

Searching for the Soul(s) of Europe: Missiological Models in the Ecumenical Debate on Mission in Postmodern Europe

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At the World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh in 1910 Europe was classified as “Christian’ territory” and thus excluded as a field and context for mission.¹ Today a plurality of religious, cultural and commercial missions is competing for the soul(s) of postmodern Europe. In the course of the 20th century the Christian churches in Europe had to learn to overcome their eurocentric perspective and to view their continent through the hermeneutical lens of the *missio Dei* and the eyes of their sister churches in the non-western world. This essay examines the last thirty years of the ecumenical missiological quest for a deeper understanding and a spiritual renewal of European culture(s) on the background of economic, political and religious changes. The developments are described in two historical phases and interpreted in three contextual missiological models, which in the second phase seem to have moved from distance to dialogue and from controversy to conversation – with significant crosscurrents.

1. The debate on the New Evangelisation of Europe 1979-1992

The vision for a New Evangelisation developed in the last period of the cold-war division of Europe, when first signs of communist breakdown already appeared. In Western Europe the European Communion rapidly moved towards a single market and a single currency.² While Francois Lyotard in 1979 had diagnosed Western (and European) society with a “postmodern condition” and “incredulity” towards the “metanarratives” of secular modernity,³ the ecumenical missiological debate was more concerned with the issues of secularism, atheism and nominal Christianity. The issue of postmodernity did not come into full view before the 1990s. In respect to mission theology the debate took up the challenge for contextual theologizing that had been coming from the Catholic bishops in Latin America (Puebla 1979) and Third-World theologians in the Evangelical Lausanne Movement and the World Council of Churches.

In 1979 Polish pope John Paul II initiated his tenure with the formulation of a new vision: the *New Evangelisation of Europe*. In the Holy-Cross-Church in Mogila, Poland, he explained: „We received a sign that the gospel will enter anew at the threshold of a new millennium. A New Evangelisation has begun, as if it was some kind of second evangelisation even if in reality it is always only one evangelisation.“⁴ The pope unfolds this vision as a mystical, spiritual and cultural renewal of the Church and society in Europe. One year later, in 1980, the Polish workers’ union *Solidarnosh*, supported by the Catholic Church, caused the first cracks in monolithic communist Eastern Europe and brought with it winds of political renewal. New Evangelisation turned into a central topic at the symposia of the Catholic Council of European Bishops (CCEE) between 1979 and 1989, leading up to the *Special Synod of Bishops on Europe* in Rome 1991 with the theme “That we may be witnesses of Christ who has set us free”.

¹ Cf. B. Stanley, „Defining the Boundaries of Christendom: The Two Worlds of the World Missionary Conference, 1910“, *IBMR* 30 (4/2006), 171-176: 171.

² Cf. F. Walldorf, *Die Neuevangelisierung Europas. Missionstheologien im europäischen Kontext*. Systematisch-theologische Monographien 8, Gießen/Basel: Brunnen TVG, 2002.

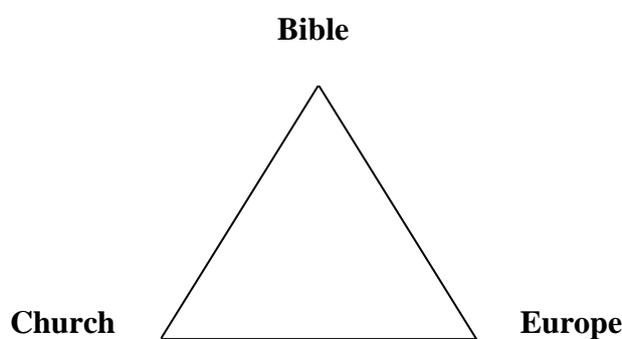
³ Cf. Jean-François Lyotard, *La Condition Postmoderne: Rapport sur le Savoir*, Les Editions de Minuit, 1979.

⁴ Cit. Walldorf, *Neuevangelisierung*, 47.

In 1984 the evangelical *Lausanne Movement* initiated a European branch, the *European Lausanne Committee* (ELC). Rolf Scheffbuch, Lutheran pastor from Germany, became the first president of the committee and wrote: “A new chapter has been opened. ... It has become clear that Europe is in need of re-evangelisation ... We do not believe in the pope and his authority, but we agree in the truth of that need”.⁵ The ELC in consequence convened two major study and leadership conferences on the contextual missiological challenges of Europe, the *European Leadership Conference on World Evangelization* 1988 in Stuttgart and the *European Leadership Consultation on Evangelization* in Bad Boll, Germany, which was held in partnership with the European Evangelical Alliance (EEA) and led to the start of the network *Hope for Europe*.

In 1984 Emilio Castro, Uruguayan theologian and director of the WCC-Commission for World Mission and Evangelism, challenged the *Conference of European Churches* (CEC), the forum of Protestant and Eastern Orthodox churches in Europe, to concentrate on mission in Europe. At a common conference of the CEC and the Council of the Catholic bishops of Europe at Lake Garda in Italy, Castro maintained that in the face of rising unbelief in Europe it was not inter-church-relations, but common missionary witness that should be of paramount concern to Christians.⁶ The CEC took up this challenge from a representative of the churches of the non-western world and in 1986 the full assembly of the CEC in Sterling/Scotland resolved to give top priority to “the mission of the Churches in a secularised Europe [...] The European churches owe it to the churches on other continents which they once evangelised to now focus on mission on their own continent.”⁷ Different aspects of this mission were studied in succeeding consultations on „Secularisation“ (Les Geneveys, Switzerland, 1987), „Bible and Mission“ (Sigtuna, Sweden 1988) and “Practical Aspects” (Kolymari, Krete, 1993).

The missiological extract of these developments can be described in three models which are derived from a basic triangular model, which interrelates three components of contextual mission theology: (1) the *bible* as the classic and basic *text of mission*, (2) the *Churches* and Christian fellowships in Europe as the *community of mission* and (3) European *culture* and society as the *context of mission*.⁸ Each of the following three models integrates all three factors, but emphasizes them differently.



1.1. The Church as the soul of Europe – the Inculturational model

“Europe cannot give up Christianity as a travelling companion, who has become a stranger, just like a human being cannot give up his or her reasons for life and hope without bringing disaster to him- or herself.”⁹ The centre of John Paul II’s vision for the New Evangelisation is the inculturation of the gospel in present-day Europe on the basis of its Catholic-Christian

⁵ Zit. Walldorf, *Neuevangelisierung*, 203.

⁶ Cit. Walldorf, *Neuevangelisierung*, 110.

⁷ Encounter at Sterling. Report of the Xth Full Assembly of the CEC, cit. Walldorf, *Neuevangelisierung*, 111.

⁸ Cf. e.g. D. Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, Maryknoll, 1991, 497; C. van Engen, Specialization and Integration in Mission Education in: J.D. Woddberry et al (ed), *Missiological Education for the 21st Century: The Book, the Circle and the Sandals*, Maryknoll: Orbis, 1996, 208-228; D. Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, Maryknoll, 1991, 497.

⁹ John Paul II at the 5th Symposion of the European Bishops 1982, cit. Walldorf, *Neuevangelisierung*, 50-51.

past. His goal is a new creative synthesis between the Church and postmodern European culture. The pope's vision for Europe is inspired by his conviction that Europe is intrinsically Christian since its Catholic baptism in the early medieval times.¹⁰ Thereby he personifies European culture and history and treats it according to sacramental doctrine. Europe continues „under the sacramental sign of its covenant with God”.¹¹ European unity is pictured mystically as the “seamless coat of Christ” (cf. John 19:23) which needs to be recaptured by overcoming the historical and theological rifts that were caused by the break with the Eastern Orthodox Church, the Protestant Reformation Churches and by secularist atheism.¹²

The basic missiological structure of the New Evangelisation is a combination of cultural-theological analysis and spiritual renewal from an ecclesiological centre in expectation and realisation of the eschatological reign of God. The missiological outward-movement with the goal to recapture the “seamless coat of Christ” can be described in concentric circles as: (1) personal conversion and renewal of baptismal grace, (2) renewal of the parochial communities (steps 1 and 2 are called “self evangelisation”)¹³, (3) renewal and unity of the Church (including ecumenical perspectives) (4) socio-ethical involvement in society, science, economics and politics. Taking up the metaphor of the anonymous missionary writer of the *Letter to Diognetus* (129 AD),¹⁴ the inculturational model attempts to present the Church as “the soul of the world”, that brings “vitality, grace and love to a hateful world”.¹⁵

This ecclesiocentric missionary vision was not shared by all within the Catholic Church. Progressive theologians rejected the notion that Europeans should be brought back into the Church. The Church rather should meet people where they are and encourage them in their own spiritual journey. German Catholic theologian Otmar Fuchs criticises: „The concept of New Evangelisation (Re-Evangelisation) presupposes a relationship between Church and Society which should have been left behind at least since Vatican II. The talk of Re-Evangelisation falsely suggests an already evangelised Church leading a desperately secularised Europe back to the right faith. The Church is supposed to have what Europe lacks.”¹⁶ Fuchs suggests that evangelisation should not so much expect that “the unchurched will return into the ecclesiastical institutions, but that they will be met and encouraged right where they are and probably will stay within their own intrinsic capability for hope and humanity”.¹⁷

1.2. Discovering God in Europe – the dialogical model

A view similar to progressive Catholics was presented by the Protestant and Orthodox theologians of the *Conference of European Churches*. This model represents an almost complete reversal of the Catholic concept. Here not the church is pictured as the soul of Europe, but the “incognito-presence of Christ through the Holy Spirit in every creature within and outside of the Church”¹⁸ Christ's incognito-presence is understood as expressing itself in the pluriform *missio Dei*, which is taking place in European society at large. The basic theological structure

¹⁰ John Paul II at the 5th Symposium of the European Bishops 1982, cit. Walldorf, *Neuevangelisierung*, 51.

¹¹ John Paul II at the 5th Symposium of the Council of European Bishops 1982, cit. Walldorf, *Neuevangelisierung*, 53.

¹² John Paul II at the 6th symposium of the Council of European Bishops in 1986, cit. Walldorf, *Neuevangelisierung*, 66-67.

¹³ John Paul II, Sermon at the 4th Symposium of the Council of European Bishops 1979, cit. Walldorf, *Neuevangelisierung*, 49-50.

¹⁴ “What the soul is in the body, that Christians are in the world.”, cit. N. Thomas, *Classic Texts in Mission and World Christianity*, Maryknoll: Orbis, 1996, 5.

¹⁵ Thomas, *Classic texts*, 5.

¹⁶ Cit. Walldorf, *Neuevangelisierung*, 46.

¹⁷ O. Fuchs, „Was ist Neuevangelisierung?“, *Stimmen der Zeit* 210 (1992) 465-473: 471.

¹⁸ Report on Section 3 of the CEC-study consultation at Les Geneveys 1982, cit. Walldorf, *Neuevangelisierung*, 137.

of this model is a combination of Orthodox *theosis*-theology and ecumenical *kosmos*-Christology with Paul Tillich's interpretation of the *justificatio* in the modern European context. Tillich maintained that God, the transcendent and indefinable ground of all being, is not only justifying the sinner, but modern European doubt and despair as such.¹⁹ In this way modern European religious and secular experiences themselves are becoming holy ground and a sacrament, where God and human beings meet. The Enlightenment is interpreted as a soteriological event in European history which liberated society from monolithic ecclesiastico-political inculturations. Mission in Europe according to the CEC should therefore not fall back into an ecclesiocentric paradigm and propagate an institutional Church, but should move churches into dialogue with the Holy Spirit's immediate work in modern European society – in order to discover God's presence there. At the CEC-Consultation in Les Geneveys 1987, Scottish theologian Elisabeth Templeton proposed: „Every interpretation of the mission of the churches in Europe has to liberate itself from the factual claim that the churches are the bearers of the gospel. Maybe we have to accept that the gospel is being brought to us ... partly from within our own secular culture, partly from churches in Eastern Europe that together with their Marxist partners have started to explore the human condition”.²⁰

Not everyone in the CEC agreed. Rumanian Orthodox theologian Dimitru Popescu suggested a New Testament based Christology “from above” as basis of a truly liberating mission in Europe.²¹ Raymond Fung, former Secretary of Evangelism at the WCC, emphasised the missionary *koinonia* in the fellowship of the Triune God as the adequate expression of mission in Europe which consisted of both, the patient waiting for lost European sons to experience the love of the Father as well as the active running towards them in the crossing of frontiers.²²

1.3. Sharing the gospel of Christ with Europeans – the translational model

Close to these latter views we find the model of the *European Lausanne Committee* (ELC). The basic structure of this model can be understood in the categories that have been provided by Lamin Sanneh's interpretation of mission as translation on the basis of the „translatability“ of the gospel.²³ The model can be described as a holistic and dynamic-equivalent²⁴ (re-) translation of the biblical witness of Jesus Christ into the lives of modern Europeans - in the power of the Holy Spirit and through the missionary witness of Christian churches and fellowships. John Stott highlighted the Christological centre, „The only way to be delivered from Europessimism is to catch a fresh vision of Christ!”²⁵, as well as the missiological process: „identification with loss of identity”.²⁶

European history, culture, churches and politics are interpreted in the tension between judgment and grace as bridges and barriers to the gospel.²⁷ Contrasting the inculturational and the dialogical model, the translational model tries to clearly distinguish the gospel from societal developments and ecclesiastical institutions. According to this perspective the *missio Dei* can

¹⁹ Heinz Zahrnt, *Die Sache mit Gott*, München, 1980, 376.

²⁰ Cit. Walldorf, *Neuevangelisierung*, 129.

²¹ Popescu in Sigtuna, cit. Walldorf, *Neuevangelisierung*, 143.

²² Fung in a bibly study on John 13,34-35 in Sigtuna, cit. Walldorf, *Neuevangelisierung*, 167-170.

²³ Vgl. Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture*, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1989.

²⁴ The dynamic-equivalence model has been developed in translation theory and was used as a model for missionary contextualisation at the Willowbank Consultation of the Lausanne Movement in 1978, cf. J. Stott, *Making Christ Known Historic Documents of the Lausanne Movement*, Carlisle: Paternoster, 1996, 99-100.

²⁵ John R. Stott in his plenary speech „Christ and Mission” at Stuttgart 1988, cit. Walldorf, *Neuevangelisierung*, 210.

²⁶ J. Stott at the Stuttgart conference in 1988, cit. Walldorf, *Neuevangelisierung*, 209.

²⁷ Cf. the contribution of the *London Institute of Contemporary Christianity*, „Barriers and Bridges to the Gospel in Europe and how to exploit them“ in Stuttgart 1988, Walldorf, *Neuevangelisierung*, 234-239.

neither be discovered directly in European history nor be identified with European ecclesiastical interpretations. Ulrich Parzany, Lutheran pastor and former president of the YMCA in Germany, stated his conviction that „Europe’s mainline churches have a mission. But it is not a matter of methodology whether the churches will fulfil their mission or not. Above all it depends on whether or not they will regain a clear biblical understanding of the gospel. The most paralyzing blocks which prevent us from effectively implementing our mission exist within the churches not outside“.²⁸

According to ELC the scope of contextualised mission in Europe has to be holistic and includes cultural and political transformation on the basis of the gospel. This is underlined when Peter Kuzmic, Croatian Baptist theologian, interpreted the breakdown of Communism: „Followers of Christ all across Eastern Europe are aware that this is the work of the Lord of history who has seen their suffering and longing for freedom, answered their prayers and provided them with a special *kairos* period to call their nations back to God and to the spiritual foundations for a free and truly new society“.²⁹

This missionary call is understood as „the *proclamation* and the *demonstration* of the love of God in Jesus Christ“.³⁰ It is to be realized through a pluriform network of local churches crossing cultural and religious bridges and barriers in the neighbourhoods of Europe. The local church, interpreted as „all believers in that place“, is seen as the premier agent of missional witness: „we will give ourselves in a servant spirit to meet material, spiritual ... and cultural needs of as many people as possible in our neighbourhoods“. While not everyone in the ELC agreed that Orthodox and Catholic churches should be viewed as part of this broad evangelical coalition of churches and mission organisations in Europe,³¹ the ELC affirmed ecclesiological plurality within the unity of mission in Europe.³²

2. Towards a common and complex model

The first period of the missiological debate had reached a high point with the downfall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the dismantling of the Soviet Union in 1991. At the same time it seems to have come to a halt with the beginning of the Yugoslav wars in 1991/1992, which disillusioned any kind of missiological or political Euro-euphoria. In the course of these and coming events the missiological debate of the churches took some new turns.

Under the auspices of Jacques Delors³³ as President of the European Commission the Treaty of Maastricht was signed in February 1992 and entered into force in November 1993. It turned the European Community (EC) into the European Union (EU) and finally led to the creation of the euro as a common currency.³⁴ At that point of the process Delors highlighted the need to “give a soul to Europe”. The famous phrase can be traced in the notes of a conversation with church-representatives in February 1992:

“Believe me, we won’t succeed with Europe solely on the basis of legal expertise or economic know-how. It is impossible to put the potential of Maastricht into practice

²⁸ U. Parzany at the Stuttgart conference in 1988, cit. Walldorf, *Neuevangelisierung*, 217.

²⁹ At the Bad Boll consultation 1992, cit. Walldorf, *Neuevangelisierung*, 267. Similar perspectives were offered by the Norwegian President Kjell Magne Bondevik at Bad Boll 1992, Walldorf, *Neuevangelisierung*, 268.

³⁰ The Bad Boll Commitment (BBC) 1992, cit. Walldorf, *Neuevangelisierung*, 303-305: 303.

³¹ Cf. Walldorf, *Neuevangelisierung*, 276.

³² Scheffbuch in a post-conference report “Time to restore Relationships” in 1993, cit. Walldorf, *Neuevangelisierung*, 287.

³³ Jacques Delors was President of the European Commission from 1985 to 1995.

³⁴ The euro entered circulation on 1 January 2002.

without a breath of air. If in the next ten years we haven't managed to give *a soul to Europe*, to give a spirituality and meaning, the game will be up. ... This is why I want to revive the intellectual and spiritual debate on Europe. I invite the Churches to participate actively in it. We don't want to control it; it is a democratic discussion, not to be monopolised by technocrats. I would like to create a meeting place, a space for free discussion open to men and women of spirituality, to believers and non-believers, scientists and artists. We are working on the idea already. We must find a way of involving the Churches."³⁵

Delors obviously picked up and varied a theme that had been inherent and even prominent in the preceding missiological discussion on Europe, especially in the vision of John Paul II. In response to Delors' plans, in 1994 the EU created the "A Soul for Europe"- budget line A-3024 to financially support projects that foster reflection on the ethical and spiritual foundations of Europe.³⁶ Beginning in 2004 a series of Berlin-Conferences became a major expression of the project and brought together members and officials of the EU "with representatives of civil, business and artistic society".³⁷ By now the Soul-project had taken a more cultural turn into "a process for placing sustainable cultural growth at the heart of the European project."³⁸

One of the reasons why Delors introduced the "Soul of Europe"- motif may have been the intention to strengthen European unity in view of the new challenge of the integration of Western and Eastern Europe.³⁹ While Delors' concern probably majored on the economic challenges of the eastward expansion of the EU, the developments in post-communist Eastern Europe also raised missiological questions. Communism as a thorny context for mission had given way to national, ethnic and religious searches and struggles for identity and orientation. Optimistic visions for the evangelisation and transformation of Eastern European societies were put to a hard test by the horrors of the Yugoslav wars which exploded between 1991 and 1995. The wars mocked the hopes of religious renewal and dialogue as it instrumentalized religion to deepen ethnical divides.

In a similar way the Islamist terrorist attacks in New York in 2001, in Madrid in 2004 and in London in 2005 impacted the context for the missiological debate on Europe. On this background the debate itself started to change and keeps changing into the present. The different models did not disappear, but they seem to have moved closer towards a more integrated and at the same time more complex view. In the following I will outline some exemplary developments and features of the debate and offer some conclusions.

2.1. Reconciled Diversity

In 1995 representatives of the European Lausanne Committee (ELC) and the Conference of European Churches (CEC) came together for a consultation in Dorfweil, Germany, and issued the declaration „Aspects of Mission and Evangelization in Europe Today. Towards a Common Mission”.⁴⁰ The declaration acknowledges „common contents of faith and a common obligation for mission”, while „radical differences in the concepts of evangelisation“ are admitted. Especially views on missionary work among secularized nominal Christians were dif-

³⁵ Cit. Hans-Jürgen Luibl, "A-3024: Auf der Suche nach Europas Seele", *Hermeneutische Blätter* 1-2/2005, www.leuenberg.net (7 pages), called up: 17.8.2009.

³⁶ Luibl, A-3024, 1.

³⁷ „The Berlin Conference 2004“, asoulforeurope.eu/what/berlin-conference/2004, 18.8.2009.

³⁸ „The Berlin Conference 2004“, asoulforeurope.eu/what/berlin-conference/2004, 18.8.2009.

³⁹ Cf. Luibl, A-3024, 3.

⁴⁰ The declaration was published in German: „Aspekte der Mission und Evangelisation im heutigen Europa. Auf dem Weg zu einer gemeinsamen Mission“, *Ökumenisches Forum* 18 (1995): 327-331.

fering. While some allowed for evangelisation of secularized members of another denomination, others thought it generally wrong to judge the faith of other believers.⁴¹ As a possible model for common mission it was suggested to enter into „a partnership..., in which both partners respect the faith and tradition of the other and at the same time are invited to challenge each other in love.“⁴²

Although the CEC had so far taken a more critical stance towards Catholic visions of Christianity as the soul for Europe, it convoked the European Ecumenical Forum on gospel and Culture 1996 in Hamburg in cooperation with the “A soul for Europe”-programme of the European Union to find “new ways of inculturation”.⁴³ The reception of these concepts in the CEC shows the level of cross-fertilization that by then had been reached in the missiological debate on Europe. This kind of mutual recognition is further illustrated by an assessment of the Evangelical movement by Walter Kasper, Cardinal and President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity in Rome. He maintained that „today it is the ‘Evangelical movement’ which – in difference to the large churches - keeps the missionary idea alive; while the traditional Protestant churches are declining worldwide, Evangelicals are experiencing rapid growth.“⁴⁴ In 2002 the CEC started a research project on mission in Europe. Darrell Jackson, responsible researcher, came to the conclusion that the differences between ecumenical and evangelical persuasions were less deep than formerly believed and should be accommodated in reconciled unity in order “to win Europe for Christ” together.⁴⁵

A further significant expression of the intentions towards reconciled diversity can be found at the World Missionary Conference in Athens in 2005. In the concluding “Letter from Athens” the Conference committee highlighted:

“For the first time the meeting included a significant number of fully participating delegates from non WCC member churches, that is the Roman Catholic Church and some Pentecostal and Evangelical churches and networks. 'We', therefore, are a diverse group [...]. In these days, we have journeyed together, although we have not always agreed. We are in mission, all of us, because we participate in the mission of God who has sent us into a fragmented and broken world. We are united in the belief that we are "called together in Christ to be reconciling and healing communities". We have prayed together. We have been particularly helped by readings of Scripture as we struggled, together, to discern where the reconciling, healing Spirit is leading us, in our own contexts, two thousand years after St Paul arrived on these shores carrying the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ".⁴⁶

2.2. Regionalisation

In the 1990s pan-European missiological visions somewhat receded and made way for regional and confessional perspectives. Paradoxically, at the same time mission theological per-

⁴¹ Aspekte, 329.

⁴² Aspekte, 330.

⁴³ Vgl. Ionita, 539.

⁴⁴ W. Kasper on the „New Evangelisation of Europe“, 4 June 2007 at the 175th anniversary of the Missionswissenschaftliches Institut Missio e.V. in Aachen. <http://www.mwi-aachen.org>

⁴⁵ Darrell Jackson, "Von Lausanne nach Athen: Europäische Mission in ökumenisch-evangelikaler Begegnung", *Europa: Christen, Kirchen und Missionen, Jahrbuch Mission 2006*, Hamburg: Missionshilfe, 2006, 253-65:55.

⁴⁶ Conference on World Mission and Evangelism, A Letter from Athens to the Churches, networks and communities, 2005, <http://www2.wcc-coe.org/pressreleasesen.nsf/index/pu-05-16.html>.

spectives became less contextual and more universal, emphasizing the constants.⁴⁷ By the mid-1990s it had become evident that Europe was more complex and that cultural and religious differences were greater than some missiological plans had suggested. The maintenance of European structures was stretching some churches and initiatives too far. The Euro-visions of the 1980s needed to be translated into empirically grounded, locally anchored and feasible approaches. While the European and ecumenical horizon was not lost sight of, missionary projects and reflections became more regionally and confessionally oriented.⁴⁸ Developments in Germany are an example of this.⁴⁹ In 1998 the Association of Christian Churches in Germany (ACK) “initiated a process of reflection and action ... with regard to mission in ecumenical cooperation in Germany”.⁵⁰ In 1999 the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) dedicated its Leipzig synod to the topic of “mission and evangelism”. It reinforced its support of missionary projects⁵¹ and critically engaged with the aspect of “self-secularization” in its own recent history, a term coined by EKD-bishop Wolfgang Huber.⁵²

Klaus Schäfer identifies three “features in this reappearance of a new interest in mission” in the churches in Germany: (1) “Mission is clearly perceived as mission in the local context.” (2) “There is a clear emphasis on mission as the conversation about faith issues and the invitation to a living faith in Jesus Christ. ... an evangelistic dimension of mission.” (3) The attempt to place mission “centre stage in the agenda of all the churches” and not to leave it to “only one particular tradition in our church”.⁵³ One exemplary result of the new orientation was the foundation of a research institute for evangelism and church development at the University of Greifswald at the Baltic Sea.⁵⁴ These regional and confessional developments did not lack trans-European and ecumenical links as they were partly inspired by the Anglican Decade of Evangelism (1990-2000) in Britain and its experiences with church planting in the Church of England. Catholic impulses came from Austrian pastoral theologian Paul Zulehner,⁵⁵ just to mention a few examples.

2.3. Critical postmodernism

Since Friedrich Nietzsche had called *truth* “illusions about which one has forgotten that this is what they are; metaphors which are worn out and without sensuous power”⁵⁶, Western (and European) mentality and life was moving towards a “postmodern condition” that Jean-

⁴⁷ Cf. Robert J. Schreiter, *The New Catholicity: Theology Between the Global and the Local*, Maryknoll: Orbis, 1997. S. Bevans /R. Schroeder, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today*, Maryknoll: Orbis, 2004.

⁴⁸ For a Reformed confessional perspective on mission in Europe see: Christine Lienemann-Perrin, Hendrik Vroom, Michael Weinrich (ed), *Contextuality in Reformed Europe: The Mission of the Church in the Transformation of European Culture*, Amsterdam, 2004.

⁴⁹ For the larger picture see: F. Walldorf, „Missionarische Bemühungen im Kontext gesellschaftlicher Veränderungen in Deutschland von 1945 bis 2000, *Evangelikale Missiologie* (1- 2/2007) 2-15.38-53;

⁵⁰ Klaus Schäfer, “Mission in Secular and Postmodern Societies: The Example of Germany”, *International Review of Mission* XCII No. 364 (2003), 40-44: 40.

⁵¹ Cf. the programmatic EKD-Text 68: *Das Evangelium unter die Leute bringen. Zum missionarischen Dienst der Kirche in unserem Land*, Hannover, 2000.

⁵² W. Huber, “Auf dem Weg zu einer missionarischen Kirche”, in: *Mission in pluralistischer Gesellschaft*, ed. A. Feldtkeller, T. Sundermeier, Frankfurt: Lembeck, 1999, 107-135,108. Cf. Schäfer, *Mission*, 41.

⁵³ Schäfer, *Mission*, 41.

⁵⁴ Cf. M. Herbst, „Ach, Sie sind also der Missionar!? Kontext, Entstehungsgeschichte und Aufgaben des Greifswalder Instituts“, in: Herbst, M., Ohlemacher, J., Zimmermann, J. (ed.), *Missionarische Perspektiven für die Kirche der Zukunft*. Beiträge zur Evangelisation und Gemeindeentwicklung 1, Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlagsgesellschaft, 2005, S. 30-46.

⁵⁵ Cf. e.g. Paul M. Zulehner, „Aufbrechen oder untergehen. Wie können unsere Gemeinden zukunftsfähig werden?“, in: Herbst/ *Missionarische Perspektiven*, 17-29.

⁵⁶ Cit. T.R. Philipps/ D.L. Okholm, *Christian Apologetics in the Postmodern World*, Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1995, 102.

Francois Lyotard described as “incredulity towards metanarratives”.⁵⁷ Many Europeans became disillusioned with the enlightenment ideals of positivist science and technological, economic and social progress. Disappointed by the promises of modernity they turned to a mindset and life style characterised by individualism, consumerism and the mass media, but also by growing sensitivity for aesthetics, ecology, the rights of minorities and the importance of communication and relationships. Since the 1980s, postmodern theories like those of Thomas Kuhn (paradigm theory), Michel Foucault (discourse analysis), Jacques Derrida (deconstruction), Richard Rorty (neopragmatism) and others tried to uncover the historical and cultural relativity of knowledge, the hidden agendas of power behind scientific discourses and tried to replace metaphysics and ontology with linguistics and constructivism.

The missiological debate on Europe turned to the topic as late as the 1990s. At the *Lausanne Consultation on Faith and Modernity* in Uppsala 1993⁵⁸ a thorough overview of the “rise of postmodernism” was given⁵⁹ as well as an analysis of New Age as a “synthesis of premodern, modern and postmodern”.⁶⁰ The question if postmodernity was a new epoch in the history of culture (as Lyotard had asserted) or “another twist” of late modernity (as Anthony Giddens and Zygmunt Bauman had suggested) was left open. While some challenged the churches to “question its allegiance to modernity”,⁶¹ others warned them not to “uncritically ... join the assault on a dying modernity, only to find ourselves as but one story among many, unintentionally reinforcing the irrationalism of postmodernity”.⁶² All in all the conference took a more apologetic stance and criticised postmodernity as an “anything goes”-philosophy⁶³ without the possibility of critical interaction on the basis of reason and reality, thus leaving the European seeker without reasons for hope.⁶⁴

A more affirming perspective came from South African missiologist David Bosch, whose thinking also influenced European missiology.⁶⁵ While some question “whether Bosch’s missiological approach can be described as truly post-modern” since he did not integrate the perspectives of feminism, ecology and non-Christian indigenous spiritualities,⁶⁶ it can hardly be doubted that he mediated a positive, though not uncritical view of postmodern epistemology to Protestant and especially Evangelical readers, and spelled out some of its consequences for missiology. He saw postmodernity as a healthy challenge to reductive enlightenment thinking, thus creating “room for ... ‘communicative’ reason”, experience, spirituality and aesthetics in the scientific process.⁶⁷ In the same vein of thinking British missiologist Lesslie Newbigin had already developed a missiology for the Western context as a comprehensive post-enlightenment critique. He proposed a hermeneutically reflected christocentric mission in the West as the spontaneous overflow of a doxological community into the grey wasteland of a secularized and disillusioned world.⁶⁸ Bosch’s and Newbigin’s perspectives became instru-

⁵⁷ Cf. Jean-François Lyotard, *La Condition Postmoderne: Rapport sur le Savoir*, Les Editions de Minuit, 1979.

⁵⁸ Cf. Sampson / V. Samuel / C. Sugden (Hg.), *Faith and Modernity*, Oxford: Regnum, 1994.

⁵⁹ Cf. P. Sampson, “The Rise of Postmodernity”, *Faith and Modernity*, 29 – 57.

⁶⁰ Lars Johansson, “New Age – a synthesis of premodern, modern and postmodern”, *Faith and Modernity*, 208-251.

⁶¹ Johansson, *New Age*, 240.

⁶² Sampson, *Rise*, 49/50.

⁶³ A famous slogan used by postmodern philosopher Paul Feyerabend in *Against Method. Outline of an anarchistic Theory of Knowledge*, London: Verso, 1975.

⁶⁴ Sampson, *Rise*, 40.

⁶⁵ Cf. D. Bosch, *Believing in the Future: Toward a Missiology of Western Culture*, Christian Mission and Modern Culture, Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1995; Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 1991, 349-362..

⁶⁶ Cf. K. Kim, “Post-Modern Mission: A Paradigm Shift in David Bosch’s Theology of Mission?”, *IRM* 89 No. 353 (1999) 172-179: 173.

⁶⁷ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 351.

⁶⁸ Cf. *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture*, Grand Rapids, 1986, 148-149.

mental for the rise of postmodern missiological concepts such as “missional church”⁶⁹, “mission-shaped-Church”⁷⁰ or “emerging church”.⁷¹ In 2004 the Lausanne Forum in Pattaya pointed to the positive implications of postmodern deconstruction as “stripping a story of its ideology”.⁷² While “postmodernism” was seen as a challenge for academic apologetics, a number of case studies showed how “post-modernity” as a broad life orientation could be interpreted as a bridge for missional encounters. Similar perspectives and case studies were explored at the WCC-consultation “Believing without belonging? In search of new paradigms of church and mission in secularised and postmodern contexts” that was held near Hamburg, Germany, in 2002.⁷³

The discussion on postmodernity has become a distinctive feature of the missiological debate on Europe. It proves difficult to reach an agreement on the definition and implications of postmodernity. Some criticise postmodernity as arbitrary and as “the cultural offspring of the consumer culture of late capitalism: freedom of choice in the market place is the supreme value and tolerance of other people’s lifestyle choices is the social equivalent”.⁷⁴ Others affirm its epistemological and cultural openness for new perspectives, religious orientations and relational reality. Yet some basic lines so far have become visible. It seems helpful to distinguish between postmodern cultural attitudes and postmodern philosophies (not all of which would call themselves postmodern). While both offer bridges for mission in Europe,⁷⁵ “postmodern theology runs the grave risk of opening up the way to an anti-realist view of religion, in which the only reference point for belief is the language of a particular community”.⁷⁶ Postmodernist extremes such as the total incommensurability of cultural paradigms contradict missiological convictions of the intercultural translatability of the gospel. Post modern rejections of truth-claims can be criticised as self-destructive, as they presuppose the truth of their own statements.

The missiological dialogue with postmodernity thus needs to develop as a *critical postmodernism*. Critical postmodernism appreciates the perspectivity and creativity of human knowledge and communication, while admitting a universally meaningful expression of empirical reality and theological truth.⁷⁷ On the level of practical missionary dialogue James Sire, author and campus lecturer for Inter-Varsity Christian fellowship, suggested, that everyone rests his knowledge and actions on axioms of belief which he assumes and hopes to be *true*, because „the heart will not long rejoice in what the mind knows is not true.“⁷⁸

⁶⁹ Cf. D. Guder (ed), *Missional church: a vision for the sending of the church in North America* (The Gospel and our culture series), Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998.

⁷⁰ Cf. Rowan Williams, *Mission-shaped church: church planting and fresh expressions of church in a changing context*, Church House Publishing, 2004.

⁷¹ Cf. Eddie Gibbs/ Bolger, Ryan, *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in postmodern cultures*, Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005. For the reception e.g. in Germany see: “Was will eigentlich die Emerging Church?” (What does the Emerging Church want?), *Idea-Spektrum* 46, November 12, 2008, 15-18.

⁷² “Lausanne Occasional Paper 45: Religious and non-religious Spirituality in a Postmodern [Western] World”, in: *A New Vision, A new Heart, A Renewed Call: Lausanne Occasional Papers from the 2004 Forum of World Evangelization in Pattaya, Thailand*, ed. by David Clayton, Pasadena: Carey, 2005. Vol.2, 171-242: 187.

⁷³ Documented in *International Review of Mission* Vol. XCII, No. 364 and 365 (Jan and Apr 2003).

⁷⁴ J. A. Kirk, “Postmodernity”, *Dictionary of Mission Theology: Evangelical Foundations*, ed. J. Corrie, Nottingham: IVP, 2007, 298-303: 301.

⁷⁵ For examples see: Lausanne Occasional Paper 45, 209-231 (Case studies); More case studies in: IRM No. 364 (Jan. 2003) 18-28.

⁷⁶ Kirk, Postmodernity, 302.

⁷⁷ Cf. Paul Hiebert, *Missiological Implications of Epistemological Shifts: Affirming Truth in a Modern/Postmodern World*, Christian Mission and Modern Culture, Harrisburg: Trinity, 1999; Bosch, *Transforming*, 360.

⁷⁸ James W. Sire, “Why should anyone believe anything at all”, in *Telling the Truth: Evangelizing Postmoderns* ed. by D. A. Carson, Grand Rapids: Baker, 93-101.

2.4. Exegesis and Ecclesiocentrism: Pope Benedict XVI

On April, 19, 2005 Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, succeeded pope John Paul II and became Benedict XVI. While he certainly shares the vision of his predecessor of the New Evangelisation of Europe, his interpretation of contemporary Europe seems to be more down-to-earth and empirical. In 2001 he asked how one could speak of a Christian society if “in a city like Magdeburg, Christians are only eight percent of the total population, including all Christian denominations”.⁷⁹ While for John Paul II New Evangelisation stood in-between “real” Mission and pastoral care,⁸⁰ for Benedict it is mission in its full sense. In 1996 he emphasized: “Above all, we should be missionaries [...] missionary responsibility means, precisely, to really attempt a new evangelisation. We cannot calmly accept the rest of humanity falling back again into paganism. We must find the way to take the gospel, also, to nonbelievers. The Church must tap all her creativity so that the living force of the gospel will not be extinguished.”⁸¹

An example of how Benedict understands his contribution to mission can be seen in his book *Jesus of Nazareth*,⁸² where he introduces postmodern readers to the biblical person of Jesus Christ. He begins by carefully deconstructing some historical reconstructions of Jesus, which have “distanced the person of Jesus from us”⁸³. He follows a canonical approach in his exegesis of the gospels in order to overcome the modern separation between history and faith.⁸⁴ In all of this he wants to leave his papal authority out of the picture. He does not want the readers to understand his book as an official doctrinal statement, but as a personal journey and search “for the countenance of the Lord”.⁸⁵ So the book turns into a postmodern pilgrimage toward Christ, an inculturational endeavour to “take the gospel, also, to nonbelievers”.

While Benedict on his exegetical mission moves close to the evangelical translational model, at the same time he sharpens the profile of the exclusive centrality of the Catholic Church. In the declaration *Dominus Iesus* (2000), which was drafted by the Doctrinal Congregation under his supervision, “The Church of Christ” is seen to “exist fully only in the Catholic Church” (DI 16). All other churches that do not acknowledge the apostolic succession are “are not Churches in the proper sense” (DI 17). Although these affirmations are not new and mostly represent quotations from Vatican II, they clearly serve the purpose to highlight the distinctiveness of the Catholic Church in the confusing postmodern plurality and on the background of the approximation of the three missiological models. Benedict’s views on mission in Europe in some respects do come closer to evangelical and Protestant perspectives than those of his predecessor. But they are certainly not less ecclesiocentric and keep stressing Catholic uniqueness. Yet, the official view is not necessarily the opinion of all Catholic groups engaged in a common mission in Europe (see 2.7).

⁷⁹ Vgl. Jenkins, *Godless Europe*, 116.

⁸⁰ Cf. *Redemptoris Missio* 33.

⁸¹ Joseph Ratzinger, *Salz der Erde: Christentum und katholische Kirche im neuen Jahrtausend*. Ein Gespräch mit Peter Seewald, Stuttgart: DVA, 1996, <http://www.ewtn.com/vnews/getstory.asp?number=19347>, called up: 17.8.2009.

⁸² Bloomsbury Publ. 2007. Quotes translated by FW from the German edition: Joseph Ratzinger/ Benedikt XVI, *Jesus von Nazareth. Erster Teil: Von der Taufe im Jordan bis zur Verklärung*, Freiburg: Herder, 2007.

⁸³ Ratzinger, *Jesus*, 11.

⁸⁴ Cf. Ulrich Luz, „Canonical Exegesis and Hermeneutics of ‘effective history’”, *Studies in Matthew*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005, 333-348.

⁸⁵ Ratzinger, *Jesus*, 22. Cf. Christoph Cardinal Schönborn, “Der Papst auf der Agora. Über einen Anspruch, den allein Gott stellen kann.”, „*Jesus von Nazareth*“ kontrovers: Rückfragen an Joseph Ratzinger (Theologie aktuell 1), Berlin-Hamburg-Münster: LIT, 2007, 9-17: 9.

2.5. Crosscurrents: Dialogue and deconstructed Christology

Birmingham mission theologian Werner Ustorf also intends to approximate the person of Jesus Christ to postmodern Europeans. But his attempt proves rather different from Benedict's. He suggests the deconstruction of traditional biblical Christology in order to discover a missiologically more relevant post-Christian European Christ.⁸⁶ In traditional biblical Christology, according to Ustorf, Jesus is "depicted as an essentially admirable and innocent man leading a life showing no trace of personal negativity".⁸⁷ Postmodern Europeans, so Ustorf thinks, cannot relate to this picture of Jesus, who "in his perfection, is mythological and not one of us": a perfect Christ has no "mediating powers". In contrast as postmodern Europeans "we have a shadow side ... Our potential for good, for creation and love, cannot be truly liberated if our 'shadow', hatred and evil, is ignored or repressed".⁸⁸

A revisionist European Christology according to Ustorf should overcome the "scandal of restricted access" (John Hick) and be able to admit the shadow sides in Jesus Christ. Ustorf detects these shadow sides in Jesus' "ethical radicalism ... expressed in the Beatitudes" which goes along with his suppression of negative thoughts and emotions in his disciples, thus keeping them from coming "to terms with themselves (and mature)", offering them "a secondhand identity" Through his message Jesus "introduced additional conflict, division, and violence into society. [...] In other words, Jesus' violent death was perhaps caused by the considerable aggression he himself had helped to arouse".⁸⁹ Ustorf concludes: "Jesus was not special [...] The profile of this man is that of a spirit-filled, charismatic figure; chaotic and creative, integrative and disintegrative, powerful and confused, loving and guilty".⁹⁰ According to Ustorf, this "Christ" is missiologically relevant since he will help Christians and Non-Christians to become mature human beings that accept that "the work of salvation has to be done by ourselves" and that failure and forgiveness both belong to that endeavour.⁹¹ Ustorf concludes:

„It seems that the disestablishment of Jesus Christ is generating ... new space ... to overcome the heritage of anxiety and aggressiveness. This would alter very much the format and structure of Christian mission ... Christianity once disestablished, is not about itself and not about Christianizing the world. It is about sharing the fullness of life on this earth, about love and reconciliation, community and peace, justice and service. ... To risk a dangerous formulation: a disestablished Christian spirituality would have failed if it were to lead us to ‚God‘; This missionary spirituality would lead us to our fellow human beings.“⁹²

Not all of Ustorf's perspectives seem to represent the consensus in missiological thinking in the European churches, but they indicate a significant crosscurrent of the discussion. In Germany a similar crosscurrent emerged after the mission-oriented Leipzig Synod of the EKD in 1999 (see 2.2). Various theologians were criticizing the new emphasis on the evangelistic dimension of mission and feared for a growing evangelical monopolization in the EKD. They pleaded for a different understanding of mission, as an open dialogue without intentions of

⁸⁶ Werner Ustorf, "The Emerging Christ of Post-Christian Europe" in: *A Scandalous Prophet: The Way of Mission after Newbigin* ed. by T. Foust et al, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 128-144. Ustorf's perspectives are inspired by a paper by Stephen Pattison, "The Shadow Side of Jesus", *Studies in Christian Ethics* 8 (2/1995) 54-67.

⁸⁷ Ustorf, *Emerging*, 137.

⁸⁸ Ustorf, *Emerging*, 139.

⁸⁹ Ustorf, *Emerging*, 140.

⁹⁰ Ustorf, *Emerging*, 138;141.

⁹¹ Ustorf, *Emerging*, 143.

⁹² Ustorf, *Emerging Christ*, 144.

persuasion and conversion.⁹³ These crosscurrents continue the somewhat more radical emphases of the dialogical model. Although they are contrary to Benedict's ecclesiocentrism in content, they seem to fulfil the same function as a reaction against a growing consensus between the different models. Within the contemporary discussion these crosscurrents can be seen as important contributions that remind all participants, that differences and even contrary positions are necessary to keep the dialogue alive and attentive to the complex reality of European souls.

2.6. The Pentecostal turn

In the postmodern context a new interest in a holistic experience and a spiritual reading of the bible has developed. For some time both have been reflected in the missionary praxis and perspectives of world-wide Pentecostal and charismatic churches, which recently have been discovered by the ecumenical missiological mainstream.⁹⁴ This development could be described as the "Pentecostal turn" in missiological reflexion. This turn was exemplified not only by the special interest and openness of the World Missionary Conference in Athens 2005 towards Pentecostals (see 2.1), but also by the Third European Conference of the International Association for Mission Studies (IAMS) in Paris in August 2006. After the conference Jacques Matthey mused that at future meetings "the followers of the charismatic movement" might be the ones giving the main speeches with only the "counterpoints given by missiologists with links to Protestantism or Catholicism".⁹⁵

At the conference, Alan Anderson, Professor of Global Pentecostal Studies at the University of Birmingham, explored the missiological relevance of Pentecostalism in Europe.⁹⁶ He showed that Pentecostals saw the decline of the traditional European Churches as self-induced, because they lacked renewal through the Holy Spirit and faith in "the simple and central truths of the Bible."⁹⁷ Similar to postmodernism, Pentecostalism is interpreted as "a distinct reaction to the rationalism of the Enlightenment. For Pentecostals, a rationalistic intellectualism has destroyed the soul of Christianity".⁹⁸ While postmodernism, by deconstructing the subject, ultimately "proved the urgency of the subject,"⁹⁹ Pentecostalism affirmed the human subject and her dignity by providing "a sense of belonging to those who have been marginalized by society".¹⁰⁰ Anderson points to some lessons the churches can learn from Pentecostals for mission in Europe:¹⁰¹ (1) Pentecostals engage in enthusiastic, experiential and participatory worship. Anderson thinks that this "experience of the power of the Spirit can be a unifying factor in a global society which is still deeply divided". (2) Charismatic mission is

⁹³ Cf. J. Hermelink, R. Kähler, B. Weyel, „In der Vielfalt liegt die Stärke. Konsequente Mission oder interessierte Kommunikation – wie soll sich die Kirche orientieren?“, *Zeitzeichen* 1 (2001), 38-40; G. Kretzschmar, „Wahrnehmung statt Mission. Alternative Sichtweisen zum EKD-Papier ‚Das Evangelium unter die Leute bringen‘“, *PTh* 91 (2002), 328-343.

⁹⁴ One of the reasons for this discovery is the numerical growth of Pentecostal and charismatic traditions in the global church. It was mainly this growth which has shifted the centre of gravity of Christianity from the Western to the Nonwestern World. Walter Hollenweger's and Donald McGavran's research and academic programmes with young Pentecostal theologians in Birmingham/UK and Pasadena/USA beginning in the 1970s were early pioneering efforts in recognizing these developments. Cf. M. Bergunder, "Mission und Pfingstbewegung", in: Dahling-Sander (ed), *Leitfaden Ökumenische Missionstheologie* Gütersloh: Kaiser, 214.

⁹⁵ "Introduction to the Programme of the Conference", *IRM* 95 (July/October 2006) 232-235: 233.

⁹⁶ A. Anderson, "Pentecostalism, the Enlightenment and Christian Mission in Europe", *International Review of Mission* 95 July/October (2006): 276-281.

⁹⁷ Anderson, Pentecostalism, 278.

⁹⁸ Anderson, Pentecostalism, 278.

⁹⁹ Knut Wenzel, „Radical Subjectivity“, *International Review of Mission* 95 July/October (2006): 259-264: 261/262.

¹⁰⁰ Anderson, Pentecostalism, 278.

¹⁰¹ Anderson, Pentecostalism, 278-281.

characterised by a radical felt-needs orientation. Anderson quotes a Nigerian pastor: “We live in rather difficult times; dreams are constantly dashed against the rocks of adversity. People desperately need to know that things will get better. ... We preach that miracles still happen! God still fixes shattered lives... A Church that preaches a message that gives hope, encouragement and healing will never lack for attendance.”¹⁰² (3) Pentecostal churches have a strong sense of calling by God and are dedicated to reach their contemporaries in up to date cultural language in music, film and television. In that respect they are truly contextual in their use of mass media, which according to Thomas Halik, is the „common language“ of postmodern society.¹⁰³

In conclusion one could say that the Pentecostal turn is a turn to holistic spiritual identity, expressive community and contemporary contextuality as essential ingredients for a missiological model in Europe. The Pentecostal and charismatic traditions seem to offer all these as they have a strong sense of the church as a „separated“, yet „a caring, therapeutic community“, „whose primary purpose is to promote their cause to those outside the church“.¹⁰⁴ Yet one should not overestimate the Pentecostal potential for mission in Europe, since its very strengths can at the same time be weaknesses. Combined with paternalistic leadership the strong emphasis on community can easily develop into a restricted social ecclesiocentrism that is not attractive to those Europeans who are looking for a kind of Christian commitment in “places where there is no obligation to opt in or to participate in communal activities beyond the service itself”.¹⁰⁵ The radical felt-needs orientation sometimes crosses the line into unhealthy and unsound “health and wealth” promises that are bound to disappoint and leave bitter feelings. Radical contemporality may prove counterproductive in the light of a returning appreciation of traditional aesthetic and cultural expressions of Christianity like cathedrals, liturgies, classical music and pilgrimages.

2.7. Spirituality, Plurality and Politics

The religiously inspired Islamist terrorist attacks in New York 2001, Madrid 2004 and London 2005 caused haunting questions on the religious base for peaceful plurality in Europe.¹⁰⁶ Not only Catholic and evangelical Protestant theologians, but liberal thinkers like Frankfurt school philosopher Jürgen Habermas emphasized that the *Christian* faith was foundational for freedom and democracy in European civilization.¹⁰⁷ Lamin Sanneh maintained that “two major forces are contending today for Europe’s soul – radical Islam and the new Christianity”.¹⁰⁸ Less provocative, German chancellor, Angela Merkel, in a speech at the European Parliament in Strasbourg in 2007 emphasized, “as a Christian I expressly acknowledge my allegiance to Europe’s Christian principles”, adding: “the most beautiful part of the play [Lessing’s famous ring parable, Nathan the Wise] is what the Sultan asks of Nathan. Bridging all the divisions of faith, the Muslim requests the Jew to ‘Be my friend’. Yes, ladies and gentle-

¹⁰² Zit. Anderson, *Pentecostalism*, 280.

¹⁰³ Cf. Tomás Halík sees “religion” and “science” as the common languages of pre-modern and modern society, while “mass media” plays the social role of religion” in postmodern society, “The Soul of Europe: An Altar to the Unknown God”, *International Review of Mission* 95 July/October (2006): 265-270:267.

¹⁰⁴ Anderson, *Pentecostalism*, 281.

¹⁰⁵ Grace Davie, “Is Europe an exceptional case?”, *International Review of Mission* 95 July/October (2006): 247-58:253.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Kippenberg, Hans/ Tilman Seidensticker (ed), *The 9/11 Handbook: Annotated Translation and Interpretation of the Attackers’ Spiritual Manual*, London/Oakville: Equinox, 2006.

¹⁰⁷ J. Habermas, *Time of Transitions*, New York: Polity Press, 2006, cit. Jenkins, *Godless Europe*, 120.

¹⁰⁸ “Can Europe be saved? A Review Essay”, *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 31 (3/2007): 121-125:124.

men, that is what we seek and for which we strive – harmony among nations.”¹⁰⁹ The theological and missiological question no longer seems to be marginal to politics in postmodern and pluralist Europe.

A missionary expression of the spiritual basis of European plurality was given at the conferences of the *Together for Europe*-movement. The movement brings together Catholic, Lutheran, Anglican and Orthodox spiritual and missionary groups and initiatives like the Focolare, Cursillo, Sant'Egidio, Geistliche Gemeinde-Erneuerung [GGE], ProChrist, Alpha-Courses. In 2004 and 2007 the movement convened large meetings in Stuttgart with every time about 9000 Christians from different European nations to represent a “Europe of the Spirit”. The Spirit of the gospel, it is maintained, creates a culture of togetherness “through which different peoples and individuals can welcome each other, get to know each other, be reconciled and learn to respect and support each other.”¹¹⁰

The first conference took place about the time when the Constitution of the EU was to be ratified and the discussion on the mention of God and the Christian tradition of Europe in the preamble ran high. The comments that a number of well-known speakers gave on this issue at the conference show how the connection between spirituality and politics was viewed. Lutheran Pastor and “Pro-Christ”-evangelist Ulrich Parzany pointed out that European democracy “depends on conditions that democracy itself cannot bring about”. He saw a mention of God and Christianity in the EU constitution “as a useful reminder” to this, but clarified that “the destiny of Europe does not depend on whether God is named in the constitution”, the destiny of Europe “hinges on the witness of people rather than texts.”¹¹¹ Another speaker, Italian historian Andrea Riccardi emphasized the complex historical significance of a reference to Christianity in the EU constitution, qualifying that it should be understood “‘in a non-monopolistic fashion’ - along with a reference to Auschwitz. The charter, he said, should contain a reminder of the darkness from which the EU was founded to escape.” Romano Prodi, President of the European Commission, reminded that the “the fathers of the EU”, the French Robert Schuman (1886-1963), the Italian Alcide de Gasperi (1881-1954) and the German Konrad Adenauer (1876-1967), “were committed Christians, unafraid to seek guidance from their faith. [...] Christians now [must] be the leaven of the new Europe, nurturing - together with other faiths - the soul of the European project”.¹¹²

Similar perspectives had been expressed at the Budapest-conference of the evangelical network “Hope for Europe” in 2002: „We reaffirm our lifelong commitment to love God and our neighbour, European and non-European, as ourselves. We will humbly seek to do this through being a community of praying, worshipping, welcoming, culturally relevant, outward looking people who know the Bible well and are united in multiplying, inclusive, evangelising local churches. We will work for peace, justice and reconciliation and will value as equals those seen as inferior by our societies.”¹¹³

¹⁰⁹ “Speech by Angela Merkel, Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, to the European Parliament in Strasbourg on Wednesday, 17 January 2007”,

http://www.eu2007.de/en/News/Speeches_Interviews/January/Rede_Bundeskanzlerin2.html

¹¹⁰ Movements and Christian Communities ‚Together for Europe‘, http://www.miteinander-wie-sonst.de/_en/home.html.

¹¹¹ Cit. Austen Ivereigh, „Europe of the Heart“, *The Tablet*, 13.05.2004, <http://www.thetablet.co.uk/articles/2469>.

¹¹² Cit. Austen Ivereigh, „Europe of the Heart“, *The Tablet*, 13.05.2004, <http://www.thetablet.co.uk/articles/2469>.

¹¹³ Budapest Perspectives: Towards an Agenda of Hope for Europe. www.hfe.org.

In an exemplary way these perspectives express some of the political emphases of the recent missiological discussion. They do not focus on ecclesiastical politics or political Christianity, but affirm political and religious plurality on the basis of the truth of the gospel.¹¹⁴ The gospel of Jesus Christ is not seen as a European religion, but as the unique revelation of God for all human beings that creates and sustains a space of grace: respect for others, meaningful communication, honesty towards failure and humility to receive and to grant forgiveness. Mission in Europe as a form of *christocentric pluralism* is seen to overcome the inverted ethics of multiple “primary groups”¹¹⁵ and enable constructive community and dialogue in Europe, even on highly controversial religious, ethical and political issues.

3. Searching for the soul(s) of Europe: Some conclusions from an evangelical perspective

In the preceding I have tried to show how the missiological debate in the European churches has changed over the last thirty years. The three models that characterised the first phase are still recognizable in the second phase. It seems obvious that each of the three models contributes essential insights towards a contextual missiology for Europe. The ecclesiocentric *inculturational* model helps to understand the importance of a visible Christian community rooted in history and relevant to European culture and identity. The cosmocentric *dialogical* model reminds us that God’s mission is broader than the Church’s mission and is at work in every society, culture and religion. It rightly challenges Christians to carefully listen to and learn from secular and religious people in Europe and build a many-coloured European house together. The bibliocentric *translational* model points to the normative and creative biblical *constants* in context and challenges contextual mission thinking not to fade into some form of pluralistic or culturalistic European religion, but to be clearly centred on the unique biblical and universal witness of Jesus Christ.¹¹⁶

Still, the models have not stayed static. They have changed, interrelated and moved towards a more integrated, yet more complex and sometimes diffuse emerging model – with significant crosscurrents. This seems to correspond with postmodern times that value relationship more than reason (or at least as “being right”) and understand the relativity of perspectives. This allows for the concurrence of differing and contrary views while (hopefully) not giving up on community. On the other hand critical mission theological evaluation of the various perspectives still seems appropriate and possible on the basis the “epistemological priority” of the “classical text, the Scriptures”.¹¹⁷ From that perspective I will take a concluding look at three essential dimensions of missiological thinking in Europe.

3.1. The context: understanding the European soul

Even though the concern of Jacques Delors to develop not only the economic, but also the affective dimension of Europe must be appreciated, it does not seem to be the task of mission to “give a soul to Europe”. Europe is not soulless, but has a most complex and dynamic

¹¹⁴ For a missiological critique of pluralist theologies of religion see e.g. A. Kirk, “Religious pluralism as an epiphenomenon of Postmodern Perspectivism”, in: V. Mortensen (ed), *Theology and the Religions: A Dialogue*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003, 430-442; A. Feldtkeller, „Verlangt der gesellschaftliche Pluralismus nach einer ‚pluralistischen Religionstheologie?“, *EvTheol* 58 (6/1998) 445-460.

¹¹⁵ J. Bouman has pointed to the self-centred dynamics of *primary-groups* in multicultural societies: “People are mainly interested in their immediate rational and emotional neighbourhood-family-friends-political party-ethnic group... The more distance grows between groups in respect to time, space, affections or identities, the less interest and concern for other people will be there.” J. Bouman, „Ethik und Kultur in einer multikulturellen Gesellschaft“, *European Journal of Theology* 4 (1): 79-87: 86/87.

¹¹⁶ Cf. Stephen Bevans/ Richard Schroeder, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today*, Maryknoll: Orbis, 2004, 33.

¹¹⁷ Bosch, *Transforming*, 187.

soul.¹¹⁸ The task of mission would be to meet, to listen to and to try to understand the soul(s) of Europe. Here are some conclusions: (1) While *Europe and the European Union* are not identical, the economic and political partnership of the 27 countries of the European Union is an essential and almost defining element for a contemporary understanding of European reality. This partnership started after the Second World War in 1950 with the plan of French politician Robert Schuman to overcome violence and hunger and to foster peace, reconciliation and prosperity through economic interrelations in Europe. It is in itself an important element of the European soul. (2) Europe can be viewed as a *post-Christian culture*. This implies the acknowledgement of the significant influence that the Christian faith in its various historical inculturations (Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant, pietist-evangelical etc.) has had and in many ways still has on European history and culture. On the other hand it includes the realization of the growing distance of many Europeans from the Christian metanarrative. (3) In a similar way Europe can be described as a *postmodern culture*. This implies the acknowledgement of the formative role of the enlightenment and modernity for Europe, and their ongoing influence in some areas of science and technology. On the other hand it means to understand the “incredulity” of postmodern Europeans towards all preceding metanarratives, while in their various turns towards aesthetics, relationships, communication, ecology and minority rights they arbitrarily pick and choose from the rich banquet of these historical metanarratives. An example: While France is diagnosed as the most secular country in Europe, “the most esteemed figure in the nation is Abbé Pierre ..., the Catholic priest whose Emmaus movement has since 1949 helped the homeless and destitute”. (4) Only on the basis of these developments in cultural history (Christian, modern and postmodern) the countries of Europe have become a pluralist culture, which places high value on the freedom of conscience, belief, speech, science and lifestyle a basis for a multiethnic, multicultural and multireligious society, an open forum and space for the *convivencia*, dialogue and witness. I agree with Luibl:

“The history of the peoples and people of Europe is the place of the Soul of Europe. Exactly here we would find, that Europe has not one but many souls: a Romanic, a Germanic and a Slavic soul, a Catholic, a Protestant and an Orthodox Soul; a Christian, a Jewish and a Muslim soul; we would find an enlightened and a pious soul; many national souls and as many souls that are minorities and live as refugees or exiles. Only such soul-stories ..., stories of the scars in the souls, maybe there, in a history of mentality, one could discover a ‘soul of Europe’, put together from thousands of European souls, a patchwork-soul.”¹¹⁹

Though, listening to the European soul(s) is a formidable and sometimes the most important task, it is not enough. From a mission theological perspective, hope for Europe does not originate from the “soul” of Europe. The bible describes the human soul (hebr. *nefesh*) as completely dependent on the creative, sustaining and redemptive word and breath of God (Gen. 2,7). “My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?” (Ps. 42,2).

3.2. The text: European Religion or *missio Dei* in Europe?

It is essential for mission in Europe that it includes the invitation to Europeans in the churches and in society to listen and let the breath of God fill their lives. Contextual mission theology in Europe constantly needs to ask if mission in Europe is a genuine expression of the biblical *missio Dei* or if it is moving towards an ecclesiastic or culturalist *missio Europae*, moving from an inculturational towards an ecclesiocentric or syncretistic orientation. Although the

¹¹⁸ Cf. Halik, *The soul*, 266.

¹¹⁹ Luibl, A-3024, 5, transl. FW.

distinction between syncretism and inculturation is not an easy one and always needs to be open for revision,¹²⁰ it remains decisive to ask if the identity of the gospel is retained or alienated in the process.¹²¹ It remains essential to clarify “the proximity to or distance from the centre, Jesus Christ”.¹²² Peter Stuhlmacher, New Testament scholar in Tübingen, tried to summarize the core identity of the gospel as follows:

„The content and the status of the gospel have been given to us in the gospels and the Pauline letters. The gospel message, authorised by the one God and Father of Jesus Christ, affirms that the messianic redeemer who was announced by the prophets to Israel and the nations has appeared in Jesus, who as to his human nature was a descendant of David, and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead‘ (Romans 1: 3-4 NIV). On Calvary he was ‚delivered over to death for our sins‘ and on Eastern morning God ‚raised [him] to life for our justification‘ (Romans 4: 25 NIV). All Gentiles and Jews who believe in the crucified and risen Christ and confess him as Saviour and Lord will be saved (Romans 19: 9-13 NIV)“.¹²³

Of course any historic or present attempt to reformulate the gospel as the core of mission on the basis of the biblical texts needs to be open to revision. Postmodernism has rightly shaken the self-confidence of positivist epistemology and pointed to the cultural perspectivity of all hermeneutics and theology. Yet there is more than just perspectives. Global intercultural communication in commerce and science is constantly creating “shared spaces”, that prove that not all is lost in translation, but that reality exists and can be distinguished from perception. While constant effort is needed, basic observations of nature and human behaviour are regularly translated and understood transculturally.¹²⁴ In a similar way the reality of God’s revelation in Jesus Christ that is expressed in the biblical texts is – through the power of the Holy Spirit - creating “shared spaces” across historical and cultural divides. The growing world-wide community of Christians and churches – though with necessarily different emphases – is constantly affirming the reality, power and meaning of the gospel as the text of mission.

Mission in Europe therefore means to share the biblical story of the Living God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, with Europeans in a holistic way as an invitation to life and truth. Since European media culture is filled with moving, but imaginary stories, it is decisive that the biblical story be true as well as life-transforming. In this respect Ustorf’s suggestion of a post-Christian European Christology does not seem to be helpful (see 2.5). While Europeans might be able to identify with a deconstructed European Christ, this Christ neither corresponds with the biblical records nor would he be able to give Europeans reason and hope for *change* in their lives.

3.3. The community of mission in Europe

While I can not quite agree with the notion that the Church *is* the soul of Europe (see 1.1.), Christian churches certainly are *part* of the European culture and are called to be “salt” and

¹²⁰ T. Sundermeier, *Was ist Religion? Religionswissenschaft im theologischen Kontext*. Ein Studienbuch, Gütersloh, 1999, 162-179.

¹²¹ H. Wrogemann, „Theologie und Wissenschaft der Mission“ in: *Leitfaden Ökumenische Missionstheologie*, hg. v. C. Dahling-Sander et al, Gütersloh: Kaiser, 2003, 17-31.

¹²² C. Van Engen, „Theology of Mission“, *Evangelical Dictionary of World Mission*, hg. v. A. S. Moreau et al, Grand Rapids: Baker, 949-951: 949.

¹²³ Peter Stuhlmacher, *Biblische Theologie und Evangelium. Gesammelte Aufsätze*. WUNT 146, Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 2002, 282, transl. Walldorf.

¹²⁴ Cf. H. Netland, *Encountering Religious Pluralism*, Downer Grove: IVP, 2001, 289.

“light” within it (Mt. 5, 13-14). The Church as the eschatological community of the reign of God is called to participate in God’s mission and in his redemptive search for the soul(s) of Europe. Mission in Europe therefore means for the churches to let themselves be constantly renewed by the text of mission and to live it out in their context, among their fellow-Europeans.

Even if it is a myth that many Europeans are no longer interested in truth, it seems to be true that the search for truth is hidden within the search for identity, personal meaning and community. Europeans are looking for real relationships *and* for truth that can carry these relationships.¹²⁵ As the hermeneutical bridge between the biblical text and the European context has broken down to a large extent, the *communio sanctorum* is the plausibility structure (Peter L. Berger) for mission and a network of hope in the geographies, cultures, religions and denominations of Europe. It is a community that is as diverse and dynamic as European society. It is composed of national, ethnic, cultural, sub-cultural and denominational groups, traditional folk and free churches, emerging church movements, Christian fellowships and communities, migrant churches, international churches, student movements and missionary societies. This network of ethically alternative and missionary expressive Christian communities is woven into the plural web of European cultural and religious communities and, as a visible *semeion* (Greek: sign, symbol), points to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

At the World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh 1910 Europe was seen as a Christian territory and thus excluded as a field and context for mission. In the 21st century, mission in Europe has become a complex challenge for a world-wide community of Christians from many regional, cultural and religious backgrounds. Christians from Africa, Asia and Latin America, together with Europeans, already have been praying and working together in that challenge for some time.¹²⁶

¹²⁵ J. Long, “Generating Hope: A Strategy for Reaching the Postmodern Generation”, *Telling the Truth: Evangelizing Postmoderns* ed. by D. A. Carson, Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000, 322-335: 334.

¹²⁶ J. Reimer, „They come with a message: The gospel of missionaries from the Two-Thirds World in old Europe“, *Missionalia* 35 (2/2007) 3-17; F. Walldorf, „Mission in Partnerschaft: Zum Aufbruch der evangelikalen Missionsbewegung in Afrika, Asien und Lateinamerika“, *Werdet meine Zeugen: Weltmission im Horizont von Theologie und Geschichte*, ed. H. Kasdorf/ F. Walldorf, Neuhausen: Hänssler, 1996, 221-248.