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**Dialogues &
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Interculturality
in Theology and
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THEOLOGICUM

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10 years celebration

M.A. INTERCULTURAL THEOLOGY

Fritz Heinrich
Cornelia Schlarb
Egbert Schlarb
Ulrike Schröder (Eds.)

Dialogues and Dynamics

Interculturality
in Theology and
Religious Studies



Universitätsverlag Göttingen

Fritz Heinrich, Cornelia Schlarb, Egbert Schlarb, Ulrike Schröder (Eds.)
Dialogues and Dynamics – Interculturality in Theology and Religious Studies

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Egbert Schlarb/Ulrike Schröder
(Eds.)

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Introduction

On the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the Master's Programme "Intercultural Theology" we organised a symposium at the Theological Faculty in Göttingen under the title *Dialogues and Dynamics: Interculturality in Theology and Religious Studies*. The celebration took place in the building of the Faculty from December 5th to 7th, 2019. Among the many guests and participants were former students, professors, and responsible persons from various institutions who supported and guided the Programme from its beginnings until present times.

The Theological Faculty, in cooperation with the University of Applied Sciences for Intercultural Theology in Hermannsburg (FIT), provides the M.A. Programme Intercultural Theology at the University of Göttingen. The programme started in the winter semester of 2009 with 11 students from six countries. Over the last 10 years, about 170 students from 53 different countries have been enrolled in the programme with 145 having graduated as of the 2021 summer semester. In order to visualize the worldwide body of students, we presented the students' home countries on a map hanging in the meeting room. The programme was subdivided into five panels and started on December 5th with the welcome addresses and the keynote speakers. An interactive workshop on the third day concentrated on the future development of the study course.

In his welcome address, the Dean of the Theological Faculty, Prof. Dr. Bernd Schröder, pointed out that the Theological Faculty is proud of hosting such a unique study course. A course through which every year many students can be welcomed by members of the faculty and who inspire us by sometimes challenging the accustomed theological perspectives and habits.

Prof. Dr. Wilhelm Richebächer, Principal and Professor for Systematic Theology in Intercultural Perspective at the University of Applied Sciences for Intercultural Theology Hermannsburg (FIT), expressed his thanks not only for being allowed to share the vision of the founders of this study programme, but likewise for the mutual learning with students in the classroom and in daily life at the campus in Hermannsburg.

The Director of the Evangelical-Lutheran Mission Society in Lower Saxony (ELM), Michael Thiel, conveyed that the programme creates space to enter into a global dialogue. He said the M.A. Programme Intercultural Theology has to be seen as a result of the transformation in the understanding of mission during the last decades. Dr. Benjamin Apsel, Inspector of the Theological Stift in Göttingen, emphasised the positive impact of the of M.A. Intercultural Theology students who were living in the community and studying in this institution. Apsel particularly highlighted their presence as a benefit in that they enable and enhance the process of intercultural learning.

Then, on Thursday evening the symposium started with a keynote lecture about Intercultural Theology as a ‘Third Space’. The keynote was held in the form of a ‘trialogue’ with PD Dr. Fritz Heinrich, Study of Religions, Göttingen, Prof. Dr. Ulrike Schröder, Chair for Religious Studies and Interreligious Dialogue at the FIT, both the academic coordinators of the M.A. Programme, and Dr. Stanislau Paulau. Dr. Paulau graduated from the Master’s Programme Intercultural Theology in 2013, completed his PhD at the Theological Faculty in Göttingen and meanwhile received two prizes for his excellent dissertation on “*Das andere Christentum: Zur transkonfessionellen Verflechtungsgeschichte von äthiopischer Orthodoxie und europäischem Protestantismus*,” – the Dr.-Walther-Liebehenz-Preis in 2020 and the Ernst Wolf-Nachwuchsförderpreis der Gesellschaft für Evangelische Theologie in 2021.

The keynote speakers outlined that Intercultural Theology opens new spaces between traditional disciplinary, religious, cultural and social realms and their boundaries; spaces, in which new questions can be asked and spaces in which new perspectives can be directed towards one’s own religious tradition. Doubts and sceptical inquiries should not be stigmatised but used to lead to new horizons in dealing appropriately with religious, cultural or human diversity.

On Friday, several panels on different aspects and issues of Intercultural Theology took place. In the first panel, the floor was given to the pioneers of the master’s programme. In 2009, when the programme was established, all three played an important role in bringing this study course into life. One of them was Prof. Dr. Dr. Frieder Ludwig. He meanwhile holds the Chair for Global Studies and Re-

ligions at the University of Stavanger. At that time, he was the Principal of the Mission Seminary in Hermannsburg and Professor for World Christianity and Mission History. The Mission Seminary had been the predecessor institution of the University of Applied Sciences for Intercultural Theology FIT. Another pivotal person has been Provost Martina Helmer-Pham Xuan. In those days she was director of the Evangelical-Lutheran Mission Society; and last but not least, Prof. Dr. Dr. h.c. mult. Martin Tamcke, Professor for Ecumenical Theology, Oriental Church and Mission History, who back then was Dean of the Theological Faculty in Göttingen.

The three of them shared their ideas, visions, hopes and wishes regarding this international study programme which they intended to establish and even today appears quite unique in Germany. Provost Martina Helmer-Pham Xuan compared Intercultural Theology with a dance where all participants are asked to interact and play an important role for the forthcoming project. This thought-provoking allegory stimulated the following speakers throughout the whole day to find new pictures and comparisons for M.A. Programme Intercultural Theology.

In the second panel, Prof. Dr. Benjamin Simon, Professor for Ecumenical Missiology at the Ecumenical Institute in Bossey, and Prof. Dr. Dr. h.c. Dietrich Werner, Referent for Theological Issues at Bread for the World and Visiting Professor at the FIT in Hermannsburg, highlighted the global ecumenical relevance of the study programme. Such a programme helps to put forth a respectful togetherness in societies and communities; it supports the creation of new identities and could be seen as an effective antidote against colonialism. Intercultural Theology could be understood as a theology of house building, applied to the construction of the one global house that we have to care for.

The third panel presented and discussed Intercultural Theology as a practical discipline in church and education. Prof. Dr. Andrea Fröchtling, Professor for Practical Theology at the FIT, compared Intercultural Theology with a tent, describing its characteristics as a theology under construction, a hermeneutical stepping-stone and a constant invitation to change perspectives. Prof. Dr. Jan Hermelink, Chair for Practical Theology at the University of Göttingen, emphasized Intercultural Theology as a scientific discipline, a specific kind of practical theology or a third rank theology. Third order or rank because the first rank represents the practicing of faith, second the reflection about the context and third the comparison of different contexts and reflections about them. Cammy Pong M.A., a former student of Intercultural Theology and now PhD student at the University of the Saarland in Saarbrücken, presented her research project in Intercultural Theology

focusing on religious education from an intercultural perspective in Germany and Hong Kong.

The fourth panel dealt with intercultural perspectives on biblical studies. Dr. Michael Wandusim, one of the programme's graduates and at the time of the symposium a PhD student who has since very successfully completed his PhD in New Testament Studies at the University of Göttingen, explained the challenges and consequences of intercultural perspectives on Biblical Studies on the basis of Mt 6:11: "Give us this day our daily bread." A Ghanaian reception of this biblical verse reads for example "Give us today our daily economic resources." Prof. Dr. Andreas Kunz-Lübcke, Professor for Biblical Hermeneutics in Intercultural Perspectives at the FIT, unfolded the international perspective of biblical studies with the help of the Jonah story in the Hebrew Bible. Prof. Dr. Florian Wilk, Professor of New Testament at the University of Göttingen, emphasized that the gospel is intercultural in itself and intercultural encounters are completely necessary to explore all options of a text.

The fifth panel was dedicated to graduates of the programme who shared their experiences and challenges with us. The speakers were Francis Peter Arthur M.A. from Ghana/Germany, Meriam Adami M.A. from Tunisia, Mehedi Hossain M.A. from Bangladesh, Elena Romashko M.A. from Belarus, who is doing her PhD in Religious Studies in Göttingen and supports the coordinators of the master's programme as scientific assistant. Some of the graduates, who are currently working on PhD projects, had prepared posters of their projects. This exhibition was shown in the Theologicum during the symposium and was organised by Elena Romashko.

Friday evening was a celebration. It was a social evening with musical contributions from the first semester students together with Adolph van der Walt, also a programme graduate and PhD student in Göttingen. We enjoyed a wonderful evening with special food from our participants' homes, multi-cultural encounters and a weaving project that was provided by Elena Romashko.

Saturday morning started with an interactive workshop to collect ideas, questions and visions for developing the programme. A round table discussion with statements from Prof. Dr. Bernd Schröder, Chahira Noura from the Internationalization Project of the University of Göttingen, Prof. Dr. Wilhelm Richebächer, Prof. Dr. Ulrike Schröder and PD Dr. Fritz Heinrich led an open discussion with all participants. The major ideas on how to shape the future of the study programme were to extend the international contacts and partnerships and to build up an alumni network in order to help students develop professional perspectives and find adequate and specific jobs.

We would like to thank all the contributors for giving us insight into their respective fields of research. Elena Romashko designed the poster for the symposium, which served as template for the cover of the present volume. She and Daniela Barton contributed a lot in making the event a reality. Those behind the scenes should also be recognized; although you were out of sight, you were no less important: thank you to Dr. Marcus Hase and his staff. Thank you to all who joined the symposium and celebrated with us; to all students who worked in the organisation and background for preparing a proper jubilee. And many thanks to all who prepared the publication. The Faculty of Theology in Göttingen provided the facilities, the rooms and took over the costs for this publication.

You all made the symposium and this publication possible. Thank you very much!

Dr. Cornelia Schlarb, coordinator ICT

Welcome Address

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

dear students,

dear staff members of either the University of Applied Sciences for Intercultural Theology at Hermannsburg or the Faculty of Theology here at Göttingen University,

dear guest lecturers who you are going to contribute to this conference,

dear – let me put it like this – founding fathers and mothers of ICT, namely Martin Tamcke, but also Frieder Ludwig and Drea Fröchtling, Jan Hermelink, and – not to forget her – Cornelia Schlarb.

I am honoured to open this jubilee conference on the occasion of a decade completed in the study program “Intercultural Theology”. My name is Bernd Schröder – I am one of the professors of Göttingen University teaching Practical Theology with special focus on Religious Education. I am right now serving as Dean as well as an Ephorus of the “Theologisches Stift”.

When the idea of establishing an English speaking study program with focus on Intercultural Theology came up during the year 2008, may be 2007, the founding fathers could not be sure that this project will bear that rich fruits which are to be admired on the occasion of this conference celebrating ten years of the study program “Intercultural Theology”.

All over Germany, there were no other study programs like this: focused on a global outreach, dealing with not only different denominations within Christianity, but also with other religions, open to a wide range of students from countries all over the world and different denominations let alone different religions. In the year

2008 “Religious studies/mission studies/ICT” have not yet been accepted as a sixth column within the range of theological disciplines.¹

Later on, the two following comparable programs of study have come into being:

- In 2013 Bonn University started a one year master program “*Ecumenical studies*” (or a two-years-version called “Extended Ecumenical Studies”; MEESt) which is given in English, but aims at deepening knowledge and experience of foreign students in German ways of doing theology.
- In 2014 Berlin’s Humboldt University started to offer a master program “*religion and culture*” which is focused on hermeneutical questions of understanding religion in the modern world. Seminars and lectures are given in German; the University of Stellenbosch, South Africa, offers an English version of the program.

Beyond that, it might be worthwhile to remember that in the year 2009, Hermannsburg still was a traditional “mission seminary”. It happened no earlier than 2012 that it became the “University of Applied Sciences for Intercultural Theology at Hermannsburg” (FIT).² Nowadays FIT is equipped with a staff who is very well qualified in their academic fields of teaching and experienced in doing theology in the global South – I just remind all of us about the latest appointment of Moritz Fischer.

Finally, there were (and partly still are) some difficult organizational challenges.

- The first challenge is just around the corner. Even then, Hermannsburg was located as far away from Göttingen as it is today and did not have its own railway station. Will a cooperation between two institutions that far apart will work? Will the students be able to manage the travelling, will there be solutions for the quest for accommodation and language skills?
- Furthermore, the challenge was and is to attract scholarships for applicants and to offer career perspectives for graduates in Germany.

¹ Cf. the current state of affairs: „Übersicht über die Gegenstände des Studiums der Evangelischen Theologie“ [Overview of the subjects of the study of evangelical theology] (2012), in: Theologische Ausbildung in der EKD. Dokumente und Texte aus der Arbeit der Gemischten Kommission für die Reform des Theologiestudiums/Fachkommission I (Pfarramt, Diplom und Magister Theologiae) 2005–2013, im Auftrag der Gemischten Kommission/Fachkommission I, hg. v. Michael Beintker und Michael Wöller, Leipzig 2014, 103–108.

² Cf. www.fh-hermannsburg.de/die_fit.

- Last but not least, it was and is not easy under the provisions of German state-church law to agree an intercultural-multi-religious study program in accordance with, for example, the denomination clause for teachers.

Ten years and two accreditation processes (2009 and 2016) later we can say: Not all the problems could be solved, some challenges are still to be coped with, but the study program has gained some astonishing successes and a good reputation for being a unique opportunity

- to get deep-digging insights into methods, subjects and people in the field of Intercultural Theology and
- to become familiar with multi-talented, multi-faceted students from all over the world,
- quite apart from giving the chance to look into the strange world of Germany and German culture, of German churches and church life, and last but not least German theology which works in a legal framework for state-church-relations that is unparalleled worldwide and in a specific denominational culture.³

For us, the Faculty of Theology, the study program is to be seen as an important piece in the mosaic of our courses of study:

- Beside those students coming from other *European* countries within the framework of ERASMUS, the ICT-students make up *the largest and best visible group of international students* at our faculty. This does fit very well into the idea of a research university, which strives to further increase its international reputation and attractiveness.
- Mostly coming from countries within the Southern hemisphere ICT students are bodily representing some of *the most inspiring and challenging discourses in the field of religion and theology* – the discourse on globalization, diversity and post-colonialism. In my opinion, these discourses are to be understood as the inevitable horizon of doing theology today.
- Last, but not least: As students who have already passed different courses of study and exams, who have collected *different vocational experiences* and who want to take responsibility in religious communities

³ Cf. Dietrich Werner, *Handbook of Theological Education in World Christianity. Theological perspectives – regional surveys – ecumenical trends*, Oxford 2010.

all over the world – you are enriching our understanding of how and what for to do theology today.

To make a long story short: ICT turns out to be a *lighthouse-example* for a program of study which fosters the open-mindedness of both, international students as well as hosting German teachers of theology – an open-mindedness which seems to me to be indispensable in the age of globalization.

However, as dean of the Theological Faculty I can sincerely underline today:

We are proud to be part of this program,

we benefit from it in terms of ideas, and

we wish all of you – the present students, the staff, and the program as such – a furthermore successful and enriching future.

To put it in a more traditional way: *ad multos annos* – for many years to come.

Thank you for listening! And please enjoy this conference!

Prof. Dr. Bernd Schröder, dean of the Faculty of Theology

Symposium “Dialogues and Dynamics – Interculturality in Theology and Religious Studies”

Dear Dean of the Faculty of Theology, Prof. Dr. Bernd Schröder,
Dear Rector of the University of Applied Sciences for Intercultural Theology (FIT), Prof. Dr. Wilhelm Richebächer, and
Dear Inspector of the Theologisches Stift, Dr. Benjamin Apsel,

thank you very much for the opportunity to say greetings in the name of the Evangelical Lutheran Mission in Lower Saxony (ELM) at the opening of the symposium.

Since December 2009 the Faculty of Theology in Göttingen and University of Applied Sciences for Intercultural Theology (FIT) of ELM are working together with their International Master Program. The certificate of agreement had been signed at that date by Prof. Dr. Kurt von Figura for the Foundation University Göttingen, Prof. Dr. Jan Hermelink as Dean of the Faculty, Dr. Dr. Frieder Ludwig, at that time Principal of former mission seminar, Rev. Martina Helmer-Pham Xuan, Director ELM as well as Mr. Detlef Kohrs, General Manager ELM. The way was much longer and was pursued by individual persons determinedly. The result shows the necessity in our context of the reality of the worldwide church, whose focus meanwhile moved to the global South. The Master's program creates spaces, where it is possible to enter into a global scientific dialogue.

There are at least three good reasons for this cooperation:

1. *Evangelical theology has become global.* Reformatory approaches and the increase of protestant free churches in Europe have joined in a global community that already long ago had its focus on the global South. Tradition, transmission, re-

spect for the great thought leaders must be associated with (connected to) the global experiences “from the margins”, as this movement is called in the documents of Ecumenical Christianity. Theology developed within other environments, gives new impulses and challenges to our contexts and *vice versa*.

2. This leads us to my second point. Already since a long time Theology has already grown from the front position of Christians among themselves into the question of the *worldwide challenges* with the key words faith, justice and the preservation of creation. Christians themselves, but also the people living with them, are asking for answers to the destructive realities they are facing. Where is God? What is our mission in this world?

3. It is not sufficient at all just considering these questions within the manifold Christian contexts, but to *seek and cultivate interreligious dialogue*. People living as Christians who want to take up responsibility in their lives and before God must search for answers so that becomes reality what Jesus means with “life in abundance” (Jn 10:10).

On the campus at Hermannsburg, this experience happens repeatedly. It is the special characteristic of this place. In addition to the scientific expertise of our college, we are happy to contribute this to the joint cooperation.

For 170 years, the ELM is working in a worldwide network with currently 19 partner churches and 3 supporting churches. The MA-course is also a result of the transformation of the Missionswerk (ELM)

Today God’s mission does not have any direction. It brings together people from all over the world requesting for his presence, sharing daily life with him and looking through him at the people in their context, wherever they live. The expertise of the Master graduates is needed all over the world – including our own country.

I would like to close by thanking all those who are constantly committed to the further development and continuation of the joint Master Program, which is linked to the theological Faculty of Göttingen University. Through this cooperation, we have a so-called “win-win” situation, out of which all sides get benefit, but above all the students. I am sure that in their talks with these personalities and students from so many countries the researchers and lecturers get back a lot of benefit and experience for themselves personally and for their further work.

Thank you for your commitment that contributes to the success of this project. Thank you for this Symposium on the 10th anniversary.

I wish the event a good course.

Michael Thiel, director of the ELM

Grußwort anlässlich des ICT-Symposiums

Dear professor Wilhelm Richebächer and professor Bernd Schröder,
Dear professor Ulrike Schröder and professor Fritz Heinrich,
Dear students of the ICT-program,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, in the name of Theologisches Stift: Congratulations for ten years ICT-program! A long way is behind you, with many encounters, a lot of energy for organization, many hours in German trains and at German stations between Hermannsburg and Göttingen – for the students and for the teachers, too! I think, this is a good moment to celebrate.

Therefore, I speak to you in my function as the Inspector of Theologisches Stift here in Göttingen. The Stift is a dormitory for mainly German theology students. Normally there live 35 students. In our dormitory we eat together, we pray together, we talk together about our faith and we search together for answers to theological questions.

Theologisches Stift is not an official part of the ICT-program. But in spite of this fact our house is one of the beneficiaries of the ICT-program, because some students of this master-program live in Stift every year for two or three semesters. They are a big enrichment for our house. Thus, the German students and I get the possibility to look beyond our German horizon: beyond our German culture, our German way of doing theology and our kind of spirituality. However, as we are a mainly German house, it is not always easy for those who come from abroad. We made the experience, that an intercultural encounter can also be very difficult, es-

pecially for those, who are not able to speak German. There are also difficulties when it comes to food habits or cultural differences in general.

Nevertheless, even these difficulties of our intercultural encounters in Stift are important aspects of learning for both sides, as well for the international students as for the German students. In my opinion, intercultural learning is not only important for our daily life in Stift, but it is a big enrichment for our faculty, too. My hope for the future is that there might be more places and possibilities where students and teachers of the German theological faculty and of the ICT-program come together and learn from each other.

So, finally I want to say thank you: Thank you to all, who took responsibility for the ICT-program during the last 10 years. In addition, thank you, that Theologisches Stift can be one of the beneficiaries of ICT-program.

Thank you very much and enjoy the conference!

Dr. Benjamin Apsel, Stiftsinspektor

Greeting at the Celebration of the 10th Anniversary of the MA Study Course “Intercultural Theology”, Göttingen, Dec. 5–7 2019

Honourable Dean of Faculty Prof. B. Schröder, honourable ELM-Director Thiel, honourable founders and present invigilators of the program Prof. Tamcke, Prof. Ludwig, Dr. Schlarb, Provost Helmer-Pham Xuan, dear organizers of this Anniversary symposium, Prof. Schröder and Prof. Heinrich, dear students and colleagues from Göttingen faculty and FIT Hermannsburg,

“Intercultural Theology is a Must” is the title of a frequently quoted academic article of our colleague Volker Küster. Let me build on that same statement today by saying: Celebrating the ‘tenth birthday’ of your ‘child’, the Göttingen-Hermannsburg study program “Intercultural Theology” is a Must too, as it means celebrating the existence of an innovative and most needed study offer at the right time. Moreover, for this as Principal of FIT Hermannsburg I convey my congratulations and warm greetings to this esteemed auditory. In addition, let me also take this opportunity to thank you, Dean Prof. Schröder and all colleagues and co-workers who are presently involved in organizing and supervising the program for the excellent and smooth cooperation. It is a pleasure for us colleagues from FIT to enrich and stabilize this MA course through our participation in lecturing as well as by our beautiful Campus, which quite often already during the program period, but in many cases especially after that has been highly appreciated.

This program was founded even before the “Evangelisch-Theologische Fakultätentag” in cooperation with the Council (Rat) of the EKD (in 2012) established the discipline of “Religious Studies/Intercultural Theology” as a sixth field of

study of theology at University faculties in Germany with a certainly stronger (though not fully equally strong) position in the curriculum and examination program of Protestant students of theology.

It was founded because you who started it in your wisdom clearly sensed, how the whole religious landscape of Germany had been changing in recent decades of ongoing world-wide migration and is still under rapid change towards more Ecumenical and Multi-religious diversity. The need to develop a New Ecumenism by also including the churches of the Pentecostal/charismatic spectrum of Christianity and plenty of historical Christian denominations who had their former geographical gravity in Eastern Europe or in the Middle East as well as the urgent need to raise the competence of academic theologians as well as Church members in the area of daily interreligious togetherness was evident. And after ten more years one can say: The basic understanding of Ecumenism in Germany as in wide areas of world Christianity has meanwhile changed, as we firmly see Ecumenism in at least three vital dimensions of 'classical' inter-denominational, inter-cultural and a third type of practical and occasional inter-contextual cooperation in practical and theoretical theology, ethics and dialog.

But of course, making such a good start should not and must not let you great founders and us all as the heirs and active pursuers fall back into complacency and over-confidence about what has developed. Just as in 'normal life' a 'ten years old child' has not yet won the race of his/her educational career and still needs plenty of care and nourishment, and perhaps at certain stages also strong hands to defend her/him in the further years of the 'adolescence'. Challenges are sufficiently present: Funds from the Protestant Churches and – one cannot satisfactorily praise it – from the wise and pious clientele of the Evangelical-Lutheran Mission in Lower Saxony in her brave pursuit of a meanwhile 170 years old unique tradition of Academic work in missiology for further creative fostering of up to date theological Academia are by far not sound and secure in times when church taxes will pass their climax and – in fatal consequence – the existence of Intercultural Theological study programs is continuously being questioned. Under such circumstances, I dare warn the most esteemed parentage of this jubilee child: Please, meet your responsibility and continue nourishing the child at a stage of growth as the investment in the future seems to be heavy and fruits are not yet imminently visible. Please, persevere in your support and you will not miss the later blessings waiting for you!

Surely, it goes without explanation that with this last mention, I am not only addressing the directors and deans of institutions present here today, but also the colleagues professors and lecturers as well as other supportive staff. All of us just

cannot and surely will not fall back into a kind of disciplinary monoculture in theological studies. Our reception of theology from the encounter with God's gracious word as well as with the daily life situations of all creatures on this planet calls us into the support for this open-minded type of Academia, as the classical traditions of schools of thoughts again become fluid and good and in its best sense new 'traditions' need to be set up which always includes: to be risked. As a good number of colleagues from different theoretical and practical fields of theology are present here and – due to the wonderfully planned program of this symposium – are enriching our academic exchange with their expertise, I kindly ask your understanding for underlining these aspects in our round this evening.

Therefore, the best way to conclude my greeting is to wish this Academic and at the same time, ecclesial and multi-disciplinary exchange of three days a vital and fruitful course. Thanks a lot for your attention.

Prof. Dr. Wilhelm Richebächer, principal of the FIT Hermannsburg

Intercultural Theology as “Third Space” Introductory Thoughts to the Symposium “Dialogues and Dynamics: Interculturality in Theology and Religious Studies”

Fritz Heinrich

1 Introduction

“My Lady, all religions are true, how much opposite they appear against each other. They are different symbols of the same reality, are like the same phrase spoken in various languages; in the way that they do not understand each other, while they say the same thing. When a pagan says Jupiter and a Christian says God they pose the same emotion within diverse concepts of understanding; they are thinking differently on the same intuition. The repose of a cat in the sun is the same thing like reading a book.”¹

These are the words of a weird, somehow intimate stranger, whom Mary met, when she eventually came home from a party, given a ride in a car by somebody,

¹ Fernando Pessoa, *A Hora do Diabo*, ed. Teresa Rita Lopes, Lisboa ³2004, 52 (Transl. FH).

whom she met at the ball. It was somewhat around midnight, she thought everything was normal, but it was a bit peculiar as well. At least she felt “dizzy, sleepy, but inwardly alert and alarmed” how Fernando Pessoa described her mental state.²

The whole situation was created by a dream of her son, who brought it into a poem. The poem, the dream, and her mood after a nice party evening created a space, in which she stood on the heights of a hill, like Jesus during his temptation (Mt 4,8), but actually looking on the cities of London, Berlin, and Paris, on which the devil pointed out. The situation appears like a night flight over big cities with their lights flashing in the dark. And somebody says: “We are passing by high above of them, pilgrims of the mystery and of the knowledge.”³

The space created by Fernando Pessoa in his marvelous small novella with the title *A Hora do Diabo* (The Hour of the Devil) allows a conversation, which otherwise had been impossible both from the social, cultural, and religious position of the actors, Mary and the devil, as well as the contents of the talk. In its surprising setting, and its astonishing course the dialogue between Mary and the devil appears quite intriguing because of its arcane, initiatory elements, and thought provoking because the usual perspectives are turned upside down somehow. In certain ways Pessoa offers a narrative translation of the Greek διαβάλλειν, which etymologically appears still present in the Portuguese *Diabo*.⁴ Pessoa’s irenic translation omits all negative connotations from the classical Greek and its usage in later epochs and takes it just as ‘throwing across’.

There is nothing bad in the story, neither in the figure of the devil nor in the conversation.⁵ The evil remains outside of the narration. Moreover, the devil conceives himself as a kind of post-modern humanist, before anybody knew what this might be. Yes, he says, “I am in fact the devil [...], and because I am really the devil, I do nothing evil.”⁶ Dangerous were only those who imitate him, “like all the

² Pessoa, *Hora*, 41.

³ *Ibid.*, 42.

⁴ See Annelies Felber, Art.: Teufel. I. Namen und Begriffe, in: RGG VIII, 42005, 179–181.

⁵ Hutter shows that the traditional Christian identification of the ‘evil’ with the personification of the Anti-God has contaminated the term ‘devil’/‘Teufel’ to an extent that it is hardly useful to be applied to any religious-spiritual entities outside of this traditions, since religious-spiritual counter-entities not always necessarily have to be understood as bad or evil, see Manfred Hutter, Art.: Teufel II. Religionswissenschaftlich, in: RGG VIII, 42005, 181–183. Pessoa’s understanding of the ‘devil’ actually converges with these observations from a Study of Religions point of view. With this narrative ‘design’ Pessoa’s ‘devil’ in fact is hard to catch with terms, which still carry the Christian semantic heritage along them. The devil in Pessoa’s novel is perhaps comparable to Exú in Afro-Brazilian contexts or Prometheus in Greek mythology and modern existentialist interpretations.

⁶ Pessoa, *ibid.* 45.

plagiarists”, who do not know how to act like the real devil does, he affirms and adds: I am only an ironist, and ironists were all inoffensive.⁷

He presents himself as the one who always contradicts, who questions all answers. “I am not, like Goethe has said, the spirit, who negates, but I am the spirit who contradicts.” Says the devil, and Mary replies: “Contradicting is bad...”, while the devil counters: “Contradicting acts, yes [...] Contradicting ideas, no.”⁸ It is the justification of the skeptic, the critical thinking that has no interest in destruction, but in deconstruction, in creativity, and in transcending the disappointments one can experience in usual every day life with its often too one-dimensional opinions expressed everywhere and all the times throughout history.⁹

With this setting in mind I would like to read Fernando Pessoa’s *A Hora do Diabo* as parable for Intercultural Theology. In doing so the story represents and articulates some aspects, which appear relevant for our disciplinary horizon and the experiences we all, students, colleagues and staff can make in this realm: critical thinking, gender equality, including all LGBTQ dimensions, religious and cultural pluralism, are and have been blamed, from some traditional, orthodox points of view uttered in the class or from outside as heretic and by that described as tempting in a demonic, devilish way, because they are said to be negatively in negating the so called traditional values and customs or even worth, the supposed true faith and belief.

All matters we deal with in Intercultural Theology possibly can be conceived as contradiction to whatever somebody traditionally used to think, to dream or to feel about it, be it the idea of God, the role of men, women, children or other personal entities in family and society, the coexistence of Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Christian, Jewish, Atheist, Agnostic or New Religious people and their religious ideals, preferences or restrictions. In an intercultural setting all religious actors and

⁷ See Pessoa, *Hora*, 46.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁹ This interpretation of the devil converges with the relation between God and Satan as it is reconstructed and explained by Feldmeier and Spieckermann along the story of Hiob: Satan appears as “persecuting attorney of God in religious affairs” and as the “narratively necessary counterpart of God”, see Reinhard Feldmeier/Hermann Spieckermann, *Der Gott der Lebendigen*, Tübingen 2011, 280. In an intercultural theological interpretation, the statement regarding the justification of critical thinking picks up and connects to what Kaiser argued for in his essay on “Ideologie und Glaube”, see Otto Kaiser, *Ideologie und Glaube. Eine Gefährdung christlichen Glaubens am alttestamentlichen Beispiel aufgezeigt*, Stuttgart 1984, particularly where he emphasizes on Christianity being a thinking religion (21s), instead of one, in which one had to just follow and agree to what is said to be true. Similarly Eberhard Jüngel, *Das Evangelium von der Rechtfertigung des Gottlosen als Zentrum des christlichen Glaubens. Eine theologische Studie in ökumenischer Absicht*, Tübingen 2011, what he describes as evil or sinful applies to what the devil in Pessoa’s means, when he speaks about the plagiarists, see 77–81.

their statements eventually can play the role of the devil and his self-conception in Pessoa's story. Mary, not coincidentally a woman, mother, and spouse, represents the however religious position that is questioned through the contradicting statements and their ideas. Both, Mary and the devil, in Pessoa's plot lead a conversation and interact in a personalized way, as I would like to bring Theology and Study of Religions into a dialogue and cooperation under the horizon of Intercultural Theology. This horizon of Intercultural Theology is not understood as a theological discipline of its own, but as a kind of cross-cutting interface, where a theological reasoning of any kind might be seen as depending on or connecting to a non-theological, empirical, cultural, historical and philological studies based Study of Religions perspective.

2 “Religious Studies” as challenge for religious statements and convictions

When almost 150 years ago, on the 19th February 1870, Friedrich Max Müller inaugurated “Religious Studies” as an autonomous academic discipline, he had an empirical one in mind, based on “Comparative Philology” as method and he named it quite positivistic “Science of Religion”. But in using a concept of religion adopted from Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher as paradigmatic basis and combining it with an explicit focus on truth as benchmark for sincere religiosity he in fact laid the fundamentals for Intercultural Theology.¹⁰ Müller himself appears to be aware of it, since he named one part of the new discipline “Comparative Theology” and the other “Theoretical Theology”.¹¹ With this new discipline and the

¹⁰ From a pure Study of Religions point of view the intercultural theological character of what Müller programmatically outlined under the name “Science of Religion” has to be conceived as a kind of hidden theology like Rudolph frequently described it, see e.g. Kurt Rudolph, *Die Problematik der Religionswissenschaft als akademisches Lehrfach*, in: idem, *Geschichte und Probleme der Religionswissenschaft*, Leiden-Köln-New York 1992, 3–36, 4. In order to take this seriously, it seems adequate to name the endeavor of Müller and his successors as “Intercultural Theology” in difference from Study of Religions. The English term Religious Studies inherently has a kind of blurriness between a religiously engaged ‘theological’ and a religiously detached “Study of Religions” approach, which actually applies to Müller and reappears in the designation of “Religious Studies Departments” in the US-Universities. I therefore use Religious Studies only as a category in the history of Study of Religions for the line of scholars in Study of Religions, which did not distinguish themselves methodologically from theological or religious approaches, but conceived themselves as doing “Religious Studies”. See Jacques Waardenburg, *Classical Approaches to the Study of Religion. Aims, Methods and Theories of Research. Introduction and Anthology*, New York-Berlin 1999, here particularly those scholars introduced in Part 1 and Part 3.

¹¹ Friedrich Max Müller, *Introduction to the Science of Religion. Four Lectures delivered at the Royal Institute in February and May 1870*, Oxford 1882, 16s.

way that he designed it, Müller competed consciously with traditional theologies of his times. Therefore, he argued:

“In these our days it is almost impossible to speak of religions at all, without giving offence either on the right or on the left. With some, religion seems too sacred a subject for scientific treatment; with others it stands on a level with alchemy and astrology, as mere issue of errors or hallucinations, far beneath the notice of the man of science.”¹²

Müller shows sympathies for both positions and concedes: “Religion is a sacred subject”, and adds in a quite colonialist attitude: “In this respect we might learn something from those whom we are so ready to teach.”¹³ Apart from the slightly overweening habit in the readiness to teach, the willingness to learn from others is the aspect that makes out of Müller’s approach an intercultural endeavour. This principal openness is combined with a kind of methodological tolerance, i.e. a respect towards any kind of religion as integral part of the necessary criticism. In explaining this Müller quotes from the Indian Reform Intellectual Keshub Chunder Sen, the founder of the “Brahmo Samaj of India” (1866), and the “Declaration of Principles” Keshub Chunder Sen had given his new organization. With the words of Chunder Sen Müller methodologically places so to speak, both, the devil and Mary, that is contradiction and defence of the good, above the entrance to the new discipline:

“No created being or object that has been or may hereafter be worshipped by any sect shall be ridiculed or contemned in the course of the divine service to be conducted her.

No book shall be acknowledged or received as the infallible Word of God: yet no book, which has been or may hereafter be acknowledged by any sect to be infallible shall be ridiculed or contemned.

No sect shall be vilified, ridiculed, or hated.”¹⁴

The religious tolerance expressed in these words certainly has not necessarily to be taken from Christian ideas, as Müller pointed out, but could as well have been deduced from Buddhist or Hindu attitudes. Basically every cultural-religious milieu

¹² Müller, Introduction, 4.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid., 5.

can serve as source for such a tolerant approach, which therefore could be named as a kind of interreligious principle. And even in a pure Study of Religions research design, where no religious interests should be pursued, this unbiased attitude could be fruitfully transformed into a methodological respect and appears to be fruitful.

What makes an intercultural theological approach out of it, is the theistic axiom behind both, Max Müllers concept of “Science of Religion”, and behind the declaration of Keshub Chunder Sen. Both conceive the world as creation and emphasize that no part of the creation should be confounded with God.¹⁵

This theistic approach is not only the reason why Müllers new discipline is better named as kind of Theology, as he himself did towards the end of his lecture,¹⁶ but moreover allows him to differentiate as strictly as possible between what should be conceived as divine and what has to be thought of as human. On the basis of this distinction Müller coins a double coded concept of ‘religion’. The first way of coding establishes ‘religion’ as empirical category; the other way of coding conceives ‘religion’ as an attribution of certain qualities:

“It will be easily perceived that religion means at least two very different things. When we speak of the Jewish, or the Christian, or the Hindu religion, we mean a body of doctrines handed down by tradition, or in canonical books, and containing all that constitutes the faith of Jew, Christian, or Hindu [...] But religion is also used in a different sense. As there is a faculty of speech, independent of all the historical forms of language, there is a faculty of faith in man, independent of all historical religions.”¹⁷

The double coded concept of religion allowed a twofold analyses and twofold statements based on them, in which empirical and normative perspectives merge. In addition to its heuristic function, the term Religion becomes a benchmark in order to measure how much truth a religious statement contents. This makes the whole new discipline to a kind of third theology. Müller spoke about a third kind of philosophy that should supplement on the one side the philosophy that focuses on the “conditions of sensuous or intuitional knowledge”, and on the other side the philosophy that studies “the conditions of rational or conceptual knowledge”.¹⁸ But

¹⁵ See Müller, Introduction, 4s.

¹⁶ See *ibid.*, 16s.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 14.

because of the theistic axiom of this discipline I would prefer the name “theology” and because of the identifiable religious-apologetic point of view in all cases of scholars from Müller onwards, I would distinguish this third theology between the first theology, which appears to be the theology, where they come from, and the second the theology, which they encounter and intend to study. The scholars of this third theology ask whether and how far certain teachings and the way of life created by them is subsumable under this concept of religion and in doing so they control and evaluate them how far they connect to this however defined “Faculty of Faith”¹⁹.

The devil in Pessoa’s story is in principle against contradicting acts, because he does not want to invent into the course of the world, but instead he wants to dream on it and transcend the limitations of it.²⁰ The scholars of the third theology, called “Science of Religion” according to the design of Müller should not be that reluctant regarding action, “where we see that superstition saps the roots of faith, and hypocrisy poisons the springs of morality.”²¹ They confine themselves to contradicting only because of their self-conception as academics, which restrain their engagement from practical issues: “But as students of the Science of Religion we move on a higher and mere serene atmosphere. We study error as the physiologist studies a disease, looking for its causes, tracing its influence, speculating on possible remedies of this *ἑρὸς νοῦσος*, but leaving the application of such remedies to a different class of men, to the surgeon and the practical physician.”²²

In this way Müller and those who follow in his path became and become a kind of theistic critics of religions. Similar to the Atheist critics of religions they apply a language of scientificity with a quite positivist sound and combine it with a claim to truth that is only justifiable on the basis of philosophical or theological axiomatic decisions. In the case of Friedrich Max Müller this is done with the

¹⁹ Müller thought that this “third philosophical discipline [...] has to examine into the existence and the conditions of that third faculty of man, co-coordinate with, yet independent of, sense and reason, the faculty of the Infinite, which is at the root of all religions. In German we can distinguish that third faculty by the name of *Vernunft*, as opposed to *Verstand*, reason, and *Sinn*, sense. In English I know no better name of it, than the faculty of faith, though it will have to be guarded by careful definition, in order to confine it to those objects only, which cannot be supplied either by the evidence of the senses, or by the evidence of reason, and the existence of which is nevertheless postulated by something without us which cannot resist. No simply historical fact can ever fall and the cognizance of faith, in our sense of the word.” Introduction, 7.

²⁰ “Because contradicting acts, for the evil they were, means to disturb the spin of the world, which is action. But contradicting ideas means to do something with what they abandon and what falls under discouragement and from there into dream and thus pertains to the world.” Pessoa, Hora, 54.

²¹ Müller, *ibid.*, 7.

²² *Ibid.*

name “Science of Religion” and the picture of a medical diagnosis. In this combination, the results claim the authority of natural sciences and force to take action. With this claim, the insights of the inaugurated third discipline compete with every other theological perception.²³ Understood in this way, the scholars of Religious Studies ultimately decide whether a religious statement can be accepted as containing truth.

Such a competing point of view could easily be denounced as a know-all attitude and then inevitably discredit Religious Studies and an Intercultural Theology pursued in the same manner. To prevent easy ways to get over challenges from contradicting cultural or religious positions, and to avoid the demonization of the whole task, I would like to limit the role of the one, who always contradicts to the disciplinary horizon of Study of Religions. Here the concept of religion has to be emptied from all normative understandings, and instead encoded in a preliminary manner that enables an empirical analysis without assessing ideologically, religiously, morally or ethically what is studied. This evaluation is the duty of Mary as representative of every good theologian in the novella of Pessoa. On the basis of such a division of labour the disciplinary horizon of Intercultural Theology can not become a third Theology, but can be a Third space, to adopt the concept of Homi K. Bhabha,²⁴ that allows to integrate contradicting perspectives into the usual process of gaining knowledge and reflecting on the insights in every kind and branch of Theology.

3 Intercultural Theology as “Third Space” for negotiation of the unbelievable

“It is because the dream, my lady, is an act that turns out to be an idea; and therefore preserves the force of the world and it refuses the matter, which is the being in the space. Isn’t it true that we are free in the dream?”²⁵

With these words the weird stranger explains in answering the question of Mary, how the dream can guarantee the persistency of the world, even though the world

²³ Müller, Introduction, 14s.

²⁴ See Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*. With a new preface by the author, London-New York 1994/2004.

²⁵ Pessoa, *Hora*, 44.

he said was action. In her reaction Mary agrees on the liberty in the dream, “but it is sad to awaken...” she admits.²⁶ As I read this small phrase, the experience of freedom in a dream and the confession of Mary that it is sad to awaken, are embracing “the many faces of Mary” how she is portrayed, and conceived not only through the eyes of Lebanese women as Rima Nasrallah has described it in a nice lecture here in Göttingen, but as well throughout the whole history of Christianity.²⁷

The dream liberates from the boundaries of reality, allows a freedom that transcends the expectations and limitations of accustomed ways of thoughts. In the way Pessoa conceives it, the dream becomes a condensed poetical space with eminent relevance for the existence. The dream derives its existential relevance not in an immediate manner like the diagnosis of a disease, but more from its power to transform moods and perspectives, to provoke thoughts and to broaden the horizon, particularly through its aftermath. That is why the strange interlocutor of Mary explains: “The good dreamer does not wake up. I never awake. God himself, I doubt that he does not sleep. Yet once he told me...”²⁸ This last remark scared her so much that she asked him who he finally was and why he dressed up. He only then introduced himself as the real devil – in contrast to Mary, the reader knew it before – and that he were not dressed up at all.

Teresa Rita Lopez who reconstructed and edited the story of Pessoa explains: “Pessoa is a mystic who wants to believe, but disbelieves because of the temptation and on principle: ‘To believe is to die; to think is to doubt’, he affirms.”²⁹ In this story, he “contradicts [...] the usual dichotomist concept of the universe as battlefield between the good and the bad, between God and the Devil.”³⁰

In fact, Pessoa has studied various philosophies of the east, particularly from Arabic and Persian authors such as Omar Khayyam, and was a close reader of Theodor Nöldeke’s *Sketches from Eastern History* as Fabrizio Boscaglia has shown.³¹ Boscaglia presents a small piece of paper, on which Pessoa summarizes in a short phrase, what he read in Nöldeke:

²⁶ Ibid., 45.

²⁷ Rima Nasrallah, *The Many Faces of Mary*, Lecture given in Göttingen, 25. January 2018.

²⁸ Pessoa, *Hora*, 45.

²⁹ Teresa Rita Lopes, Prefácio. *História e Alcance de A Hora do Diabo*, in: Pessoa, *ibid.*, 13–36, 27.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 15.

³¹ See Fabrizio Boscaglia, Fernando Pessoa. Leitor de Theodor Nöldeke. Notas sobre a recepção do elemento árabe-islâmico em Pessoa, in: *Pessoa Plural I* (2012), 163–186.

“O monotheismo Arabe é um polytheismo (paganismo) de um só Deus.”³²
 “The Arabic monotheism is a polytheism (paganism) of only one God.”

With this sentence Pessoa summarized three statements he found and underlined on page 92 in Nöldekes *Sketches*:

1. “The Koran in its unsophisticated anthropomorphism attributes human qualities to God throughout.
2. Some positively maintained the corporeity of God.
3. God produces the good as well as the evil deeds of man.”³³

Pessoa not only turns the negative assessment of Nöldeke into a positive meaning. Nöldeke, by the way, with blaming the Koran to apply an “unsophisticated anthropomorphism”, appears to be very much in line with Friedrich Max Müllers double coded concept of religion. Moreover, with his lines Pessoa creates a semantic space, in which he can express the contradictory freely without dissolving the tensions between the contradictions. This he had similarly, but more poetically done in the conversation between Mary and the devil about the dream, its liberty and its force, where Mary realized that the power of the dream derives from his end.

The way how Pessoa summarizes the readings of Nöldeke and the way how he brings the devil as creature of God, which illuminates the night and even surpasses God in the act of dreaming, in a conversation with Mary, both can serve as masterpieces of Intercultural Theology: Pessoa creates spaces, in which the pagan and devil keep on contradicting the saint and the right faith without any bad or evil outcome. Quite the contrary, both the statement and the contradiction are brought into a reciprocal relation in constantly changing their positions towards each other. Thus the pagan can sit with equal rights side by side with a Muslim, Christian, Vishnu or Shiva devoted Monotheist. They keep on contradicting each other and in doing so learn how to express the truth in

³² Boscaglia, Fernando Pessoa, 168.

³³ Quoted from the reproduction of the page in Boscaglia, *ibid.*, 169.

their language in a deeper manner, which takes the contradiction into account instead of just evade it.

This is, from my interpretation, the outcome of reading the novella *A Hora o Diabo* as parable for Intercultural Theology: The devil, in contrast to how he is commonly conceived, is neither evil, nor the radical opponent of god, but the one who integrates the questions into the reasoning and the one who protects from fanaticism through the invention of irony.

4 Conclusion: De-demonization of the contradiction

It is just a dream. If you wake up, the disturbing experience is that everything is as it has been or should be, as if nothing has happened. That is the situation, where the story of Fernando Pessoa started and ended. Mary came home, going upstairs to her husband, giving him a kiss, and speaking with him. “Was there something?” What was it? She asks herself being confronted with the usual. Something has changed. A space had been opened. A space in which things could be thought and said, which otherwise and elsewhere had no possibility to be spoken out or taken into account without negative attitudes or attributions. She met the devil, really? But the devil is not, what they say, he were.

If the devil is not seen as representation of the evil, the other problem remains: how to identify the plagiarists or in other words how to name and qualify the evil properly without demonizing the contradiction as such? The line perhaps runs somewhere between destruction (acts) and criticizing or deconstruction (thinking, deliberating, considering).

Pessoa gives a hint regarding his opinion. Mary admits towards the end of the talk:

“This conversation has been very interesting...” The devil asks back: “This conversation, my lady? But this conversation, even though it was perhaps the most important fact in your life, has given you nothing truthful. In the first place, it is well known that I do not exist. In the second place, as the theologians concur, which call me Devil, and the books of the intellectuals, which call me Reaction, non of my conversation could be of interest. I am only a poor myth, my lady, and, what comes first, an inoffensive myth. I am only consoled by the fact that the

universe – yes, this issue is documented by various forms of lights and lives – is a myth as well.”³⁴

Even if we do not want to follow according to the mythic character of the universe, the contradiction can be integrated without demonizing it. The evil must be searched elsewhere in the acts of human being and the intentions and interests combined with them. In this sense the Study of Religions understood as an autonomous, non-religious, empirical cultural studies discipline within the horizon of intercultural Theology can serve as a methodological tool that allows to integrate all possible perspectives, issues or questions without demonizing them simply because they are contradicting. As soon as the critical work of contextualizing and relativizing a given position, act, attitude, idea or item and the unmasking of interests connected to them has been done in a thoroughly and reciprocal manner, the task of the Study of Religions perspective is completed, quite comparable to the subordinated role of the devil in Pessoa’s story, and the work is handed over to theological and religious reflections of any kind.

³⁴ Pessoa, *Hora*, 59.

Intercultural Theology as “Third Space” Theoretical Reflections on Dialogues and Dynamics

Ulrike Schröder

1 Spaces

Since its inception, the M.A. study program “Intercultural Theology” has existed as a space where people from different cultural and religious backgrounds study, learn and live together. This rather radical approach of combining all three things together as a community of speakers, listeners, and learners, is often a huge challenge, for students and teachers alike. Looking back into the past years, I have never experienced this challenge more intensely than each year in the winter term, when a new group of students starts with their first semester. The classroom often equals the tower of Babel with many different languages as well as English accents, not to forget the manifold non-verbal forms of culturally-coded expression and communication, which simultaneously call for everyone’s attention. Each group of students constitutes a unique assembly of people from all over the world, trying to communicate and to understand each other across the boundaries of faith, culture and language. Each hour in the class is an immensely intense and joyful experience of teaching and learning which challenges me as a lecturer as much as the students in the attempts to build up together an academic communication and reflection about religion and faith. Every new beginning like this implies the potential of opening up a new space for communication. And, on top of this, there is this big

question in all of our minds: What is an intercultural theology and how should it look like as a practice, if we do it together – inside and outside of the classroom?

I must admit here that the idea of Intercultural Theology carries in itself a certain trait of incommensurability, which permanently resists any attempt to define it more closely. Given the experience, which we all make as being engaged in this special form of communication, this trait might be explained as a result of the incompleteness of human communication in general. The performative character of Intercultural Theology as a discursive speech act under such special conditions and circumstances as they exist in an international, super-diverse classroom renders it almost naturally impossible to find a suitable definition for this endeavour.

Yet, as one could say: “Speak of the devil and he will appear.” Academic folks cannot live without definitions for very long. The contribution of Fritz Heinrich points us towards the idea of Intercultural Theology as a “third space for the negotiation of the unbelievable”, where the statement and the contradiction are “brought into a reciprocal relation in constantly changing their positions towards each other.”¹ This has many interesting implications of which I can discuss here only a few in brief. Hence, my main concern as an historian of religion, specialized in the colonial history of religious communities in India and Southern Africa, is here to revisit some particular genealogical aspects of Intercultural Theology and the Study of Religions and to raise a few theoretical concerns which may help us to reframe our understanding of dialogues and dynamics when we practice thinking and learning together in the space which we create as our ‘third space’ in the classroom, outside of the boundaries of established religious communities and their prescribed educational settings of faith.

Intercultural Theology is a challenge, not to be reserved only for the future of the academy and religious communities, but as a task for the present time in which we live. Globalisation, migration and religious conflicts have significantly changed the face of contemporary religion – including Christianity – in the 21st century. Therefore, the task of doing theology is getting more and more complex. The cultural, geographic and denominational varieties of Christianity worldwide challenge the traditional Western face of academic Christian theology. The emerging varieties demand new and global forms of theological thinking and religious reasoning across the lines. Intercultural Theology seeks to embrace these dynamics with a constructive dialogue, opening up new spaces of collaborative thinking and aca-

¹ See Fritz Heinrich’s contribution in this volume.

demical reflection, combining the fruits of several disciplines, most prominently Theology and the Study of Religions.

Fortunately, the study of Christianity as a worldwide religion has received an increasing interest in the past years. This includes an increasing amount of contributions from other disciplines in the humanities (e.g. history, anthropology, literary studies etc.) which have – in the wake of the cultural and postcolonial turn – widened our analytical and methodological reflections by producing a vast array of knowledge and new perspectives on the subject.

Different terms and names have developed for this newly emerging and interdisciplinary field of study, i.e. terms such as ‘World Christianity/-ies’ (both, in singular and in plural), ‘Global Christianity’ and ‘Worldwide Christianity’, just to mention a few.² All terms are bolstered with different normative – often theological – ideas and notions about the very nature of religion, and Christianity in particular. Among these names now globally popular in academia, the term “Intercultural Theology” often remains the little-known stranger, because it has never been fully adopted beyond the German-speaking, central European context.

When the term ‘Intercultural Theology’ was first introduced in the 1970s by Hans Jochen Margull, Walter Hollenweger, and others, heated debates about the decolonisation of theological practice were at the table of the emerging Ecumenical Movement. The task of the hour was to acknowledge, “*all* theologies are contextually conditioned.”³ Thus, doing theology required the inclusion of those theologies which were usually neglected by the Western academia, being excluded either as emerging theologies of the ‘young churches’ (i.e. the former mission churches), or as the hyper-engaged, leftist and liberationist “Other” vis-à-vis standard academic theology, or even more as ‘exotic’/‘primitive’/‘sectarian’ Christian thinking.

At a later stage, during the 1990s, the term “Intercultural Theology” gained more significance when the traditional discipline of ‘Mission Studies’ in the German theological landscape was reframed and new emphasis was placed on intercultural and interreligious studies, as a response to the cultural and religious diversification in Europe. Some faculties of theology – though not all! – followed the move to either add “Intercultural Theology” to Mission Studies/Ecumenism or to rename “Mission Studies” (Missionswissenschaft) as “Intercultural Theology”.⁴

² For a further discussion of the terminology see Dale T. Irvin, *World Christianity. An Introduction*, in: *Journal of World Christianity* 1 (2008), 1–26.

³ Werner Ustorf, *The Cultural Origins of ‘Intercultural Theology’*, in: *Mission Studies* 25 (2008), 229–251, 229s (my emphasis).

⁴ For an overview of these developments, see Ulrich Dehn and Dietrich Werner, *Protestant Theological Education in Germany and the Role of Religious Studies, Missiology, and Ecumenics*, in: *Die-*

In retrospective view, Werner Ustorf saw these developments as acts of “theological repentance of the North,” moving from a one-sided mission paradigm to the acknowledgment of non-European Christianities. Yet, Ustorf also argued that the new term Intercultural Theology was at that time – and still remains today – a “culturally particular term with context-specific origins”, i.e. the specific contextual dynamics in Europe /Germany, out of which the term “Intercultural Theology” arose in the last decades.⁵ Others, for example the West-African Catholic scholar Francis Anekwe Oborji, feared that adding intercultural and interreligious studies under the rubric of Intercultural Theology to Missiology would pave the way to “alter the traditional subject focus of missiology,” ending up in the promotion of a “parochial or ethnic theology in the family of God.”⁶

The critique of Ustorf as well as Oborji are still relevant today for a close reflection on the dynamics and challenges of communicating about religion and doing theology in an international study programme, together with students and lecturers from diverse geographic, cultural and religious backgrounds. First of all, one has of course to admit, that Germany, the place where the programme is located, does not make it an easy task since the privilege of the place situates us in a certain structural power position where the consequences of global political, economic, and religious decision-making leave the least impact, as compared to many other places in the world. However, for studying and doing theology in a global and postcolonial horizon, both positions – Ustorf and Oborji – lead us on an analytical level to three important challenges for Intercultural Theology as a practice when reflecting on the global nature of Christian faith and of religious communities in general.

First, Intercultural Theology cannot transgress the implications and effects of context on its practice. It is bound not only to the people who do it, but to a certain context – including history, institutions, knowledge-power-relations etc. – in which it is done. To put it more simply: Intercultural Theology is different in different places. Therefore, a proper academic reflection of its historical and contextual situatedness is the first and basic precondition of any serious act of doing Intercultural Theology.

Secondly, a central problem of Intercultural Theology is the implicit notion of “culture”, which is at work in the term “intercultural”. This notion affirms heavily

trich Werner/David Esterline/Namsoon Kang et al., *Handbook of Theological Education in World Christianity: Theological Perspectives, Regional Surveys, Ecumenical Trends*, Oxford 2010, 577–583.

⁵ Ustorf, *Cultural Origins*, 231.

⁶ Francis A. Oborji, *Missiology in its Relation to Intercultural Theology and Religious Studies*, in: *Mission Studies* 25 (2008), 113–114, 114.

essentialist ideas of “culture”, which can be traced back to the intellectual tradition of German idealist philosophy in the 19th century. Johann Gottfried Herder defined ‘culture’ as a completely self-contained entity (of people), which has the centre of happiness in itself. Herder compared this idea to the image of a ball, since it also has the centre of gravity in itself. Thus, in theological language, every culture is immediate to God, without any mediation.⁷ Hence, Oborji’s fear that the project of Intercultural Theology could possibly end up in reviving ideas of “ethnic” or “parochial” theologies which divide the Christian faith along the fault lines of cultures, as ‘balls’ easily to identify and to describe, has to be taken very seriously. Hence, any attempt to reflect and understand on the ‘inter’, i.e. the in-between, as a communicative and dialogical space in which a truly intercultural theology takes place, must lay out with greatest transparency, what its preeminent definition of “culture” actually is in order to avoid feeding into overly simplistic models of culture and identity.

Thirdly, what is the role and contribution of Study of Religions as a discipline to the practice of Intercultural Theology? In our academic institutions in Europe, the relationship between Theology and Study of Religions has become quite tense during the last decades, due to the still ongoing emancipation process of Study of Religions as a separate discipline from the faculties of theology. This development will carry away parts of the scholarly community from further academic communication with theology departments. Yet, the project of Intercultural Theology depends on a strong partnership with Religious Studies, since all inquiries on the historical and lived realities of religions heavily depend on methodological and theoretical frameworks, which can only be provided by secular disciplines like the Study of Religions, Cultural Studies and other neighbouring fields in the humanities. The critical reflection on the meaning of the word “intercultural” and its subsequent practice will need further space in our discussions as an academic learning community if we do not want to end up again in either parochial or universalist claims. In addition to this, a second task, not less important, is necessary to be considered: the dialogical exploration of the meaning of “religion” vis-à-vis “theology”.

⁷ Johann G. Herder, *Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte zur Bildung der Menschheit* (1774), as cited in Wolfgang Welsch, *Transkulturalität. Die veränderte Verfassung heutiger Kulturen*, in Freimut Duve et al., *Sichtweisen. Die Einheit in der Vielheit*, Weimar 1994, 85–122, 88–90.94.

2 Dialogues

As Fritz Heinrich explains in his contribution, the emergence of Religious Studies in the nineteenth century created a “double coded concept of ‘religion’”⁸ which proved to be highly influential in the academic world as well as among religious communities worldwide; the latter creatively translated and adopted the term through making their own interpretive endeavours amidst the encounter with European culture and colonial politics.⁹ As much as the creation of a ‘third theology’ by Friedrich Max Müller was meant to allow the integration of contradicting perspectives into the process of academic knowledge production, yet it left a deep impact on both sides of the encounter which we are still struggling to understand properly.

Any process of academic and theological knowledge production requires a critical and self-reflexive assessment of the “location of culture”, as Homi Bhabha called his seminal book about the production of “culture(s)” in colonial literature.¹⁰ Bhabha contends how colonial literature, as a matter of fact, mirrors processes of cultural displacement in the wake of encounters between Europeans, Asians and Africans in the nineteenth century. These encounters as well as their literary reflections in novels, books, and missionary reports initiated and enforced a distinct search for cultural authenticity, which became a characteristic feature of the colonial past and is still dominating the postcolonial present. Yet, we have to keep in mind that cultural authenticity remains an unfulfilled quest for either side of an ‘intercultural’ encounter, simply because the longing for a very own, unique, and identifiable ‘culture’ remains an unfulfilled desire. Any ‘culture’ – constructed vis-à-vis, or against, the human ‘other,’ – carries in itself already the traces of this encounter, and, therefore, never is ‘original’ or unmediated.¹¹

In order to illustrate the dynamics of “locating” cultures, Bhabha tells us the story of the Indian convert and catechist Anund Messeh and his encounter of a

⁸ See the chapter by Fritz Heinrich in this volume.

⁹ The rather complex emergence of a globally meaningful concept of ‘religion’ is discussed in great length in Michael Bergunder, *Umkämpfte Historisierung. Die Zwillingsgeburt von „Religion“ und „Esoterik“ in der zweiten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts und das Programm einer globalen Religionsgeschichte*, in: Klaus Hock, *Wissen um Religion. Erkenntnis – Interesse. Epistemologie und Episteme in Religionswissenschaft und Interkultureller Theologie*, Leipzig 2020, 47–131.

¹⁰ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, London 1994.

¹¹ The encounter between German Lutheran and Ethiopian Orthodox Christians is just another striking example of how questions of authenticity and authority play a role in intercultural encounters, see the chapter of Stanislau Paulau in this volume.

group of Indians under a tree outside of Delhi in 1817 to illustrate this argument.¹² Messeh, who is fully committed to his missionary task to ‘propagate the gospel’ according to his English missionary masters, hurries over to a grove (‘tope’) where he expects to meet a group of Indians who are reported by the locals to have just recently founded their own religious “sect”:

“During his stay there, a report was in circulation that a number of strangers from several villages to the west of Delhi had assembled together, nobody knew why, in a Tope near the imperial city; and were busily employed in friendly conversation, and in reading some books in their possession, which had induced them to renounce their Caste, to bind themselves to love and to associate with one another and intermarry only among their own sect, and to lead a strict and holy life. This account filled Anund with great anxiety to ascertain who and what they were; and he instantly set off for the Tope...”¹³

Upon his arrival he discovers that the group of fellow Indians apparently reads a ‘book’ containing a local Hindi translation of the Christian gospels from which they have even produced hand-written copies.¹⁴ As it seems, these people are convinced that the ‘book’, which they discovered, was directly given to them by Jesus as a newly revealed ‘god’ in a unique act of revelation in Hurdwar (Haridwar). Afterwards, they organised themselves as an independent religious community on their own terms.

The community in the grove receives Messeh in a friendly manner and responds politely to his arguments that the discovery of the ‘book’ is identical with their discovery of Christianity as the true religion, a step which now only needs to be confirmed by baptism. Yet, they reject his invitation, since converting to the religion of the Europeans is no option for them:

¹² The original report is published as an excerpt in a letter of the CMS missionary Henry Fisher, *The Visit of Anund Messeh to Delhi; and His Discovery of an Extraordinary Body of Native Christians*, in the widely circulated journal *Missionary Register*, January 1818, 17–19.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹⁴ The translation can be traced back to the Baptist missionary John Chamberlain, who produced a ‘Hindi’ translation of the Christian gospels in 1813, using the North Indian local language of Braj Bhāshā. It is worth mentioning here that Henry Fisher mistakenly cites this translation as an Urdu (“Hindustani”) translation; a hint how much information and knowledge was lost – or even altered – in intercultural processes of encounter and translation. See John McClintock, *Cyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature*, New York 1889, 587ss.

“These books”, said Anund, “teach the religion of the European Sahibs. It is THEIR [sic!] book; and they printed it in our language, for our use.” “Ah! no,” replied the stranger, “that cannot be, for they eat flesh.” – “Jesus Christ,” said Anund, “teaches, that it does not signify what a man eats or drinks. Eating is nothing before God. (...) “That is true; but how can it be the European Book when we believe that it is God’s gift to us? He sent it to us at Hurdwar.” “God gave it long ago to the Sahibs, and THEY sent it to us.”¹⁵

The very moment of encounter is, according to Homi Bhabha, an event where the “ambivalence between origin and displacement, discipline and desire, mimesis and repetition” becomes visible.¹⁶ Through an act of cultural – and religious – ‘displacement’, “the English book” [i.e. the bible] is adopted by the Indians in a creative process of translation, repetition and productive reading, re-reading, or, – in missionary terms – ‘misreading’; all of this outside of the well-established hermeneutical frameworks of local Brahmin Hinduism and of European Christianity.¹⁷ Yet, in my view the matter of origin and displacement is even more complex than seeing the ‘book’ as a symbolic representation which migrated from one cultural sphere to another. It is important here to recognise that the Indian group in the grove reads the bible in Braj Bhāshā, an important literary and religious language before the standardization of Hindi later in the 19th century. This language played an important role in North Indian *bhakti*, a devotional type of Hindu religious practice whose history on the Indian subcontinent is full of new scriptures and forms of religious practice, providing alternative spaces for highly individual as well as new communal lay forms of worship, often closely related to vegetarianism. The group of Indians in the grove resists the urge to become Christians, the tension between the two contradicting readings of the ‘book’ as an evidence of the truth of revelation is not resolved. Messer’s arguments do not ultimately convince the group to follow him right to the next mission station, receive baptism and accept the sacrament. Rather, they insist on defending their own space of faith, some-

¹⁵ Missionary Register, 18.

¹⁶ Bhabha, Location, 110.

¹⁷ These observations can be complemented by similar insights from other parts of India, see Ulrike Schröder, Globalizing Religion, Localizing Christian Mission: Robert Caldwell and Colonial Discourse in Nineteenth Century South India, in: Pius Malekandathil/Joy Pachuau/Tanika Sarkar, Christianity in History. Issues of Culture, Power and Knowledge, Delhi 2016, 232–255.

where between Hindus, Christians and Muslims in India.¹⁸ Printed in the *Missionary Register*, a widely read journal of the Protestant missionary movement in the nineteenth century, the story remains an unwittingly ambivalent example of encounter where the contradictory is not solved. It reveals that questions of authority and authenticity are contested matters of negotiation when diverse cultural and religious spheres intermingle: After all, to whom belonged Christianity – to Messerh and his missionary masters or to the group in the grove? And, was Christianity really the matter here?

Coming back to our discussion about the role of the Study of Religions for doing Intercultural Theology, it has to be kept in mind that the beginnings of the Study of Religions as a discipline go back precisely to those years of the most intense colonial /imperialist rule at the end of the 19th century. It was during this time that Christianity, Hinduism and Islam emerged as increasingly separated religious and cultural spheres in the colonies in Africa and Asia. And here again, Max Müller and Keshub Chandra Sen come into play.¹⁹ The historical frame of Müller’s intercultural endeavour of other religions is, again, the high tide of European colonialism at the end of the 19th century. The task of the hour was to “integrate” the people in the conquered territories into the European civilizational project, including a common framework for what would be called a ‘religion’. His ‘discovery’ of the principle of religious toleration in India/Asia (and – certainly – not in Europe!) seems at first glance a unique appreciation of Asian religions and their rich history and tradition. However, at a second glance, Müller’s reference to Keshub Chandra Sen, the famous founder of the Brahma Samaj, precisely reveals the complex entanglement and mutual influence between Hindu /Indian philosophy and European scholarship on religion and philosophy in the 19th century – neither of them functioned as a separate “cultural space” in terms of their intellectual progress.²⁰

¹⁸ In the report, the rather implicit reference to Islamic concepts of revelation should also be noted. In my view, evidence for this can be seen in the remark that God had revealed the book “through an angel from heaven” to the Indian group, *Missionary Register*, *ibid.*

¹⁹ See Heinrich’s discussion of these two figures in his contribution.

²⁰ For a comprehensive discussion, see Wilhelm Halbfass, *India and Europe. An Essay in Understanding*, Albany/NY 1988, and Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion. Postcolonial Theory, India and “the Mystic East”*, London 1999.

3 Dynamics

A close reading of Pessoa's text as making, re-making and unmaking the contradictory²¹ can show us that the complete dissolving of contradictory tensions, in order to achieve a common, uniform and fixed understanding of a subject-matter, should not be the primary goal of academic learning, especially when we discuss matters of faith and religion in Intercultural Theology as a group of persons coming from diverse ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds. This reminds us again, that 'culture' is a discursive signifier which is indeed in itself a contradiction, even though it produces 'location'. It exists only in the unmeasurable plurality of performative communication about human life, any attempt to define the reality might – in Pessoa's words – potentially destroy the dream and destroy the space of alternative reasoning.

Again, I want to draw our reflections away from Pessoa for a moment, looking deeper into theory. In thinking about 'culture', we can get helpful insights from another author of postcolonial theory, Stuart Hall. As a scholar of Caribbean descent who lived in Great Britain, he was mainly interested in understanding processes of cultural change and identity assertion, which typically come along with migration, transnationalism and diaspora. In all of these dynamics, certain 'representations' of a single, unique culture are created. This raises the question how scholars should deal with such essentialist notions of culture /identity in methodological and analytical perspective, if they do not want to fall into the trap of becoming an advocator of these claims (e.g. by establishing "parochial" culture-specific theologies!).

Hall distinguishes between two different ways of thinking about culture and cultural identity:

"The first position defines 'cultural identity' in terms of one, shared culture, a sort of collective 'one true self', hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed 'selves', which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common. Within the terms of this definition, our cultural identities reflect the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes, which provide us, as 'one people', with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning, beneath the shifting divisions and vicissitudes of our actual history.

²¹ Fernando Pessoa, *A Hora do Diabo*, ed. Teresa Rita Lopes, Lisboa 32004.

This ‘oneness’, underlying all the other, more superficial differences, is the truth, the essence, of ‘Caribbeanness’, of the black experience.”²²

Diaspora communities, but also any other group of people defined by a common culture and representing this as their ‘identity’, frequently seek to “discover, excavate, bring to light and express” this ‘essence’ of culture, for example through arts and religion.²³

But Hall contrasts this first position with a second, different understanding of cultural identity which admits that apart from the many points of similarity between people belonging to one culture, there are also deep and significant differences among people which contradict the idea of a coherent culture. The sameness as well as the differences do not only constitute ‘what people are’, but rather ‘what people have become’ though the intervention of (colonial) history, especially in terms of the manifold ruptures and discontinuities, which constitute ‘identity’:

“We cannot speak for very long, with any exactness, about ‘one experience, one identity’, without acknowledging its other side – the ruptures and discontinuities which constitute, precisely, the Caribbean’s ‘uniqueness’. Cultural identity, in this second sense, is a matter of ‘becoming’ as well as of ‘being’. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous ‘play’ of history, culture and power. Far from being grounded in a mere ‘recovery’ of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which, when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past.”²⁴

This position transcends any essentialist notions of culture and history. Instead, it views culture and history as products of dynamic change, a process that is unfinished,

²² Stuart Hall, *Cultural Identity and Diaspora*, in: Jonathan Rutherford, *Identity, Community, Culture, Difference*, London 1990, 222–237, 223.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Hall, *Cultural Identity*, 225.

contingent and open into the future. It should be noted that Hall does not speak in a relativist manner against the all-to human need to 'have' (a) culture. Yet the more important point here is, that his intervention creates space for another perspective, which integrates the analytical questioning into the reasoning about culture; a perspective, which exists side by side with what we name (or 'know') as 'culture'. Likewise, it prevents us from misperceiving cultural ideas (dreams) as reality.

4 Conclusion

As our three short, and rather performative, explorations from different perspectives²⁵ have shown, Intercultural Theology can best thrive if much room is given to the contradictory simultaneity of sameness and difference and the spaces in-between both, between the reality and what we think /dream of it, leaving critical space for the ambiguous, the not-thinkable vis-à-vis the thinking /knowing something 'for sure' about religions and cultures. The approach here is not to create a new functional discipline in the canon of theological disciplines ('a third theology'), but rather to reflect upon our experience as a temporary and fragile 'third' space outside of the established boundaries of our academic disciplines, faith and theological traditions. As such a third space, we should engage in ICT as a creative endeavour for engaging with difference, i.e. the 'locations' (in the words of Bhabha), and for exploring the powerful dynamics of being located and producing locations, i.e. cultural as well as religious locations, and the spaces in-between (the 'inter'). Such an intellectual task, I conclude, must necessarily be dialogical in nature.

²⁵ The papers of Stanislau Paulau, Fritz Heinrich and myself were originally presented at the symposium in a trialogical presentation, where we conjoined the literary, theoretical and historical perspectives of our papers in one speech performance.

Intercultural Theology as “Third Space” Dialogues and Dynamics in the History of Global Christianity

Stanislau Paulau

1 Introduction: The location of Intercultural Theology

Let me begin my presentation by recalling another keynote lecture that was delivered here at Georgia Augusta. Three years ago, on the 1st of November 2016, a prominent guest from Harvard University was invited to the University of Göttingen – Homi Bhabha, the renowned cultural theorist, to whom the concept of the “Third Space” is attributed.¹ His speech was entitled “On the Internal Emigrant. Contemporary Reflections on the Humanities” and was devoted to the problem of internalization of the university curriculum.²

In a highly nuanced talk, Homi Bhabha envisioned a project of “global humanities”. What I found especially striking while listening to this lecture in the

¹ Cf. Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, London 1994.

² See a report about the lecture appeared in the local newspaper: Alisa Altmann, *Globalisierung und Geisteswissenschaften. Postkolonialist Bhabha bei Vortrag in Göttingen*, in: *Göttinger Tageblatt*, 5.11.2016, www.goettinger-tageblatt.de/Campus/Goettingen/Tagung-zu-internationalisierter-Lehre (25.06.2020).

overcrowded university assembly hall was the fact that there was seemingly no place for theology in his “contemporary reflections on the humanities”.

What does this absence of theology mean? One could read it as a tribute to classical – and some would say obsolete – models of secularism and ignore it. One could, however, also interpret the absence of theology as a subtle critique. In this case, it would imply that theology is not part of the conversation due to the mere fact that it has nothing to contribute to the current discourses of global humanities. In fact, institutions of higher theological education – be they Christian or otherwise – are often being perceived as traditionalist and rather reserved towards innovation. Evidently, in most of the cases this outward perspective does not correspond to the self-perception of the respective theologians. Nevertheless, this critique brings us to a legitimate and challenging question about the contribution of theology as such – and especially of the emerging field of Intercultural Theology – to this global conversation.

The tenth anniversary of the M.A. programme “Intercultural Theology” at the University of Göttingen seems to be a suitable forum for a critical reflection about the role and purpose of this discipline. Or, coming back to Homi Bhabha and his highly influential book *The Location of Culture*, we might use a rather spatial metaphor, and ask ourselves: What is the location of Intercultural Theology? In the following, I would like to approach this question from the perspective of the global history of Christianity. Thereby I would like to reflect upon various dimensions of the notions of “dialogue” and “dynamics” in relation to Intercultural Theology.

2 Dialogues: Towards a non-missionary genealogy of Intercultural Theology

To begin with, I would like to invite you to participate in a small thought experiment. Imagine the following setting: A town in Germany of a rather modest size mostly known for its university. Thanks to its excellent faculty of theology, the university gradually becomes more and more famous and attracts students and visitors from near and far. Close to the university building one can see a small group of people chatting – two German professors, a German student and a visitor from Africa. This kind of situation might seem familiar to most of you. Maybe some of you can even recognize themselves in one of these roles.

However, the small university town in this story is neither Göttingen nor Hermannsburg, but Wittenberg. The events took place not several days, but 485 years ago, in the year 1534, and the names of the German professors were Martin

Luther (1483–1546) and Philipp Melanchthon (1497–1560). The visitor from Africa was an Ethiopian Orthodox monk and deacon, Abba Mika’el, who came to converse with the Wittenberg reformers.³

Since the visitor could speak neither Latin nor Greek, knew, however, some Italian, Melanchthon invited one of his students fluent in Italian to assist with translation. In this way, Luther and the Ethiopian monk were able to have a discussion. Interestingly enough, the topic of their first conversation that later continued at Melanchthon’s home at the dinner table was genuinely theological – the Trinity. Melanchthon found this encounter with Abba Mika’el to be so extraordinary that he decided not to wait until the next morning in order to write a letter to his friend Benedict Pauli (1490–1552), telling this news.⁴ And indeed, from a retrospective point of view, this episode proves itself to be nothing less than the first documented dialogue between the Reformation and Orthodox Christianity,⁵ as well as, furthermore, the first transcontinental ecumenical encounter in the history of Protestantism.

The Ethiopian monk stayed in Wittenberg for five weeks, until 4 July 1534, regularly meeting with the Wittenberg reformers for theological conversations.⁶ And it seems that he was eager to also continue the dialogue with other adherents of the Reformation around Europe. Before the departure of the Ethiopian monk, the Wittenberg reformers issued him a formal letter of recommendation that can be regarded as the key document of this encounter. With this letter, written by Melanchthon and signed by Luther, Abba Mika’el could be welcomed in other Protestant centres.⁷ From one of Melanchthon’s letters one can learn that the Afri-

³ For a detailed analysis of this encounter, see Stanislaw Paulau, *Das andere Christentum. Zur transkonfessionellen Verflechtungsgeschichte von äthiopischer Orthodoxie und europäischem Protestantismus*, Göttingen 2020; Idem, *An Ethiopian Orthodox Monk in the Cradle of the Reformation. Forgotten Theological Dialogue between Abba Mika’el and Martin Luther (1534)* [forthcoming].

⁴ Letter of Philipp Melanchthon to Benedikt Pauli, 31.5.1534, in: Heinz Scheible (ed.), *Melanchthons Briefwechsel. Kritische und kommentierte Gesamtausgabe*, vol. T 6, Texte 1395–1683 (1534–1535), Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt 2005, 99s. Cf. also Carolus Gottlieb Bretschneider (ed.), *Philippi Melanchthonis Opera Quae Supersunt Omnia*, vol. 2, Halis Saxonum 1835, 730s.

⁵ In this paper, the generic term “Orthodox Christianity” comprises both Eastern Orthodox (often called Byzantine) and Oriental Orthodox (often called Miaphysite) Churches. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church belongs to the latter group.

⁶ The two reformers were on site for almost the entire stay of Abba Mika’el. The only exception were the few days the reformers spent in Dessau from 3 to 8 June 1534. Cf. D. Martin Luthers Werke. *Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 59, *Nachträge zu Band 1–57 und zu den Abteilungen „Deutsche Bibel“ und „Tischreden“*, Weimar 1983, 351, and Heinz Scheible (ed.), *Melanchthons Briefwechsel. Kritische und kommentierte Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 10, *Orte A–Z und Itinerar*, Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt 1998, 426s.

⁷ The critical edition of the letter of recommendation can be found in: Scheible, *Melanchthons Briefwechsel*, 123s.

can guest was to visit another prominent reformer, Martin Bucer (1491–1551), in Strasbourg.⁸

According to what we can, reconstruct based upon the available sources, the main topics of the dialogue between Abba Mika’el, Martin Luther and Philipp Melanchthon were the Trinity, the Eucharist and Ecclesiology. In a way, it was nothing else than an intensive seminar in Intercultural Theology. Both sides had to deal with cultural and theological otherness and, evidently, mutual misconceptions also played an important role in this process. Nevertheless, without being able to go into detail about the particularities of this multi-layered dialogue at this point, I would like to highlight its most significant outcome: Abba Mika’el and the Wittenberg reformers came to the conclusion that despite cultural and ritual differences the adherents of the Wittenberg reformation and the faithful of the Eastern Church belong to the same *one* Church of Christ. Interestingly enough, the transmitted formula that expresses this attitude belongs to Abba Mika’el. In the letter of recommendation Luther quotes the Ethiopian monk in the following way:

*Nam etsi orientalis ecclesia habet aliquas dissimiles ceremonias, ipse quoque iudicat, quod dissimilitudo earum non tollat unitatem ecclesiae nec pugnet cum fide, quia Christi regnum est spiritualis iustitia cordis, timor dei et per Christum fiducia. Hanc sententiam et nos probamus.*⁹

Even though the Eastern Church observes some divergent ceremonies, he [= Abba Mika’el] also judges that this difference does not abolish the unity of the Church nor conflict with faith, since the Kingdom of Christ is spiritual righteousness of heart, fear of God, and trust through Christ. We, too, approve of this opinion.¹⁰

Ultimately, this particular dialogue has a number of implications for the field of Intercultural Theology. First of all, it challenges the narrative of the globalization of Christianity in the early modern period as a process performed exclusively by the Europeans discovering the wider world. Furthermore, it adds to our understanding of how new and connected forms of world building between Europe and Africa, as well as between Protestantism and Orthodoxy, were negotiated.

⁸ Cf. letter of Philipp Melanchthon to Martin Bucer, 4.7.1534, Scheible, Melanchthons Briefwechsel, 122.

⁹ Testimonium datum cuidam Aethiopi a d[omino] Mart[ino] Luth[ero]. Φ[ιλιππος] M[elanchthon] f[ecit], Scheible, Melanchthons Briefwechsel, 123s.

¹⁰ Translation SP.

Finally, this dialogue – and dialogues like it – allow us to envision a genealogy of Intercultural Theology that is rooted not in the history of missionary expansion of the Christian West, but rather in exchanges and mutual influences of culturally and concessionally heterogeneous set of actors.

3 Dynamics: Interculturality and (in)visibility of the other

Intercultural Theology is a very sensitive field. Not least because in one way or another it always deals with the representation of the Other. Such representations, as has been shown already by Edward Said, are intermingled with the question of power and tend to develop their own dynamics in the course of time. Consequently, intercultural negotiation does not only take place in the course of the dialogue itself, but also in the consequent process of its representation.

In order to make this idea more tangible, I would like to come back to the dialogue between Abba Mika’el and Luther and analyse the dynamics of its representation. The puzzling question in this regard is: Why, despite its significance, has this event been virtually forgotten?

At an early stage, among the first generation of Protestants, this encounter seems to have played a considerable role. Both Luther and Melancthon have themselves repeatedly spoken about this dialogue with the Ethiopian monk, highlighting the perceived accord in the main issues of faith. References to that can be found in letters, sermons and table talks.¹¹

Already soon after Luther’s death, his followers started to make handwritten copies of his legacy. And Luther’s recommendation letter for Abba Mika’el enjoyed special popularity, as the comparatively high amount of the extinct manuscripts containing it suggests. So far, I was able to identify nine handwritten copies of the letter dating back to the 16th century.¹²

¹¹ For a detailed overview of these references, see Paulau, *Das andere Christentum*.

¹² Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, Ms. Coll. Dupuy 796, 702s (Heading: *Epistola commendatitia data cuidam Aetiopi. Phil. Melanthon pro Mart. Luthero scripsit*); Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève, Paris, Ms. 1458, fol. 224^v (Heading: *Epistola commendatitia data cuidam Aetiopi. Φ. M. pro M. L. scripsit*); Forschungsbibliothek Gotha der Universität Erfurt, Ms. Chart. B 1483, fol. 84^{r-v} (Heading: *Epistola commendatitia Martini Lutheri data cuidam Aetiopi, autore Ph. Mel.*); Herzog August Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel, Cod. Guelf. 64.4 Extrav., fol. 5^v (Heading: *Epistola commendatitia Martini Lutheri data cuidam Aetiopi, autore Philip. Melanch.*); Herzog August Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel, Cod. Guelf. 107 Helmst., fol. 10^v (Heading: *Epistola commendatitia M. Lutheri data cuidam Aetiopi*); Herzog August Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel, Cod. Guelf. 214 Gud. Lat. 4°, fol. 16^{r-v} (Heading: *Epistola commendatitia D. M. L. data cuidam Aetiopi*); Stadtbibliothek Trier, Ms. 1880/1444, fol. 135^{r-v} (Heading: *Testimonium datum cuidam Aethiopi a. d. martino Luther*); Universitätsbibliothek Basel, Ms. O III 4, fol. 124^r-125^r (Heading: *Epistola commendatitia M. Luth. data cuidam*

Especially interesting in this regard is a manuscript now kept in the University Library Basel. The title of the letter of recommendation “*Epistola commendatitia M. Luth. data cuidam Æpiscopo*” indicates that Luther had given it to an “*Æpiscopus*”, a bishop.¹³ The representation of the Ethiopian guest as a bishop, and not just a deacon, was supposed to give to the declared unity in faith an even higher importance. In the context of the Ethiopian ecclesiastical structure, this anyway remarkable transformation of the status of Abba Mika’el also had an additional dimension. Since, until the 20th century, the Ethiopian Church has merely had one single bishop at any given time, the claim that Luther met an Ethiopian bishop would imply that he met the head of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.

As long as the Lutherans found themselves in a formative stage, the Ethiopian Other played a stabilizing role. In the context of theological polarization within Latin Christianity, the idea of common belonging to the very same church with Orthodox Christians in distant parts of the world made the article creed regarding the universality of the church plausible. However, in the consequent centuries, the need to commemorate these transcontinental linkages was not perceived anymore. Even more than that, at a later point, the idea of Luther having amicable theological conversations with an African theologian did not fit into the emerging nationalistic Luther imaginations. The dynamics of forgetting the Ethiopian monk can be clearly seen in the production of printed editions of this recommendation letter.

The German translation of the letter of recommendation was published for the first time in 1784. Gottfried Schütze (1719–1784), the theologian and director of the Hamburg City Library, had found the text in the holdings of his library and published it in both the Latin original and a German translation.¹⁴ However, this publication was accompanied by a new attribution of meaning. Insofar as the letter of recommendation, among other things, referred to *orientalis ecclesiae*, the Eastern Church and its doctrine, Schütze was led to the mistaken conclusion that this was to be equated with the Greek Church, which was probably the most familiar to him. He introduced the text as follows: “A recommendation letter for a foreigner, who in regard to his confession of faith belonged to the Greek Church, thereby however thought in a good and Protestant way.”¹⁵ The assertion that Abba Mi-

Episcopo); Universitätsbibliothek Leipzig, Ms. 2630, fol. 60^r–61^r (Heading: *Commendatio data Aethiopi Anno 1535*).

¹³ Universitätsbibliothek Basel, Ms. O III 4, fol. 124^v–125^r.

¹⁴ Gottfried Schütze, *D. Martin Luthers bisher ungedruckte Briefe*, vol. 2, Leipzig 1781, 319s; Idem, *D. Martin Luthers bisher grossentheils ungedruckte Briefe. Nach der Sammlung des Hrn. D. Gottf. Schütze, aus dem Latein übersetzt*, vol. 2, Leipzig 1784, 54.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

ka’el, who as a clergyman of the Ethiopian church obviously stood in the miaphysite theological tradition, would have followed the creed of the Greek (i.e. a Chalcedonian) Church, indicates an undifferentiated view of the Christian East.

In the subsequent editions of the letter, this interpretation was not only left uncorrected, but was even solidified. Thus, around 50 years later Wilhelm Martin de Wette (1780–1849), professor of theology at the University of Basel, referred to Abba Mika’el in his edition already as to a “Greek clergyman”.¹⁶ The Ethiopian monk disappeared.

Intercultural negotiations are often ambiguous. And as these dynamics clearly indicate, intercultural negotiations do not only take place in the course of the dialogue itself, but also in the consequent process of its representation. And here we come near to one of the central questions of intercultural discourse: How the visibility or invisibility of the Other is being produced. And, in my view, it is one of the tasks of Intercultural Theology, to investigate these mechanisms and their interconnectedness with one’s own identity building.

4 Conclusion

The first groundbreaking works of postcolonial theory were deeply shaped by dichotomies. However, in the last decades, the binary structure has been replaced by more differentiated epistemologies. These newer approaches highlight the complexity of negotiation processes and point out the realms of the “in-between”, the “Third Space”. Intercultural Theology in its own way enriches these epistemologies by investigating how the “in-betweenness” is being produced in theological and religious fields through negotiation and ambiguity. In this paper, I have attempted to demonstrate the dynamics of this process in the history of Global Christianity using as an example the dialogue between the Wittenberg reformers and Abba Mika’el.

Though the story of cross-cultural intellectual exchange between Abba Mika’el and Martin Luther and Philipp Melancthon might seem exceptional, it was not. In the 16th century, several highly educated Ethiopians visited the urban centres of Europe and introduced their hosts to a previously unknown African intellectual

¹⁶ He entitled the text as “Offenes Empfehlungsschreiben. L.[uther] empfiehlt einen griechischen Geistlichen als rechtgläubig”. Wilhelm Martin Leberecht de Wette, Dr. Martin Luthers Briefe, Sendschreiben und Bedenken, vollständig aus den verschiedenen Ausgaben seiner Werke und Briefe, aus andern Büchern und noch unbenutzten Handschriften gesammelt, kritisch und historisch bearbeitet, Berlin 1827, 550.

tradition. These diasporic Ethiopian scholars took up a wide range of projects. Some of them focused on the production of printed books: for example, in 1548, an Ethiopian resident of Rome, Täsfa Şəyon (ca. 1508–1550) organized the publication of the first printed version of the New Testament in the Gə‘əz (Ethiopic) language. Other Ethiopian visitors acted as information brokers for the growing number of European scholars interested in Eastern Christianity. In 1513, a monk named Tomas Wäldä Samu’el assisted German priest Johannes Potken (1470–1524) with the Gə‘əz text of a polyglot Psalter. Some Ethiopian visitors served as advisors to prominent figures in the Catholic Church: Ethiopian priest known as Giovanni Battista Abissino counselled Pope Pio IV (1499–1565) and became bishop in Cyprus; the already mentioned Täsfa Şəyon met Ignatius of Loyola (1491–1556) on multiple occasions.¹⁷ These are just a few examples of African intellectuals, who had profoundly shaped the religious and cultural landscape of Europe in the 16th century and indeed contributed to the increasing interconnectedness of the Christian world. What they did can be called Intercultural Theology *avant la lettre*. The dynamics of these, and many other, important – yet often undeservedly forgotten – intercultural encounters in the history of Global Christianity are yet to be studied.

The past and present of Christianity, as well as of other religions, is much wider, much more complex and much more interconnected than some textbooks let us imagine. Moreover, I think it is good news. At least, we still have a lot of work in front of us.

¹⁷ For Ethiopian journeys to Europe in the 16th century and Ethiopian diasporic communities in the Mediterranean see James De Lorenzi, *Red Sea Travelers in Mediterranean Lands: Ethiopian Scholars and Early Modern Orientalism, ca. 1500–1668*, in: Allison B. Kavey (ed.), *World-Building and the Early Modern Imagination*, New York 2010, 173–200; Samantha Kelly, “Medieval Ethiopian Diasporas,” in: eadem (ed.), *A Companion to Medieval Ethiopia and Eritrea*, Leiden 2020, 427–441; Matteo Salvatore, *The African Prester John and the Birth of Ethiopian-European Relations, 1402–1555*, London 2017; Idem, *The Ethiopian Age of Exploration: Prester John’s Discovery of Europe, 1306–1458*, in: *Journal of World History* 21/2011, 593–627.

Remarks on my Attempt at Incorporating Intercultural Learning into my Studies

Martin Tamcke

When I was a child, I used to escape difficult situations in my life by hiding between the pages of a book. Books that took me to faraway places. Books that made me dream of a life on an island in the Pacific Ocean. It was not only the Pitcairn Island with its story of the mutiny on the *Bounty*, *Robinson Crusoe*, or *Stevenson's Treasure Island*. A place like the *Malden Island*, which used to be inhabited and is now deserted, fired my imagination. One of the reasons for leaving my native country might have been the state of our society at the time. It was our generation's challenge to come to grips with the true experiences of our parents in the Third Reich. So much was broken in the world I was born into after the Second World War. Not just on the outside, but on the inside. People only managed to survive by shutting out and hiding crucial aspects of their experience. They were not only physically affected by the war, but also war invalids who suffered internal damages which were only provisionally mended by fictitious tales created by suppression and fear. Among the basic experiences of my life is the knowledge that my grandfather fought during the First World War in the battle of the Somme in France. He lost his right leg and was only saved in the last minute. He suffered from phantom pain in his missing leg his entire life. My father was not able to psychologically process his experiences during the Second World War. Like many war

veterans and prisoners of war, he suffered physically as a consequence. He lost his sight. Both of them decided to study theology in order to escape the confined conditions of society and overcome nationalism, fanaticism, and the dominant ideology of inhumanity. Not all things went well for them after that. My grandfather had to endure the consequences of hatred directed at him from fanatic people with opposing political opinions. The Second World War destroyed his vision of a world that is working towards a mutual understanding. The failure of interreligious dialogue and interculturalism during the Second World War became a burden for every member of my generation to bear who was growing up in Germany. Our society was severely damaged and lost its most important interreligious partners inside this country - their Jewish brothers and sisters. It was and remains the cornerstone of my interest in other cultures. What started out as childish dreams turned into travels, studies, and finally research and teaching. I have initiated and supported study programmes that were specifically meant to overcome collective egotism: the international Erasmus-Mundus MA Programme Euroculture at the end of the 1990s, the MA Programme Intercultural Theology ten years ago, the MA Programme for Mediterranean Studies, and the latest Programme on the Christian Orient. I have been involved as an Erasmus coordinator at my faculty since day one. I sought to establish research cooperations around the world and started study programmes with India, Japan, Mexico, the United States, and Lebanon. International funding from the EU in particular allowed us to begin joint international and interdisciplinary research and teaching with our partners in Russia, Turkey, Jordan, Italy, Spain, France, Japan, the Netherlands, and Belgium. I managed to form a particularly strong relationship to Ethiopia, India, and Russia, but I also tried to establish solid connections to Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Iran, China, and Indonesia. It all seems rather implausible and were I to continue this way, I would feel bad myself. There are already too many institutions involved. And institutions always have a tendency to deform creative approaches. There is a difference between Saint Francis and the Franciscans, after all.

To ask a deliberately provocative question: if a programme celebrates its ten-year anniversary, is that not in itself a sign that its creative spirit is dissolving? Has it not submitted its control to good order and the institution? And does not creativity all too often give way to institutional momentum? When I arrived in Göttingen, the International Office constituted one or two people. Today, it is an organisation that holds regional responsibility worldwide. It is without question that they do great work. Nevertheless, the basic element – from colleague to colleague, student to student, the emphatic “yes” to internationality and the resulting real friendships: it all involves battles and great sacrifices. Does this no longer exist? At least

that seems to be a possible explanation in places where institutionalisation has replaced the basic foundation of face-to-face interaction. But how much of the core human aspect remains and how much is just done as a traditional routine practice, because it requires next to no sacrifice. In the 1980s, when I was a pastor in a town south of Hamburg, I was asked whether I would take a position at the Mission Seminary in Hermannsburg and become a lecturer for Church and Mission History. I accepted the offer and started in 1988 as a part-time lecturer. It became a full-time occupation from 1994 to 1999. I worked there for eleven years and took part in all the usual activities typical for Hermannsburg: life on campus, assignments with students in the parish, supporting students in the difficult decision whether to work overseas for nine years following their studies. This has prepared me for intercultural perspectives in many ways. As a student from Göttingen my travels have brought me to faraway regions, among them war zones in the Far and Middle East. In the mid-70s when I was a student here at Göttingen University, I had the good fortune to be chosen for a job by one of my Professors. My teacher Wolfgang Hage introduced me to research on Syncretism – as it was called back then – in Central Asia. Since then, I have retained a lively interest in early Christianity under the Mongols, the Turkic peoples of Central Asia, the Chinese, and the Indians. Yet my focus shifted towards Eastern Europe while my teacher and I shared an interest in India, Northeast Africa, and the so-called Near East. Teaching at a Mission Seminary did not only mean lecturing on Mission History (as well as practical theology for a short period), it also entailed research on Mission History as it was called back then.

My passport says I am German. However, is Germany really my home? I am not quite sure about that. I was born here, but I was not asked whether I wanted to be born here. What I became was mostly defined by the interactions I have had with other cultures. I travel a lot. I always travel to meet specific people. I still want to get to know the world, the beliefs and cultures of other people. I have learned a lot about my personal limits and I have often struggled with them. I have met people who became friends. When I encountered them, it was like looking into a mirror. They showed me what they saw. And I saw how I could be perceived, whether I liked it or not – whether I recognised myself in their eyes or not. I have met people who have been stuck in the post-colonial discourse for 40 years. Occasionally, their constant complaints hide what is wrong in their own countries and cultures. Some of the people here want to be more African than Africans, more Asian than Asians, more Indian than Indians. I have experienced first-hand how hard it was for some of my students in those countries to find access to a study programme that not only allowed them to think freely, but also considered free thinking a cru-

cial goal of their studies. Yet without such freedom, they would never be able to succeed in fulfilling their vision of their future societies, cultures, and countries. It is often impossible where they come from. Whether it is still possible here, I dare not say. In most legitimate cases coming to Europe is not a means of fleeing their homeland. What it offers them, however, is time outside of the legal limitations of their home countries and therefore room to try new things. Anyone who comes to Europe without any interest in European cultures will only get what they brought from home. And for us, it means we will lose someone who is just as concerned about our culture as we are concerned about theirs. If someone living in Germany for one or two years or even longer cannot hold a conversation in German, they essentially remain on the “outside” and miss the chance to have a true internal understanding of their experience in this country. This active participation has always been lesson and life. Whoever wants to study here has to interact with us. According to Raimon Panikkar, conversation is a necessary step towards interfaith dialogue, because it can lead to understanding. We cannot truly understand the perspectives of others, if we do not share them with each other. Interaction harbours a potential for shock once it reaches consciousness. In such cases, it can lead to aggression and all kinds of self-preservation measures instead of productive openness and controlled exchange. Interculturalism should always include the added dimension of transculturalism. Any exchange also requires an awareness of what we have in common. How far can we take this? Where is the limit? Have we reached it, once I have done everything in my power? Have we reached it, where my fear prevails over my interest? Have we reached the limit at the point where the freedom that I gain through my faith ends due to insurmountable obstacles and the love I require to help others can no longer grow.

We cannot learn about other cultures through books. Books can lead us astray or offer us cognitive constructions that have nothing to do with the real life experience. Face-to-face interaction is crucial in gaining intercultural insights. The other has to be a burden or a gift, a promise or alienation. This requires language. Anyone who seeks to have real interaction with Germans needs to speak their language. Love can be challenging. One of those challenges can be learning someone else's language.

Travels are just travels, being with each other is different – it is an act of learning. I wish it were not just me travelling to universities around the world. I wish people from all over the world would come to Germany to study so that they could give student of theology over here a chance to experience being a global Christian. I wish we had an actual interreligious, intercultural, and international programme. I have to admit that I failed to succeed in this respect. In a first phase, we took im-

portant steps to establish partnerships with other institutions around the world and some of them have signed a special partnership contract. A majority of the partner universities are part of my network at this faculty. They were easily won over. After a few year, the kind of orientation towards internationalisation that I had achieved for Euroculture was no longer possible. We continued to demand students study at least one semester in one of these institutions, which had signed with the programme alongside their practical training. This is no longer guaranteed now. I still envision a genuine international programme that sees all partners equally responsible, but I can no longer realise it myself for I am about to retire. There are still Christian – exclusively Protestant – Europeans who are teaching Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam. Therefore, the process of construction continues. In addition, colleagues who visit us from Africa, Asia, Latin America, or Oceania for a few weeks as guest lecturers do not rectify this. We need German students in these parts of the world, but also Indians in Africa or Latin Americans in Oceania. Our programme is too conventional in so many ways. And in far too many instances we are mere observers instead of participants. I know about the hidden agendas that some people are having, of course. Writing a PhD thesis with us in order to use the programme to migrate, increasing our student numbers. Problematic consequences follow: brain drain, the end of lively international interaction. The idea of learning under the same conditions as our partners around the world remains a vision. There are so many things to do, so many things to improve.

Unfortunately, I only have a short time left to partake in this learning process myself. I hope the programme retains a restlessness that drives things forward and I hope for people that stand up for their cultures and at the same time show an appropriate amount of seriousness when it comes to learning with us, the lecturers. Because lecturers are never just teachers, they are only advanced (or maybe longer trained) learners themselves.

I will close with a sentence I have expressed during my guest lecture in India, when my friend and colleague Pune invited me, and it is a sentence that every student who has visited my lectures should know:

I am not you,
as you are not me.
Yet I am not just separated from you,
as you are not just separated from me.
There is something of you in me,
as there is something of me in you.
Therefore,
when we have to interact,

I deal with you in me
as you deal with me in you
for a better understanding of each other,
as a value in itself.

Personal Reflections on 10 Years of the M.A. Programme “Intercultural Theology” in Göttingen and Hermannsburg

Frieder Ludwig

1 Motivation and perspectives

Let me start with two quotations:

“Theological training is a key for preparing people to be relevant and qualified for the various ministries in the church.

We are in need of qualified personnel who are able to convey the Gospel according to our Lutheran understanding in different cultural and socio-political contexts.

Theology cannot be done in isolation – so we need exchange between and exposure to different international theological contexts and world-views.”

These are some of the Recommendations of the ELM Partner Church Consultation from 6th to 12th of October 2008. Shortly before, in May 2008, the concept for the M.A. Programme Intercultural Theology had been drafted in Göttingen, with cooperation from Hermannsburg:

“The M.A. Programme Intercultural Theology enables students to reflect theologically 1. on the intercultural character of the Christian message. 2. on the communication of the Christian message in different cultural contexts and 3. on the interactions of Christians with people of other faiths and worldviews. It also analyses the transformation processes activated by these encounters as well as by social, political and economic changes.

The factual knowledge and skills to be acquired in the M.A. Programme Intercultural Theology are of central importance for the analysis and shaping of intercultural relations. The gravity of Christianity is shifting southwards and the majority of Christians living in Africa, Asia and Latin America is increasing. Movements of transnational migration as well as intensified encounters and mutual exchange processes necessitate a high level of competence in intercultural dialogue. Since the M.A. Programme Intercultural Theology presupposes the crossing of cultural boundaries, it conveys this competence in a unique way.”

Both texts indicate a new emphasis: In Göttingen the recognition of the increasing importance of African, Asian and Latin American churches and theologies, in Hermannsburg the shift from a traditional mission seminary to new forms of qualified academic education. To me, these two dimensions – and the mutual openness, the willingness and the energy to cooperate – had been highly motivating: There was, on the one side, the painful farewell to the old structures: I remember very well an article in the *Cellesche Zeitung* published on the 1 February 2008, the day when I started, which raised questions concerning the future without the mission seminary – it had been clear that it would be closed since a recommendation of the regional churches in 2005, and we were not allowed to recruit new students. However, on the other side, there was a strong conviction that Hermannsburg needs an academic institution or at least academic programmes. Mission could not be conceived without a focus on education, and today higher education, quality education with accredited programmes, is a significant contribution to the global ecumenical movement. This has been emphasized in several publications¹ and does not need to

¹ Cf. for instance Dietrich Werner, *Theological Education in World Christianity, Essays and Articles*, PTCA Kolkata 2012, in: Dietrich Werner et al., *Handbook of Theological Education in World Christianity*, Oxford 2010; Frieder Ludwig, *Neue Ausbildungsmodelle im Kontext von Globalisierung und Mission*, in: *Evangelisches Missionswerk in Deutschland* (ed.), *Zusammen wachsen. Weltweite Ökumene in Deutschland gestalten*, Hamburg 2011, 242–247.

be re-iterated here; this contribution is a more a personal retrospect (including reflections and memories).

The cooperation with Göttingen strengthened this academic dimension in ways, which had not been imagined before. Martin Tamcke was instrumental in it: He was dean of the faculty at the time and had initiated the conversations. Florian Wilk, then the dean of studies, worked on the module catalogue and all these details, Jan Hermelink, Thomas Kaufmann, Andreas Grünschloss and others also contributed a lot. On the Hermannsburg side Martina Helmer-Pham Xuan was a very strong and inspiring force, Andreas Kunz-Lübcke, Volker Keding and Mirjam Laaser contributed. In 2009, two important women joined our intercultural team: Drea Fröchtling in Hermannsburg and Cornelia Schlarb in Göttingen. Without their coordination, commitment, love and care for the students the whole thing would also not have worked out. Altogether, we had good luck with our recruitments: In 2012, when the Fachhochschule für Interkulturelle Theologie Hermannsburg was founded, Wilhelm Richebächer came and brought many academic as well as church-related experiences. In 2013, Erna Zonne-Gätjens joined FIT. In 2014, Ulrike Schröder became professor of religious studies and interreligious dialogue; she is now one of the academic coordinators of the M.A. Programme together with Fritz Heinrich. In 2016, Gabi Beckmann came, in 2019, Moritz Fischer. In 2012, we started a project of the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft and Phuti Mogase accepted the position as a research fellow, and that has been a very wonderful development. And of course there are many in the administrative support team who need to be mentioned, as for instance Daniela Barton, Elena Romashko und Adolph van der Walt in Göttingen, Marina Herrlich, Linda Braun, Dietlinde Rückert, Dorothea Müller, Gerlinde Winkler, Anja Engelke, and Erich Fiebig in Hermannsburg. Others will be mentioned later.

2 Accreditations and highlights

The first 11 students of our M.A. Programme “Intercultural Theology” arrived in fall 2009. They came from Ethiopia, Ghana, Germany, Zimbabwe, South Africa and South Korea. It was a surprise for many that our MA ICT had become a reality; and I was surprised and continued to be surprised how well the groups worked together. There are challenges, which I will elaborate on later, but in general, there is a high level of energy in the classes and a high degree of personal commitment. I remember when Perry Schmidt-Leukel came to Hermannsburg and gave a presentation on pluralistic theology of religions: Most of our students did not agree and there was an intense discussion – but he enjoyed that and said afterwards that he

prefers this to seminars where some students sit on the back benches and just wait until the time is over. In Norway, I have to get used to the more Nordic temperament again which reminds me of the time when I was a student and me and many fellow students were hesitant to say something.

For three years, the Hermannsburg part of the programme was conducted at the old Missionsseminar, which fulfilled its obligations towards the students who had registered before the decision to close this institution was implemented. These students played an important role in the integration of the newcomers, and both sides profited from the experiences at the campus in Hermannsburg. I am thankful that this transition went so well. And I am grateful to the support of former missionaries who invited international students to their homes and also helped with translations during worship services at the Peter-Paul Church.²

However, as it had been clear since 2005 that the seminary would not continue³, we had many intense discussions on the future of Hermannsburg. One idea was to create two new (church-sponsored) professorships in Göttingen and to conduct the whole programme there. That would have meant that Hermannsburg would lose its academic institution, which had been central to the existence of the mission society. Another option was to maintain the relationships with the partnering institutions of the mission seminary in Birmingham and Stavanger and to introduce new programs in cooperation with them. That proved to be impossible, since they could not continue the partnership with a seminary, which was not acknowledged as an institution of academic training in its own country. Therefore, the third option was to apply for institutional accreditation. After a while, I favoured this solution because it could give Hermannsburg stability: The ELM was in itself in a major process of transformation, since the model of sending pastors trained in the mission seminary was slowly ending. Therefore, it was clear that a new structure was needed and the committees of ELM also favoured this solution.

² Many international students have fond memories of their time in Hermannsburg; cf. for instance the Weblog of Elim Wilsen Taruk: www.study-in-germany.de/blog/studying/enjoying-advent-and-the-christmas-market-in-germany/.

³ The history of the Missionsseminar cannot be discussed within the range of this paper; this has been done elsewhere. Cf. Jobst Reller, *Ausbildung für Mission. Das Missionsseminar Hermannsburg von 1849 bis 2012*, Münster 2016. When the seminary was closed in September 2012, I had summarized its contribution as follows: "Das Missionsseminar hat über 160 Jahre Theologinnen und Theologen für die Arbeit außerhalb Europas ausgebildet. Es haben gute Leute hier unterrichtet, es sind gute Leute aus dem Seminar hervorgegangen. Die Gründung der Fachhochschule für Interkulturelle Theologie trägt den Entwicklungen – dem Erstarren der Partnerkirchen, der Schwerpunktverlagerung des Christentums nach Süden – Rechnung, an denen auch das Missionsseminar seinen Anteil hatte – ich denke, das kann man als Teilnahme an der Mission Gottes bezeichnen. Wir blicken dankbar auf diese Zeit des Missionsseminars Hermannsburg zurück und gehen zuversichtlich mit der Fachhochschule für Interkulturelle Theologie Hermannsburg in die Zukunft."

We had several meetings with the Lower Saxonian ministry of culture and science, the accreditation Committee ZEvA and the German Academic Council in Bonn, and after a very intense work process the Fachhochschule für Interkulturelle Theologie (FIT) was acknowledged by the state in summer 2012. At the inauguration of the FIT, Johanna Wanka, then minister of culture and science in Lower Saxony, said: “There are many private universities that wanted this recognition but they had to try several times. The fact that the Hermannsburgers managed to get this recognition in a short time, namely in almost a year, is a ‘special achievement’.”⁴ Five years later, in summer 2017, the FIT received the institutional accreditation, and again this has been the result of a hardworking team; I am grateful to all who contributed to this process.

Teaching in all programs has been fruitful and rewarding. I enjoyed the classes on the history of the ecumenical movement and on the history of Christianity in interactions with other religions and I have fond memories of our discussions on reform Hinduism and African Traditional Religions. The relationship between Pentecostalism (many students came from that background) and the traditional mainline denominations was also important. One Pentecostal student remarked that it was a new insight for him that so many things had happened between the Pentecost narrative in Acts 2 and the Azusa Street Revival in 1906. Highlights were also the joint excursions (I know that Martin Tamcke has been very good in that), the visits to the Kirchentag (usually organized by Drea Fröchtling) and the student interactions inside and outside the classroom.

I also learnt a lot from our conferences and workshops: We had two meetings which focused on Martin Luther and the reformation. In the first one, in 2009, Tsitsi and Kenneth Mtata pointed out that Luther’s booklet *Ob man vor dem Sterben fliehen möge* (whether one can escape from dying) of 1527 which was written during the time of a pest epidemic against the assumption that pest was a punishment from God is used and helpful in the context of the churches struggle to com-

⁴ “Ministerin würdigt Weg zur FH als besondere Leistung”, in: *Bergener Stadt- und Oertze-Anzeiger*, 10. Oktober 2012. “Es gibt viele private Hochschulen, die diese Anerkennung wollten, aber einige Anläufe gebraucht haben“, sagte Wanka. Dass es den Hermannsburgern in kurzer Zeit, nämlich in nur fast einem Jahr, gelang, diese Anerkennung zu bekommen, „ist eine besondere Leistung“, so Wanka. The article is republished in: Fachhochschule für Interkulturelle Theologie (FIT), Dokumentation und Ansprachen der Eröffnungsfeier am 2. Oktober 2012, 27. The brochure also published the greeting of Landesbischof Professor Dr. Friedrich Weber (1949–2015) who said as chairman of the Mission Committee (Missionsausschuss): „Die drei Trägerkirchen wollen diese Fachhochschule und wir wissen, dass diese zarte junge Pflanze der Pflege und der Begleitung bedarf. Die Gremien des Missionswerkes stehen für diese Begleitung ein.“ (ibid., 18s).

bat HIV/AIDS. In Zimbabwe, the programme to combat AIDS “Let’s Help Each Other” had been initiated by Lutherans.

In the second conference of 2016, David Daniels showed that Luther was aware of Ethiopian Christianity and, indeed, impressed by it. “Ethiopia and Africa belonged to Luther’s theological world”; the Wittenberg reformer contrasted the Ethiopian Church favourably with (Catholic) Christianity in Europe. Of course, interreligious encounters and the presence of Islam in Europe also had an impact on the reformation and it became clear that more research has to be done on these interreligious dimensions of European history.⁵

This also applies to other research projects and conferences we conducted. In a symposium, jointly organized by the Ludwig Harms Kuratorium and FIT in late 2018, we focused on the First World War which led to a fundamental reorganization of international relations. This had a profound impact on churches and mission agencies and their ecumenical networks. European Christianity was increasingly questioned: In 1916, the *Sierra Leone Weekly News* characterized the war as “the greatest evidence afforded of the exceeding thinness of the Christianity of European Christendom in the Twentieth Century.”⁶ The shock was all the greater since the war alliances were formed without considering religious orientation. During and after the war, emancipatory movements in African and Asian churches were strengthened and new leaders and charismatic figures emerged. An example is the Indian Christian John Nelson or Sadhu Christiananda who came out of a Brahmin-Christian family and had been baptized by the Hermannsburg missionary Wörrlein; in the early 1920s, he gained reputation as an evangelist. In the mid-1920s, he came to Europe and was a speaker at the Hermannsburg mission festival in June 1926. He supported the formation of an autonomous indigenous church and was especially critical of the idea to hand over the property to the US-Americans without consulting Indian Christians.⁷

⁵ Cf. David Daniels, Luther and Ethiopian Christianity, in: Frieder Ludwig/Mirjam Laaser et al., *Reformation in the Context of World Christianity: Theological, political and social interactions between Africa, Asia, the Americas and Europe*, Wiesbaden 2019, 21–31.

⁶ The European War, *Sierra Leone Weekly News*, June 17, 1916, quoted in: Frieder Ludwig, “Introduction”, in: Idem, *The First World War as a Turning Point. The impact of the years 1914–1918 on Church and Mission (with special focus on the Hermannsburg Mission)*, Berlin 2020, 1–36, 2. The document was re-published in: Klaus Koschorke/Adrian Hermann et al., *Discourses of Indigenous Christian Elites in Colonial Societies in Asia and Africa around 1900*, Wiesbaden 2016, 289.

⁷ Cf. Hugald Grafe, *Kirche unter Dalits, Adivasi und Kastenleuten in Südindien. Die indischen Partnerkirchen der lutherischen Kirche in Niedersachsen*, Berlin 2013, 99–101, also Ludwig, *ibid.*, 23s.

3 Reflections and challenges

In a paper given in Stavanger, which was recently published, Martha Frederiks (Utrecht University) investigated the discursive triangulation of migrant Christianity in Europe, European Christianity and Christianity in the ‘global South’ in certain world Christianity discourses.⁸ It argues that this triangulation is brought into play to underscore the binary of the vibrancy and growth of Christianity in the ‘global South’ on the one hand and the decline and decay of European Christianity on the other, and that both the selective representation of migrant Christianity and its discursive functionality within triangulation aim to reinforce this binary.

Now, while this binary has never been the dominant position in our Master Programme – we understood world Christianity as polycentric, and including Europe – it also has not been entirely free from it and students are sometimes from this background of “remissionising” Europe.

It may be good to include various definitions of World Christianity at the beginning of the lectures and also to look at what we can learn from each other in the intercultural exchange processes. Again, I think intercultural theological education in exchange between institutions in the North and the South is a key contribution. In our age of globalisation and migration, we need bridge-builders, people who can mediate between different cultures and religions and who can reflect self-critically on their own assumptions and stereotypes.

In my lectures, I came to focus more and more on the interactions between European theologies and African and Asian theologies. I do think, for instance, that the slave revolution in Haiti 1804 had a profound impact in Europe. So the “inter” in intercultural theology is central. Mark J. Cartledge and David Cheetham pointed out that: “An intercultural approach pays particular attention to the cultural embeddedness of all theological forms and displays a reflexive attitude towards it, as well as an interest in comparison, whereby other different cultural expressions are also considered important for theology. Hence in this discourse ‘inter’, meaning ‘between’ or ‘among’ or ‘across’, refers to the awareness of and engagement with different expressions of theology as they exist between different cultures.”⁹

⁸ Martha Frederiks, “Microcosm” of the Global South. The Discursive Functionality of Migrant Christianity, in: “World Christianity”, *Exchange* 48 (2019), 313–333.

⁹ Introduction, in Mark J. Cartledge/David Cheetham, *Intercultural Theology. Approaches and Themes*, London 2011, 1–5.

Thus, the use of the arts in theology – paintings, woodcuttings, dance, theatre, drama – and narrative approaches have been emphasized by early protagonists of Intercultural theology as, for instance, Walter Hollenweger.

However, the German theological tradition is a different one and that brings me to the next challenge. The German tradition maybe best expressed in a quote from Carl Mirbt, who was Professor at Göttingen University. He said at the Famous World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh 1910: “Lectures are not sermons.”¹⁰

I think, we operate in this tension – we do Intercultural Theology in the context of a Western University system. This is necessary and good so, but sometimes I find it difficult and challenging, because there are students of whom I know they are able, they are hardworking, they are functioning perfectly and intelligently in a certain context – let us say of a charismatic congregation – but not all of them are able to translate this intelligence into the academia. Moreover, of course, it is my role as an academic teacher to evaluate the papers and theses critically.

My own approach would be a mutual critical perspective. I do not think we should romanticize African and Asian Christianity, as we also should not European churches and mission societies. We find power structures and the “our positions are God-given – but you, you have to prove yourself” syndrome on both sides, albeit in different forms.

Lesslie Newbigin (1909–1998) has argued that Western Christians need African, Asian, and Hispanic Christians in order to have a rigorous analysis of some of the elements within Western culture. He was deeply concerned about the need for a mutual give and take structure within the ecumenical circle. According to Newbigin, “we need their witness to correct ours, as indeed they need ours to correct theirs. At this moment, our need is greater, for they have been far more aware of the danger of syncretism, of an illegitimate alliance with the false elements in their culture, than we have been. But ... we imperatively need one another if we are to be faithful witnesses to Christ.”¹¹

¹⁰ Carl Mirbt, *The Extent and Characteristics of German Missions*, in: *World Missionary Conference 1910. The History and Records of the Conference*, Vol. IV, Edinburgh 1910, 206–217, 213; cf. Frieder Ludwig, *Carl Mirbt (1860–1929)*, in: Bernd Schröder/Heiko Wojtkowiak, *Stiftsgeschichte(n). 250 Jahre Theologisches Stift der Universität Göttingen (1765–2015)*, Göttingen 2015, 155–164.

¹¹ Lesslie Newbigin, quoted in Andrew F. Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History*, Maryknoll/NY 2002, 69.

4 Everyday encounters and mutual learning experiences

Of course, there had been many challenges also in everyday life: Living in Hermannsburg has its inspirations, but also its frustrations, and usually these come in waves. During the first period until Christmas everything is nice, the programme is new, then there is the first snow and students who have not experienced this are happy building snowmen and engage in snowball matches. There are Christmas markets, Christmas invitations and Hermannsburg is “the village where everybody smiles”. Then January comes and it is still cold, the nights are long (though not as long as in Stavanger), the results of the examinations may not be as good as expected, and in the intercultural encounter there are also dimensions which are not so easy after all – as for instance the smelling of fufu for non-Ghanaians, or the regularity of the German Abendbrot with sausage or cheese for non-Germans, or the empty streets in Hermannsburg which are so different from the sceneries in Addis Ababa, Dar es Salaam or Bangalore (“Is it allowed to walk here it all? I do not see anyone”, a student once asked). But if groups are able to overcome this period, then they made it, and as Facebook indicates, there are many intercultural friendships which continue. And there are also international partnerships and marriages and families.

When groups of young people come together, it can take a while before an organized structure is fully implemented. The housekeeping and maintenance staff at FIT – Annelene Neuber, Manfred Hilmer, Katharina Hefle, Heike Nordhaus, and later Horst Hinken, Kerstin Kutnik and Edyta Bertram – has done a wonderful job to create a welcoming environment and they deserve all praise for their achievement. This is also true for the kitchen staff; Magdalena Buhr, Margitta Bosselmann and during some seasons Stefanie Haas-Rexrodt prepared breakfast, lunch and supper and that made it possible for students and staff to focus on teaching and learning. They did this in such a charming way that once a group started to collect money. This was done in the convincing Pentecostal style (“I know you can give a bit more, brother”) and I was sorry that it could not be continued.

Sometimes, the challenges of intercultural encounters are reflected in everyday experiences in Hermannsburg, and some narratives of international students indicate a critical view of the Western lifestyle and its underlying assumptions. To give an example: There was a time, when my daughter was young, when we had rabbits or bunnies. We wanted to go on a brief vacation and I advertised this as a job for students. An Ethiopian student offered his help and I explained to him how to feed them. Then he asked me: “And how often shall I walk them?” The implication was

of course that Germans who are walking their dogs – something that is not common in Ethiopia – they might also be strange enough to walk their rabbits.

5 Wishes and prospects

The project in Intercultural Theology went through several stages; new colleagues came in and the programme changed and improved, and that was a good process. What became increasingly clear to me is that what we need is institutional reliability: Not absolute security, but reliability – being on the way together, so that it is possible for colleagues who are committed – and we have excellent committed colleagues – to plan their future, that this programme continues to offer good perspectives for good students – and our Master in Intercultural Theology already has a good record of PhD students and academics coming out of it –, that it is recognized as a contribution of Göttingen and Hermansburg to the ecumenical movement and to World Christianity. I am very happy that both institutions are jointly represented in this celebration.

Let me conclude with one last personal story, this time from the Partner Churches Consultation of ELM in Addis Ababa in 2015. Helmut Winkelmann, a member of the Missionsausschuss of the ELM, and I had arrived early and were in the same hotel. Winkelmann is a bit on the conservative side, but we are getting on well with each other despite our sometimes-different views. Therefore, we went out for a walk and we passed a Lutheran church, and Helmut said: “Let us go inside.” So we went and we met a deacon for youth work. Winkelmann asked him “Do you know Hermansburg?” The deacon replied: “Oh yes, I do know Hermansburg. There are programmes of Intercultural Theology.”

The Beginning of the “Fachhochschule für Interkulturelle Theologie” in Hermannsburg

Martina Helmer-Pham Xuan

I am most thankful to share with you some ideas and dreams about the origins of the “Fachhochschule für Interkulturelle Theologie” (FIT). I served as Director of the former Hermannsburg Mission (HMS) from 2003 to 2013 – and when I left, I felt there was little scope for the future.

1 Brief history of the Hermannsburg Mission (HMS)

The history of the Hermannsburg Mission is linked with the Mission seminary. So allow me to start with a detour – in order to understand the long path to the FIT:

HMS was widely regarded as a farmers' mission (“Bauernmission”) because of its origins in the Lüneburg Heath, and the rural background of its missionaries. Ludwig “Louis” Harms (1808–1865) founded it.

Harms was particularly fascinated by the Christianization strategy used by monks in converting the barbaric Saxons to Christianity. The monks established self-sufficient Christian communities, which would serve as practical examples of Christian living and thereby attract the heathen. This was the approach Harms selected for the HMS.

The first group of twelve missionaries was supposed to live in one place and settle there. They would meet their own needs, as they were to be proficient in agriculture. Here they would attempt to convert the local population and at the same time educate them in cultural affairs.

Thus, the missionaries developed a strong sense of mission, which lasted for decades. They were sent not by the official church of Hanover, but by a charismatic founder, Louis Harms.

The missionaries received not only a theological education and various relevant practical experience, but also the devotion to serve for a lifetime as missionaries in a country where Louis Harms or his successor Theodor sent them, first to South Africa, later on to India, Ethiopia, Brazil, Peru.

During the years, the HMS became an independent foundation. The Hermannsburg Mission was one of the last mission societies in Germany to send co-workers for a longer period. Therefore, they started learning the local languages, which was a wonderful benefit and enabled them to plunge into a complete different culture.

2 Challenges through declining finances

After 1975, Hermannsburg Mission was no longer the “Hermannsburg Mission”, but was forced to change its name into Evangelisches Missionswerk in Niedersachsen, ELM. This was the result of a dramatic financial situation in the mission, which could only be solved by the financial support of the churches in Hanover, Brunswick and Schaumburg-Lippe, and a new legal constitution. The HMS became a private foundation; shareholders were the churches, Hanover, Brunswick and Schaumburg-Lippe, and a group of friends, who considered themselves as the heart of the mission. The consequences were a somehow mixed system of “ecclesiologies” in one mission body:

- There was the ongoing understanding of a “mission”, ready to send (mainly male) missionaries to the partner churches in order to help them in church planting and missionary work.
- There were the churches Hannover, Brunswick and Schaumburg-Lippe, who were somehow aware of the need to do mission work
- There were the representatives of the Independent Lutheran Church (in German: Selbständige Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche – SELK) with its own hermeneutic of Bible understanding.

This “mixed” entity was an embodiment of unity in diversity and lasted for more than three decades.

In 2004, the church of Hanover anticipated a severe shortcut of finances for the future. Therefore, the synod decided on a rigid austerity program:

- Within four years the reduction of 30% of the financial support for the mission in Hermannsburg,
- the closing of the Hermannsburg Mission seminary,
- closing the “branch office” in Hildesheim, the department of the Hermannsburg Mission, which was affiliated in the late 1970 and focused on development issues.

The demand to close down of the seminary was a shock for the Hermannsburg missionaries. Since 1849, more than 700 missionaries had been sent into various partner churches. They had accompanied the coming into being of churches and considered themselves as advocates, facilitators and intercessors; indeed this was the absolutely essential and crucial point for the mission: to send personnel. And one should keep in mind:

- Some of the students in the Mission seminary started their study of theology with a deep conviction of being called and sent to serve abroad.
- Some of them started as a “new way” after having being educated already in a different profession.
- Some had difficulties in studying in the universities and considered the students and lecturers in the universities as “non-believers”.

2004 became a point of change, which was hard to understand for most of the missionaries. They were deeply disappointed

- by the churches of Hanover, Brunswick and Schaumburg Lippe,
- by the questioning of their sense and self-understanding of mission,
- by the first female director who was not able to show any strength against these church bodies nor demand secure financial support.

3 Difficulties in doing mission with sending personnel

Looking back to these days in summer 2004, one can still remember the deep disappointment and disillusionment of co-workers in the Hermannsburg Mission, not only in Hermannsburg but also in all partner churches of the Hermannsburg Mission.

The still young and active missionaries were willing to support their receiving churches with all their strength. Most of them were in their late twenties or early thirties and had started their families in the new environment and were fully supported by the respected partner churches.

In a lot of churches they were not only able to substitute the missing pastors, but would be asked and elected for “higher positions” as Deans and Project manager in their respected churches. This happened although they were quite young, but were well educated and brought their own salaries.

In the late 1990s, it was accepted that 9 years was the minimum for the graduates of the seminary to serve overseas before they would be enabled to apply for a pastor’s position in Germany. .

In addition to the financial issue, it became evident that many of our graduates were no longer able to remain for such a long period abroad. It was one of my worst experiences when I had to talk with the graduates about their future destination. The situation became even complicated:

- There were married male graduates whose wives just did not want to follow their husbands in an uncertain environment.
- We had candidates who were not strong or healthy enough to face a foreign culture, starting with food and climate.
- We had candidates who were not capable to cope with a foreign intercultural context.

This was the situation when the church of Hanover decided not only to reduce the financial support for the ELM, but to ask for the closing down of the Mission seminary. When the decision was made by the synod of Hanover, it was obvious that the whole notion of a Hermannsburg Mission was questioned and challenged

4 Developing the idea of FIT

Around this time two wonderful people arrived on the scene: Professor Frieder Ludwig and Professor Drea Fröchtling.

We heard about the synod’s decision in Hanover – but at the same time, we remembered a special anniversary: the first World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh in 1910.

Moreover, we remembered some dates and figures:

In 1910, Europe was sending about 19,000 missionaries – and 100,000 local people received their work, among the 19,000 missionaries, we had about 5,500 ordained people. In the Church of England, there were about 14,000 ordained priests. Worldwide there were about 3,200 main mission stations and 32,000 smaller branches. These missions were initiated not only by Lutherans, but also by an extraordinary number of Protestant representatives.

Though the outcome of the Edinburgh mission conference was described as “the explicitly theological harvest of Edinburgh was meagre!” by David Bosch¹ it was obvious:

Mission needed to be done by the local churches and they would be responsible for this task. Mission is a task of the church – and not only for the churches in Africa, Asia or Latin America, but was urgent needed in Europe and North America.

Mission was no longer the idea of sending missionaries for proclaiming the gospel and founding churches, but to enable people in a globalized world to proclaim the gospel in a way that the cultural variety of people could live in unity. David Bosch described this movement as the Ephesians 4:13-Moment:

“... until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”

Our world has become a larger one and in the same moment a much smaller one. We need to know each other not just in order to do mission but to live reconciliation in a wounded world. This means to learn empathy and solidarity.

When coming together with Frieder Ludwig and Drea Fröchtling and Andreas Kunz-Lübcke there was the deep conviction that we would have to continue mission as the way of reconciliation. But we had to find new ways, new instruments.

How could we do mission studies in a global world with intercultural knowledge and expertise?

- We needed to give a farewell to the Hermannsburg Mission seminary.
- This was painful for those who had grown up in this institution and considered the seminary as the roots of their being and coming into life as missionaries.
- We needed a completely different approach, of research and intercultural encounter, which would be accredited by international universities.
- Therefore we started talking with the Dean of the theological faculty at Göttingen University.

¹ David J. Bosch, *Witness to the world. The Christian Mission in Theological Perspective*, Atlanta 1980, 161.

- We needed to have contacts with theological seminaries worldwide, in order to create cooperation – through exchanges of teachers and students – which was done in a most convincing way through Frieder Ludwig contacting seminaries in South Africa, India, Nigeria, and Latin America.
- We needed to offer lectures no longer in German only, but in English.
- We needed to apply for an internationally accepted degree – which would replace a first or second Theological Church Examination – which is the route to becoming a pastor in a German Landeskirche and would give us an independent position towards the mission and churches.
- We needed the support of our supporting churches – they would need to understand that our mission has changed. We were no longer a sending mission, but an important part, a hinge – to overcome intercultural ignorance, which is an ongoing obstacle between churches in North, South, East and West.
- We needed to offer a broader approach to mission i.e. we needed to include the issues of development and sociology.

In this way, we were able to understand more about our Christian roots in not only a European context but also the influences of African, Asian and American Cultures.

We would have the chance to understand that our colonial history did not end after World War II but was, and still is, influencing our thinking into a “They” and “We”.

We would enable a dialogue between the various denominations and this would include the growing number of Pentecostal representatives; and even the interreligious dialogue was in mind – and we would face and hopefully overcome the never-ending issue of racism. The only way that we could start to realize these ideas was the M.A.-Program.

We needed to find young and courageous students from all over the world who would have the chance to learn and study in unity, not just for two or three months but to share life experiences, first face to face in Hermannsburg, Germany.

We invited people to come to Germany, to find out about the beginning of the mission movement – on “Mission ground” – but with the expectation, they would carry this knowledge to their home churches, and the idea was to start an international network of living together, doing research together, encouraging and reconciling diversity.

This was a change, a huge change! When the first students arrived, local people in Hermannsburg were challenged when they realized that these were the future Hermannsburg missionaries!

Nevertheless, the idea was really to enable international students to do research in theology in an intercultural, interdenominational and interreligious way – it was a kind of “seed growing” – and wondering what was going to happen in our churches in Germany and our partner churches worldwide.

Thus, they were confronted with different values and even questioned about their faith. The questioning started with gender issues – should women have an equivalent role in their churches and should men act as careers and be in charge of home matters like cooking and cleaning?

We invited people from the international seminaries to nominate candidates. Nominations were sent. The growing numbers of students were a vivid sign of the need of theological education. While the concerns and doubts within the mission were growing, the international support and the support of various non- governmental organizations was increasing.

And there was a second obligation or task we accepted as FIT: Even before 2015, from the early 1970s we had a growing number of migrants in Germany, not only from European Lutheran countries, like Finland, but from Korea, quite a few Anglo- and Franco-African countries, from China and Vietnam etc. I noticed the very slow awakening of German churches to accept the unwillingness of migrant churches to step into the tradition German church system of Landeskirchen and the difficulty that these migrant churches were facing as their leaders had different theological education.

However, many of the migrant churches started with most enthusiastic founders, clearly guided by the Holy Spirit, and made a strong emphasis on meeting social need.

A lot of migrants were facing most challenging situation: The issue of permanent residence, search for employment, renting a home, accompanying growing children, elderly people – these were only some of the questions facing the congregational life. So leaders of the migrant churches were invited to study the bible, the word of God and to learn what is the impact of culture, what means reading in contexts, to understand the roots and tradition of a worldwide Christianity.

Migrant church leaders and appointed students from abroad and Germany came together and stayed together in Hermannsburg for a certain period of time.

Of course, it was still difficult to find a position for the migrant church leaders in the German churches. It was difficult to find the finances or even scholarships. Solidarity or justice beyond German church roofs needs to extend. Most of the

leaders earned their own salaries in low salaried employment. The migrant congregations were not participating in the German “Church Tax Collecting” system, but were forced to ask for regular donations from their congregational members.

However, there was the chance of offering a broader understanding of the meaning of the Bible, leadership, church, confession, membership and much more. And this was not only received by the migrant churches but also by the welcoming German congregations.

I do hope that FIT will continue its unique work – as a unique way in mission in global solidarity. People these days are asking for climate justice. Worldwide justice in solidarity was my dream for our mission because each of us is unique, as God’s beloved children. Thus, the mission was completely re-shaped. It is for me a continuation of responsibility for a worldwide mission. During these days, this FIT–project is questioned again and again. One is asking whether this form of mission is successful for the supporting churches. Still, I am convinced that the FIT is a unique opportunity for German churches and the mission to give a clear witness that makes a difference to the world.

FIT offers a new way of theological thinking, which reminds me of a “Theology of Dance”: While dancing, we do not have to carry any longer heavy burdens of our traditions and customs, but we are moving in order to become a “We” and this “We” has no other desire than giving praise to our God. While we are dancing, body, soul and spirit will become easier, and our space, our feelings and our thoughts will be changed and will become liberated from desires and loneliness. Dancing can become a sign of the presence of the Holy Spirit, which shows that something new will begin and would guide us into a new understanding of the creation.

Of course – still a long way to go, a long time to practice in order to understand a new paradigm for mission is growing; But I would like to encourage us with words in Job 9:10:

“He who does great things beyond understanding, and marvellous things without number.” (NRSV)

Intercultural Theology in the Context of Global Development Conflicts, Global Climate Emergency and Rapid Changes in the Landscape of World Christianity

Major Tasks and Expectations from the Perspective of a Christian Development Agency

Dietrich Werner

1 Intercultural Theology as integral dimension of any theology

Let me start with my first thesis: Intercultural theology is a vital part of any (denominational or ecumenical) theology, which shares in the general task of Christian theology (using a definition of ecumenical theology from Visser't Hooft, the founding General Secretary of the World Council of Churches) to communicate and to reflect about the whole Gospel to the whole world (inhabited earth = *oikoumene*) by the whole Church. Intercultural theologies are the result of diverse cultural communities doing theology (multiple and diverse subjects).

Having worked professionally in institutional contexts both of mission, of development and of global ecumenism brings me to explain this first thesis with my conviction: Current intercultural theological work has to take seriously all four key dimensions which have played a crucial role in the history and streams of the global ecumenical movement: These four major streams (and themes) are namely the dy-

dynamic of intercultural *mission*, ecumenism as passion for wider *church unity*, Christian service or the concern for justice and *development* or Christian social witness and Diaconia, and last but not least *education*. None of these dimensions can be played off against each other. All are equally important and intercultural theology should relate to all of these four. If one dimension is neglected intercultural theology becomes a limping and insufficiently integrated exercise.

As I am the only representative of a Christian development organization in this context I would like to state some convictions specifically related to this context, the context of global development conflict and global climate emergency. I would like to start with the perhaps uncomfortable thesis that in established definitions and also the academic practise of intercultural theology issues of the global development conflicts and the issues of ecological sustainability sometimes seem to not enjoy equal attention and the intentional focus they would deserve.

To summarize: Intercultural Theology (ICT) is the result of a diversification of the subjects doing and practicing theological reflection. ICT reflects the newly emerging pluricentric character of World Christianity. ICT is a dynamic movement leading to the de-parochialization of Christianity, its liberation from any narrow-minded cultural captivity, which is not to lose the cultural conditions of Christian faith as such. But ICT prevents Christianity from becoming an ethnocentric tribal religion or a nationalistic religion. ICT thus is an antidote and critical conscientization process over against any cultural captivity of Christianity theology as well as any cultural superiority feeling of any kind of Christianity, i.e. it always has a strong decolonializing hermeneutical impetus. We can also state in the traditional language transmitted through the tradition of ancient Christian creeds: ICT realized and spells out the four essential marks of what it means to be the church: apostolicity, catholicity, unity and holiness – all of them together, not just one of them!

2 Insufficient attention to Ecumenical Social Ethics

The insufficient attention to ecumenical social ethics which is an important element within the broader stream of the ecumenical movement can be illustrated already with one of the founding documents using the term “intercultural theology”: When the German association of missiologists (DGMW) and the working committee of religious studies and missiology in the year 2005 came up with a programmatic statement to suggest to replace the traditional term “missiology” with the new umbrella term of “intercultural theology” they were led by the intention to wider the horizon, to pool resources and to claim space in academic settings and curricula. They wanted to defend the legitimacy of this new academic discipline (“intercultural theology” re-

placing the older term of “missiology”) in a more secularized academic university context and to avoid continuous misunderstandings, stereotypes and wrong projections associated with the term “mission”. They were aware in that statement that theological work in a western context should take place in wider framework of reference taking seriously the processes of globalization, cultural diversification and also growing conflicts within World Christianity as well as its relation to other religious traditions.¹ However, in describing the three major fields of intercultural theology/missions theology at that time the dimension of ecumenical social ethics was somehow side-lined and referred to only in a marginal comment. A very short and marginal reference to the North-South development conflict was made in the second dimension of intercultural theology, but without mentioning the discipline “ecumenical social ethics” and without explaining in more detail what contextual theologies in the context of development conflicts would actually entail and mean: Intercultural theology according to this foundational statement from 2005 should have three major fields:

- *Comparative History of World Christianity*: „History of Christianity in non-western contexts (Theologie- und Christentumsgeschichte Afrikas, Asiens, Lateinamerikas und Ozeaniens)”
- *Contextual Theologies*: “Intercultural theology in a more focused sense (contextual theologies; dynamics of North-South exchange; conflicts within World Christianity, Migration, the development conflict)”
- *Theology of religions*: “Theology and hermeneutics of relations to other religious traditions (interreligious dialogue, missiology, theology of religions)”

It is obvious that in the rather vague definition of the second dimension of intercultural theology in this 2005 document issues of justice, the global development conflict and global issues of sustainability played as less prominent role. The whole tradition of ecumenical social ethics was not in the minds of authors. Questions of the theology of religions, of religious plurality and intercultural learning between different forms of indigenous Christianity’s were the two major arenas, which remained in the forefront.

¹ See Statement 2005: Missionswissenschaft als Interkulturelle Theologie, in: https://dgmw.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Text_07_16.10.12_DGMW-Papier.pdf.

3 Ecumenical Social Ethics as being a vital and indispensable dimension of doing intercultural theology

My next thesis is: Christian development organizations (and their global umbrella organizations) and regional or international mission agencies are important hubs, platforms and strategic partners for intercultural theological dialogue (this applies also for theological faculties). The continuation of engagement and expertise for international intercultural and ethical dialogue cannot be taken for granted (generation and knowledge gap), but needs deliberate efforts in terms of leadership formation, training and capacity building both from German churches as well as from non-western churches.

To state this again as a distinct thesis: Ecumenical Social Ethics is a vital and indispensable (but often neglected) part of doing intercultural theology today. The ecumenical movement started with wrestling with issues of conceptual work after fascism and communism had led into barbarism in Europe and much beyond, bringing together leading thinkers on social ethics, political ethics and peace ethics, which articulated a vision for reconstructing Europe, which was demolished to ruins in the 40ies. Enormous conceptual treasures are still there in WCC Archives and EWDE archives waiting to be researched about with regard to the history of ecumenical social ethics, ecumenical Diaconia and development ethics.

Working together on a new Ethics for Life – as Alternative Paradigms for a new post-colonial and post-growth oriented Development Concept is a common vital task for new research and training in intercultural theology. The “year of global ecumenism” 2020/2021 should provide a chance for starting a new joint initiative for raising the profile of ecumenical social ethics in our contexts in the preparatory phase toward the 11th assembly of WCC. The collaborative networks of intercultural theology in Germany therefore should start already now to reflect together on how they would like to present themselves to the 11th assembly of the WCC, which is going to convene in September 2021 in Karlsruhe. Members of churches all around the world will come and they might be interested to learn how Christian theological education is integrating issues of intercultural theology, ecumenical social ethics and religious studies in their curricula and in their long-term international research plans.

We need to recapture the potential of Social Diaconia and development partnerships as offering vital dimensions and reflections for intercultural theology. In our generation (studying in the 70s) we had the enormous privilege to be introduced and to profit from the potential and treasures of the whole field of ecumenical social ethics (ökumenische Sozialethik) which was much stronger at that time (the height also of action oriented development programs within WCC). As young students and then

later as a university assistant we realized the breadth and depth of ecumenical social thinking which was developed in the early phase of the ecumenical movement both between the two World Wars as well as after the Second World War. It were the pioneers of the Life and World stream within the ecumenical movement which paved the way towards new concepts of society after the complete breakdown of human civilization and emerging human barbarism which has destroyed much of Europe during the Second World War. It was in Bossey that leading Christian figures of that period met to chart new models for the reconstruction of Europe, for building responsible Christian elites in politics, churches and society. Mission was about transformation at that era, not about colonialization. The Gospel was understood as having social relevance for the world, not just for the individual. The tradition of Social Protestantism, starting already early in the 20th century and before, was something we looked up to as an example and role model. It were those working in the department of Church and Society in Geneva WCC, which dealt with some of the most advanced social ethical and political questions in the period of rapid urbanization and technological changes in Post second world war contexts. Working towards a “responsible society” on national scale (Amsterdam 1948) as well as on international levels (Evanston 1954 and Uppsala 1968) was the beginning of a discourse on ecumenical social ethics, which attracted the brightest amongst the younger generations of theologians as well as thinkers from other academic disciplines. The achievements of a new order of liberal democracy, a middle way between laissez-faire capitalism and totalitarian communism, the affirmation of basic human rights, a deepened understanding of freedom of religion, and the critical reflections on the beginnings of international development were all part of the fruits of this early discourse. Treasures of high-level quality documents can still be studied and discovered in the holy archives of WCC, not far from here in Geneva or in the archives of EWDE. Major inspiration still is available from insights of the generations of fathers and mothers in the ecumenical tradition of political and social ethics, which have gone before us. The encounter with some of them in my earlier working periods in Hamburg had resulted in a major 650 pages book, which was prepared by a group of young colleagues bringing together a unique collection of the key resources of ecumenical social thinking from the first 100 years of the ecumenical movement, published in German language, but with English original resources under the title “Ethik für das Leben – 100 Jahre Ökumenische Wirtschafts- und Sozialethik”.²

² Wolfram Stierle et al., *Ethik für das Leben. 100 Jahre Ökumenische Wirtschafts- und Sozialethik*, Rothenburg 1996.

Where is this enthusiasm for the social relevance of the Gospel today? Looking back for instance to past conferences of the major forum of younger generations of researchers and scholars exploring issues of intercultural and inter-contextual theology (AÖF) I got the impression that issues of ecumenical social ethics feature much less prominently on the agenda in the past two or three decades. Partners of Bread for the World from different regional contexts, like Latin America as well as Asia and Africa complain more and more that there is a lack of properly trained theologians and partner-theologians who can meaningfully engage in public theology, i.e. with issues of ecumenical social, economic, and environmental ethics, which are confronting churches all around the globe. Who will form the think tanks and the ecumenical ethical knowledge hubs, which can engaged with social and political issues surrounding the conceptual issues around the UN Agenda on sustainable development? Issues like global poverty, disappearance of species, global climate change and environmental pollution do not stop any more within certain national or regional boundaries, they are trans-national and therefore can be tackled also only in transnational and intercultural collaboration.

There are huge challenges still to be faced in articulating concepts of a post-growth oriented economy and to go beyond the growth concepts which still seems to inform the current Sustainable Development Agenda 2030 of the UN which does not have a clarified and consolidated concept of growth, but instead inbuilt tensions between the economic goals of Agenda 2030 (No 1–11) and the ecological goals (11–15). Bread for the World has encouraged its partner organizations to spell out the conceptual and ethical concepts, which inspire their work. A fascinating volume with keynote papers from around 30 international partner organizations has emerged, called “Ethics for Life”.³ Who is there to take further this conceptual dialogue on an intercultural ethics for life and “new paradigms of Life and Society”?⁴ Where are the new generations of theologians and the emerging think tanks of intercultural dialogue to carry forward the heritage of the tradition of ecumenical social ethics, which needs to inspire the urgently needed transition into a completely new model of an ecological civilization, which is more able to live within the given planetary boundaries?

It was suggested to use the key symbolic image of “dance” to understand more deeply the task of intercultural theology today. While this might contribute a creative dimension of emphasizing the flexibility, intercultural exchange, the movement be-

³ www.brot-fuer-die-welt.de/fileadmin/mediapool/2_Downloads/en/20_About_Us/Ethics-for-Life.pdf.

⁴ Cornelia Füllkrug-Weitzel/Dietrich Werner, *Ethics for Life. Voices from Ecumenical Partners on a New Paradigm of Life and Society*, Berlin 2019.

tween closeness and distance with regard to the “other”, this key symbolic figure lacks a dimension of seriousness and responsibility, which is also there in the history of ecumenical theology. This can be better described by a complementary key image, the symbol of “housebuilding” or the role of a carpenter. Jesus was a carpenter. He wanted and learned to build houses, to rebuild the *oikos* of this world, a common household for all. Any household needs a good plan, needs household rules, needs ethical guidelines, which inspire and regulate social relations and living together, which protect the weakest and assist the poor. Intercultural theology can be understood as a carpenter theology which contributes to criticizing existing rule of the game in today's industrialized, polluted, commercialized world, and which tries to articulate new rule for a world, which can be different and should be transformed in the light of the promise of the Kingdom of God. Christians cannot refrain from intending to transform the existing rules of the households of this world

4 Rapid and ongoing changes in landscapes of World Christianity 1910–2010 and beyond – ecclesial and wider ecumenical dimensions of Intercultural Theology: Who sits at the table?

My next thesis: We are experiencing a dramatic shift and change of composition in the multi-centered landscapes of World Christianity in the 21st century. This implies crucial questions for instance on how to do intercultural theology. Who sits at the table? Who is invited? Who invites? Who sets the agenda? Intercultural theology always also involves issues of power relations, access to decision making, real influence and deliberate efforts of making visible that usually are kept invisible. We have a huge need to enlarge our terms of references and to widen the circles of inclusion with regard to the churches beyond the spectrum of historical mainline churches. Churches of the families of independent churches, charismatic churches and Pentecostal as well as Oriental Eastern Orthodox Churches as well as migrant churches need to be made visible for participating as serious partners in our intercultural and international research efforts on regional and national levels.

A development related organization like Bread for the World is not an ecumenical research institute (therefore needs centres of intercultural theological and social ethics research centres like in Göttingen, in FIT and in Humboldt University Berlin), but still has a major theological department. In this, we are facing many pertinent questions with regard to the changing landscapes of Global Christianity. In Latin America, many historical mainline churches are struggling with institutional instability; ecumenical places of theological research and education have crumbled or are

in crisis (ISEDET; UBL); landscapes of Global Christianity are changing faster than we can follow. People from both ecclesial partners as well as secular partners in political arenas ask questions on how we can react to newly emerging ecclesial groupings like visible in the field of charismatic and Pentecostal churches. There is a growing concern not only about a phenomenon called “Bolsonaro-Christians”, those who support and voted for a right-wing autocratic new political leader in Brazil, as well as with regard to the integrity and relation between churches and right-wing populism in Latin America. Some churches feel torn between their commitment to sustain a strong and critical prophetic task in defending Gospel values against the destruction of the rain forests, defending human rights of ethnic or sexual minorities, engaging in issues like violence against women, land property and resistance against the dominant power of big agro-business on the one hand and the episcopal task to keep and protect the unity of the church and its membership by avoiding a major church spilt on the other hand. Tensions within churches and between churches seem to grow in many regions.

Thus, if we speak about ecumenical dimensions of intercultural theological dialogue the questions will necessarily have to come up: Who sits at the table? Who is invited? Who sets the rules for the conversation? As a development organization based on institutional membership of historical mainline churches, we certainly have to respect our primary audience and the vast majority of our partners are in some relationship with historical mainline churches. We cannot indiscriminately enlarge our partnership portfolio as we have certain standards to be respected. We also cannot do the ecumenical job related to ecclesial unity, which NCCs and regional ecumenical forums of churches have to do themselves in their own regional contexts in terms of widening the framework of ecumenical reference in order to leave no one behind. At the same time, we observe that there not only clear trends for a rapidly changing landscape of World Christianity, but also clear indications that some (not all!) of the new churches are opening up and getting interested to collaborate with ecumenical partners both within national contexts as well as in international partnership in order to equip themselves for public theology and ethics of development. In many national councils of churches (NCCs) in Africa we have also Pentecostal and Charismatic churches now being fully included already. In several regions, we have collaborative networks between historical mainline churches, African Instituted churches and Charismatic churches. Research think tanks like one in Humboldt University of Berlin have done promising research to understand better the potential and unique lan-

guage of African Instituted Churches for sustainable development.⁵ The ecclesial landscapes are transforming quickly. However, at the same time also polarizations emerge and re-emerge quickly both within denominational traditions as well as sometimes between them. While affirming a case-to-case application approach and a substantial scrutiny of any potential partner before getting into any more close contact we realize that we move towards an enlarged frame of reference for intercultural theological dialogue and reflection on development. We have a partner, Dennis Mukwege,⁶ who as a medical doctor with his clinic in DRC has done excellent work with women facing traumatic consequences of rape and being violated against, but still comes from a Pentecostal background. We are aware of other Pentecostal churches like the Church of Pentecost in Ghana, which has done excellent work in developing national campaigns for environmental care, waste management and against illegal mining. We have collaborated since several years with the umbrella organization of AICs in East Africa, OAIC, which undertakes a marvellous program for building capacity with a multi-country program on livelihoods and local farmers education program thereby benefitting many rural communities which otherwise would not have been reached by any mainline churches entity. Thus, the traditional borders and lines of affiliation seem to be blurred and widened. Thus, we need to continue to build capacity also for more developmental literacy, competence in ecumenical and agricultural ethics amongst those churches, which traditionally have not had major exposure to such streams of ethical and theological expertise in ecumenical Diaconia and ecumenical social ethics because they have different or only rudimentary forms of theological education to prepare for local ministry.

5 Intercultural Theology in the era of a planetary emergency – ecological dimensions

The key thesis here is the following: We are in an unprecedented planetary state of climate emergency as the very functioning of the ecological systems, which provide for life of humankind, animals and plants on earth are in severe crisis. Earth system sciences tell us that rapid transformation towards a new ecological civilization, different consumption and production patterns and life beyond fossil fuels is an imperative as otherwise life as a whole in many regions of the world will become unbearable and

⁵ Philipp Öhlmann et al., *African Initiated Christianity and the Decolonialization of Development*, Routledge 2019 (forthcoming).

⁶ www.mukwegefoundation.org/story/dr-denis-mukwege/.

biospheres allowing for life will disappear rapidly. As a development organization, we are listening constantly to voices from an increasing number of partner organizations in the global South for whom climate change is not a far future, but a very bitter reality already in the present. Although Bread has worked for more than 60 years now quite successfully the gains in developmental progress seem to be eaten up and destroyed rapidly by accelerating climate change impacts.⁷ The European Parliament has declared a climate emergency recently to increase pressures on policy makers to come up with more ambitious political measures.⁸ In Bread for the World we listen to voices of partners arguing that we are already in the midst of a planetary crisis which endangers the very survival of vast sector of the human family in vulnerable areas in the global South. The key argument here is that this changes the understanding, framework and operational goals of intercultural theology to an extent, which probably not all have grasped yet. Just to bring one example: We have had another recent ecumenical theological consultation in University of Pretoria in October 2019 where around 70 different partners, both traditional Bread for the World partners, senior secular researchers as well as representatives from African instituted churches (AICs) as well as from African Charismatic Churches came together to discuss and strategize on issues of eco-theology and ethics of sustainability. Eco-theological reflections have become a joint area of interest between quite different churches. What does it mean to do intercultural theology with partners on sinking islands, in flooded coastal regions, in territories with burning rainforests and melting permafrost soils or heavily polluted air? While the interests and broader platforms to engage in eco-theology are growing, the question is far from being solved as to how do we do intercultural theological in contexts of grave differences in terms of chances for ecological survival, access to financial means and unequal power relations?

To summarize our viewpoint here on the future mandate of intercultural theology: Intercultural theology cannot continue to be performed just as a comparative theological exercise of people who compare and bring into dialogue with each other different cultural forms of Christianity, sitting in comfortable armchair positions from a kind of neutral and unengaged point. Intercultural theology has to bring together the two key dimensions again which always played a role in proper contextual theologies, namely the simultaneity of listening to cries of the poor and listening to the cries of suffering mother earth. What Leonardo Boff⁹ and Pope Francis¹⁰ have

⁷ Cornelia Füllkrug-Weitzel, *Klima geht uns alle an*, Leipzig 2019.

⁸ www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20191121IPR671110/the-european-parliament-declares-climate-emergency.

⁹ Leonardo Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, New York 1996.

called the main motive of their theological work and what the Franciscan World Order has elaborated further in their main theological program¹¹, regains its proper importance as an orientating principle of intercultural theological work in general.

6 Intercultural Theology as contributing to the task of *colere* in the era of the Anthropocene

In the context of the planetary emergency, we need to re-interpret the task of intercultural theology from the root term, which is behind the word inter-cultural: that is *colere* from the Latin, which stands for caring, preserving, also nurturing, protecting. The term also neighbours on meanings, which stand for worshipping, for adoration, for praise, for venerating. Thus what we give care for is what we venerate, what we preserve, what we protect. Here is a nice and often neglected interrelatedness of spirituality and ecology, issues of religious values and attitudes and issues of ethics. If there is one imperative for intercultural theology today it is to recover that deeper meaning of *colere* in which worship/adoration and caring/protection are two sides of one coin.

The earth needs “rest”, an interruption in the endless continuation of the cycle of exploitation and violence, expressed in the vision that there shall be “a year of complete rest for the land” (Lev 25:5). This means that the primary task of intercultural theology today is not so much a comparative, but more a synergetic and constructive task of pooling resources for climate change resilience and of articulating hope for ecological transformation in a context of global climate emergency. Churches and Christian traditions from all kinds of different cultural traditions are called to share with each other their specific contributions, their resources, their creative energies for expressing their *colere*, their care for the earth, their approaches to tender mending of broken and fragmented creation.

We have an European Environmental Christian Network in Europe (ECEN) which has its office in Brussels, influences legislations in the EU and brings together an annual forum and different working groups of environmental issues with representatives from churches and grassroots initiatives from European churches. We still have nothing like an umbrella network for eco-theologies and ethics of sustainability in Africa. Does this mean anything for our ways of doing and prioritizing research in

¹⁰ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si*, Encyclica 2016.

¹¹ An OFM Study Guide on the Care of Creation: The Cry of the Earth and the Cries of the Poor, <https://ofm.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/CuraCreato-EN.pdf>.

intercultural theology? Those who have the least and smallest share in causing the dilemmas with CO₂-emissions and worsening climate change, those who are most vulnerable by its potential effects, are often also the least equipped to deal with the expected drastic consequences on their continent. But maybe they are not the least equipped theologically to focus on coping with disaster and environmental threats as there are indigenous sources of wisdom and knowledge which contribute to solving the global climate crisis. And many of these churches have traditions of spiritual resilience: As they have lived Christian faith in a social and political context where a genuine spiritual orientation and daily lived Christian hope is the main condition for continuing life despite very harsh living conditions and disasters almost everywhere physically present, they know what it means to live with spiritual sources of resilience and hope which are independent from what contradicts faith in factual reality. We need to listen to each other interculturally to generate cultural and religious resources for resilience and climate adaptation and for hope in being confronted with really apocalyptic scenarios. A group of ecumenical theologians recently articulated the conviction that the global climate emergency also needs a common theological and ethical emergency response by the ecumenical movement. It called for a deliberate attempt to prepare and call for a global “Decade for the Healing of the Earth”.¹² This should give shape to an intentional effort to focus theological and ethics energies on answering the dilemmas and adding more ecological expertise for churches, not to remain as part of the problem, but to become part of the solution of the challenges of global climate change and mass extinctions of species happening right now.

In order to summarize: The context of the Anthropocene has altered fundamentally the conditions for doing theology intercultural. Intercultural theology is not a comfortable, armed chair seated and easy academic exercise any more to do comparative studies between different cultural approaches to theology or different religious traditions, but becomes an emergency imperative for common survival of all humankind as well as the biosphere (the ecological *oikoumene*). Intercultural theology nowadays has to be redefined in terms of the original sense of the task to explore the art of *colere* that stands for cultivating, nurturing, care giving, protecting for broken, fragmented and suffering creation as well as for adoration, worshipping, praising (“cultus”). It has become a part of a new ecological mind-set to redefine the core tasks of intercultural theology related to the goal of identifying and bringing into synergetic cooperation all cultural and religious resources and energies which have

¹² See Kairos for Creation. Confessing Hope for the Earth. The “Wuppertal Call” – Contributions and Recommendations from an International Conference on Eco-Theology and Ethics of Sustainability, Wuppertal 2019.

the potential to contribute to an ecological transformation of our common civilization, i.e. to nurture the ability of humankind to provide care and healing for the earth. This is because the earth needs “a year of complete rest for the land” (Lev 25:5).¹³

7 Interreligious dimensions of Intercultural Theology and intentional training for doing theology in multireligious settings

How to remain self-confident and visible in terms of a Christian identity and a diaconal profile while communicating closely and openly within a multi-religious setting has become a major issue also in the diaconal field. In the past, we have often focused on ecumenical learning in local parishes and in church settings, which was legitimate. Today we realize that Diaconia is also a major player in opening towards intercultural sensitivities and competences.¹⁴ Churches are shrinking demographically, the systems and the number of employers in Diaconia is growing, as an ageing society needs many professional caregivers in diaconal services. Diaconia research hubs play an important role in intercultural theology both on the national level¹⁵ but also on the European and international level.¹⁶ How do we relate to the discourse on intercultural dialogue and competences in Diaconia systems in missiology, ecumenical and studies of religious in theological faculties? Might be this is not a marginal issue and question as the number of people who are affected by multi-cultural settings and therefore need intercultural competences in fields of counselling, care and diaconal assistance is much bigger then might be just in local churches. To cut it short: Intercultural theological discourses should take notice of the pioneering roles which diaconal work has in many regards for the development of intercultural competencies and sensibilities.

The last World Assembly of Religions for Peace in Lindau,¹⁷ where almost 1,000 members met from all kinds of global religious traditions, all facing and pointing pas-

¹³ See Wuppertal Call *ibid*.

¹⁴ www.diakonie.de/fileadmin/user_upload/Diakonie/PDFs/Diakonie-Texte_PDF/02_2019_Identitaet_und_Pluralitaet_Druck.pdf.

¹⁵ www.diakoniewissenschaft-idm.de/2018/09/27/abschlussstagung-forschungsprojekt-merkmale-diakonischer-unternehmenskultur-in-einer-pluralen-gesellschaft/; www.diakonie.de/fileadmin/user_upload/Diakonie/PDFs/Ueber_Uns_PDF/190509_Begrueessung_Symposium_Diakonische_Identitaet_FINAL.pdf; www.diakonie-wissen.de/documents/10179/4183628/2019-01-29_Diak-Identitaet-in-pluraler-werdenden-Gesellschaft.pdf/0012ce22-6bd3-49f8-aac5-00ae8fd13238?version=1.0.

¹⁶ www.diaconiaresearch.org/.

¹⁷ rfp.org/home-3-2/10th-world-assembly/.

sionately to the urgency of global threats to peace, to the ongoing global development conflicts and to the global climate crisis has shown once again that

- a) there are many people of very good will in other world religious traditions who are eager to explore more close collaboration with Christian FBOs and churches on issues which are vital for the survival of humankind;
- b) that only common resistance and counter measures against hate speech, fake news and distorted perceptions of the religious other are meaningful, strong and relevant enough in the long run;
- c) that intercultural and interreligious theological dialogue can lead to convincing acts of public theology and joint commitments, which can have a lasting effect, particularly with several regional conflicts which were dealt with in separate second track forums.¹⁸

The emergence of strong right-wing populist movements in Europe despite four decades of intercultural theology, ecumenical dialogue and diaconal work with strangers and migrants in Germany also raised questions about the impact of academic intercultural theological endeavours on the local grassroots situations in our country. Where are the benefits of intercultural discourses to be felt in terms of resistance against the temptations of easy slogans and simplifications coming from right-wing populist propaganda in Germany and beyond?

8 Intercultural Theology as identifying and collecting sources of hope and comfort in the midst of despair – the pastoral and priestly dimensions

We need to come back to the core of that is the task of Christian theology as such, because the specific task of intercultural theology cannot differ from the general and fundamental task of Christian theology as such, which is to communicate, to understand and to reflect about faith in God which is the source of all hope on earth. It is not only the recent discussion within development organizations about the need for an integral concept of development and humanitarian assistance,¹⁹ which needs to re-

¹⁸ See Final Declaration from Lindau: <https://rfp.org/declaration-of-the-10th-world-assembly-of-religions-for-peace%ef%bb%bf/?fbclid=IwAR0pMbgFHCfV6GPs4vuTdRcWjSrNLQ7s6V7WjPOWxiL6vHAEezGoGmRc7E>.

¹⁹ https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/sites/default/files/iasc_guidelines_on_mental_health_and_psy

flect on the significance of psycho-social care in humanitarian assistance as well as in development cooperation, but it is also the recent events like Fridays for Future (FFF) strikes in the last months which give us background for this reflection. Spiritual care and pastoral counselling are often apart of development as well as humanitarian emergency relief work. This is a sensitive dimension, as actors need to make sure that occasions of vulnerability are not misused for proselytizing purposes. However, sharing about what sustains our hope – and therefore intercultural dialogue on spirituality - is an essential part of doing intercultural theology. Young people participating in FFF demonstrations are increasingly also asking quasi-religious questions: How long will I still live before the earth collapses totally? Does it make sense to continue with life as usual if Madrid COP25 fails to make a major progress? Can we still maintain the belief that God is holding this world in his hands if scientists tell us that the likelihood for a planetary disaster is greater than ever before as scientific evidence points to an accelerated speed by which crucial tipping points can be reached in the carefully balanced systems of nature?²⁰ Where is God in the processes unfolding, which destroy his precious creation? How can be explaining his presence to sustain the earth when all seems to point to an apocalyptic disaster? What provides us hope for resurrection not only for our own lives and those of our dear ones, but for the whole of suffering creation?

Fundamental religious questions like this emerge today in all culture of this earth. We have a great need to listen and deepen the pastoral dimension of intercultural theology, which in this sense allows us to share in the heritage and treasures of other forms of Christianity to articulate and to live hope in the midst of a suffering earth and humanity.

In order to summarize: Intercultural theology shares in the principle task of any Christian theology to reflect and share about what sustains genuine hope in a situation of apocalyptic despair. Intercultural dialogue on sources and energies of spirituality is a vital component of ecumenical theology today. Young people in many different contexts increasingly ask very religious questions in the midst of facing ever more evidences coming from alarming statements of natural scientists that the fate of this planet might be doomed to death or severe alteration if humankind is not able to change the course of fossil-based civilization within 10–15 years from now. Where is God today in the midst of the ecological crisis? How to interpret the faith statement

chosocial_support_in_emergency_settings.pdf; https://actalliance.org/?post_type=capacity_building&p=1532; <https://actalliance.org/documents/act-community-based-psychosocial-cbps-guiding-principles/>.

²⁰ See the dramatic new report of global environment scientists: www.nature.com/articles/d41586-019-03595-0.

meaningfully that God remains faithful with his covenant with creation and will now allow this earth to be destroyed again - in a context with overwhelming opposite evidence from natural scientists? What really provides hope beyond understanding for the whole of creation – while not falling prey to either religious escapism or hectic political activism or blind optimism?

Pastoral dimensions of intercultural theology thus point to the priestly function of Christian theology, i.e. the task of collecting the pains and scares of wounded creation from all parts of the globe, and bringing them together in local faith communities in liturgies of lament and of prayers while at the same time collecting voices of hope and encouragement celebrating the resurrection of life and its resistance wherever God's Spirit is sending us these signs. The pastoral dimension of intercultural theology also provides insights and capacities to cope with the limitations and the fragility of our human existence. Individual pastoral counselling deals with limitations, ruptures and traumata we experience in our personal live. Intercultural counselling and pastoral theology deals with collective and ecological limitations and rupture we face. It teaches us to cope with limitations, to spiritually digest limitations and to articulate hope beyond limitations, which is in God's hands. Experts tell us that with the external crisis in violation of nature and ecological catastrophes there is going hand in hand a more silent but nevertheless equally dramatic challenge with regard to worsening psycho-so-called disease burden of humanity: Many people suffer from mental health issues which is a partial reflection also on the stress the global environmental situation is taking as an advance from us. Living within limits, i.e. being liberated from the vicious circles of transgressing the planetary boundaries in our styles of production and consumption is the imperative we are facing in global learning process on ethics of sustainability. Living within the limitations of our physical bodies and our individual life networks without over-demanding our dear ones and ourselves is the imperative of intercultural learning between many local churches and with ecumenical friends in different settings of this world. Intercultural theological work should be ecologically inspired by the vision of the Sabbath for the whole of creation:

But in the seventh year the land is to have a year of Sabbath rest, a Sabbath to the LORD. Do not sow your fields or prune your vineyards. Do not reap what grows of itself or harvest the grapes of your untended vines. The land is to have a year of rest. Whatever the land yields during the Sabbath year will be food for you – for yourself, your male and female servants, and the hired worker and temporary resident who live among you. (Lev 25:4–6)

Ecumenical Perspectives on Intercultural Theology

Benjamin Simon

In a world that is more and more interconnected by globalisation and migration as well as media and technologies, theology and especially theological formation has to find new ways how to respond and to deal with the new challenges that are coming up. Theology needs to have the global perspective in mind. It is far too limited to only deal with theological trends and convictions coming from one context. A multi-perspectivity is needed in theological disciplines. I therefore plead for an Intercultural Theology that includes Ecumenical as well as interreligious questions that equips with the essential and requisited tools.

Hereby, Ecumene is seen in its etymological understanding: Ecumene is the whole inhabited world. Hence, Ecumene and ecumenical theology is always dealing with a global perspective. It is a contradiction in itself, if one deals with Ecumene without having the global aspect as well as interreligiosity and interculturality in mind. Most of the colleagues teaching theology in the European context and dealing with Ecumenical theology have limited their view to an internal perspective (“Binnenperspektive”), which is still Eurocentric or at least western influenced. It is high time that theological topics, especially in the field of systematic theology, are taking into consideration the understandings and experiences of people of the global south. This can take place by giving their approaches more space in the teachings at Western universities, by organising encounters with students, where

one can learn from each other or by using different methodologies, which would open new approaches to theological topics.

As a short prolegomena, I would like to concretise those three ideas by stressing on the good practices of the United Evangelical Mission¹ and other Mission agencies. They invite colleagues from the Global South to give guest lectures at European Universities. This is also done vice versa. Lecturers are sent to the Global South or also in a South-South exchange to learn in the very context they are sent to. Hereby, it is important that these exchanges are done for a limited period, so that the helpful experiences of doing theology in an intercultural setting are brought back to their own contexts.² A highly problematic issue that I observe in terms of the future of European churches is – despite the fact that *interculturality* and diversity gets more and more prominent and something with which Church people will have to deal with even more in the future – that church leadership no longer encourage colleagues and offer experiential-exchange opportunities abroad. This is due to the decreasing amount of Church workers and pastors.

Another way of learning from each other in a globalised world and of developing relevant theologies are encounters of any type. This is something, which should be promoted already during the studies. The younger generation is used to travel, is used to have contacts all over the world and to be connected via technologies with people from all over the world. Hence, it is of eminent importance that theologies are also entering this conversation by offering students of theology the possibilities of learning together and encountering each other. Knowing that theologies are not something – or at least should not be something –, that are developed in the so-called “ivory-tower”, the ideal for collecting those experiences would be not only to have classes together with colleagues from different cultural and denominational backgrounds, but also to share lives for a certain period of time. Many existential questions are raised and answered outside the classroom, where they are developed in long conversations. Two excellent cases where this example is put into practice are, the University of Applied Sciences for Intercultural Theology, Hermannsburg;³ and the Ecumenical Institute Bossey⁴ of the World Council of Churches.

This leads me to the third aspect, where classical approaches of doing theology should experience a change: the methodologies used. Narrative Theology can be of

¹ Cf. www.vemission.org.

² I am personally very grateful to UEM for the experience I collected at the Makumira University College in Tanzania.

³ www.fh-hermannsburg-eng.landeskirche-hannovers.de.

⁴ www.bossey.ch.

tremendous help, if we want to consider properly genuine contexts and existential settings leading to an intercultural theology. Narrative Theology is a methodological approach, which has its origin in French study of literature at the end of the 1960s. It was only in the 1980s that this methodology was taken up for exegetical discourses and used in biblical sciences.⁵ One of its findings suggests that most often a story has different perspectives and meanings. A story is always polysemous – it can be narrated from different perspectives. The methodology of narrativity enables to explain why certain biblical stories are helpful and “do function” in a certain way in a culture and why others are not. Hereby, narrativity does not want to establish criteria for reaching a verdict. Narrations are always true for those who want to hear the truth out of them.⁶ Performativity becomes relevant. The story includes the one reading or hearing it, and one becomes part of it by being transformed and changed. Christianity is since its very beginnings a narrative community.

Those perceptions are helpful for any theology. Theology speaks always from a certain context into a certain context. We are always wearing a “certain pair of glasses”, through which we perceive theological insights – most often, they are autobiographically related.

It is of importance that we do not move from Schleiermacher to Barth up to our times back and forth by focussing on historical reconstructions. This is for sure an important foundation for doing theology. But, we need always to be reminded that they are speaking into a certain time and coming from a certain context and culture. We should not remain there, if this is the case, it would be a provincialism, which is not helpful in a *glocalised* world.⁷ They might be a “narrative trampoline”, by adjusting their insights into the cultural and contextual situations in which our theology should speak into and be of existential relevance.

Neglecting the intercultural aspects of theology would be problematic. Even more problematic it would be, if we continue focussing on the Ecumene on a national level only. It would not be complete and not dealing with the whole issue – the locality of Ecumene needs to be widened by the intercultural perspective on a

⁵ Cf. Dorothea Erbele-Küster, Narrativität, in: Das Wissenschaftliche Bibellexikon im Internet, www.bibelwissenschaft.de/stichwort/37118.

⁶ Hereby, it is important to acknowledge that this is not a *laissez faire* [...] The case of the Kimbanguist Church from Congo has shown that inculturation has also its limits and needs some criteria to define if an inculturation is still Christian or not. Cf. forthcoming: Benjamin Simon, *Genese einer Religion. Der Kimbanguismus und sein Abschied von der Oekumene*, Leipzig 2020/21.

⁷ Cf. Reinhold Bernhardt, Interkulturelle Theologie – Ihre Programmatik in systematisch-theologischer Perspektive, in: *ZMiss* 2–3 (2014), 149–172, 150.

global level, hence the term World Christianity becomes more and more prominent.⁸ Intercultural Theology draws its material from a multitude of cultural and contextual expressions and diversities in order to deal with World Christianity.⁹

Intercultural Theology cannot be seen without the ecumenical aspects und perspectives. The global approach to intercultural theology is eminent if not crucial if one wants to deal with intercultural theology at all. Intercultural Theology has to have the Ecumenical perspective. Hereby, we always keep in mind that Ecumene means the whole inhabited world and implies the diversity of World Christianity up to and from the margins¹⁰ and includes to deal with people of different faiths. The problems that humanity is facing in our days are too existential; that people of faith should not cooperate and develop synergies to address and eradicate for e.g. issues of racisms and xenophobia, climate change and integrity of creation as well as questions on justice and peace.¹¹ All those aspects have been accumulating and becoming more obvious in the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the following part, I would like to demonstrate by developing four theses how far the Ecumenical perspective is of eminent importance for a proper definition of Intercultural Theology. Hereby, I always highlight the importance of Ecumene, if one talks about Intercultural Theology.¹² The aim is that it does not only remain a “science of mediation” (Vermittlungswissenschaft) as Andreas Feldtkeller¹³ has labelled it, but develops towards a discipline of Theological studies, dealing with crucial and existential matters of World Christianity.

⁸ Philip Jenkins, *The next Christendom. The coming of Global Christianity*, New York 2011.

⁹ Cf. Henning Wrogemann, *Interkulturelle Theologie und Hermeneutik. Grundfragen, aktuelle Beispiele, theoretische Perspektiven*, Gütersloh 2012, 13.

¹⁰ Cf. Jooseup Keum, *Together towards Life*, Geneva 2012. Chapter 2 is dealing with “Mission from the margins”.

¹¹ Those are genuine topics, which the World Council of Churches is dealing with: Ecumenism embodies the search for Reconciliation in eradicating oppression and bringing people of good faith together as well as Unity, the collaborative work for justice and peace.

¹² The Ecumenical dimension is often neglected when one speaks about Intercultural Theology. Cf. Benjamin Simon, *Missionswissenschaft und Interkulturelle Theologie. Genese und Notwendigkeit einer neuen Theologie*, in: Uta André, *Transkulturelle Begegnungen und interreligiöser Dialog. Erkundungen und Entdeckungen im Anschluss an Werner Kahl*, Hamburg 2017, 45–56. Henning Wrogemann is an exception when he says: „Interkulturelle Ökumene hat um vieles mehr die Entwicklungen des weltweiten Christentums im Blick als herkömmliche Konfessionskunde.“ 52.

¹³ Vgl. Andreas Feldtkeller, *Interkulturelle Theologie und Religionswissenschaft*, in: *ZMiss* 2–3 (2014), 231–243.

Thesis 1

Intercultural Theology from an Ecumenical perspective develops common sense for a respectful togetherness.

If one follows mass media and some political parties and their statements about the political situation in Europe, one gets the impression that Europe and actually many other parts of the world fall back into nationalism, if not tribalism. Several states have to deal with segregation, intentions, and processes of autonomy. An individualisation of societies is moving on forward. One gets the impression, that the personal ego is permanently put forward – there is no more space for others, strangers, and especially not asylum seekers. In COVID-19 pandemic the decisions were mostly taken on national levels, without looking at the potential of e.g. a European Union. Racism and its segregation have nearly become part of the politically correct overtone – in some parts of the world, it is a racism of colour – the Black Lives Matter-movement is the most prominent. On top of this, it has become a racism of privileges – it is about the “Haves and the non-haves”. Human beings who are different are pushed at the margins and excluded from the society.

For the World wide ecumenical movement, represented by the World Council of Churches questions on xenophobia and racism are of central importance too. The daily struggles of oppressed and marginalised people in all kinds of cultures, especially in the last months show that racism is still a virus amongst humanity, which is not excluding the Christian communities. I quote from the general secretaries’ report:

“The problem of racism is growing quickly in many, if not all, parts of the world. That means that a new programme to combat racism must address this poison as it appears in many forms in many contexts. It must particularly help the churches to be able to analyse its roots and how it appears in attitudes, practices, policies, politics, public discourse and debates, legal systems, and much more. Now is the time to move beyond discussion based on accusations and denials of being a ‘racist’. Most people would deny that, without reflecting on how we are all involved in cultures and practices of discrimination, degradation, prejudice, a sense of superiority vis à vis others, and exclusion. The WCC should use its potential for being a platform of sharing, empowering, analysing, and learning what this is and how to address and combat it.”¹⁴

¹⁴ Report of the general secretary Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit to the WCC Executive Committee on 20 November 2019, www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/executive-committee/bossey-november-2019/report-of-the-wcc-general-secretary-rev-dr-olav-fykse-tveit-to-the-wcc-executive-committee).

We need to analyse this xenophobic curse and learn about it – as well as to make it part of our curricula. Intercultural Theology has the local and the global perspective – it does not limit its view to a theological snip but rather brings in perspectives from different contexts. Hence, the local and global perspectives become *glocal*. Through encounters, prejudices and barriers are eradicated. We learn from each other and learn to accept each other in our differences so that we can build a respectful togetherness.

Thesis 2

Intercultural Theology from an Ecumenical perspective recognises our own vulnerability and responsibility for God's creation.

The phenomenon of migration is as old as human kind. The reasons for migrations differ: They might be of political, sociological, economical or ecological reasons or due to wars. The reasons are more and more interconnected and not to be seen monocausal and unilaterally. This is shown best in one of the major reasons of migration of tomorrow: The ecological migration. At the WCC-Assembly in 2013 in South Korea a delegate from the pacific island Tuvalu told me under tears, that his island will be floated in less than 20 years. An objective truth relying on scientific findings. Nevertheless, it is admirable that their motto as church people and part of the world wide ecumenical movement is: “We are not drowning but fighting.”¹⁵

Climate change makes the vulnerable more vulnerable and it affects all dimensions of life. Therefore, all the United Nations' 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that includes Quality Education (Goal 4) become crucial. “It is impressive to hear and see how the churches around the world are raising their voices and issuing calls for pilgrimages of climate justice, getting into serious discourse with governments and the finance and business sectors”, WCC general secretary said.¹⁶

Intercultural Theology in an Ecumenical perspective has to deal with those challenges, and try to find answers and solutions. Intercultural Theology is a prophetic theology that enables theologians and church people to respect the cultural features and characteristics to speak into the societies and help the people to raise their voices.

¹⁵ Cf. for more informations: <https://climateandcapitalism.com/2014/08/27/pacific-climate-warriors-we-are-not-drowning-we-are-fighting/>.

¹⁶ Fykse Tveit, Report.

Thesis 3

*Intercultural Theology from an Ecumenical perspective opens up for the positive aspects of the inner-Christian plurality and the “one family of humanity”.*¹⁷

Our societies are changing permanently through migration. This is not due to asylum seekers who arrived in the last 3–5 years in Continental Europe, rather to people migrating of many other reasons. Migration is a genuine human characteristic and hence, a part in all of our societies. To deal with this increasing phenomenon will be one of the main challenges of the future. Worldwide an increasing amount of people will have more and more reasons to migrate to other parts of the world (lack of food and water, social injustice etc.) Some 10 years ago, a statistic has shown already that 67% of people with migrant background in the German context are Christians.¹⁸ They are mainly Roman-Catholics from Eastern Europe and Orthodox Christians, but amongst the Christians are also many Africans and Asians of rather protestant traditions.¹⁹

A common phenomenon with migrants is that they are also bringing their faith and spiritualities. The diversities of Christianity are brought with and have become a part of the contexts we are living in.

In how far do we recognise and acknowledge them? When I started my research on Christians from African origin in 1998, it was a pioneering work.²⁰ In the meantime, we do have fortunately some researchers of different disciplines dealing with that phenomenon. Established Churches are dealing partially with those new Ecumenical partners but only as a marginal topic.

In Intercultural Theology from an Ecumenical perspective, one will have to deal with hermeneutical questions. The growing part of Christianity is related to a Charismatic-Pentecostal Spirituality, with which also the Ecumenical movement will have to deal much more in the future.

Already in Acts 2 plurality is quoted as something positive. The Spirit helps to understand but does not want to level the differences. “Without a dissolution of diversity and the complexity of its origin, without eradicating other forms of un-

¹⁷ Tveit uses the term “one human family”, which includes all people in societies in which we live, cf. Report.

¹⁸ Cf. Hessischer Integrationsmonitor 2008.

¹⁹ Benjamin Simon, Christliche Gemeinden und Migration. Zwei Seiten einer Medaille, in: Deutsches Pfarrerblatt 5 (2011), 255–263.

²⁰ The thesis was published under the title: Afrikanische Kirchen in Deutschland, Frankfurt/M. 2003. The English reworked version was published five years later: From Migrants to Missionaries, Frankfurt/M. 2008.

derstanding, follows an unpredictable commonality of experience and of understandings.”²¹

It is through daily encounter that one starts to understand different spiritualities, worldviews, other religions, and in general the stranger.²² Through this encounter, one realises that there are much more common themes that unite us than divide us. Hence, it is so important that we interact with each other that we deal with different intercultural perspectives and contextualities. If differences occur, the methodology of “Receptive Ecumenism” could be of pronounced help – a methodology through which we can learn from each other.²³ One listens to the other and is ready to share the different perspectives. Self-critique is welcomed and at use.

Intercultural Theology uses different methodologies and is not only an „attitude and method“²⁴ as Franz Gmainer-Pranzl suggested. It is rather a way in which a ground-breaking self-revision of Theology can take place²⁵ – and I would like to add: on the way to an independent and new theological discipline.

Thesis 4

Intercultural Theology from Ecumenical perspectives transforms Christianity by raising awareness that identities are something fluid.

Church people tend very often to stick to traditions and behaviours, which refer to former times and to their so-called “church-culture”. A consequence of this is shown in the drastically loss of membership of the established churches in the European context until the year 2060. The “Freiburger Studie” has recently shown that membership figures of the protestant churches in Germany will be halved. It is not due to the age pyramid but rather to the fact that it is not anymore an automatism that young parents between 25 and 40 bring their children for baptism.²⁶

The attractivity of established churches has decreased for that age group. Churches are too much sticking on old-fashioned ways of living their faith and spiritualities – it seems that they have forgotten that Christian identity or rather

²¹ Michael Welker, *Gottes Geist. Theologie des Geistes*, Neukirchen-Vluyn 1992, 218s (Transl. BS).

²² Cf. Theo Sundermeier, *Den Fremden verstehen. Eine praktische Hermeneutik*, Göttingen 1996.

²³ Paul D. Murray, *Introducing Receptive Ecumenism*, in: Uta André et al., *Reforming Theology, Migrating Church, Transforming Society*, Hamburg 2017, 52–60.

²⁴ Franz Gmainer-Pranzl, *Welt-Theologie. Verantwortung des christlichen Glaubens in globaler Perspektive*, in: *Interkulturelle Theologie* 38 (2012), 422.

²⁵ Volker Küster, *Einführung in die Interkulturelle Theologie*, Göttingen 2011, 13.

²⁶ Matthias Drobrinski, *Kirchen verlieren bis 2060 fast die Hälfte ihre Mitglieder*, in: *Süddeutsche Zeitung* vom 2. Mai 2019 (online-Version). Drobrinski bezieht sich dabei auf die Studie des Freiburger Forschungszentrums Generationenverträge von 2019.

identities are something that are open and not determined. Its identity is not a rigid corset, but constitutes itself every time anew through the encounter.²⁷ Identities are something fluid.

Amongst the first academic disciplines, dealing with the encounter of the stranger have been Missiology and Mission studies. Mission was always about going to the edges and margins, and listening to the marginalised, combined with the ability and the willingness of changing its own setting and leaving the well-known comfort zone. Mission was always about changes and transformation. Mission is not only about *translatio* of the Gospel into different contexts, not only about *transmissio*, the being sent, but also *transformatio* constitutes one of the three pillars of mission.²⁸ This accords with the idea expressed in the Mission document of WCC Together Towards Life (TTL): “Mission spirituality resists and seeks to transform all life-destroying values and systems wherever these are at work in our economies, our politics, and even our churches.”²⁹

Learning through intercultural encounters can help in transforming the way how Christianity and its spirituality can be lived. Furthermore, the power of transformation shows if a theology is of relevance.³⁰ Theological and Spiritual traditions do not have to stick on the way it was – this theological flexibility on identities can lead to an openness towards each other, which leads to reconciliation and even unity.

Conclusion

The challenges to Theological formation especially Ecumenical Theological formation have increased in the past twenty years. It is far too less to deal with only the classical theological disciplines dating back to the 19th Century.

Church life as well as Theological formation are in need of transformation in a *glocalised* world. Such transformation can be promoted by giving Intercultural Theology the space in theological formation, which it deserves in view of the contemporary challenges. Those challenges can be summarised in a peaceful togetherness, responsibility for God’s creation, knowing how to deal with diversity and religious pluralism as well as being aware of transformative powers in Christianity.

²⁷ Theo Sundermeier, *Den Fremden verstehen. Eine praktische Hermeneutik*, Göttingen 1996, 227.

²⁸ Benjamin Simon, *Mission and its three Pillars. Translation, Transmission and Transformation*, in: *IRM* 107 (2018), 399–412.

²⁹ WCC, *Together Towards Life*, Geneva 2012, 29.

³⁰ Bernhardt, *Interkulturelle Theologie*, 153.

These topics, if one wants to address them adequately, can only be addressed from an ecumenical point of view. Therefore, it includes reflections on justice and peace, as well as reconciliation and unity. Hereby, it would be too monolithic if one would not take into consideration the different views and perspectives from the various contexts and cultures. Intercultural Theology with ecumenical perspectives helps Theology to get out of regional, national, and ethnical isolation.

Worldwide, theological formation is in need of transformation towards the existential needs of the believers and adherents. Intercultural Theology from Ecumenical perspectives should be seen on one hand as a dimension of doing theology, and on the other hand, as a new theological discipline.³¹ Hence, Intercultural Theology explores the contextual and interreligious dimensions of Christian faith and needs to take hereby also the ecumenical perspectives into account.³² A solid formation in Intercultural Theology is the *sine qua non* if theologians and hence the churches want to be prepared for the challenges to come in a *glocalised* world dealing with World Christianity.

³¹ Cf. Küster, Einführung, 13.

³² Cf. *ibid.*, 115.

Intercultural Theology: Stepping-stone towards Just and Inclusive Congregations?

Andrea Fröchtling

“Intercultural theology and the practical work in churches and education”, this is what this panel session is supposed to venture into. I would like to describe intercultural theology itself as a – primarily – practical discipline:¹ constructive and re-constructive, a kind of migratory hermeneutics, exploring action-oriented pathways alongside milestones such as contextual theologies, cultural studies, constructivism, postcolonialism and the classical loci of liberation theologies and rights-based approaches.

In my brief pointers for discussion, I would like to focus on the (potential) impact of Intercultural Theology for churches and congregations. Some ten years ago, I observed a very vivid debate between students of the first cohort of the MA Inter-

¹ Praxeology, doing theology and the transformative potential have its basis in the four functions of Intercultural Theology as highlighted by Volker Küster, *Einführung in die Interkulturelle Theologie*, Göttingen 2011, 115s: the heuristic, the fundamental theological, the anamnestic and the ethical function. Intercultural Theology as a discipline is located in-between diverse and hybrid forms of Christian expressions and their respective local, cultural and cultural embeddings and the respective dialogues with regard to universality and particularity (see inter alia Klaus Hock, *Einführung in die Interkulturelle Theologie*, Darmstadt 2011, 149). For a concise survey on the development of intercultural Pastoral Theology see, inter alia, Emmanuel Yartekwei Larrey, *Pastoral Theology in an intercultural world*, Cleveland 2006, 47ss.

cultural Theology. Their task, then, had been a twofold one: first, to come up with a definition of Intercultural Theology, second, to define its potential impact on the churches. My class notes from that point in time read: “No consensus on a definition, general feeling that Intercultural Theology is rather doing theology or theological work under construction”. The constructive aspect of Intercultural Theology was highlighted by quite a number of students, for example:

“With Intercultural Theology, you can build the church of Christ anew. Or maybe not anew, maybe as it was meant to be right from the scratch.”

“Ordinary theology here in Ethiopia, it is what the West prescribed, all set in stone, since the missionaries came. With this intercultural theology it is like with a new cornerstone: You can build something new.”

Another aspect strongly highlighted by the first cohort of students was the perception of Intercultural Theology as doing theology from a justice-perspective: A student remarked in this regard:

“I guess with Intercultural Theology, nothing is cast in stone. Not theology and dogmatics, not culture and also not the world as it is now: oppressive, racist, the majority excluding the minority, hates against have-nots, human rights violation, gender-based violence. The world as it is, is not cast in stone, and Intercultural Theology is small stepping stones towards just and inclusive communities everywhere.”

Longkumer, when analysing Intercultural Theology, talks about the imperative for theologians and mission scholars to “persist in developing a theological discourse that promotes values that engender global peace and justice, where goodness of life flourishes for all creation.”² She argues that intercultural hermeneutics “strikes at the roots of hegemonic dominance and parochialism of any culture that undermine the plurality of contexts and diversity of cultures”³. She describes intercultural hermeneutics as “a potential resource for articulating a theological position that consciously advocates for the marginalized.”⁴

² Atola Longkumer, *Intercultural Hermeneutics from an Indian Feminist Theology Perspective*. *Interkulturelle Theologie*, in: *ZMiss* 40 (2014), 201–218, 202.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

In this vein, she emphasizes that intercultural hermeneutics is “more than recognizing differences and the warm rhetorics of dialogue”⁵, but rather “an exercise to challenge, oppose and transform oppressive structures to being inclusive and just”.⁶

Longkumer thus ascribes Intercultural Theology the inherent potential to challenge and transform the world at large. And, I would add, Intercultural Theology also bears the potential of changing the much smaller world of ecclesial landscapes. In an increasingly globalized world, congregations world-over develop into more diverse, more intercultural communities. Intercultural Theology can, indeed, serve as a stepping-stone towards more just and justice-oriented and more inclusive communities. Just some few pointers for discussion in that regard:

a) Intercultural Theology is a constant invitation and reminder to change perspective, location and loci: Intercultural Theology considers marginality as theology-, discourse and agency-/praxis-generating places par excellence. Classical theological loci get contextualized, often in ways that put a praxeological axis at centre stage.⁷ This implies no monolithic readings, but dynamic encounters between text(s) and context(s), moving from deductive to inductive approaches, encultured and culturally sensitive and yet inspired by a Pentecost(al) perspective of Oneness in diversity. As an invitation and a reminder to change perspective, Intercultural Theology could also serve as the hermeneutical stepping stone towards developing intercultural competence in congregational and generally in interreligious faith-based settings.

b) Intercultural Theology means doing theology and justice: Theologizing regains its ‘sapiential’ grounding and community-focus; it newly asserts its character as a life-science and dares to venture out of the silo and the ivory tower into the public arena. In Germany as well as in a number of other European countries, right-wing movements are claiming more and more public space. Rhetorics are used that essentialize notions of culture, that construct cultural ‘clashes’ or ‘irreconcilabilities’ and that incite logics of exclusion and othering. Right-wing populism and extremism highjacks the notion of ‘culture’ to safeguard the ideological

⁵ Longkumer, *Intercultural Hermeneutics*, 203.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 213.

⁷ See e.g. Gemma Tulud Cruz’s seminal book: *An intercultural theology of migration*, Leiden-Boston 2010, 235ss, for further reflection on “wilderness and marginality as space”.

and hegemonic construct of ‘the Christian West’. Intercultural Theology has the potential and, I would say, also the duty to become a kind of public theology that opposes exclusivist and racist claims, a public theology that fosters diversity and that offers counter-readings against cultural absolutism and migration policies that endanger human life, livelihood and dignity.

c) Intercultural Theology encourages the priesthood of all believers: As there are no hegemonic readings, the interpretation of the Gospel in word and deed is a task of the congregation at large. The priesthood of all believers acknowledges and encourages the plurality of voices; *missio Dei* and its transformative, life-giving and sustaining aspects feature strongly as a common task of congregations and churches.

d) Intercultural Theology calls for inclusive communities: At the current stage, in the German context, 10 o’clock on a Sunday morning has often been cited as the most segregated hour of the week. Believers of various denominational backgrounds gather, more often than not, in rather mono-ethnic and monolingual settings for worship. Intercultural Theology could broaden the base for intercultural opening of churches, congregations and faith-communities, turning them into more ecumenical communities at large. Thus, changing ecclesial landscapes will, in the long run, also lead to changes in the perception and practice of *martyria*, *leitourgia*, *diakonia* and *koinonia*, in a more inclusive, more just and more diverse and thus more ecumenical way. Inclusion in theory and praxis implies acknowledging heterogeneity, not homogeneity as the norm.⁸

Intercultural Theology, depending on the approach, has often links to classical liberation theologies, to the triad of see-judge-act, to contextual hermeneutics, to community paradigms and the like. But, other than most expressions of classical liberation theologies dating back to the 70s and 80s, Intercultural Theology lacks a notion of uniformity that was often the background of e.g. Latin American base

⁸ Henning Wrogemann, *Interkulturelle Theologie und Hermeneutik. Grundfragen, aktuelle Beispiele, theoretische Perspektiven*, Gütersloh 2012, 354ss, discusses issues related to ecumenical models of unity and/in diversity and points to power-issues at play in the process. In a similar vein, Martha Frederiks, *World Christianity. A training school for multiculturalism*, in: *Exchange* 38 (2009), 3–20, esp.19, takes a critical look at unity and diversity/pluralism. She describes pluralism as “a critical notion that can function as a safety-valve against the development of Christian ideologies”. Considering these findings, tackling ‘community’ from the perspective of inclusion could help to safeguard diversity as ‘the norm’ and mitigate power-struggles for hegemonial interpretations, discourses and practices.

communities. Today, margins and centres are in flux and so are identities. Intercultural Theology has no longer its allocated space, discourse and struggle ground in only one region but has started to occupy the 'trans-', the interstices, the third spaces, the hybrid. As such, it has started, in some places, to shape faith communities towards becoming inclusive communities, more sensitive to diversity, more sensitive to issues of justice and inclusion. In order to gain a stronger impact on churches and congregational life, the embedding of Intercultural Theology and intercultural pedagogy⁹ into curricula in theological training, whether on-site and residential or online or blended-learning might be a next important step.

⁹ Areas of convergence between Intercultural Theology and intercultural pedagogy are manifold and start with the respective 'Leitmotive': Georg Auernheimer, *Einführung in die interkulturelle Pädagogik*, Darmstadt 2016, e.g., identified the principles of appreciation of diversity, inclusion and equal opportunity as 'Leitmotive' of intercultural pedagogy (19s).

A Correlation Study on Religiosity, Attitude towards Immigrants and Ambiguity Tolerance and its Implications on Religious Education

Pui Yee Pong

1 Introduction

Migration is a worldwide phenomenon, but attitude towards immigrants differ from country to country.¹ Sometimes religious issue plays a major role in matters of conflicts and of accepting strangers. The question is open whether there are influences of education in schools, parishes and families and whether these influences are similar in different contexts.

This article is a part of my doctoral research project, themed “A Correlation Study on Religiosity, Attitude towards Immigrants and Ambiguity Tolerance and Its Implications on Religious Education”. This thesis is to research if there are common correlations among the matters of attitude towards immigrants, religiosity and ambiguity tolerance with the focus of Protestant secondary schools in Germany and Hong Kong.

¹ United Nations. Department of Economic and Social Affairs, International Migration Report 2017. Highlights, www.un.org (27.6.2021).

This intercultural and comparative study is to present an overall picture of religiosity, ambiguity tolerance and acceptance attitude of secondary school students towards immigrants. The research intends to provide useful information for (1) teachers in schools and religious organizations to predict students' thinking and behaviour towards immigrants. Teachers would be able to lead students into better discussions in classrooms and to enhance teaching effectiveness and (2) for leaders and policy makers in schools and religious organizations to adjust existing policies so as to prevent cultural and religious conflicts. They would be also able to make plans to create harmonious school and social atmospheres.

The topic of this panel is "Intercultural Theology and the Practical Work in Churches and Education". Therefore, the focus of this article is on religious education system in secondary schools in Germany and Hong Kong.

2 Religious education

Religious education in religious organizations, such as churches and mosques emphasize more on spirituality. The objectives are to develop the understanding of doctrines, enhance religious beliefs and religious participations of followers.

Compared to the religious education in religious organizations, religious education in secondary schools are more focused on moral and citizenship. The curricula aim to nurture students with good moral and socially acceptable behaviour and to become good citizens. The subject of Religious Education (RE) helps to increase social integration of migrants and promotion of a harmonic society. The comparisons of the subject of RE in secondary schools in Germany with Hong Kong are as follows:

2.1 Types of curricula

Germany

According to the Basic Law (*Grundgesetz* – R1, Article 7), RE is part of the curriculum in state schools. In the report of The Education System in the Federal Republic of Germany 2016/2017, published by the German EURYDICE Unit of the Federal Government, RE is part of the curriculum² in state schools. Denominational religious education is given in accordance with the religious community concerned.³

² Donald P. Kommers, *The Constitutional Jurisprudence of the Federal Republic of Germany*, Durham ²1997, 126s, stated that this is the constitutional obligation to provide Catholic RE and

Hong Kong

There are two types of RE curricula: school based curriculum and public examination based curriculum.⁴

a) School based curriculum

School based curriculum provides school management organizations⁵ a larger flexibility on teaching and assessment. The curriculum is non-standardized. Teaching curricula are designed by religious organizations and/or RE teachers.

In Hong Kong school system, there are three main types of schools:⁶ (1) Government school, which is operated and financed by government. (2) Government aided school, which is operated by religious organizations or charitable organizations and financed by government. (3) Private school, which is operated and financed by private organizations.

School based religious education curriculum can be founded in most schools operated by religious organizations, according to the decisions of the school management committees. School based religious education curriculum are not founded in schools operated by non-religious organizations. Because their school management committees usually have no interest to provide RE subject in schools.

b) Public examination based curriculum

Religion instructions and ethics instructions are combined as an elective part of the public examination based curriculum. In the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE)⁷ curriculum, the concepts of promoting social integration

Protestant RE, students and their parents have the right to withdraw from RE with their freedom of conscience.

³ The German EURYDICE Unit of the Federal Government. The Education System in the Federal Republic of Germany 2016/2017. A description of the responsibilities, structures and developments in education policy for the exchange of information in Europe. Bonn. Federal Ministry of Education and Research: www.kmk.org/fileadmin/Dateien/pdf/Eurydice/Bildungswesen-engl-pdfs/dossier_en_ebook.pdf (25.6.2020), 19–21.

⁴ Public exam based curriculum is in secondary 4 to 6.

⁵ Schools in Hong Kong do not hold constitutional obligation to provide RE. Schools have freedom to provide or not provide RE.

⁶ ESF and other private international schools are categorized as non-local schools, which provide secondary education with another curriculum, such as International Baccalaureate (IB). According to the statistic from the Education Bureau, in 2019 to 2020, there are 504 registered secondary schools, including 471 local schools and 33 ESF and other private international schools, cf. Education Bureau, Home. About EDB. Publications and Statistics. Figures and Statistics: www.edb.gov.hk/en/about-edb/publications-stat/figures/sec.html (22.7.2020).

⁷ After the completion of 6 years primary school and 6 years secondary school, students are eligible to participate the public exam, which called “Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education

and equal human rights of all people without racial borders, are included in the subject of “Ethics and Religious Studies” (ERS). One of the aims of instruction is to educate students to accept and respect people with different abilities and backgrounds.

After the completion of three-year study in secondary senior level, students are eligible to participate in the public examination, HKDSE, which prepare students to study in universities. Similar to the religious education in schools in Germany, ERS subject is also a mixture of ethics, biblical and dogmatical themes, in addition, social issues in an open-ended approach without indoctrination. It is viewed as a part of humanities studies⁸ in academic training.

Because the number of students⁹ who enrolled in ERS subject is very small. To reduce redundancy of teaching resources, some schools,¹⁰ usually located in the same district, with the same or different denominations in Protestantism, join and offer one ERS class. ERS students in a combined class whose subject teachers and classmates are not from their own attending schools. Students are from several schools in the district. Concerning different school schedule and transportations, a combined class is usually on Saturday morning or afternoon.

2.2 Characteristics of curricula

Germany

RE is a mixture of social, biblical and dogmatical themes in an open-ended approach with no indoctrination. The religious education classes, mainly in Catholicism and Protestantism, are applied in state schools of most federal states (*Länder*) in Germany. The curriculum is standardized.

(HKDSE). Officially, HKDSE is equivalent to General Certificate of Education (GCE) Advanced Level (A Level) in United Kingdom.

⁸ The Education Bureau in Hong Kong divided all subjects into “key learning areas” in the overall curriculum development in secondary education. The subject “Ethics and Religious Studies” is under the area of personal, social and humanities education, cf. Education Bureau, Home. Curriculum Development. Curriculum Documents and reports. Subjects under the 8 Key Learning Areas. The Government of Hong Kong Special Administration Region: www.edb.gov.hk/en/curriculum-development/cs-curriculum-doc-report/8-key-area/ (23.12.2016).

⁹ ERS is an elective subject. And it is not an entry prerequisite of almost all faculties in universities in Hong Kong. But many other faculties in universities in Hong Kong required good HKDSE results in certain elective subjects as university entry requirements. For example, many sciences faculties require good results in the subjects of Physics, Chemistry and or Biology. Secondary school students would select elective subject(s) in secondary school in order to fulfill university entry requirements, especially for those who aim at entering universities.

¹⁰ Class of ERS (Catholicism) are arranged by the Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong.

Hong Kong

a) School based curriculum

School based curriculum is non-standardized. It is a mixture of ethics, biblical and dogmatical themes. School management organizations have large flexibility on curriculum design, teaching and assessment. Many Catholic schools and Protestant schools help students to develop a Catholic or Protestant system of value through their RE classes.

b) Public examination based curriculum

Hong Kong exam based is a mixture of ethics, biblical and dogmatical themes, in addition, social issues in an open-ended approach without indoctrination. It is viewed as a part of humanities studies in academic training.

2.3 RE subjects

Germany

Most RE subjects are Catholicism and Protestantism. Jewish, Orthodox and other religions of RE are provided in about half of all the states, according to the German EURYDICE Unit of the Federal Government.

With the purposes of integration and enhance intercultural and interreligious competences, some federal states started to introduce Islamic RE¹¹ in state schools. Some federal states provide Islamic RE in German language, some other federal states provide Islamic RE in students' native language. Islamic RE was firstly introduced as a standard subject in Nordrhein-Westfalen in 2012 and in Niedersachsen in 2013. Some federal states offer Islamic RE as pilot projects and trials at individual schools.

Hong Kong

a) School based curriculum

The subjects of school-based curriculum are commonly called "Religion", "Christian¹² Education" or "Christian Ethics" in Protestant secondary schools. They are viewed more relatively as a part of student personal growth or personal development, rather than as a part of academic training, in both junior and senior second-

¹¹ Until now, according to the Article 7, Paragraph 3 of the Basic Law, Islamic organizations have not been recognized as religious communities. The process of introducing and implementing Islamic religious education as a standard subject is still on a transitional basis, stated in the EURYDICE Unit, 19–21.

¹² Christian refers to Protestant in Hong Kong context.

ary education,¹³ but more obvious in junior level. Other religious schools, including Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism, usually offer school based RE lessons specialized in their religions, according to the religious background of school management organizations.

b) Public examination based curriculum

The subject of public examination based curriculum is called “Ethics and Religious Studies” (ERS). This is one of the elective subjects in the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE). Students can choose to study one of the Religious Traditions: Buddhism and Christianity. Confucianism, Islam and Taoism will be implemented at a later phase.

2.4 Substitutes subjects

Germany

In most of the federal states, schools offer the subject of “Ethics” to replace the subject of RE. The subject objective of “Ethics” is to enable students to make reasonable judgments and responsible actions, and to understand the diversity of beliefs and worldviews. In some federal states, the “Ethics” subject is called “Philosophy” or “Values and Norms”. The subject of “Ethics” does not have the full legal value of RE. It functions as a substitute subject.

In Berlin, the subject “Ethics” is a compulsory subject in grades 7 to 10. In Brandenburg, the subject “Fundamental questions of life – ethics – religious education” (*Lebensgestaltung-Ethik-Religionskunde – LER*) is a compulsory subject in grades 5 to 10. In Berlin and Brandenburg, on request, students may also attend in RE classes, as an addition or an alternative subject, stated in the German EURYDICE Unit of the Federal Government.

Hong Kong

a) School based curriculum

Government schools¹⁴ and non-religious schools do not provide school based RE lessons. Some of these schools develop school-based subjects named, “Life Education”, “Growth Education” or “Moral and Civic Education” for teaching what is right and wrong according to the common values accepted in society. Some other

¹³ Junior secondary education refers to secondary 1 to 3. In average, students are about age 13 to 15. Senior secondary education refers to secondary 4 to 6. In average, students are about age 16 to 18.

¹⁴ It is comparable to the state schools in Germany.

of these schools do not offer any personal growth, ethics and values subjects or related subjects.

b) Public examination based curriculum

ERS is an elective subject. There is no substitute subject of ERS.

2.5 Student participation

Germany

The German EURYDICE Unit quoted the Law on the Religious Education of Children (*Gesetz über die religiöse Kindererziehung* – R11) in the report of The Education System in the Federal Republic of Germany 2016/2017, which a child is independent to decide on receiving religious instruction at age of 14. Parents, with the child's consent, decide on receiving religious education for the child of age 12.¹⁵

Hong Kong

a) School based curriculum

School based RE in Catholic and Protestant schools mainly emphasize on value education from the teachings of the Bible¹⁶. Students are expected to participate in school based RE lessons in religious schools, regardless of their religious affiliations. In other words, the RE lessons are compulsory for all students in religious schools. Students or parents¹⁷ should choose a non-religious school if RE lesson is not preferred.

The fact is, many Hong Kong parents like to send their children to Catholic schools and Protestant schools, although parents and/or children are not religious. Because Catholic schools and Protestant schools have very good reputation in academic training. Students' university entry rate is usually high in Catholic schools and Protestant schools. Some parents even change their religion affiliations to Catholic or Protestant, so their children have a better chance to get into a Catholic school or a Protestant school.

¹⁵ Cf. 19–21.

¹⁶ For example, teaching students the concept of forgiveness through the bible story: Jesus instructed Peter to forgive seventy seven times. Students are expected to apply forgiveness in their daily life.

¹⁷ Students are free to choose between religious schools or non-religious schools which including RE subject or not. In my observation, many non-religious students are attending religious schools. Non-religious students and non-religious parents basically have no rejection on RE subject. The religious background usually is not the main concern in the selection of school, but the academic standard.

b) Public examination based curriculum

Under public exam based curriculum, ERS is an elective subject and is not an entry prerequisite of almost all faculties in universities in Hong Kong. According to the Hong Kong Examination Authority, in 2019, the total number of candidates are 46,916 people. 726 candidates¹⁸ took part in ERS exam, and number of school participation is 80 schools.¹⁹

2.6 Allocation criteria

Germany

Secondary school students have to attend RE lessons according to the confession in which they are enrolled. If secondary school students and their families do not belong to any religious community or if provided with an official letter written by parents, students can study the subject of “Ethics” instead of the RE subjects.

Hong Kong

a) School based curriculum

Under school-based curriculum, it is the decision of school management to offer a religion subject or not. For example, a school operated by a Catholic organization would offer religious education subject only in Catholic, but not Protestant or other religion. A school operated by a Protestant organization offers a religious education subject only in Protestant. Same practices are in schools operated by Buddhism, Confucianism or Taoism organization. Catholic, Protestant, Buddhism, Confucianism or Taoism religious subjects would not be founded in one school.

If the RE subject is offered, all students in this school, are normally expected to participate, regardless of students’ religiosity and religion affiliations. If students do not want to have RE lesson in school, they may choose to study in government school or aided schools operated by charitable organization or non-religious organization.

b) Public examination based curriculum

Under public exam based curriculum, RE is an elective subject. It is the decision of individual student to take a RE subject in the public exam.

¹⁸ The statistics include only day-school students.

¹⁹ 2019 HKDSE Entry statistics. Table 2g: 2019 HKDSE Entries statistics in each of the Category A subjects: www.hkeaa.edu.hk/DocLibrary/HKDSE/Exam_Report/Examination_Statistics/dseexamstat19_2.pdf (22.7.2020), 7.

2.7 Teaching materials

Germany

Standardized textbooks are the main teaching materials of RE subject. Jäggle, Rothgangel and Schlag²⁰ mentioned that, according to the article 7, the federal state is responsible for providing RE, including teaching material, and the religious groups are responsible for the contents of the lessons. Therefore, the RE curriculum is in line with the principles of religious groups. Thus, the German churches, participate in lesson plan committees on the issue of curriculum content as well as making decisions on approving teaching materials.

Hong Kong

a) School based curriculum

Under school-based curriculum, there is no official standardized textbook. Teachers use self-designed teaching materials, usually in line with the denomination background of the school management organization.

In Hong Kong, religious teachers in Catholic school must complete an additional catholic teaching training course offered by the Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong. Similar practice does not applied in Protestant school and other religious schools. Therefore, teaching materials among Catholics schools may be similar. But teaching materials among Protestant schools and other religious schools may be very different.

b) Public examination based curriculum

The learning content of the public exam based subject, is standardized. However, there is no standardized textbook available. Because of a very small number of students, textbook publishers find low profitability in publishing RE textbooks. Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority and Hong Kong Education Bureau published teaching reference books²¹. Teachers usually use these reference books for preparing their own teaching materials.

²⁰ Martin Jäggle/Martin Rothgangel/Thomas Schlag, Religious Education at Schools in Europe 1, Central Europe, Göttingen 2015, 120.

²¹ References and Resources of ERS in Education Bureau Hong Kong, cf. www.edb.gov.hk/en/curriculum-development/kla/pshe/references-and-resources/ethics-and-religious-studies/index.html.

Comparison between religious education in Germany and Hong Kong

	Germany	Hong Kong	
1. Types of curricula	State school curriculum	School-based curriculum	Public examination curriculum
2. Characteristics of curricula	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Constitutional obligation 2. Non-denominational 3. Academic training 4. Standardized curriculum 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Denominational obligation 2. Denominational education and personal development 3. Non-standardized curriculum 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Academic obligation 2. Non-denominational 3. Academic training 4. Standardized curriculum
3. RE subjects	Catholicism, Protestantism and partly Islam, Jewish and Orthodox	Catholicism and Protestantism. Partly Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism.	Ethics and Religious Studies (ERS) (Buddhism or Christianity)
4. Substitute subjects	“Philosophy”, “Ethics”, “Values and Norms” or other substitute subjects	“Life Education”, “Growth Education”, “Moral and Civic Education”, other substitute subjects	No substitute subject
5. Student participation	Compulsory, in most of the states	Compulsory in many schools operated by religious organizations	Voluntary/Elective
6. Allocation criteria of RE subject	By students’ religious affiliation	By school management organization’ religious background	By students’ individual preference
7. Teaching material	1. Standardized textbooks	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. No standardized textbook 2. Teachers’ self-designed materials 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. No standardized textbook 2. Teachers’ self-designed materials 3. Education Bureau’s curriculum support materials

3 Conclusion

In a report published by the United Nation, International Migration Report 2017: Highlights, Hong Kong SAR, China and Germany are in the list of top twenty countries or areas hosting the largest number of international migrants. (p. 6) In response to the change of population structure with international migrants, in Germany, RE is not only available in Christianity, but also including other faiths, such as Islam. RE in Hong Kong currently is focusing on Buddhism and Christianity. Other faiths in RE, such as Confucianism, Islam and Taoism will be available in the later stage.

Religious organizations play important roles in the development of RE in schools in both Germany and Hong Kong. In Hong Kong, religious education in Catholic and Protestant schools are highly influenced and directly influenced by the religious organizations with church background. The influenced areas are including teaching content, method and teacher training. In Germany, RE in secondary schools and religious education in churches are separated. Nevertheless, the voice of churches on religious education in schools should also be listened.

Practicing Intercultural Theology at University

Some Reflections on a Third Level

Jan Hermelink

The reflecting, the commenting on the two preceding contributions – that seems a rather difficult task for me. That is because I have not much experience with the practical consequences: with the factual distribution and impact, Intercultural Theology has in churches and parishes, in schools and hospitals – in Germany and even less in other parts of the world.

Instead of that, my job as a practical theologian in Göttingen is only to reflect scientifically on the manifold activities of faith communities, on the basic work of Christian teachers and preachers. And I am practicing these reflections in two specific institutional contexts: in the framework of theology, and in the context of a university.

It is in these two contexts where I am facing Intercultural Theology, and even more: these are the specific academic contexts where I am doing Intercultural Theology. So my question in this paper will be: *What does it mean to practice Intercultural Theology at University?*

I will ponder on that in three steps: starting (1) with the two contributions I was asked to comment; going on (2) with my own educational practice of Intercultural Theology which has been lasting since several years; and (3) giving some conclusions.

1 Three ways of practicing Intercultural Theology

The preceding papers of Pui Yee Pong and of Drea Fröchtling, besides their themes and contents, can be read as perfect examples of two different ways of practicing Intercultural Theology, namely as *description*: by arranging, comparing and contrasting complex data, and as *conception*: by unfolding and displaying programs and visions.

To start with Pui Yee Pong: She gives a very accurate sketch of the institutional framework: the education system, in which religious education (RE) takes place in two very different contexts. I do not need to repeat that – my point is, that Pong is demonstrating: RE always is *a highly contextual practice*, it is embedded in a very complex network of pupils' expectations and parents' expectations, it is embedded in the attitudes and the decisions of the respective school management, and also of the institutions which are running or aiding the school. RE has to do with curricula elaborated by civil authorities and may be – as in Germany – also in cooperation with the Churches and other religious communities. And RE is embedded in an elaborated system of final examination and the educational tracking to university.

So Pui Yee Pong has shown us, by describing and arranging, by comparing and contrasting, how deeply the practice of RE is embedded in very diverse social contexts and political institutions. After some twenty years of doing Practical Theology, I am firmly convinced: This *institutional embeddedness* also is meaningful for the practice of churches: of ministers and church councils, of religious counsellors and charity organisations. By describing the practice of Christian institutions in different social contexts – by doing Practical Theology as a descriptive practice – you will gain a very deep insight in the *dependencies*, in the framework of political institutions and cultural customs that are coining religious practice – as for example RE – into its deepest core.

And if you do Practical Theology as *Intercultural Theology*, by broadening the scope of description with respect to other cultures, religions and societies, then this deep institutional embeddedness of every Christian practice becomes absolutely obvious. For students and readers in Intercultural Theology, this contextuality of religious practice may be self-evident – but this well-known matter of course nevertheless has to be substantiated: by naming, by carefully arranging and describing the respective 'hard' organisations and the respective 'soft' customs that shape the specific religious thoughts, rituals and communities at stake.

But obviously, Intercultural Theology is not only describing and arranging. This scientific discipline also lives from painting visions, it receives its fascination from

unfolding values and ambitions. Therefore, Intercultural Theology is *conceptualising* normative intentions, potential objectives – in a religious way and by metaphorical language. Drea Fröchtling gives a fine example of that: using scientific expertise to envision the potentials of an intercultural approach to theology and faith.

In Fröchtling's view, the purpose of Intercultural Theology is to renew the Church of Christ. Doing Intercultural Theology should give some fundament to new forms of Christian life and Christian community. Intercultural Theology, so Fröchtling is teaching us, basically is a vision of rocking the temple of traditional theology or at least – more modestly – to produce some brick stones of a new, of a more inclusive way of living the Christian faith, promoting peace and justice, making the marginalized visible and fostering reconciliation.

Again, this conceptual or normative dimension is part of every profile of theology, and especially Practical theology can be understood fundamentally as unfolding and specifying the normative values of Christian faith and, by that, it can be done as criticising the church's activities which are not coming up to these visions.

As Fröchtling points out, Intercultural Theology receives its energy from liberation theology and from the manifold versions of contextual theology. So the conceptual, the visionary dimension of every theology is even deepened here. Again, it is the perspective on a wide range of different cultures, that strengthens not only the descriptive precision, but also to visionary potential of Intercultural Theology. Additionally, some *specific contrasts* are empowering this normative energy, namely the contrast between the marginalised and the dominant forces of religion, and the contrast between of religious vision and social realities in many cultures and societies. It is obvious, that these aspects of Intercultural Theology constitute much of its fascination for most students, may they come from abroad or may they come from the ordinary curriculum of academic theology in Germany. It is this visionary, this *confrontational dimension* that enables our students to reconstruct their religious traditions and – hopefully – to rebuild their churches and its leadership.

In my view however, these two ways of practicing Intercultural Theology basically are living from a third way, a third dimension of practicing Intercultural Theology, namely the practice of *reflection*. May be this is so self-evident that there was no need to mention that in Pong's and Fröchtling's papers, esp. in dealing with the practical consequences of Intercultural Theology. But in my view, doing reflection in Intercultural Theology is just the dimension which makes the difference of practicing *theology* – and not only practicing a sermon in church or giving a lesson in school.

By the practice of reflection, the specific framework of e.g. RE can be perceived in its limits and its chances. You need to reflect on that practice of faith, you especially need to reflect on its framework, its actors, its structures, its institutional conditions, as named above – and only by pondering on these circumstances, by deliberating their differences, their implications, their cultural traditions and so on – only by *reflecting* all these issues you may see the potential, and also the restrictions of religious educational work in the respective educational system, and you also may see the potential to change views on immigration or on tolerance.

The third way of practicing Intercultural Theology also is crucial for its visionary, its conceptual dimension. Only by carefully reflecting on the values of peace and justice, only by working on their different traditional profiles and on their manifold cultural consequences – and even more: only by acquiring a kind of *reflective distance* to the great visions of faith – only by these means, this is my firm conviction, only by these means it will be possible to elaborate those values and ambitions in a constructive way, in relation to the respective institutional and cultural challenges.

So I would like to advocate for a practice of Intercultural Theology in a reflective way – and so, simply spoken: I would like to practice Intercultural Theology as *academic* theology: as a scientific endeavour of comparing and differentiating, of argumentation and elaboration, of research and reconstruction. Intercultural Theology must be practiced as reflection – otherwise its description will remain blind, and its visions of rebuilding church and society will remain empty.

2 Teaching Intercultural Theology in practice

This agenda of a reflective, of a scientific way of doing Intercultural Theology obviously is endangered to be just another program, another dream in the theologian's ivory tower. So I will try to ground this agenda by referring to my own practice of doing Intercultural Theology, namely in teaching a practical theological course on "Concepts of Ministry in Different Christian Traditions". Many of the students who were present at the Symposium have been participants in this course, so I hope they can elaborate and also relativize my remarks.

Basically, this course consists of three methodical elements:

- The course always started with studying on some central *concepts of ministry in the Bible*: concepts of being a priest, a prophet, an apostle and so on. By close reading, by carefully describing, by discussing, sometimes applying and criticising the respective texts, regularly two

dimensions, or two layers of their meaning become visible. First, these texts are describing: They are articulating specific social contexts, they are rearranging social relationships, and they are mirroring specific institutions. And second, these sources articulate specific religious traditions, some specific values – and these normative aspects are dependent, they are entangled with the social-descriptive dimensions of the respective texts.

How to deal scientifically with this complex normativity? It is my conviction, fed from my own experiences in those courses, the inherent, sometimes quite explicit normativity of biblical texts can only be dealt with by academic reflection: by comparing the texts, by researching their backgrounds, by differentiating its claims. And that practice of reflection only can be done in a common effort, in a shared activity.

- The second element of my course consists of studying some central concepts of ministry elaborated in the churches' tradition: Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Reformed and Lutheran, Pentecostal, sometimes also Buddhist or Muslim concepts of leading a religious community. Again, that is done by describing, comparing and debating – and by these ways of common reflection, the respective concepts show their contexts, their institutional and traditional backgrounds. Therefore, it becomes clear again – only by common reflecting – how these concepts of (e.g.) leadership are combining social and theological horizons, how they modify and relativize each other, and how they are embedded in a broader stream of theological tradition.

- The third element of my courses consists of showing each other some of the respective personal background: How does my own tradition, my own church, my own religious community live and understand ministry? This again is 'simply' description, with many pictures, many details on clothing or complex leading structures – but it is also a practice of theoretical reflection, because every contributor is forced to explain her or his specific idea of ministry to the other students – in the newly formed context of the group, in the meanwhile originated atmosphere of research and reflection – I hope that does not sound too idealist.

By discussing these individual traditions, brought into the class by its members themselves, we again very often see how important the contexts of educational systems are, also the contexts of state administration, also the pertinent models of civic leadership in the respective soci-

ety. Again, the study group comes to its best when we commonly start to reflect on these differences, on the respective values and visions, the impact of institutional framework and how that influences the respective idea of leadership.

At the start of every new course I ask myself whether I should give more input, place more knowledge, explain more theories – in one word: whether I should act more as a theologian, an academically expert. But after some lessons, every year I'm convinced again: The medium of academic reflection is not a lecture primarily, and also not accumulating religious appeals and pious wishes. The main medium of reflection is discourse, is a vivid discussion. Theological reflection only happens in arguing with each other, in contrasting and consenting, in disagreeing and complementing each other. Moreover, in my view that works, if the different traditions and convictions are brought into an open discourse, into a mutual relativization, thereby enriching and deepening each other.

Again, I hope this does not sound too much programmatically. That practice of reflection, as a collaborative work, surely does not happen in each lesson – but it happens in every course, and not just a few times.

3 Intercultural Theology as third level theology

In the Symposium in which this paper was presented, a kind of competition took place how to describe Intercultural Theology: as dancing or carpeting, as vividly playing or as giving a lecture as exhaustive as possible. To add another concept, I would like to describe Intercultural Theology as a third level Theology, an academic theology in the third order of reflection. Just a few words on that.

- The first and basic theology takes place in the different religious traditions themselves, with their different visions, for example, on ministry or on religious education. So every student participating in a theological course not only brings along her or his religious practice into the classroom. But when academic reflection starts, there always is present, from the very beginning, a high amount of theology – *before* we even start reflecting on that.
- The second level of theology: that is describing and reflecting the *institutional embeddedness* of the respective first level theologies. Every religious activity, and its internal theological reflection, is framed by a local culture, by social structures and – even more important – by state

regulations and government decisions. This framework has to be reflected scientifically, as Cammy Pong showed to us, it must be reflected theologically. Therefore, the second level theology is reflection on the context –not least on its effect of marginalizing some groups of believers, and its power of concealing some strands of religious tradition.

- Intercultural Theology then is *third level theology* – namely comparing different contexts, and the different traditions that have been grown in these contexts. Intercultural Theology reflects on different religious practices, also different concepts of leadership (first levels), and it reflects on the social embeddedness of these religious ideas and visions, and again, even stronger: it reflects on the marginalising forces, which are acting in these different contexts.

From this construction, I am drawing one conclusion mainly: *Intercultural Theology should not try to have the first word.* This academic practice should not think of itself as fundamental, not for faith and not for the churches. No theology should misunderstand itself as fundamental, as the first word. In addition, biblical theology surely is not a first word.

The first word that is the practice of faith – in parishes, in schools, in hospitals, in the homes of every believer. Theology then only has the second word, in reflecting on that contextual practice; and Intercultural Theology only has the third word – in reflecting on differences and conflicts, on embeddedness and on the visions, which are allowed and powered by that.

4 Conclusion

Intercultural Theology, as a third level theology, is nothing else than a kind of Practical Theology. Therefore, I am happy that I am sometimes part of that: practicing Intercultural Theology, with highly engaged students and in an inspiring academic context.

Intercultural Perspectives on Biblical Studies An African Perspective

Michael F. Wandusim

“Interpreting the biblical text is never, in African biblical hermeneutics, an end in itself. Biblical interpretation is always about changing the African context.”¹

1 Introduction

I preface my presentation with this quote from Gerald West, a South African biblical scholar, because, in two sentences it captures the core of my presentation. For given the focus of this panel, namely deliberating on intercultural perspectives on biblical studies, I find it apt, not only as an alumnus of the ICT² Program, but also as a young African researcher in biblical studies in a European context, to limit my presentation to a sketch of the state of biblical studies in Africa³ and through that

¹ Gerald West, *Biblical Hermeneutics in Africa*. In *African Theology on the Way*, in: Diane B. Stinton, *Current Conversations* (SPCK International Study Guide 46), London 2010, 21–31.

² Intercultural Theology.

³ Indeed, in using “Africa” and “African biblical studies” here I am aware of Andrew M. Mbuvi, *African Biblical Studies. An Introduction to an Emerging Discipline*, in: *Currents in Biblical Research*

lay out the emphases therein drawing out possible implications for intercultural biblical studies. I will illustrate the emphases with a concrete exegetical sample from my current research on the reception of the Lord's Prayer (Mt 6:9–13/Lk 11:2–4) in Ghana.

Because I currently find myself in a European context and having my African background in mind too, I will like to share my impressions on biblical studies here in Europe by relating my experience at this year's *Annual Conference of the European Association of Biblical Studies* held in Warsaw, Poland. During the Conference in which I presented a paper on my dissertation, I attended a couple of sessions. Some of the sessions that I can still remember dealt with thematic issues such as *social memory theories, the remembered Jesus and the Jesus of history, the historical and the remembered Paul, evolutionary approach to biblical manuscripts*, etc. I had a glimpse of the state of biblical research and I was impressed by its advanced nature. At the same time, however, knowing that questions in some of the sessions especially the one on evolutionary approach to manuscripts are hardly the ones that I encounter in the African biblical studies (ABS) materials that I deal with, I perceived a high degree of abstraction in some of the sessions. Admittedly, what I mean by "abstraction" here is contingent on the implicit comparison that I am making here in relation to ABS and therefore will be better understood when I sketch⁴ out the nature of biblical studies in Africa below.

2 African biblical studies and its emphases

Even though a nascent discipline,⁵ ABS seems to express a clear sense of what it seeks in the academic study of the Christian scriptures.⁶ At least this is the impression one gets when one reads African biblical scholars like John Mbiti, Kwame Bediako, Kwesi Dickson, Justin Ukpong, John Ekem, Gerald West, just to name a few. In the works of these scholars the *desire* to pursue a biblical studies that, on the one hand, reacted to and corrected the negative appreciation of African culture, values and religion by earlier western missionaries and imperialism and, on the other hand, that equally respond(ed) to existing religious, social and economic

15 (2017), 149–178, caution that such designations could overshadow the peculiarities of the continent. Much of what is presented therefore pertains more to sub-Saharan Africa.

⁴ Due to constraints of time/space, it can only be a sketch. For a full discussion, see Mbuvi's article referenced below.

⁵ See Mbuvi, *African Biblical Studies*.

⁶ Even though Mbuvi, *ibid.* 149, has argued that the content and nature of African Biblical Studies are still much in a flux.

needs of Africans is well articulated. The consequence of such a desire is that biblical studies in Africa has tended to be rather much *contextual and reader centred*.

In other words, when one looks at the various hermeneutical approaches that predominate ABS, one has no difficulty arriving at the conclusion that almost every exegetical enterprise in the context of ABS does not end at decoding the *Sinn des Textes* in its historical, social and literary context, but much more at how the *Sinn des Textes* could *transform*, for the better, the African contexts. This is where I return to Gerald West's quote stated earlier. He makes the observation against the background that biblical interpretation in Africa characteristically consists of three poles: the pole of the biblical text, the pole of the African context, and the pole of appropriation. And the African reader and biblical scholar occupying the pole of appropriation bring both text and context into dialogue.⁷ This approach to biblical interpretation in Africa is also informed by the fact that the biblical texts are perceived, not just as ancient texts but more importantly authoritative texts (Holy Scripture).⁸

Rightly because it is the (African) reader who brings his/her specific context and the biblical text into conversation, different interpretative approaches dominate ABS. They are influenced by different *concerns* and *interests*, which are largely shaped by the socio-economic realities and the underlying *Weltanschauung* (worldview) in the continent. I have in mind the following hermeneutical approaches; inculturation biblical hermeneutics, mother-tongue biblical hermeneutics, African women/feminist hermeneutics, liberation and post-colonial biblical hermeneutics. These approaches in their application shift the entire exegetical concern from what the biblical texts meant in their historical and literary contexts—typical of much of western historical critical exegesis—to what the texts mean now; what they can offer the African contexts. Put differently, hermeneutical concerns take priority over exegetical concerns. This priority taking should not be understood as a neglect or de-emphasis of historical exegesis, but exegesis is only the first part of the process that ends in appropriation. This is an important point to note especially in relation to my opening remarks on how I perceived the nature of European biblical studies, for therein lies the explanation of “abstraction” above: the hermeneutical interest in ABS brings the *present* to the foreground; it stops not at the exegesis but moves further into application. This quest for relevance of the biblical texts for contemporary African contexts finds explanation in an already stated

⁷ West, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, 21s.

⁸ Cf. Mbuvi, *African Biblical Studies*, 154.

point, namely that the Bible is viewed as not only as a *classic* but more importantly as a *sacred* text with *good news* for African contexts.

At this point, it will be helpful to illustrate this depiction of ABS with an excerpt from my doctoral research on the reception of the text of the Lord's Prayer (LP) in Ghana. In one of the academic sources (an MTh-Thesis), the researcher, John K. Addo Jr., applies a liberation hermeneutic to the study of the bread petition of the LP (Mt 6:11) in light of poverty and hunger in Ghana.

Mt 6:11 Greek text (NA²⁸) τὸν ἄρτον ἡμῶν τὸν ἐπιούσιον δὸς ἡμῖν σήμερον.

English translation (NRSV): Give us this day our daily bread.

A Ghanaian reception reading (excerpt from doctoral research): "Give us today our daily economic resources."

After preceding his approach with an exegesis, he comes to the startling conclusion that the petition could only make meaningful sense to the socio-economic lived realities of his research context, if it were re-read as: "Give us today our daily economic resources."⁹ The call for a re-reading of this text is chiefly informed by the context of Addo Jr.'s research, making it more context oriented and relevant.

As a result of this shift in the exegetical focus to largely a hermeneutical concern in dealing with the biblical texts, African exegetes do not only declare here their subjective contextual interest in the exegetical process eschewing thereby any claim of neutrality and objectivity, but in addition, they often begin the interpretive process from outside the academy.¹⁰ In other words, the existential realities of the African contexts constitute the hermeneutical interest in exegeting a given text. The research work I just cited best illustrates this point, for the researcher takes a community in Western Ghana as a research context for his study of the chosen text. Through that, the socio-economic lived realities of the community became the underlying motivation in the exegesis of the text and shaped the results.

The context-oriented nature of biblical studies in Africa finds expression in Justin Ukpong's description of the biblical interpretive process in Africa as *existential* and *pragmatic* in nature and *contextual* in approach.¹¹ To further buttress the point,

⁹ John Kwesi Addo Jr., "Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread". An Exegetical Study of Matthew 6:11 in the Light of Poverty Experience in Gomoa Potsin in the Central Region of Ghana. (MTh-Thesis, Trinity Theological Seminary), Legon 2015, 91.

¹⁰ West, *Hermeneutics*, 23–28.

¹¹ Justin Ukpong, *Inculturation Hermeneutics: An African Approach to Biblical Interpretation*, in: Walter Dietrich/Ulrich Luz, *The Bible in a World Context. An Experiment in Contextual Her-*

I recollect vividly a time in the second semester of my MA study in which visitors from Africa (and Asia?) came to the FIT.¹² One of the African visitors asked me what I was studying. “M.A. Intercultural Theology”, I replied happily. Then she quickly followed up with another question: “What relevance does this program have for your African context?” Now, I am unsure precisely what my reply was, but it underlines the point of contextual and reader-centred nature of biblical studies in Africa, which seems to even extend to theological programs as ones that should serve the societal needs of Africa as this episode with the African visitor attests.

From the foregoing, the following points can be made in respect of ABS:

1. African biblical studies could be construed of as one that is aimed at contributing to the broader quest for an advanced, developed and economically truly independent Africa, albeit from a Christian, theological perspective.
2. It follows from this point then that ABS is in the end overtly contextual, reader-centred, existential and pragmatic.
3. And the main interest or emphasis, therefore, is what *good news* do the biblical texts have for the African and his/her socio-economic, political and religio-cultural realities.

Given the context of our panel discussion, it should be noted that describing European biblical studies as in part abstract and that of Africa as contextual and reader-oriented should be understood in light of the respective socio-cultural and politico-economic moods of each context. For these moods inform the specific interests that predominate each biblical studies context. Herein then lies the uniqueness of both worlds – European biblical studies and African biblical studies.

3 Implication(s) of intercultural considerations in biblical studies

The presentation on ABS makes it clear that it is unique vis-à-vis that in other parts of the world. Therefore, when we engage in intercultural discourses on biblical studies, the following opportunities and challenges seem to me evident:

meneutics, Michigan 2002, 17.

¹² University of Applied Sciences for Intercultural Theology in Hermannsburg.

1. It offers the room to see how other contexts engage the Bible and what they make out of it; the specific interests and presuppositions that they bring to the biblical texts that are other than ours that are equally shaped by our own contexts.¹³
2. Moreover, we allow our own presuppositions and interests in the biblical texts to be challenged and possibly re-shaped or completely changed. That can be tough!
3. Additionally, we get the rare opportunity to see biblical texts in broader light than we have seen because of our culturally shaped presuppositions, interests and blind spots.¹⁴
4. Finally, at the level of theological programs like the M.A. ICT Program, one encounters in a single time period interaction of various contextual engagements with the biblical texts in ways that are at once enriching and challenging for both students and professors. For students who come into the study program come with different religious and hermeneutical backgrounds different from the teaching staff in the program.

4 Conclusion

All in all, however, a significant task of an intercultural discourse on the academic study of the Christian scriptures and running intercultural theological programmes is, in my view, to create and secure a room, say a third space, for the teaming voices in global biblical studies to be heard in their distinctive tones – as my presentation on ABS has done – and to offer the opportunity for intercultural hermeneutical learning from one another.

¹³ See Werner Kahl, *Intercultural Hermeneutics-Contextual Exegesis. A Model for 21st-Century Exegesis*, in: *International Review of Mission* 89 (2000), 421–433; Idem, *Jesus Power Super Power – Productive Friction in Intercultural Hermeneutics. A German Perspective*, in: *Journal of Mother Tongue Biblical Hermeneutics* 1 (2015), 78–109.

¹⁴ See Kahl, *Jesus Power*, 80.

The Rebellious Prophet Jonah and his Accusation against God – An Intercultural Rehabilitation

Andreas Kunz-Lübcke

The book of Jonah is an excellent medium and topic for an intercultural theological teaching. The reason for this is simple: It is indeed an intercultural one. Its geographical setting covers the space between the triangle Jerusalem (temple)/Jaffo, Tarshish on the Spanish coast and Nineveh; and its cast are one Judean prophet and traveller, a diverse ship crew from different nations or religious groups, and the population of the city of Nineveh, which might be seen as a political world centre.

The book of Jonah is one of the topics within the MA-program “Intercultural Theology”, and for good reasons: It contains some provocations. One of the provocations (to our international students) is “our” westernised dealing with the book as a narrative discourse. In almost every student cohort, one polemic question has been raised: “For 150 years your missionaries have reached us (with ‘us’ referring to certain ethnic groups or regions in Africa) and have taught us, that if you would not believe that it is possible to survive in the belly of a whale for three days by a miracle of YHWH/God, then your faith is not strong enough. And now you are coming along with the crazy idea we should read Jonah as a narrative discourse, a symbol, a metaphor?”

Within the book, five different characters appear. The prophet with the name Jonah Ben Amitai, the sailors and the Ninevites, both representing the nations, and

the big fish (I guess the worm is not a character). Finally, last but not least, the most interesting and complicated character in the book of Jonah is represented by YHWH/God. Who is who?

This article focuses on the intercultural qualities in the book of Jonah. Firstly, the scene of the violent storm that descends upon the ship Jonah is on that leads to the sailors making burnt offerings and vows to YHWH/God will be examined. The anomalous context of the burnt offerings and the significance of the characters involved have intercultural and interreligious importance that allow for different interpretations of the text. Secondly, an alternative reading of Jonah's protests and silence against YHWH/God in the later chapters of the book subverts the traditional Western interpretation of the scene. Indeed, rather than negative connotations of rebellion and accusation, alternate readings Jonah's actions such as metaphors linked to Ancient Near East literature and through the Tongan scholar, Jione Havea's work, Jonah's actions can be viewed in a more holistic and contextually relevant light – making the book of Jonah a great case study for intercultural theological pedagogy.

1 The nations – the sailors

It has been accepted by most interpreters that the sailors and the Ninevites both represent “the nations” vis-à-vis to Israel. In contrast to the Ninevites who are interpreted as an ethnic, religious and linguistic unit, the sailors on the ship are followers of different gods, and so the reader may conclude that they belong to different religious, lingual and ethnic groups. As the text exemplifies, everyone prays to his own God during the storm, so there is no question that a great variety of gods has been worshipped on the ship. Even after Jonah's confession and explanation for the storm, they remain to be good people. Even after learning that Jonah is responsible for the storm, they hesitate to throw him overboard as this would mean to shed innocent blood. Instead, they start to fear YHWH, and they make a burnt offering and vows to YHWH. Is this a conversion to the God of Israel? I do not think so. To fear a new God and to make vows to him indicates clearly that they are convinced of the omnipotence of the new God they just learnt about from Jonah.

The book of Jonah is written with a post-exilic perspective from the time of the Persian Empire. From the perspective of Jewish readers of the book, it contains at least four problems concerning the burnt offering made on board the ship. In other words: Neither the sacrifice of the sailors nor their vows could be a conversion of some pagans into post-exilic Judaism. This is because:

- Every cultic activity is necessarily bound to the Temple of Jerusalem. The book of Deuteronomy reflects a long and intensive struggle for the Temple of Jerusalem to be established as the only legitimate place for the cultic worship of YHWH. Would the authors of Deuteronomy (and modern readers) find a sacrifice for YHWH outside of the Temple of Jerusalem acceptable? Probably not.
- The making of a sacrifice without priestly participation would be inappropriate from a Jewish perspective. The sacrifice of an animal by a group of pagans also raises questions of legitimacy. For example, do they know to distinguish between clean and unclean animals? Probably not.
- As mentioned above, any cultic activity outside of the Temple of Jerusalem is illegitimate from a Jewish perspective, what more a cultic activity outside the land of Israel and far away at sea. According to one of the first readers and interpreters of this text, from the Aramaic translation of the Targum Jonathan: The sailors have only promised to make a sacrifice after their return to the dry land.¹ In other words, our ancient translator of the text was aware of the impossibility of the cultic behaviour of the sailors after the storm.

As such, the sailors could be interpreted as follows: As believers of different gods, they represent the diversity of the nations. After the storm and Jonah's explanation, they start to fear YHWH. It is not specified if they have thrown their former gods overboard, signifying a conversion to Judaism. Rather, in it merely signifies that their viewpoint YHWH might be the most powerful God. Therefore, their cultic activity of making a burnt offering is nothing more than a naive attempt of an imitation of Judaism.

2 The nations – the Ninevites

Traditionally, the case of a human being surviving three days within the belly of a big fish has been seen as the great wonder of the book of Jonah. The second and perhaps more exciting wonder is the reaction to the shortest sermon ever given.

¹ Targum Jonathan implements within the sentence in Jon 1:16, that the men (on the ship) started to fear YHWH with great fear and that they have offered sacrifices to YHWH only the single word "they said" (ואמר ליה זבה קדם יי): "And *they said* that they will offer sacrifices for YHWH."

Five Hebrew words (“Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown”) are convincing enough and YHWH/God (and with him, the reader) realized accepts that “they turned from their evil ways”. A great number of scholars interpret this reaction as a conversion to Judaism. However, this explanation seems to me an over-interpretation. The book of Jonah represents a Second Temple perspective: A conversion into Judaism would necessitate an intensive and comprehensive study of the Torah including the learning of the Hebrew language, circumcision, and the observance of Jewish customs, festivals and dietary rules.

Nothing like this is mentioned here. The reader is only informed that the Ninevites have repented from their evil ways. Which evil ways? There is no chance to answer the question based on the book of Jonah. However, the reader of the book of Jonah is also the reader of the books of the 12 Minor Prophets. Here it is clear that Nineveh is the capital of the Neo-Assyrian Kingdom – the centre and incarnation of imperialism, oppression and violence, which will be punished and eradicated by YHWH's actions (cf. Nah 3:7; Zeph 2:13).

Have they been converted from imperialists to peacekeepers, from storm troopers to blue helmets? I hope that!

3 YHWH/God – a complicated character

YHWH/God in the book of Jonah is not easy to determine. At the beginning of the story, he seems to be the God of Justice who punishes evil and rights wrongs. However, at the end of the book he appears as a different character who can show forgiveness, mercy and compassion to all creation.

In chap. 1, he is distant, the reader does not learn how Jonah has been informed about his duty, and he sends the storm from heaven onto the sea.

In chap. 4, he is very close to Jonah. They have a conversation like equals. This intimacy is also evident in chap. 2, when Jonah is in the belly of the big fish yet Jonah knows that his prayer will reach its addressee in the Temple of Jerusalem, reaffirming for the reader the legitimacy of the Temple of Jerusalem as the locus of Jewish practice and the presence of YHWH/God.

The question here is whether the reader is confronted with a changing character of YHWH/God within the small book, most notably when the narrator states that God, upon realizing the (surprising?) positive reaction of the Ninevites, is suddenly prepared to relent, reverse his judgement and forgive (Jon 3:10). The *narrator* emphasizes that YHWH/God in the moment that he has realized the (surprising?) positive reaction of the Ninevites is ready for emotions of compassion and forgiveness (Jon 3:10).

One of the amazing characteristics of the book of Jonah is its openness to different interpretations. As mentioned above, the book invites its reader to believe that the reaction of the city has motivated God/YHWH to step down from his position as God of Judgement. This could be seen as the author's (fictive) position. The point of view of the figure Jonah is different.

Jonah knew from the beginning, or so he argues, that YHWH is the God of mercy and forgiveness, slow to anger, abounding in love and full of mercy towards evil (Jon 4:2). Evil was the reason in Jon 1:2 that caused the anger of YHWH/God against Nineveh that motivated YHWH's decision to destroy it.

Jonah's statement is: "You have not the ability to punish!" While this is not necessarily the core message of the book, Jonah's statement allows (or provokes) the reader to think in this direction.

The reader is provoked to consider three different options.

Firstly, the conversion of the Ninevites should be understood as a metamorphosis from evildoers to repentant (former) sinners and lastly to better human beings. The statement that YHWH/God himself was surprised by this positive development in the Ninevites supports this interpretation. But here the reader may ask: What kind of a God is this YHWH, who cannot foresee the future?

The second option is to assume that YHWH/God knew from the beginning that the Ninevites would be ready to repent. In this case, the reader may ask: Why send the prophet of judgement on this long journey? Is it only to teach Jonah the lesson that no one in this world, including the city of Nineveh as a significant example for evildoing, is incapable of repenting and changing for the better?

The third option concerns Jonah's statement that he has known from the beginning that YHWH is the God of mercy. This would allow for the interpretation that this mercy is not dependent any prerequisites like a conversion or repentance. In this case, Jonah would have argued that the repentance of the Ninevites was a surprising occurrence but not the prerequisite for YHWH's decision to spare the city.

4 The rebellious prophet – a rehabilitation

There is no question that Jonah's reaction to YHWH's/God's instruction to go to Nineveh and announce there that the city is doomed, and his final polemic debate with YHWH at the end of the story are two acts of disobedience and resistance. His final silence leaves open the question if Jonah is convinced by the arguments of the God of mercy, or if his silence is an expression of his ongoing protest.

This question is not easy to answer. After the arguments, the reader may hesitate: Who is right? The God of mercy who shows responsibility for all his creations, which includes the population of the evil city of Nineveh? Or is Jonah right who still demands that the city must be destroyed? Most interpreters argue that at the end of the book, YHWH/God is right. As creator and the God of mercy, he has the right (or the obligation) to rescind his violent plan.

Should the reader interpret Jonah's final silence as disagreement, he may think that Jonah was not completely wrong. After all, the appearance of Nineveh and Assyria in the 12 books shows that Nineveh represents brutality, oppression, imperialism and exploitation. No wonder then, that other voices have called for or demanded the punishment and destruction of this city. I would like to follow the argument of Etan Levine, that the different viewpoints of Jonah and YHWH/God should be seen as a juridical dispute. While YHWH emphasizes his right not to condemn the city, Jonah is insisting that the evildoings of Nineveh demand divine intervention and punishment.²

To understand the position of the fictive literary character of Jonah, it is useful to refer to a literary tradition in the cultural environment of Israel. From Egypt, we know a number of examples where the accusation is made that God remains too inactive in the face of evil and injustice in the world.

I would like to mention two examples from Egyptian literary traditions, which could be seen as significant examples for the so-called accusation against God. The first example is the Admonitions of Ipuwer, the second being the speeches of the Eloquent Peasant.

Readers of the 12 books of Minor Prophets know (like Jonah) that Nineveh is the incarnation of evil in the world. This alone would be sufficient reason to incite YHWH's/God's wrath and his desire to punish evil by destroying the city. Jonah's polemic sentence in Jon 4:2 with its extended list of the different aspects of the God of mercy could be read as the statement that Jonah finds YHWH's/God's wrath absent. In other words, Jonah believes that evil will remain in the world as long as God does not execute his wrath and judgement. The same accusation appears in the Egyptian Admonitions of Ipuwer.

According to the Admonitions of Ipuwer, the world is facing evil and injustice because of the absence of God's wrath, which should be initiated by the existence of evil and would lead to the punishment of the evildoers. Ipuwer does not deny

² See Etan Levine, *Jonah as a Philosophical Book*, in: ZAW 96 (1984), 235–245, 235ss.

the existence of God who loves justice; his complainant is that God has hidden his wrath beyond a wall of silence:

“A fighter goes forth, that (he) may destroy the wrongs that they have brought about. There is no pilot in their moment. Where is he today? Is he sleeping? Behold, his might is not seen.”³

By not executing his divine wrath, God remains indifferent towards humans, for if God knew about the evil in humans, he would eradicate them.

“Would that he had perceived their nature in the first generation (of men); then he would have repressed evils, he would have stretched forth (his) arm against it.”⁴

In both cases, Jonah and Ipuwer are talking with God face-to-face. Both are very emotional and angry, while God remains calm in both cases. Both are upset enough to demand a clarification from God why he is allowing the existence of evil to continue in the world.⁵ This statement might be seen only as an example for the tradition of the human lament to God in the Ancient Near Eastern and Egyptian literature.⁶

Jonah and Ipuwer are not the only ones who demand that God eradicate evil by destroying the evildoers, even if this means eradicating the human race. Another example, which can only be briefly mentioned here, are the speeches of the Eloquent Peasant. As a consequence of his own negative experiences with the high officials of the state, he demands that God should have eradicated the evil (and also the evildoers) from this world.⁷

³ Translation according to Allan H. Gardiner, *The Admonitions of an Egyptian Sage from a Hieratic Papyrus in Leiden* (Pap. Leiden 344 recto), Leipzig 1909, 78; see also Wolfgang Helck, *Die „Admonitions“*. Pap. Leiden I 344 recto (KÄT 11), Wiesbaden 1995, 55.

⁴ Translation according to Gardiner, *ibid.*; see also Helck, *ibid.*

⁵ For Ipuwer cf. Anette Schellenberg, *Hiob und Ipuwer. Zum Vergleich des alttestamentarischen Hiobbuchs mit ägyptischen Texten im Allgemeinen und den Admonitions im Besonderen*, in: Thomas Krüger u.a., *Das Buch Hiob und seine Interpretationen. Beiträge zum Hiob-Symposium auf dem Monte Verità vom 14.–19. August 2005*, Zürich 2007, 55–79, 74, has stated: „Erregt fordert er den Allherrn zur Stellungnahme auf („antworte!“).“

⁶ For a lucid collection of the relevant material, see Dorothea Sitzler, *Vorwurf gegen Gott. Ein religiöses Motiv im Alten Orient (Ägypten und Mesopotamien)* (StOR 32), Wiesbaden 1995.

⁷ For the German Translation of the Eloquent Peasant see Dieter Kurth, *Der Oasenmann. Eine altägyptische Erzählung übersetzt und kommentiert*, Mainz 2003, 66–96.

The idea that Jonah represents (alongside Job) one of the Biblical characters who have raised their voices against God regarding the ongoing existence of evil in the world and God's own inaction to punish this evil also appears in another context. Jione Havea, a Biblical scholar from Tonga, conducts a reading of Jonah from an *oceanic perspective*⁸ has argued for the two protestors, Jonah and Job, to be seen through the lens of the occurrences of blatant injustice:

“Both Job and Jonah attributed their sufferings and struggles to something that God has done, including not doing something that they expected of God – God is the enemy in both of their eyes.”⁹

Jione Havea's question is if Jonah would address the same polemic questions to God regarding the human right situation in West Papua and Palestine nowadays. According to Havea: Yes, Jonah would.¹⁰

In other words, Havea's interpretation of Jonah is not so far away from the protagonist of the Biblical book and its roots in the Ancient Near Eastern intercultural environment. As theologians in an intercultural setting, we do not need to debate if a person is able to survive in a fish's belly for three days. More relevant is the question of how to explain the ongoing human readiness for evil and the oppression of others. It is still helpful to listen to the voices of some pugnacious theologians, which may have raised their voices in front of Nineveh and between Palestine and West Papua.

⁸ For the concept of an *oceanic reading* see also Jione Havea, Casting Jonah across Seas and Tongues. A Transnationalizing Reading; in: J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu/Andrea Fröchtling/Andreas Kunz-Lübcke (ed.), “Babel is everywhere!” Migrant readings from Africa, Europe, and Asia (Studies in the Intercultural History of Christianity 157), Frankfurt/M. et al. 2013, 25–36, 25ss.

⁹ Jione Havea, Sitting Jonah with Job. Resailing Intertextuality, in: The Bible and Critical Theory 12 (2016), 94–108, 102s.

¹⁰ Cf. *ibid.*, 105s.

Societal and Interreligious Relevance of Intercultural Theology

Peter Arthur

Albert Einstein once said that the most important question for humanity was: “Is the cosmos a friendly place?” Today, religious communities and people of all cultures need to verify whether this is the case or if our world is a mere waiting room for better things to come. Whatever our personal answer is; an honest look at our beliefs and refining its opportunities can enable us to find hope. This, we can share it to engage ourselves and contribute to a peaceful togetherness in our societies. This is how Intercultural Theology and interreligious dialogues can have relevance in a practical way.

1 What is Intercultural Theology?

In my understanding, Intercultural Theology is a way of interpreting the Scriptures by referring to the cultural setting in which they were written. In these regards, one comes to a deeper understanding of its original meaning. Then, keeping in mind that culture forms a frame; one can conclude what the same writing can mean to us, today. For example, we need to understand not only the Bible’s figurative language and distinctive literary forms, but also its geographical, historical and cultural contexts. The stories of the Bible abound with place names, dates, references to

customs and descriptions of all kinds. It spans several centuries and settings from Mesopotamia to Egypt, Palestine, Asia Minor, Greece, and Rome. It takes us onto battlefields and into palaces. We ride beside warriors in their chariots, and walk behind prophets in their sackcloth and ashes. We see weddings and funerals. All are part of the rich fabric into which God wove the golden threads of the wonderful story of salvation.

God has accommodated himself to us by using human languages and thought-forms, cultures and environments. In Europe during the early modern times, two scholars made the Bible available for study in its original languages. These were Johann Reuchlin (1455–1522), among Christians also known as the “Father of the study of Hebrew”¹, who translated a Hebrew lexicon into Latin; and Erasmus (ca. 1466–1536), who published the first Greek New Testament. Martin Luther (1483–1546), William Tyndale (1484–1536) and John Calvin (1509–1564) also used their work when they adopted the philological methodology of the Renaissance humanists and applied it to the Bible.²

Theology has always been intercultural and contextual.³ For example, the church father Augustine (354–430 ACE) theologized in a context of controversies that raised key questions for Christianity like the validity of baptism, the necessity of grace and the instability of the present world. Thomas Aquinas’ (1225–1274) lived in the then new culture of 13th century Europe when Aristoteles’ writings were rediscovered. Luther’s context was the backsliding within the Catholic Church and the emerging individuality in Western thought. Teresa of Ávila (1515–1582), again, operated within the Catholic Reformation, and De las Casas (1484–1566) argued for the rights of indigenous Americans while claiming that African slaves were made for hard work. Schleiermacher (1768–1834) theologized in dialogue with the Enlightenment’s “turn to the subjective”. Martin Luther King (1929–1968) had the big dream of blacks and whites getting along peacefully, and that there should be freedom and justice accessible for everyone. He wanted humankind not to judge one another by their skin colours, but by their characters. Bonhoeffer (1906–1945) resisted the Nazi dictatorship by opposing Hitler’s euthanasia program and genocidal persecution of the Jews.

Even though all these theologians created their interpretations of the Bible within the named contexts of their times, it was not always the case that they were aware of this. Some scholars and representatives of certain denominations through-

¹ Samuel A. Hirsch, in: JQR 8, No. 3 (1896), 445–470.

² Bernhard Ramm, Protestant Biblical Interpretation, Michigan 1970, 52s.

³ Stephen B. Bevans, Models of Contextual Theology, Maryknoll/NY 2003, 54s.

out the years claimed their theology would have a universal validity, and these assertions continue to persist in some quarters, up to date. Recently, modern theologians have identified these ongoing attempts to universalize theology rather than producing one that transcends history, culture and human circumstances. Any theology is ultimately the interpretation of experience. This is how the Scriptures came to be written, how all doctrinal traditions were formed and how new theologies are being conducted, today. To ask about the nature of “Intercultural Theology” means to ask about the nature of theology, itself. Doing theology intercultural means to be in dialogue between the two time zones: the experience of the past recorded in Scripture and in the churches’ traditions as well as the experience of the present or the diverse contexts in which Christians live.⁴

2 My most important learning insights during the study program

To me, a real eye-opener within the studies was the challenge to question my comfortable position of a supposedly Christian superiority over other religions. From this time on, I became more familiar with the culture of ancient Israel as represented in the Bible against the backdrop of its Ancient Near Eastern setting. Archaeological discoveries revealed the spiritual and cultural heritage of all inhabitants in the region. One of the major consequences of these finds is the insight that the materials in the Bible have their origin in these ancient writings. We were explained that the traditions in the Bible did not come out of a vacuum. The early chapters of Genesis 1 through 11 are not best understood as history in the conventional sense, but they owe a great deal to the Ancient Near Eastern mythology. The first creation story draws upon the Babylonian epic known as *Enuma Elish*. The story of the first human pair in the Garden of Eden in chapters two and three has clear affinities with the “Epic of Gilgamesh”, a Babylonian and Assyrian epic in which a hero embarks on his exhausting search for immortality. The story of Noah and the flood, which occurs in Genesis 6–9, is simply an Israelite version of an older flood story of which copies have been found in a Mesopotamian story called the “Epic of Atrahasis”.

Not only were the similarities between Biblical materials and Ancient Near Eastern sources high- lighted in the study program. Rather, their dissimilarities often are remarkably important. The Biblical transformation of its common Near

⁴ Bevans, Models.

Eastern heritage shows radically new conceptions of God, the world and humankind.

2.1 The program's impact on my further professional way after graduation

The learning program had a very profound impact on my further job opportunities. I found a work as religious teacher in a Montessori high school nearby where I live. My students come from all religious backgrounds: Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Buddhist, and atheist. I teach together with other colleagues in an ethic conjunction about philosophies of life. Here, I can introduce the adolescent into the diverse religions and beliefs throughout the history of humankind.

2.2 The relevance of Intercultural Theology to modern churches and societies

In my opinion, Intercultural Theology is the lighthouse of all theologies. Today, we live in a world that is ever transforming. Old ideas and practices, which have been nourished by our ancestors, in this perspective seem drained of meaning and even appear somewhat repellent in our modern scientific age. Nevertheless, religion can be reformed. Religious reformation is not new, and it can take place at any time. If it does not stand still, it has a chance to survive. The big ecumenical questions are no longer how Reformation churches with Rome or Lutherans and Baptists will get on with Pentecostals. The urgent ecumenical questions are:

How can European and immigrant Christians peacefully worship together in one church, authentically expressing their same faith and love for Christ?

How can interfaith dialogue contribute to a mutual understanding and respect that helps people of different beliefs to live and cooperate with each other?

The Anglican theologian Andrew Wingate views appreciation between religions as the central challenge of the 21st century. He formulated: "The call is to remain faithful to the gospel of Jesus Christ, which includes loving our neighbour who is Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Buddhist (or) Jewish, learning from them, and sharing our faith with them in word and action."⁵ Martin Luther King Jr. said: "Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter."

⁵ Andrew Wingate, *Celebrating Difference, Staying Faithful – How to Live in a Multi-Faith World*, London 2005.

ICT is a product of faith with the idea of peace and love towards humanity without being nationalistic or denominational. We should seek to bridge between the state, religious communities and universities. In the program, I was encouraged not to lose faith in humankind. Mahatma Gandhi said: "Humanity is an ocean; if a few drops of the ocean are dirty, the ocean does not become dirty." In addition, the Dalai Lama mentioned: "Love and compassion are necessities, not luxuries. Without them, humanity cannot survive."

2.3 My ideas and visions for the future of the program

My hope for the future of FIT/ICT is that the zeal to create a ground for a stronger unity among Christians and an increase of understanding among people of different beliefs should be continued to work on, and it should be spread in more universities in this land and around the globe. We should expand the concept of unity in diversity as an expression of unity without uniformity and diversity without fragmentation.

"Without mutual knowledge, there can be no mutual understanding; without understanding, there can be no trust and respect; without trust, there can be no peace, only the danger of conflict. This means we have to be willing and able to familiarize ourselves with the way people of other cultures think and perceive the world around them, but without losing our own standpoint in the process."⁶ (Roman Herzog)

⁶ http://1world1way.com/coach/quotes_diversity.html.

Societal and Interreligious Relevance of Intercultural Theology

Mehedi Hossain

I am very much honoured and feeling delighted to express my thought as a plenary of the session named “Societal and Interreligious Relevance of Intercultural Theology”. As a Muslim by faith, it was my first chance to talk and establishing a different kind of communication with other people of faith and dwellers of the different parts of the world at the same time. Fortunately, the Master’s program Intercultural Theology brings all sorts of people but “likeminded” from the different corners of the world. The “likeminded” in a way that everybody wants to know each other regardless of their values, identity, and creeds. As a Muslim, I know that theology stands at a very high level of intellectuality. The necessity of understanding theology means understanding and realizing the revelation from the very core point of its exegesis and trying to perform it within our personal life. The Islamic faith not only claims its place and justification of monotheistic ideology but also ensures the previous Abrahamic faiths as their predecessors. As per Quran declared: “And there are, certainly, among Jews and Christians, those who believe in God, in the revelation to you, and in the revelation to them, bowing in humility to God. They will not sell the Signs of God for a miserable gain! For them is a reward with their Lord.” (Quran 3:199)

However, this study program facilitates me as a student of theology to know the different types of theology, which belong to the faith of Christianity. The Intercultural Theology Program is occupied with very different approaches from the general way or guidelines of theological study. It taught us the way the religious verdict comes into action and takes the shape into daily life. Moreover, the way of understating revelation by its believers is neither the same nor culturally apprehensible of their own. Consequently, it is a tremendous responsibility for a theologian of a particular religion to enrich and collaborate with other parts of the world who are conceived other faith as their own. In that process, the systematic study of theology should be intercultural and more open for all at the same time. Though I found all of the teaching materials and teachers are very much profound with the knowledge of Christian theology. Therefore, it was for me very exceptional and also challenging. The insight I found here that the dogmatic and ideological purview of a different faith, even the various denominational teaching of Christianity which makes its more global religion. On the other hand, the quest of students to compare Christianity with other established religions reaffirms the values of our tiny, little applied institute FIT in Hermannsburg, which helps us to open the door of freedom of speech, and thought simultaneously. In this way, I was enriched and more knowledgeable within and outside of our classrooms.

After two years collaborative program at George-August-Universität Göttingen and FIT, I found myself well groomed by FIT teachers and it helps me to finish afterward the Ph.D. research-training course at the faculty of Berlin Graduate School of Social Science in Humboldt, Berlin. It was my slow but steady change in life, to gather epistemological understanding in academia. The study program “Intercultural Theology” has increased my analytical ability and taught me how to make a focus in life, which is more important for me rather than to find a professional job. Nowadays, secular ideologies define the way of success in life but unable to provide the inherent meaning of it.

My ideas to flourish this department in its full fledge would have been performed in many different ways. First: writing a thesis based on the students’ bachelor degrees and assimilate it with the knowledge of Intercultural Theology. Second: to support non-religious or those who have not any theological background through some introductory courses and research materials. Third: to provide some professional workshops. Fourths: few summer schools are continuously happening around Europe; teachers and administrative officials should provide information and encourage the student to attend there. Fifth: most of the MA students are coming from abroad and they have no proficiency in the German language, which

makes them vulnerable to find a good job after graduation. Therefore, my suggestion is that, if our teachers keep 20 credit point quotas for learning the language throughout the 4 semesters as an option, which will be more inspirational for the students to learn a new language in a very systematic and step-by-step (A1-B2 level) process. Sixth: most of our teachers are well trained in theology but the world we live in now almost equipped with the thought of rational and liberal attitude. As human beings, we are not above our natural habits and full errors of stereotypes and irrational logic. So, if we are working together to solve this problem through continuous process and have to do this in this program which is the main purpose of this study; to survive beyond our logical fallacy that would be lifetime achievements.

**Dialogues and Dynamics – Interculturality in
Theology and Religious Studies
10th Anniversary Symposium M.A. “Intercultural Theology”**

December 5 to 7, 2019

Georg-August-University of Göttingen

Thursday, 5.12.2019 (Theologicum, room TO.136)

19.00 Welcome Address

19.30 Keynotes: Intercultural Theology as “Third Space”

(Fritz Heinrich/Göttingen, Ulrike Schröder/Hermannsburg,
Stanislau Paulau/Mainz)

20.30 Reception & Buffet

Friday, 6.12.2019 (Theologicum, room TO.136)

9.00 – 10.30 **Panel 1**

Historical, Ecumenical and Intercultural Perspectives on Global Christianity

(Martin Tamcke/Göttingen, Frieder Ludwig/Stavanger,
Martina Helmer-Pham Xuan/Braunschweig)

11.00 – 12.30 **Panel 2**

Ecumenical Perspectives on Intercultural Theology

(Dietrich Werner/Berlin, Benjamin Simon/Bossey)

14.00 – 15.30 **Panel 3**

Intercultural Theology and the Practical Work in Churches and Education

(Andrea Fröchtling/Hermannsburg, Pui Yee Pong/Saarbrücken,
Jan Hermelink/Göttingen)

16.00 – 17.30 **Panel 4**

Intercultural Perspectives on Biblical Studies

(Michael F. Wandusim/Göttingen, Andreas Kunz-Lübcke/Hermannsburg,
Florian Wilk/Göttingen)

18.00 – 19.30 **Panel 5**

Societal and Interreligious Relevance of Intercultural Theology

(Meriam Adami/Göttingen, Peter Arthur/Berlin, Mehedi Hossain/Berlin,
Elena Romashko/Göttingen)

19.30 Social Evening with Buffet, Poster Exhibition

Saturday, 7.12.2019 (Theologicum, room TO.135)

9.00 – 10.30 **Interactive Workshop Intercultural Theology** – all are welcome!

11.00 – 12.30 **Round Table Discussion**

Intercultural Theology: Questions, Challenges and Prospects for the Future

13.00 Farewell and Departure

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This volume contains the texts from the symposium on the occasion of the 10th Anniversary of the M.A. Programme Intercultural Theology. The contributions address the challenges and consequences of an intercultural approach in academics as well as in the churches and in society. Since globalisation has significantly changed the face of contemporary Christianity in the 21st century, the task of doing theology has become more complex. The cultural, geographic and denominational varieties of Christianity worldwide challenge the traditional Western face of academic Christian theology and demand new and global forms of theological thinking across lines. Intercultural Theology seeks to embrace these dynamics with a constructive dialogue, opening up new spaces of collaborative thinking and academic reflection.



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