



**THE EVANGELICAL MISSIONARY MOVEMENT – THE
PURE GOSPEL, OR CAN THERE BE A BIT OF PROGRESS,
ENLIGHTENMENT AND COLONIALISM?¹**

*O movimento missionário evangélico – O puro evangelho, ou pode haver um
pouco de progresso, Iluminismo e colonialismo?*

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ABSTRACT

In Evangelical theology, great emphasis is placed on preaching and teaching according to the Biblical word, and hence the term “pure gospel” plays a central role. Starting point for this article are observations in Ghana that make clear how, in the history of Evangelical mission, different contexts, not only the culture, have also profoundly shaped the life in the Christian communities in the sense of a comprehensive context. Both the British and the German colonial histories have left deep traces in Ghana and continue to shape the country today from the first grade in school all the way up to the public media. What is this really pure about, which the missionaries in the nineteenth and early twentieth

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centuries proclaimed and taught in Ghana, in the sense of the ideal (“the pure gospel”), in the sense of doctrinal biblical purity, and what are overlays and mingling with contextual specifications? In this context, it makes sense to look back at the tradition of the European history of philosophy, especially at idealism and Platonism, because there we already find the ambivalence of original purity in the sense of timeless ideas as well as the consideration of the real world as a more or less contaminated shape of the original ideas. In contrast to the Greek model, Biblical revelation is consistently historical. That is, God consciously and willingly manifests Himself in historical contexts by which He connects Himself to a very specific language, culture, and in the case of Israel, for example, to a specific country and a people chosen by Him. Analogous to this, the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ is likewise not an ideal concept of timeless, ideality detached from the world, but entering into the framework conditions of the created world. A problem of Western cultural history is now defined by the overlap between the Greek idealistic understanding of the purity of the idea, on the one hand, and the historical contingency of the revelation of God in the biblical texts (on the other hand). The purity of the gospel is characterized precisely by the fact that the message gets involved in the historical framework conditions and permeates them in such a way that they become the medium and form of the divine revelation in its accidental historical manifestation. In this horizon, another or new understanding of the purity of the biblical message comes into the discussion, namely, that which defined the Lutheran Reformation of the sixteenth century as an essential characteristic of the Church, namely, according to Article 7 of the Augsburg Confession: let the gospel be “purely preached”. This purity has an entirely different goal than the idealistic understanding: the pure Gospel, in the sense of the Reformation rediscovery of the Gospel, is the message of the justification of the sinner by grace alone. In this sense, the gospel must be proclaimed purely, that the justification before God must not be supplemented by any addition and embellishment by man, but is solely and exclusively an act of divine grace. In terms of missionary history, however, and the assessment of today’s global church, this means that the gospel can be drawn in a variety of contexts, and the key emphasis is that, with respect to soteriology, no human achievement can and must be provided by which man could acquire the salvation of God.

Keywords: Contextualization of the Gospel. Idealistic philosophy in the sense of archetype and image. Justification by grace alone.

RESUMO

Na teologia evangélica, grande ênfase é colocada na pregação e no ensino de acordo com a palavra bíblica e, portanto, o termo “evangelho puro” desempenha um papel central. O ponto de partida para este artigo são observações em Gana, que deixam claro como, na história da missão evangélica, diferentes contextos, não apenas a cultura, também moldaram profundamente a vida nas comunidades cristãs no sentido de um contexto abrangente. Tanto as histórias coloniais britânicas como as alemãs deixaram traços profundos em Gana e continuam a moldar o país hoje, desde o primeiro ano na escola até a mídia pública. Pergunta-se o que é realmente puro, em relação ao que os missionários no século XIX e início do século XX proclamaram e ensinaram em Gana, no sentido do ideal (“o puro evangelho”), no sentido da pureza bíblica doutrinária, e quais são as sobreposições e coisas que se misturam com questões contextuais? Neste contexto, faz sentido olhar para trás, para a tradição da história europeia da filosofia, especialmente no idealismo e no platonismo, porque já encontramos a ambivalência da pureza original no sentido de ideias

atemporais, bem como a consideração do mundo real como uma forma mais ou menos contaminada das ideias originais. Em contraste com o modelo grego, a revelação bíblica é consistentemente histórica. Ou seja, Deus se manifesta de forma consciente e voluntária em contextos históricos pelos quais Ele se conecta a uma linguagem, cultura e em um caso muito específico, no caso de Israel, por exemplo, para um país específico e um povo escolhido por Ele. Analogamente a isso, a encarnação de Deus em Jesus Cristo também não é um conceito ideal atemporal, idealidade separada do mundo, mas algo que entra nas condições estruturais do mundo criado. Um problema da história cultural ocidental agora é definido pela sobreposição entre a compreensão idealista grega da pureza da ideia, de um lado, e a contingência histórica da revelação de Deus nos textos bíblicos (de outro lado). A pureza do evangelho caracteriza-se precisamente pelo fato de que a mensagem se envolve nas condições estruturais históricas e as permeia de tal forma, que se tornam o meio e a forma da revelação divina em sua manifestação histórica accidental. Neste horizonte, surge uma outra ou nova compreensão da pureza da mensagem bíblica, a saber, aquilo que definiu a Reforma Luterana do século XVI como uma característica essencial da Igreja, ou seja, de acordo com o Artigo 7 da Confissão de Augsburgo: que o evangelho seja “puramente pregado”. Essa pureza tem um objetivo inteiramente diferente do que o entendimento idealista: o Evangelho puro, no sentido da redescoberta da Reforma do Evangelho, é a mensagem da justificação do pecador somente pela graça. Nesse sentido, o evangelho deve ser proclamado puramente, que a justificação diante de Deus não deve ser complementada por qualquer adição e adorno pelo homem, mas é unicamente e exclusivamente um ato de graça divina. Em termos de história missionária, no entanto, e numa avaliação da igreja global de hoje, isso significa que o evangelho pode ser desenhado em uma variedade de contextos, e a ênfase principal é que, em relação à soteriologia, nenhuma conquista humana pode e deve ser fornecida pelo qual o homem poderia adquirir a salvação de Deus. Palavras-chave: Contextualização do Evangelho. Filosofia idealista no sentido de arquétipo e imagem. Justificação por graça apenas.

1 RANDOM OBSERVATIONS IN GHANA

A public primary and middle school near the Ghanaian capital Accra. It is December 2012. In the pleasant coolness of the morning before the beginning of our meetings I am always drawn to the KGs, that is, to the Kindergarten kids. Their frizzy hair, big dark eyes, the easy smile of the children’s faces with their flashing white teeth—I know these are the clichés of a European who, as a grandfather, cannot escape the charms of the young Africans. The school is located right next to the campus of the Akrofi-Christaller Institute of Theology, Mission and Culture, where we are meeting with the Committee of the Global Christian Forum, an international ecumenical working group.

So I go over to the spacious schoolyard, where the different classes have lined up in three rows for the start of the lesson. The preschool children and the first-graders fit into the discipline. The children are decked out in blue school

uniforms based on the British model with white shirt and necktie. But one of them has forgotten his tie. Weeping, he steps out of the line and gets some swats from the teacher on the back. Another has no proper shoes. He suffers the same fate.

They sing a hymn together followed by “The Lord’s Prayer”. In the end the national anthem is played. They put their right hands on their hearts. They are dismissed to their classrooms and they read together the text written on the blackboard: „The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. “(Psalm 23.1). Finally, instruction begins.

What kind of strange amalgam is it that comes together here? Deep traces of the Basel missionary work, with a self-evident Christian confession at a state school. This is supplemented by the British education tradition and the almost military drill of old colonial times.

This event is certainly nothing more than a very accidental flash of light in a strongly Christian-influenced African country with a colonial history full of change. And yet, this snapshot makes the explosiveness of our subject plainly clear: “The Evangelical missionary movement - the pure gospel, or are a bit of progress, idealism, and colonialism allowed?”

It was allowed. Not only in the past more than two hundred years of missionary activity, but even today, policy and Bible, business interests and personal testimony may still be interwoven in a very striking openness. We were in Accra in the week before the Ghanaian presidential elections. On the one side a Pentecostal preacher and on the other an elder of a Presbyterian congregation stood as candidates. The Pentecostal placarded with an Old Testament Bible verse: “The battle is the Lord’s” - the Lord decides the election campaign. In the street image of the capital, hopelessly overloaded by traffic, there is hardly a car on which a Bible word or a confession of Jesus is not attached as a bumper sticker, next to a campaign slogan and information about the owner.

Was the declared intention of the missionaries to proclaim the pure gospel only an illusion in the face of the temptations and needs of this world? Did they fail with their purist missionary concept?

2 THE CRAZY (DISPLACED) PURITY REQUIREMENTS OF IDEALISTIC PHILOSOPHY

Indeed, the phrases chosen for the topic do leave an ironic undertone. It would also be too naive to want to believe that one could build a church or even rule a secular state exclusively with the gospel without regard for the interests of this world. In reality, Prussian discipline intertwines with British traditions and Christian content to form an overall picture, in which it is often impossible to clarify precisely what flows from each source.

And yet the demand is present that the pure gospel without admixture should define (characterize) Christian mission.

2.1 The dream world of philosophical idealism

Historically, the 19th century was the great epoch of German idealism, beginning with Kant, radicalized by Fichte, developed by Schelling and completed by Hegel. Now it may hardly be assumed that the missionaries, who were sent to Africa and Asia in essence from Pietist Bible schools and seminaries, had intensively participated in the philosophical developments of their epoch. Yet, the long tradition of philosophical idealism has shaped Western thought since the time of Plato and Plotinus.

What characterizes this spiritual heritage? First and foremost, the deep conviction that the world of ideas is the real reality. Everything else that we have in mind in the world of tables and benches is only a shaded, unclear, and, in fact, already defiled reality. To make it concrete by example: If we have a table before us, it is no trouble for us to identify and name this object as a table. The amazing thing with this is that we have objects that form a round surface or a rectangle made of wood or plastic, which have high or low legs, but all spontaneously stand for the same word table and then in principle we also know what is meant by this. Platonic philosophy interpreted this phenomenological phenomenon as follows: All the concrete tables that exist in the world have their origin in the idea of the table, which, as a spiritual (intellectual) dimension, embraces all earthly reality, and yet can never be represented materially in this world. For every concrete model of a table, for example, by a carpenter, is ultimately only an approximation attempt to what pretends to be the pure idea. The table itself, that is, the idea of the table, is realized as a table in every piece of material work, but it is still concealed

as a purely spiritual dimension, and at the moment when it assumes an earthly form, the idealism of spiritual origin is already abandoned and corrupted. This being-structure of ideas is further developed starting with simple material things and increasingly abstracted to mathematical ideas, ethical values, and finally to the sum of the good, i.e., an absolute and ideal representation of God. What we recognize in our world are only derived, shadow-like ideas, which, while they give us an awareness of the nature of the origin, do not really reveal it.

This is not without meaning and impact on the notion of “the pure gospel.” Is there a presentation of divine revelation in this world that retains its original ideality? This is philosophically hard to imagine and must basically remain a phantom, which one chases after yet cannot reach. The high estimation of the idealism of the pure prototype in the world of ideas over against their concrete transformations in the world remains, however, even when the call for the pure gospel is raised in theology and the church. Moreover, this greatly defined the Protestant theology of the late 18th and especially the nineteenth century strongly influenced by German idealism. The goal and the ideal is a representation of God and a redemption of the pure spiritual soul from this world, which is removed from all the confusions and aberrations of material reality. Hegel’s God is that absolute spirit that cannot be grasped. It can only be experienced through its opposite, the antithesis, which enters into the world and suffers it. This is what Hegel’s concept of incarnation, cross, and redemption looks like. In the Hegelian understanding, Jesus describes as a mortal man the antithesis to the absolute spirit, which alone represents the pure idea of God. In this system of dialectical processes, God is, then, the original thesis.

2.2 The Inevitable Conflict of the History of Biblical Revelation and Hellenistic-Greek Philosophy

The apostolic theology in Biblical times was a thoroughly missionary (missional) theology. It was challenged theologically by the philosophical thinking patterns of the West. The Greek philosophers since the pre-Socratic age raised questions about the origin, namely, about the *archae* of being, and thus about an ontological foundation and a general view of reality. In this respect the problem arises in a particular way whether and to what extent this philosophical approach of the Greek tradition is compatible with the Biblical way of thinking

with respect to form and content. This is ultimately about the basic legitimization of any missionary (missions-oriented) theology in the context of contextualization.

Within the relationship of text and context, the term text first refers to the uniqueness of the Biblical text as a revelation given in a specific linguistic, cultural, and historical environment. The text of the Hebrew Bible and the oral proclamation of Jesus, communicated by the evangelists and apostles, encounters the Greek-speaking world of the Roman Empire in the age of Hellenism. This places the Biblical texts in a fundamentally different context of world experience and thinking. Thus, the early Christian mission is necessarily drawn into the process of contextualization. The challenge to contextualization within the Bible is also underlined by the fact that the New Testament canon as such is already written in the Greek language, although most authors of the New Testament and Jesus Himself lived in the Hebrew-Aramaic language and thought world. The same applies to the Septuagint, the translation of the Hebrew canon into Greek. It is not only about the profound differences of language as such, but also about the fact that language is associated with a cultural mentality as well as a specific historical experience. For theology, therefore, the encounter of Jewish-Semitic historical thought, as it is anchored in the historical revelation of Israel, represents the primary and constitutive accomplishment of contextualization with the thought tradition of philosophical and scientific Hellenism. From the connection of Jewish and Greek thinking arose namely that fundamental reflection form of theology, which has become characteristic of the two-thousand-year history of the Occident. Within the horizons of the Christian churches with their mission and apologetics, develop from the canonical prescribed forms of language and possibilities of thought, combined with the philosophical thought structure of Hellenism, what we call systematic theology today and in particular missionary apologetics. This form of theological reflection characterizes in its peculiarity the theological understanding of the West until today.

With the mission among the Germans and Slavs north of the Alps, a new challenge to contextualization emerged in the early Middle Ages. And in the course of the modern discoveries and the subsequent history of missions history since the 16th century, the Christian mission in Latin America, Asia and finally Africa once again encounters a wealth of cultural and linguistic contexts, into which the Christian message has to be formulated and reflected upon. On a global scale, the need for missionary contextualization in the 20th and 21st centuries with

their mobility and information media is finally evident as something which is indispensable.

The interrelationship between text and context is, on the one hand, concerned with the continuity or preservation of the original text and, on the other hand, with the openness to various new contexts, in which theology must express the text in new language forms and thought structures. Only in this way can it correspond to the missionary canon which Paul bases his mission on in I Cor. 9.19-23.

Discussion today about the evangelization of different milieus is only a recent and final offshoot of the need for contextualization.

3. THE CONDESCENSION OF GOD AND HIS HISTORICAL REVELATION

The contrast, as shown, could not be greater. On the one hand is the pure world of ideas, which is unaffected by all material earthly events and, on the other hand, the down-to-earth tangible stories reported by the Bible.

The God of the Bible is revealed in history, that is, He binds (limits) Himself to a concrete place and a concrete time and engages in a specific historical situation. Therefore, Paul can say, "But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law." (Gal. 4.4) The eternal comprehensive truth is thus bound to a tiny province of the Roman Empire in remote Galilee. The time circumstances are clearly fixed. It is Herod the Great, who has developed the framework conditions for the fact that Pontius Pilate, as a Roman governor, has led the Jewish people into a deep crisis.

Against the background of historical events in space and time, God also binds Himself with His word semantically and mentally to the Semitic languages of Hebrew and Aramaic. The use of these languages also necessarily provides the framework for genuine possibilities of expression and limitations to certain structures of thought. The provocation is that, with this condescension of God into a historical constellation, the abstract claim of philosophy is rejected. God has not at all been subtracted ("abstract") from, but is involved in the conditionality of earthly existence. Furthermore, as God chooses places, times, and situations for the event of His self-disclosure, He confines Himself to seemingly entirely accidental

framework conditions and does not claim to bring a knowledge of the truth which has broken free from the world. His truth reveals itself rather in historical realities at specific points in time. The choice of the accidental, sometimes even the arbitrary, is, from our point of view, part of the peculiarities of the action of God. This can be found throughout the Bible and is already clearly evident in the Old Testament. Among all men at the time of the Flood, Noah finds the grace of God. Abraham, a nomad, is chosen from among the many who pass through the desert. It is in tiny Israel that makes God the place of His action. The small planet Earth in the midst of an infinitely large universe with its incomprehensibly extended Milky Way becomes a place of creation and history of salvation. The entire election then finds its completion in the Incarnation, that is, in the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Here, God not only speaks and acts, but He as a person enters without restriction and reservations into the confusion and anxiety of this world. Moreover, even the eschatological hope of the Christian faith is not solved by physicality, but by the fact of the bodily resurrection, precisely what is so important for the Platonic doctrine of the soul is denied. According to Greek understanding, the immortal soul dissolves (is freed) from the body at death and is placed in a celestial ideal sphere, where it nothing has anything to do with corporeality. Therefore, the proclamation of the resurrection of the body was described and rejected by the Greeks as foolishness. But the incorporation into a concretion, albeit other than merely earthly, is, nevertheless, the hallmark of all Biblical revelation.

This entire connection between the condescension of God and the historicity of his revelation is permanently important also for the body of Christ, that is, the Church and her mission. Mission always means concretization of the gospel into the flesh, into a given geographical, ethnic, historical and cultural situation which, with a different claim and self-understanding, is opposed to the Christian message. Precisely because the revelation of God is historical, mission cannot abandon material reality abstractly in the sense of an idealistic purity, but must engage with it, indeed enter into it. In this sense, contextualization is anything but an invention or a new paradigm of mission theology of the 20th and 21st century. Rather, it is clearly described in the so-called missionary canon of Paul: "For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as

one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings. Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it.” (1 Cor. 9.19-24).

The pure gospel is thus definitely laid out for contextualization by the apostle to the Gentiles. It is therefore not a question of denying one's own culture in the mission, which is not possible, or vice versa, to deny the culture of the missionary target group, but in a new situation in which non-Christians live, connecting these with the incarnate gospel in Jesus Christ.

4. THE PURE GOSPEL AS A COMMISSION FOR CONTEXTUALIZATION

The subject is the incontestable tension of eternal divine truth on the one hand and the temporal revelation of this truth in human form on the other. Neither Israel nor the Christian Church received the truth of God in a transcendent sphere, in which they would have been direct witnesses to the divine truth, but only in the given form of their respective historical conditions of life. This also proves to be the ever-new task and challenge, in every epoch of missionary history. In this way the missionaries of the 18th-19th centuries faced the „savages“ in the tribal regions of Africa and Asia in the sense of the then colonial “superiority” of Europe. In a difficult process of self-understanding, the missionaries had to learn to distinguish between their involvement in their own traditional cultural conceptions and how the culture of the missionary country, with its peculiarities and values, had already been prepared for the Gospel of Jesus Christ or also hindered it as an obstacle. Mission therefore always implies thorough study, both of the Biblical text and the historical-cultural context. It is crucial that the text clearly has precedence over the context. The truth claim of the text, especially in view of its historical condition, is normative for the newly emerging respective contexts in mission history.

The thorough study of the Biblical text creates the necessary autonomy and distance from the context. The Biblical revelation of God is constantly questioning man and his situation and confronts him with a truth that he cannot have from himself. His own knowledge is at least relativized, often negated.

By clearly studying the profile of the Christian truth claim through the study of scripture, there is a sovereign freedom against the context. This must not devour the text, but must give it space and accept that the text transforms the context.

In this dynamic process of text study, a self-critical reflection of one's own context that the missionary brings with him also comes about. This can be seen and overcome only by distancing itself from itself and by being compared to really perceived other contexts. For man first lives in his given context in a kind of notorious blindness. Just as he does not consciously perceive the air that surrounds him, so little is clear to him what is the peculiarity, danger, and chance of his own context. One of the outstanding achievements of missions, therefore, is cultural-historical, therefore, to become sensitive to the conditionality of one's own context, and thus to become capable of real transculturality. I became aware of this for the first time through a research semester in the U.S.A. Before that, I had always seen Americans at international conferences who spoke with great enthusiasm and much optimism about their faith. They developed far-reaching visions. I considered this to be a particularly faithful and true-to-the-Gospel attitude of American Christians. When I then experienced within the country how the economy was presented enthusiastically in advertisements or how politicians advertise their programs with visionary concepts and show the same optimism as I had known from the evangelists, I realized that what I had regarded as genuinely Christian, was at least partly the Christian expression of the American Way of Life. I then combined this criticism with the conclusion that the sometimes crippling or even pessimistic sense of life of the Germans is not a pure explication of the Christian faith, but rather a typical mental condition of our tradition. Within this horizon of historical condition, searching for the pure gospel does not mean, on the other hand, abolishing the specifics of different mentalities and ethnic expressions in order to penetrate to the abstract of the pure gospel, but, rather, asking how the Biblical text accepts or even corrects the context in its characteristics and its possibilities.

It is unquestionably an advancement in modern mission theology that these connections have been thoroughly analyzed and worked out for practice. However, I would have some doubt about talking about a „paradigm shift in mission theology“, since the task of contextualization is already set with the Great Commission, namely, “going to all peoples”. In the varied and highly differentiated way of the mission from Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria to the ends of

the earth, the task of contextualization has been posed since the very beginnings.

An eloquent example of this is Luke's Acts of the Apostles, which tells us how the Gospel encountered magical religious ideas, Hellenistic popular polytheism, and the constructs of a highly differentiated Greek philosophy. All these processes demonstrate in a variety of ways the penetration of the text into new contexts and the penetration of the contexts with the text, as Jesus implies in His parable of the leaven.

5 THE PURITY OF THE GOSPEL IN THE FORM OF THE DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION

It would be a disastrous misunderstanding to discredit the theological task of the proclamation of the pure gospel as impracticable in the face of the confrontation with the purity of idealism. The opposite is the case. Christian theology, through the permanent challenge of the mission, has continually set itself the task of clarifying the nature of the gospel and the extent to which this gospel is identical with itself in spite of its integration into changing historical forms of expression and must be preserved in this identity. In this sense, the pursuit of a „*theologia perennis*“, that is, a theology which is always the same is certainly justified. In the controversial theological disputes of the history of theology and the history of missions this fact can be proved in many ways. Here, in a special way, it is the Reformation of the sixteenth century, which, in the form of the Confessionio Augustana, speaks for itself a theological purity which is inextricably linked with the truth of the Gospel. There the church is said to be a meeting of the faithful: „in qua evangelium pure docetur ...“ (in which the gospel is taught purely). Certainly it is not the abstraction of the Greek doctrine of ideas but the sole efficacy of grace without works of the law. Luther's whole life and theological struggle were defined by the question of how sinful man can stand against the holy and just God and be saved from the Last Judgment. In this, through his study of the Roman letter, that is, of a Biblical text, Luther discovered that the event of justification is an absolutely exclusive matter. It is in no way possible, either as a preparation or as a condition, to involve human activity in any way whatsoever. Justification is done solely by faith (*sola fide*) and by grace alone (*sola gratia*). If in this event any human involvement, if only a mental one, were

involved, everything would be spoiled. For the being and action of man is always sinful, even in his best endeavors, before God. This basic view of the purity of the gospel is foundational for and can be given up by the evangelical church and theology. It is not asserted of this pure truth that it is certainly abstract and without context in the idealistic sense.

Rather, it is strongly connected with the historical presuppositions of the late Medieval church as well as with the framework conditions of Germanic law consciousness. Without the penitent theology propagated by the late Medieval church with its prerequisites for the right acceptance of grace and the open question of purgatory or indulgence, the justification solely from grace taught by Luther would not be conceivable without works. For example, in dealing with the so-called antinomians, i.e., those groups which wanted to abolish the law altogether, or in the critical attitude of Dietrich Bonhoeffer towards “cheap grace”, the proclamation of justification still remains as a crucial norm.

The lack of moral seriousness and effective sanctification cannot and should not damage justification by grace alone.

The *cantus firmus* of a Biblical theology of missions and evangelism remains therefore bound to the Christological and soteriological context of the doctrine of justification. Justification is possible because Christ, through His sinless holiness on the cross, saves the sinful man. Man is enabled by the power of the Word and the Holy Spirit to believe in the message of justification. Missionary theology, which does not proceed wholly from the justifying Christ, has given up its essence.

The present insights into the mission-theological definition of the purity of the Gospel will now be briefly outlined and related in a concluding section, at least in some aspects, to the concrete situation of Evangelical missions in the 18th and 19th centuries.

6 CONCRETE PROBLEMS IN THE BAGGAGE OF WESTERN MISSIONARIES

6.1 European nationalism and colonialism in the history of missions

With the great discoveries at the beginning of the modern age (North and South America, Africa, and Asia), the feeling of cultural and religious superiority of Western imperialism developed. People were thus so connected with their own traditions that the cultural, economic, and political structures of Europe were largely identified with the truth claim of the Christian Church. This merging of European and North American superiority with respect to the ethnic groups and cultures of the southern hemisphere was so dominant that the expansion of the Western empire by colonialization was regarded as an act commanded by the Christian faith. Towards pagan cults and customs as were found among the so-called “savages”, there was only the task of overcoming paganism by means of the message of the Church, and, insofar as this was not possible, by force. The history of Latin America is a devastating example of this. This problem also arose for the Protestant mission of the 18th, 19th and early 20th century. On the one hand, missionaries were convinced that the Word of God as such has the power to change people and cultures from the inside out, while at the same time respecting the people who are reached by this word in their dignity. This often resulted in an ambivalence between the solidarity with the peoples and churches in the missionary countries and the simultaneous need to use the infrastructure of the respective European colonial powers as a shelter for their own missionary activities. The ambivalence addressed here permeates the newer history of missions in the tension between colonialism and nonviolent proclamation of the Christian faith.

However, an essential motivation of identifying with the contemporary colonial leaders of the European states came from the conviction of the superiority of Western civilization, which was shared by both the colonial powers and the missionaries. They wanted to use the gospel to teach the benefits of the Western world in the fields of school, business, politics, healthcare, and technological infrastructure to the underdeveloped peoples.

6.2 Slave Trade and Slavery

A particularly vehement point of conflict in this respect is the slave trade or slavery, which was carried out by the white „christianized“ peoples with the aid of Arab merchants. A number of pseudo-biblical reasons often served to justify imperial racism. One of these was the curse which Noah had pronounced upon his son Ham (Gen. 9:25f.). Black Africans were regarded as descendants of Ham and of Canaan and were therefore subjected to the rule of Shem. This primitive logic was used to justify the subjugation and exploitation of the Africans. Then there were references to the practice of slavery, both in the Old and New Testaments, not least in view of the practice of the Roman Empire. It was pointed out that Paul, for example, nowhere generally prohibited slavery or called a slave riot. It is, however, certainly overlooked precisely how the apostle to the Gentiles dissolves the essence of slavery from within through the spiritual power of the Christian communities in his letter to Philemon.

In the more recent history of missions, besides the effort to mitigate the effects of slavery, there is also the firm determination to abolish slavery altogether. At the same time, however, there was always the temptation to at least partially secure the economic advantages of slavery.

6.3 Marriage and family as well as the question of women

Another field of conflict was raised with regard to the question of marriage and the family. What had to be changed with regard to the Biblical order of creation? How can a monogamous relationship between man and woman be achieved, for example, in a polygamous society with its social structures and customs? The missionaries realized very quickly that they could not simply plant the Christian model of marriage from one day to another in a completely differently structured culture and society. Only if one took the existing structures with a certain flexibility and gradually transformed them into the Christian marriage was a chance for a long-term change realistic. A very significant model for this missionary practice is already found in Titus 1.5-9, where Paul, in his exhortation to the elders and bishops in verse 6, explicitly says that the bishop should be “husband of one wife (or “a man of one woman)”. This means that, in many of the Pauline missionary churches, there were polygamous relationships which continued to exist even after

conversion and baptism. However, the community leader should be characterized by the fact that he lived in an exemplary way in a monogamous marriage. In this way, the Apostle was able to change the social structure of the entire church over one or two generations so that Christian marriage and family were at the end of the development. In many respects, this cautious and sensitive handling of the problem also applies to recent missionary history.

An important issue in this context was the question of the role of women in church and society. Especially in societies that were strictly patriarchal in structure, the emphasis was on emphasizing the dignity and equality of women and instilling these things in their minds and also putting them in practice.

6.4 Finance and Work Ethics

A further missionary theological problem was the question of the financing of mission work. At first, the missionaries were materially supported by the monetary offerings from Germany and other Western countries of origin, in order to be able to finance the construction and maintenance of mission stations. In the era of advanced colonialism, the missionaries were tempted to participate fully in the economic privileges of the white population in the African and Asian countries. Thus, the missionaries then belonged to the social upper class and at least indirectly also benefited from the exploitation of the natives by the colonial administration. However, many of the missionaries, especially from so-called faith missions, deliberately did without the prerogatives of colonialism to lead their lifestyle more in solidarity with the indigenous population.

With regard to money and in the broader sense of work ethics, there was also a sufficient amount of conflict. Missionaries attempted to teach the African and Asian populations European work discipline and how to build up a reliable financial administration, not least with the goal that, in the longer term, the young churches could be on their own financially. It is precisely in this respect that the difficult balancing act between the Western feeling of superiority and solidarity with the indigenous population is shown again.

6.5 The Enlightenment and liberal theology

European-American colonial history cannot be understood without the

background of the European Enlightenment of the eighteenth century. However, at this point, the distance between the missionary work of Pietist-Evangelical provenance and the intellectual leadership in the colonial territories is particularly virulent. The Revival movement of the nineteenth century was theologically strictly in conflict with the so-called “neology”, that is, with the liberal theology of Protestantism shaped by the Enlightenment. It was true that the scientific and technological knowledge that emerged from the Enlightenment was adopted and used, but, at the same time, Pietist-Evangelical missionaries remained consciously against enlightenment theology that was critical of the Bible. This configuration is of great relevance to the history of missions as the young churches of Africa and Asia, as well as Latin America, are definitely shaped by the Awakening movement and Bible-oriented Protestantism. Many tensions, especially in the so-called “mainline churches”, that is, the large traditional churches in Europe, such as Lutheranism, the Reformed Churches, Methodism, the Baptists, etc., are divided today between conservative and liberal positions.

The young churches of the global south, which are growing strongly, are clearly keeping a distance from the northern liberal churches and are risking a division of the church rather than adopting liberal positions.

6.6 Missions as an ecumenical impulse

Finally, it is significant that the ecumenical movement, in the context of Evangelical missions of the nineteenth century, was of great importance precisely in view of the “pure proclamation” of the gospel. With its founding in 1846, the Evangelical Alliance succeeded for the first time in modern church history in building a fundamental bridge across all borders of the three main streams of the Reformation of the 16th century. Christians from Lutheranism, the Reformed Churches, and the Anabaptist free church movements assembled in the Evangelical Alliance, and thereby were instrumental in preparing the first World Missions Conference in Edinburgh in a missiological manner. Modern ecumenism has one of its decisive impulses in world mission. This was because it was increasingly recognized that, in the missionary countries, the confessional divisions within Christendom were a serious obstacle to the faithful proclamation of the Gospel. This confessionalism, which had emerged from the 16th and especially the 17th century, is one of the great achievements of the modern Evangelical mission

movement.

6.7 Summary

6.7.1 Contextualization as God's Risk

We must be careful not to judge the new missionary movement in an a-historical manner from the position of an abstract idealism. Rather, it is a matter of God's way to speak His word and His church into respective contexts, even at the risk that the contextualization can sometimes lead to serious errors and delusions. But a church free of context is, from the theological grounds given above, neither possible nor worthy of pursuit because it would contradict the essence of God's revelation. Rather, the real issue is the struggle between textual contextualization and the overcoming of unbiblical contextualization attempts.

6.7.2 Missions in the tension between adaptation and contradiction

The extent to which individual missionary societies and individual missionaries have been arrested by the temptations of European progress and colonialism is shown in contradictory fashion in mission-historical reality. The spectrum ranges from a self-critical distance from its own Western culture to a naive acceptance of the aims of colonialism along with its repressive politics.

6.7.3 Intercultural flexibility and the pure gospel

The overall result is that the question of a pure proclamation of the gospel in missions is a highly contradictory and complex context in which a high degree of flexibility and intercultural reflection are required. The flexibility in cross-cultural work must always be rebound to the one pure gospel of the justification of the sinner by grace alone.