orbits around it. This was ingenious: celestial mechanics became simpler and more transparent. Of course, it was difficult to revise one’s thinking. The Earth, previously at the centre, was now somewhere on the periphery.

¹⁰ Rainer Bucher, *Die Theologie im Volk Gottes. Die Pastoral theologischen Handelns in post-modernen Zeiten*, in: id. (ed.), *Theologie in den Kontrasten der Zukunft. Perspektiven des theologischen Diskurses*, Graz et al.: Styria 2001, 13-39, here: 32 footnote 46.

¹¹ See <https://www.synodalerweg.de/english> [accessed 4.6.2022].

¹² “Umänderung der Denkungsart”: Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* [KrV] B xvi – “the alteration in the manner of thinking”: second Preface (1787) to *Critique of Pure Reason*.

That was painful for our self-confidence. To this day, we talk about sunrise and sunset, although every schoolchild knows that nothing rises and sets there, but that the Earth rotates.

So what might happen if we were to make a similar swap when thinking about a pastoral ministry of the future? And what might that look like?

An important preliminary note: An “alteration in the manner of thinking” is hard. You can’t shift minds like gears. If you want to straighten a crooked piece of wood, you have to overbend it to the other side, as even good old Aristotle knew.¹³ If we want to change our way of thinking, our perspective, we must necessarily overemphasize the opposite. And that is what I am going to do. I will strongly highlight specific perspectives. But there is no other way, in my view. And it probably hurts in places. So far the preliminary remark.

So what might such an “alteration in the manner of thinking” look like? Fortunately, our own faith constantly challenges us to do so when we look at the Bible.

Copernican Turn, Biblical Version: The Parable of the Good Samaritan

At a pivotal point in Luke’s Gospel, Jesus very quickly agrees with a teacher of the law on what, along with the commandment to love God, is the most important commandment: “You shall love your neighbour as yourself.” As we know, the interlocutor then asks, “And who is my neighbour?” upon which Jesus tells the parable of the Good Samaritan (cf. Luke 10:25-37). Today, in sermons it is frequently pointed out that only those who love themselves can love their neighbour. This is certainly a good psychological observation, but probably not the point of this doctrinal conversation, or it would have gone differently.

Because the teacher of the law—and we, too—probably has this idea as a starting point: My neighbours, that’s my family. Family comes first. To this day, Christians and non-Christians, believers and atheists agree: family is the highest value (some even claim it is a central Christian value). Then come friends and close acquaintances, then everyone else. Politics usually comes at the very end of the scale of values – together with religion.¹⁴

¹³ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, II 9, 1109b7 – “as people do in straightening sticks that are bent.”

¹⁴ Cf. Paul M. Zulehner/Hermann Denz, *Wie Europa lebt und glaubt. Europäische Wertestudie*, Düsseldorf: Patmos ²1994, 91-92; Gert Pickel, *Säkulari-*

And our understanding of the church is articulated in a similarly manner. There is the core congregation, which includes everyone who is involved in the parish council, the church choir or the parish festival and who comes to church every Sunday. These are our neighbours, so to speak. Then come—further away—those who appear in church now and then on Sundays, then those who can only be seen at Christmas, at First Communion or Confirmation. And then there are the merely nominal members, for whom we pray specifically in the 3rd Eucharistic Prayer: “Hear the prayers of the congregation gathered here, and lead to you also all your sons and daughters who are still far from *you*.”¹⁵ The picture drawn here is seductive: closeness to the core community thus largely determines the closeness to Christ. Missionary pastoral care, in logical consequence, has the task of drawing those who are far away into proximity – for the first time or, if they have drifted away, again. Is this wrong? Certainly not! But I repeat: With some exceptions, this pastoral programme simply does not work or does not work any longer, and this is true even in one’s own family. Thus, something is wrong here.

“Alteration in the manner of thinking”: What is needed is a change of perspective. Jesus himself tries to initiate it. For at the end of his parable, he abruptly and without comment turns the initial question around. Not: “Who is my neighbour?”, but: “Who ... has made himself the neighbour of the one who fell among the robbers?” (Luke 10:36). This is a classic “Copernican turn.” The one on the margins, the wounded one, is suddenly at the centre! He organises the space around him: Who has become a neighbour to me—in this example, a Samaritan who does not belong to God’s people. And who is not: the pious priest and the Levite who sneaked past him. So it is not the one on the margin who must move closer, but those who are called to love their neighbour and whom the wounded man draws close to him, as it were. The conclusion for us: Not the others “out there” have to move, we do.

But where is the LORD? He has moved away, for he has been searching for the lost sheep for a long time, simply leaving behind the 99

sierung und Konfessionslosigkeit im vereinigten Deutschland, in: Reinhard Hempelmann/Hubertus Schönemann (eds.), *Glaubenskommunikation mit Konfessionslosen. Kirche im Gespräch mit Religionsdistanzierten und Indifferenten* (EZW-Texte 226), Berlin: Evangelische Zentralstelle für Weltanschauungsfragen 2013, 11-36, here: 22-23.

¹⁵ My emphasis. This follows the German liturgical version of the Latin “Omnes filios tuos ubique dispersos tibi, clemens Pater, miseratus coniunge”: “... und all deine Söhne und Töchter, die noch fern sind von dir.” The English liturgical translation is quite different: “Father, hear the prayers of the family you have gathered here before you. In mercy and love unite all your children wherever they may be.”

righteous of the established core group (cf. Luke 15:4). He even identifies himself with the lost one in such a way that he can only be found in him: “Whatever you did for the least of these my brothers (who are poor, hungry, sick, strangers, and homeless), you have done to me” (cf. Matt 25:35-40). The people of God he has left behind have no choice but to follow their Lord in this direction, to find him surprisingly there.

“Metanoiéte.” This is what Jesus says at the very beginning of his activity (Mark 1:15). “Turn around,” or more precisely—because the word contains the Greek root “nous,” i.e. “reason”—“think differently,” “think bigger.” What we are experiencing in terms of disruptions and breakdowns, in terms of scandals and losses, is not a mere accident in the church’s history. It is intentional: The kingdom of God is coming closer. We read and hear about it, but who likes to be inveigled out of the rut of his manner of thinking? The sociology of science talks about a paradigm shift and admits that even science finds it difficult to alter its ways of thinking.¹⁶ Pope Francis calls this: going to the margins.¹⁷ More precisely, however, this means that the margins are not at the margins at all, they are at the centre. And we, the church, suddenly find ourselves standing on the fringe and have to move to the newly recognised centre.

This gives me a queasy feeling: The Eucharistic prayer for the sons and daughters “who are still far from you”—doesn’t that really mean us as a congregation and less the others? The next provocative question immediately imposes itself: Are perhaps some of those who have distanced themselves from the church messengers of the Holy Spirit, who sends them ahead into the untraveled terrain of forced secularity, into which the church has yet to follow? Let us interpret Jesus’ parable of the sower (cf. Matt 13:1-9) from another angle: What do the seeds in the sack of the sower say to each other? “So many gone—fewer and fewer of us left.”

*Thesis 3: Alteration of Perspective:
Mission Means Being Sent, not Being a Magnet*

Saying something like that is easy, thinking it and putting it into practice is very difficult for us – for me, too. Please check your ideas of pastoral ministry, check the strategy papers and conversations about the future—do they do not rather have the ecclesiocentric model in mind: Mission is “membership recruitment,” which is where all efforts

¹⁶ Cf. Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1962.

¹⁷ Pope Francis, *Gaudete et exsultate* (2018) #135.

are directed. But mission from the root of the word means “sending”—and from our point of view, this is centrifugal and does not go inward or toward us.

Suddenly, the Great Commission at the end of Matthew’s Gospel sounds different: “Go therefore to all nations and make disciples of all people, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you,” it famously says (Matt 28:19-20). First, we hardly ever do that. Secondly, it usually doesn’t work. Altering our “manner of thinking” is therefore necessary and immediately the text reads differently: “make disciples of all people” actually means: “accept all peoples as disciples”, and not so much: “make them church members.”¹⁸ And the command to baptize? Of course, it is important and correct—no one who comes, no matter from where, should be excluded. But how come then that the greatest missionary of all times, Saint Paul, emphasises at the very beginning of his first letter to Corinth: “Christ did not send me to baptise, but to preach the gospel” (1 Cor 1:17)? This *latter point* seems to be crucial for him.

Another missionary story emphasises the same point. Jesus sent out his 72 disciples with the command, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, then, to send out workers for his harvest. Go! I am sending you out like lambs in the midst of wolves. [...] When you enter a house, first say: Peace to this house! [...] Heal the sick who are there, and tell the people: The kingdom of God is near to you” (cf. Luke 10:2-9). This is about harvesting, not about sowing. Harvesting sees and gathers what has already grown. Jesus has called fishermen who have not put the fish to be caught into the lake. They are experts in finding them and harvesting them, so to speak. So in a missionary perspective we must ask: Where is today’s great harvest here in Eastern Germany, or in Western Europe? The kingdom of God *is* near even now, the text says, and will not be brought to the people by the 72. People just don’t know it – and we often don’t see it. The Gospel does not indicate whether, after the mission was completed, more than the 72 disciples came back to Jesus.

¹⁸ The usual German translation: “machet zu Jüngern alle Völker”—make disciples of all peoples—(Luther-Bibel 1984, similarly the Catholic Einheitsübersetzung 2017), is probably not quite exact, rather it should be: “lehret alle Völker”—teach all peoples—(Revised Luther-Bibel 2017, which thus returns to Martin Luther’s translation of 1534). See Wolfgang Reinbold, “Gehet hin und machet zu Jüngern alle Völker”? Zur Übersetzung und Interpretation von Mt 28,19f.: *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 109 (2012) 176-205 (<https://www.jstor.org/stable/23586464> [accessed 1.6.2022]). See also: “docete omnes gentes” (Vulgata); “teach all nations” (King James Bible).

Can we then say, “Well, that hasn’t worked out; there are no more of us than before”?

So missionary concerns are not oriented towards a “comeback of the church,” as we sometimes read or hear,¹⁹ but towards “the others” to be visited (if they let us in!), to be healed and above all to be informed in every way. “To propose the faith” (*proposer la foi*)—this is the ingenious phrase of the French bishops.²⁰ What the others do with this proposal of ours is their business—and the business of the Holy Spirit. The question authenticating all missionary pastoral work would therefore have to be, “Would we do it even if it didn’t benefit us?” Run kindergartens, schools, hospitals, organise street festivals, launch and support initiatives, send people to offer pastoral care in prisons, police stations and military operations? “Would we do it even if it didn’t benefit us?” If the answer to the question can be yes, fine; if not, at least problematic. Because then on the other side the impression may easily arise: They are not really interested in me and do not want anything for me, but actually and secretly for themselves. They are just more or less trickily looking for a point of attack or a gateway to place their actual concern: How might we get you into the church? How can we recruit the necessary personnel? This is ecclesiocentrism. After the Copernican turn, however, the centre is no longer where we are, but somewhere different.

Of course, mission also means gathering people into the “communio” and of course, it does have something to do with sowing.²¹ Therefore, to be on the safe side, let me repeat my warning: I am deliberately overdrawing in order to straighten the crooked stick which is myself. So on we go: Whoever rings at other people’s doors to be let in, should inform himself well about those behind the door and their “existential culture” before he does. Mission must be done with a certain ethnological interest: Who are “they”? How do “they” live? What makes them “tick”? What is their language? Once again, a change of perspective is necessary.

¹⁹ J. Hartl/K. Wallner/B. Meuser, *Mission Manifest. Die Thesen für das Comeback der Kirche*, Freiburg i. Br.: Herder 2018.

²⁰ See Les Évêques de France, *Lettre aux catholiques de France*.

²¹ The German Bishops’ Conference issued a remarkable mission document with the title “A Time for Sowing. Being Church in a Missionary Manner”: Sekretariat der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz (ed.), *“Zeit zur Aussaat”. Missionarisch Kirche sein* (Die deutschen Bischöfe; 68), Bonn: Sekretariat der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz 2000.

*Thesis 4: We Switch from the Deficiency Model
to the Alterity Model*

The “others” are not lacking/deficient, they are simply different. The deficiency model is based on a norm, so it is normative: the others do not yet or no longer correspond to the norm, therefore they must at least be brought up to our level. This view is well founded in the Bible: we are all sinners, in need of redemption, far from God. The deficiency model practically imposes itself on our thinking because we are constantly working with negations and saying what the others are not: Atheist, *non*-denominational, *un*-believers, they *no longer* go to church, etc. But the disadvantage of the model is: we no longer communicate on a par with them. The missionary initiative comes from above: it lectures, it treats something that is wrong, and those who cannot be convinced may sometimes be threatened with a “judgment”: “Just you wait, once you face death, you will realise...”

It becomes even more peculiar, since the other side also works with a deficiency model: “You Christians are otherwise quite normal people, just not quite up to date, a bit abnormal, still somewhat infantile or unenlightened, you simply still need a God to cope with the crises in your life.” This is where enlightenment, i.e. instruction, therapy, and sometimes pressure, is required. It’s not difficult to imagine how strange the resulting communication will be when both sides assume that the others are deficient or lacking.

The alterity model (from French: *altérité* = otherness) on the other hand is descriptive, it depicts without making value judgements. What is now set in motion is curiosity about the others, even if they may continue to appear strange: “How can one live like this? How can one think like that?” This is respectful and appreciative. Each side now enters into a dialogue on a par with the other. But they are not necessarily aiming for consensus; they are enduring dissent. Perhaps in the end, both are better informed as to where exactly the differences lie, and that can also be very productive. After all, neither side is in possession of the truth, which is always greater than what you believe and think, and what I believe and think. The classic biblical passage here is the parable of the weeds and the wheat, which urges caution in all value judgements: we might be mistaken in what we uproot and promote (cf. Matt 13:24-30).

If we consider the three fields in which the church is active—service or diakonia, proclamation and witness, liturgy and rituals—we must now put diakonia first. This does not mean merely charitable activities, but a basic attitude: “The Son of Man came to serve, not to be served” (cf. Mark 10:45). Church should therefore—to use a modern

term—first of all be a service provider. Those who see themselves as service providers are less in danger of acting from above, but rather from below (cf. Mark 9:35; John 13:14). Thus, we 72 disciples of today should knock politely and first of all ask, “What can I do for you?” And only then comes proclamation or witness or the offer of worship and liturgy.

The alterity model requires a descriptive approach based on curiosity. Then we will discover something that, at least in eastern Germany, we have actually noticed for a long time, but usually suppress: It is quite possible to live well and decently without God. The non-denominational or non-religious (or whatever we want to call them—the designation does not matter here) do not miss anything; at least generally they do not feel any deficits more or less than we Christians do.

It Is Possible to Live Well and Decently without God

I don't need to elaborate on this, but will just touch on a few points: There has been no extraordinary decline in values as a result of secularisation, even if this is often claimed when people feel they must complain about the times and criticise modern conditions. No academic study that I know of has found serious differences between Christians and non-denominational people with regard to what is considered important or less important.²² Many so-called Christian values are by now so firmly rooted in society that they are accepted as humane and reasonable. Whether people then also live according to them is another question, but there, we Christians also are always on the way.

The “others” have a stable culture of celebration even without religion: school admission instead of first communion, youth dedication²³ instead of confirmation, civil weddings and secular funerals; they organise their celebrations and their leisure time in their own way and tend to go to soccer matches, out into nature or to see friends instead of Sunday mass. There is nothing missing.

Even the so-called “liminal situations” such as illness or death are no cause for conversion: only those turn to prayer in hard times who

²² Cf. the analyses of various surveys by the “Forschungsgruppe Weltanschauungen in Deutschland” (Research Group on Worldviews in Germany): <https://fowid.de/meldung/wertevorstellungen-konfessionsfreier-menschen> [accessed 1.6.2022].

²³ “Jugendweihe,” or “youth dedication,” is a secular alternative to confirmation. It was developed in the late 19th century by the freethinker movement, adopted by the socialist labour movement, and propagated in the German Democratic Republic with enormous social pressure.

had learned to pray at some stage. And if questions of meaning suddenly arise or even non-religious people start praying, they often say: I am no longer normal in such a situation; normally I do not ask myself such questions, let alone pray. I have to cope with this crisis, then this will be over.²⁴

Admittedly, this is only a sketch, but it can be substantiated by many examples in literature or if we observe our circle of acquaintances—provided we do not fall into the trap of comparing apples with oranges, that is: good Christians with bad non-Christians (by the by, the others do the same the other way around). The question now is—and it is sometimes addressed to us by the “others” as well: Why are we Christians, what’s the use, if you can also live well and decently without God and unbaptised people also go to heaven, as we have good reasons to assume?

Therefore, we are not Christians to save our own souls, but, to modify an aphorism of Saint Augustine, “With you I am a human being, for you—and not for myself—I am a Christian.”²⁵ Again, I’m exaggerating a bit, I’m sure you’ve noticed, but we are, after all, attempting a Copernican turn. As a human being among human beings, I act on a par with them; as a Christian, I don’t act from above, but from an attitude of service: What can I do for you—out of the spirit of the Gospel, out of my faith? And let’s not forget: What can I learn and receive from you? Every congregation ought to ask itself regularly: Would our town, our neighbourhood be missing something if we were no longer there? If so, what? If not, then an immediate conversion is on the agenda, because we are there for “them,” not for us.

Thesis 5: We Need an “Ecumenism of the Third Kind”

I call “ecumenism of the first kind” that between Christians, “ecumenism of the second kind” that between believers of different religions (usually called interreligious dialogue), and “ecumenism of the third kind” that between the religious and the non-religious persons.²⁶

²⁴ Religious indifference is usually combined with a sober everyday pragmatism. Cf. Kornelia Sammet, *Atheism and Secularism. Cultural Heritage in East Germany*, in: Francis-Vincent Anthony/Hans-Georg Ziebertz (eds.), *Religious Identity and National Heritage. Empirical-Theological Perspectives*, Leiden: Brill 2012, 269-288, here: 277-279.

²⁵ Augustine: “For you I am a bishop; but with you I am a Christian”: (Serm. 340, 1: PL 38, 1483; cf. Lumen Gentium 32).

²⁶ In greater detail, including about the concrete forms of such an “ecumenism of the third kind” cf. Eberhard Tiefensee, *Ökumene mit Atheisten und religiös Indifferenten: evangel. Magazin für missionarische Pastoral* 6

To avoid misunderstandings, a short explanation regarding “ecumenism”: The word is not a Christian invention. It derives from the Greek “oikos” which means the house, the (shared) dwelling, as in the word “economy,” which originally meant housekeeping. So, it has a very mundane origin. Therefore, when we talk about ecumenism, we have to start in our own house: at the kitchen table and in the neighbourhood, after all, everyone now meets: the Catholics and the Protestants, increasingly the other religions, and also the religious and the non-religious of the most diverse “existential cultures.” Accordingly, oikumene originally means the (whole) inhabited earth. An “ecumenical council,” for example, is not one where Protestant and Orthodox Christians are also present, but an assembly of churches from all over the world, which makes decisions that are valid worldwide. End of explanation.

The three types of ecumenism are each very different. Between Christians, it is: one Lord, one faith, one baptism. Between religions, common religious and spiritual experiences may be the basis. In the ecumenism of the third kind, it’s our common humanity in all its dimensions. Nevertheless, there are points of contact and structural analogies between the different types. I am confident that when one of them is not making much progress, positive impulses may sometimes arise from the others: After all, the ecumenism of Christians came into being more than a hundred years ago because they had encountered other religions, i.e. the ecumenism of the second kind got going, and they realised that it does not make any sense to continue to be at odds with each other about matters of faith and church structure in the presence of the “others.”

Since in our pluralistic part of the world we have had decades of experience especially in the field of ecumenism of the first type, some principles can be identified—additions are always possible:

Nobody tries to win “the (respective) others” over to their side.

This seems to be the opposite of mission, at least as we have understood the concept so far, before our Copernican turn. Can you seriously formulate such a precept and then still speak of missionary pastoral ministry? First of all, I would like to point out that in the ecumenism of the first type, any conversation would end immediately if one side formulated as its goal: the result will, hopefully, be that all end up Catholics—or vice versa: all will be Protestants. This even led to a Thirty Years’ War in Germany. It simply doesn’t work that way. Has the attempt to get as many people on one’s side as possible ever really

(2015) no. 2 [<http://www.euangel.de/ausgabe-2-2015/oekumene-und-mission/oekumene-mit-atheisten-und-religioes-indifferenten/>] (accessed 1.6.2022)].

worked between the religions? Some will point to the successful mission history in the so-called Third World, but what about the mission to the Jews? It was not awfully successful and has even been recognised as the wrong way and officially stopped.²⁷ Of course, conversions and baptisms are not ruled out, and there is always great rejoicing when individuals decide to follow our path. But that cannot be the goal when it comes to Jewish-Christian dialogue. The mission to Muslims has been equally unpromising and—I dare to make the realistic prediction: among the religiously indifferent around us, the success in winning them over to our side will also remain very meagre. So, we should do what I have already indicated: “Proposer la foi”—propose the faith.

Second principle: Do as much as possible together. Humanity needs our common service in large and small ways.

Third principle: Prohibition of relativism. We do not succumb to arbitrariness, as if it did not matter whether I am a Christian or not, we rather sharpen our profile on each other. Always respectfully and appreciatively, so as to hurt the others as little as possible, especially in matters that are sacred and important to them. In a hospitable house, one takes off one’s shoes and does not trample into the living room with boots and certainly does not venture into the bedroom. But after contact with “others” we know better than before what is typically Catholic, what is typically Christian, what is typically religious. This, by the way, includes being mutually transparent, i.e. trying to follow the other’s logic: What do they say about the things we are saying now? What do they think about what we are thinking now?

And where does it all go? We don’t know that for sure, not in the inner-Christian ecumenism nor in interreligious dialogue, and the same goes for the ecumenical cooperation with the non-denominational and religiously indifferent. The concrete goal is ultimately God’s business. But I suspect it is ultimately about building up the body of Christ. That is my image for the project that has been set in motion by God at the beginning of time, and which he tenaciously and patiently pursues

²⁷ Cf. “Gott wirkt weiterhin im Volk des alten Bundes” – Eine Antwort der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz auf die Erklärungen aus dem Orthodoxen Judentum zum Verhältnis von Judentum und Katholischer Kirche (“God Continues to Work in the People of the Old Covenant” – A Response of the German Bishops’ Conference to Statements from Orthodox Judaism on the Relationship between Judaism and the Catholic Church) (press release, 13.2.2019 [https://www.dbk.de/fileadmin/redaktion/diverse_downloads/presse_2019/2019_-020a-Stellungnahme-zu-juedisch-orthodoxen-Erklarungen.pdf] [accessed 1.6.2022]) – with references to other church documents.

through the history not only of the church but of humanity, indeed of the whole universe, until Christ is all in all (cf. Col 1:15-20; Eph 1:17-23). Paul's image of the body and the many members, which he develops for the church in Corinth, where each member is different, none really unimportant and each dependent on the others (cf. 1 Cor 12:12-30), applies not only to a church, but also to world society: no one can do everything, everyone is a specialist somewhere and hopefully contributes to the whole. We as Christians are specialists: We know about questions of God, we know how to believe and pray, we have heard about the great project called the Kingdom of God or the building up of the Body of Christ, we can give specific impulses in this regard, stimulate, encourage, heal, also criticise and try to integrate the divergent forces. Others do other things. Everyone is important for the whole to succeed in the end: the Muslims play their part and also the so-called unbelievers. Networks and connections are formed through marriages among members of different churches, through interfaith family alliances, through marriages between religious and non-religious. People interact in the various spheres of culture, some putting on the brakes so things don't move too fast, some pushing forward so things don't grind to a halt, some gathering, some sowing. Nobody can keep track of the whole development, but we Christians can contribute the confidence that it will succeed, even if it is always threatened by failure and death, because we can proclaim THE ONE who works behind and in all this.

In Conclusion: "Ite missa est!"

I return once again to thesis 3. A small Copernican turn was made by the Second Vatican Council when it turned the position of the priest around during Holy Mass so that he has to look into the congregation. I know there is a never-ending argument whether one should celebrate "versus populum" or rather again—as it is strangely called—"versus Dominum," i.e. towards the Lord. Personally, I am glad that since the change in position I am allowed to look for the Lord in the people of God, as he is in the midst of us. It is my privilege during Holy Mass to have my eyes on the church door all the time, which is usually at the back of the church. I can see not only who is late, but more importantly, it is the exit, and the whole service we call Mass is aimed at it. It ends, if it is held in Latin, with the call "Ite missa est!", which we usually translate as the somewhat bland "Go in peace!" But it really means, "Go, it is dismissal!" And the word "missa" refers to the idea of "mission." Therefore, "Go! You are sent!" Therefore, as a priest, I am constantly reminded of the fact that our gathering around the ambo and

altar is oriented toward the exit. It is important to come together, to be strengthened and to strengthen each other, to find peace and joy in the faith and sometimes to hear a good sermon, which is certainly not always successful. But the whole thing has an orientation: "Get out! You are sent." It is certainly nice to stand together outside the church door for a while, but then we need to get to the point: "That's it. This is not what we have been here for, but rather that we set out, each and every one to where he or she is sent: into the forced secularity around us." And it is only in this perspective that all our sacramental action, our prayers and singing make any sense. Out there is where the action is. Out there is HE whom our soul seeks. So let us follow the supernova. Let us follow the Holy Spirit, who at the time hit the apostles congregated in the Upper Room like a bomb and drove them apart—all the way to Rome and even to India. *Ite, missa est.*

ABSTRACTS

Die westlichen Gesellschaften im Allgemeinen und der Osten Deutschlands im Besonderen sind durch eine fortgeschrittene und manchmal sogar erzwungene Säkularität gekennzeichnet, die den Religionen und Kirchen eine Rolle zuweist, die sich von jener in traditionellen Systemen unterscheidet. Dieser Artikel zeigt Perspektiven auf, um die Veränderungen und die aktuelle Situation als neues Paradigma anzugehen. Es ist erforderlich, eine grundlegende „Umänderung der Denkart“, eine kopernikanische Wende zu akzeptieren. Dies ist nicht völlig neu, wie der Verweis auf das Gleichnis vom barmherzigen Samariter und die Stellung des Nächsten darin zeigt. Im neuen Paradigma muss akzeptiert werden, dass Mission Senden bedeutet, nicht zuerst Anziehung zur Kirche. Im Gegensatz zu ekklesiozentrischen Ansichten geht es darum, „den Glauben vorzuschlagen“ und zu einem Modell der Alterität überzugehen, in dem man sich den anderen in der Art einer Ökumene der dritten Art nähert, in der die Gläubigen Gastfreundschaft annehmen und ihre Dienste anbieten.

Las sociedades occidentales, en general, y el este de Alemania, en particular, se caracterizan por una secularidad avanzada y, en ocasiones, incluso forzada, que asigna a las religiones e iglesias funciones diferentes a las de los sistemas tradicionales. Este artículo sugiere perspectivas para abordar los cambios y la situación actual como un nuevo paradigma. Se requiere aceptar un cambio fundamental en la forma de pensar, un giro copernicano. Esto no es del todo nuevo, como explica la referencia a la parábola del buen samaritano y la posición del prójimo en ella. En el nuevo paradigma hay que aceptar que la misión significa enviar, no atraer a la iglesia en primer lugar. En contraposición a visiones eclesiocéntricas, se trata de "proponer la fe" y de cambiar a un modelo de alteridad en el acercamiento a los demás a la manera de un ecumenismo de tercer tipo, donde los fieles aceptan la hospitalidad y ofrecen su servicio.

Les sociétés occidentales et l'Allemagne de l'Est en particulier sont caractérisées par un sécularisme avancé, et même forcé, qui assigne aux religions

et aux Églises un rôle différent de celui des systèmes traditionnels. Cet article suggère des perspectives pour prendre en compte les changements et la situation actuelle comme un nouveau paradigme. Il est nécessaire d'accepter un changement fondamental dans la manière de penser – un tournant copernicien. Ce n'est pas entièrement nouveau comme le montre la référence à la parabole du Bon Samaritain et la position du prochain qui y figure. Dans le nouveau paradigme, il faut accepter que la mission signifie envoyer et non pas d'abord attirer dans l'Église. En contraste avec les positions ecclésiocentriques, il s'agit de « proposer la foi » et de changer pour un modèle d'altérité dans notre approche des autres, à la façon d'un œcuménisme du troisième type, où les croyants acceptent l'hospitalité et proposent leurs services.