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**Mission and Postmodernities**

Speaking here as a representative of the 2009 United Evangelical Mission Theological Consultation on Mission, I would like to briefly raise three topics that I feel are missing from the study paper we have received.

The very basic question that is underlying everything I want to say here is this: How can the Gospel of Christ be lived and preached in the market place without becoming a commodity? How can we make sure that evangelism does not become marketing?

Following Christ and preaching the Gospel always moves in the tension between contextualization and counterculture – the Word has become flesh, God became human in Jesus Christ, but this human person nevertheless was different from all other humans in ways that we need to always understand anew.

The first topic I would like to raise is: How we can phrase our Gospel message so that it speaks to the burning questions of our time? I very much doubt that ‘How do I find a graceful God?’ is what keeps people awake today. The questions are rather ‘How can I find a good life?’ or ‘Who / what can protect me from evil powers bent to destroy life?’ Consequently, in my country, Germany, there is now a lively discussion on whether we should give up (or at least tone down) the interpretation of the cross of Christ as a sacrifice for the salvation of sinners and rather stress that Christ’s death was a consequence of his message of unconditional love for everyone and his challenge of the powers that were. In the African and Asian churches of the UEM community, the question of protection from evil powers is paramount.

And that brings me to my second issue: One of the big trends of postmodernity is the return of the irrational. Whether it is esotericism in the West or the resurgence of witchcraft and magical practices in Africa and Asia, rationalistic critique has lost its power. The issue here is not deconstruction, but rather protection. I believe that Pentecostal and charismatic churches are growing because they have found an answer to this need: Rituals of deliverance from demons, protective prayers and a theology that names threatening powers. While I know plenty of social science research into this phenomenon, I really miss a well-grounded theological debate. We are beginning to engage in this now within the UEM community.

And then the third issue: Mission is no longer a movement from the North to the South, but coming from everywhere going everywhere on the globe. The Edinburgh study process does mention this phenomenon in several instances. But one question has not been asked explicitly: Are churches only those who are sent into mission, or are they also recipients of mission? Concretely: African, Asian and Latin American Christians are moving to Europe and tell us that they want to bring revival to our dead or dying churches. If their mission is indeed driven by the Holy Spirit, what does this mean for the churches in the North? How can we properly receive this mission?

Could it be that mission today is first and foremost neither winning souls for Christ nor identifying the Spirit at work in world events, but rather trying to live as the body of Christ, a community which overcomes borders and limits (racial, social, economic, cultural) in an increasingly fragmented world? If that is the case, we would have to seriously critique any ecclesiological or missionary concepts that allow the church to break into ever smaller and more homogeneous groups – even if these seem to be successful in terms of winning new members.