

RELIGIONS IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF CHRISTIAN MISSIONS: HISTORICAL AND THEOLOGICAL ASPECTS

Dear Friends!

At the end of today's professional conference headed by the theme „Missions in Church History“, I would like to close our common reflections with some historical and theological aspects regarding the question of the religions in the perspective of Christian missions:

“Religions in the Perspective of Christian Missions: Historical and theological Aspects”

The following considerations will expound this theme:

1. The global encounter of cultures and religions
2. Religions and salvation: Pluralism, Inclusivism and Exclusivism
3. The influence of God, man and the demonic in the religions
4. Summary

This leads us to the first consideration:

1. THE GLOBAL ENCOUNTER OF CULTURES AND RELIGIONS

This year we can already look back at the first decade of the new millennium in order to undertake an initial analysis and evaluation. Already eight years have passed since the catastrophe of 9/11 has marked an epochal turn of an era. Here – beside other aspects – it also became obvious that humanity was transferred into a global state of consciousness which was not present in this kind of quality before.

Thus, the Summit on the Global Agenda in Dubai/United Arab Emirates from 7.-9. November 2008 has published the following declaration:

„Religion is high on the global agenda. The claim that religion would inevitably decline with modernity – the core of the secularization thesis – has been proved wrong. Today's global challenges of war and peace, democracy and human rights, and economic and social development all have an important religious dimension.”¹

The Global Agenda is part of the World Economic Forum which took place at the end of January 2009 in Davos/Switzerland. The official report “Islam and the West” aptly remarks on the theme of “religious freedom”:

“In the contemporary era of globalization, with its increased cross-border flows of people and ideas, an age-old problem in Muslim-West relations has gained greater visibility – proselytism².
...

The ongoing controversy over proselytism suggests that this universal impulse within both Christianity and Islam is likely to generate tensions and complicate dialogue on other issues in years to come.”³

Regarding our question of the relationship of the religions⁴ toward Christian missions, this means that the „Clash of Civilizations“, which had been articulated by Samuel Huntington⁵ already 15 years ago,⁶ took place no longer in a largely hidden form but emerged to the surface before the eyes of the world public.

Huntington advanced the thesis that the basic cause of conflict of the new world order will be neither ideological nor economical but mainly of a cultural nature. Thus he aptly remarks:

„The clash of civilizations will dominate global politics. The fault lines between civilizations will be the battle lines of the future. ... Western civilization has two major variants, European and North American, and Islam has its Arab, Turkic and Malay subdivisions. Civilizations are nonetheless meaningful entities, and while the lines between them are seldom sharp, they are real.“⁷

Since then this clash has become conflagrant not only in television and the print media⁸, but also in the virtual communication world of the world wide web.⁹

Concerning this, the philosopher Peter Sloterdijk¹⁰ provides the following appraisal:

„Because globalization is based in its technical dimension on overcoming space through fast means of transportation and information, it destroys the natural and politically grown system of distances between nations and cultures. It involved the contemporaries into an electronical infosphere of largely unknown and untried capacities. ...

More communication initially means primarily more conflict. In the tele-age, insults are articulated across great distances. Through an unwise use, the modern media develop into transporters of hatred of the farthest. ...

From these considerations can be deduced that the current form change of the world has taken place far too quickly to be comprehended by such lethargic systems like cultures, religions, faith communities in common mode with the technical innovations.”¹¹

Against the background of these developments the task becomes more urgent than ever to determine the relationship between the Christian faith and the religions, not only in the historical but also in the theological dimension. This is existentially necessary in order to prepare the Christian church and Christian missions for the challenges and opportunities in the coming second decade of this century.

This was rightly emphasized by Barbara Brown Zikmund, former President of the *Association of Theological Schools*

(ATS),¹² the largest American society for the recognition and accreditation of theological schools.¹³ Although the challenge of religious pluralism represents *the* central question for Christians in the 21st century,¹⁴ theological education in the Christian sphere has so far not addressed this question in an adequate way, as Zikmund aptly remarks:

„In the face of these changes many Christians, whether they are Roman Catholic, Orthodox, ... Protestant, or participants in various Evangelical groups do not have an adequate theology to deal with religious diversity. And unfortunately, most programs in theological education have thus far not helped many religious leaders think through this situation or develop an adequate theology. ... most graduates of theological schools remain woefully uneducated about other religions and theologically naive about the ways in which issues of religious pluralism will affect every aspect of their Christian ministry.”¹⁵

This deficit of a qualified interaction of the Christian faith with the religions is not only being seen by Western observers but also increasingly by non-Western theologians and missionaries. Thus the Indian theologian Ken Gnanakan formulated already in 1992 in a precise manner the task of interaction with religious pluralism:

„Religious pluralism is not just a fact to reckon with but a reality requiring a response. The evangelist, the pastor, the student or even an average Christian today faces the challenge all over the world, whether it be in India where pluralism is taken for granted, or even in so called Christian Europe. Hindus,

Muslims, Buddhists, Sikhs and almost every other major or minor religion and cult will find its representatives making his or her presence known. The Christian is confronted by the challenge of their presence and is called upon to respond in some way ...”¹⁶

The historical development toward religious pluralism and the multicultural world of the 21st century is aptly described by Bassam Tibi¹⁷. From the 16th to the 20th century the expansion of the European influence took place, both politically and economically and in terms of cultural imperialism.¹⁸ However, through the subsequent massive migrations of large streams of populations from the non-Western world to Western Europe and North America, the most diverse cultures encountered each other in the course of globalization which had only little knowledge about each other and contact with each other before. Therefore there is the necessity to find forms for a peaceful coexistence between cultures. In this situation, *multiculturalism* seems to be the only plausible way toward a peaceful coexistence of cultures in one country.¹⁹

In doing so, Tibi presents a mainly rationalistic approach to his solution. He aims at finding a common orientation of values between cultures. However, it remains doubtful whether this approach will succeed realistically.²⁰ Tibi underestimates the basic spiritual dimension that cultures as carriers of religions always also transport perceptions of God which are irreconcilable with each other through rational arguments.²¹

Against this background of the global encounter of cultures and religions,

the foundational perspectives of Christian theology regarding the non-Christian religions will be introduced and described in the following. This is an important prerequisite for the future interaction with the manifold perceptions of salvation in the religions.

2. RELIGIONS AND SALVATION: PLURALISM, INCLUSIVISM AND EXCLUSIVISM

From the perspective of the Christian faith there are three foundational questions regarding salvation which all religions attempt to answer in one way or another:

First, what is salvation?

Second, who gives salvation?

Third, how does man receive salvation?

Every religion needs to provide justification for these questions since the question of salvation is a foundational concern of existential significance for man. Here, the questions could be specified, “*from what*” specifically man needs to be saved and “*for what*” purpose this salvation should serve. Subsequently we will familiarize ourselves with the three classical possibilities of response.

2.1 Pluralism says:

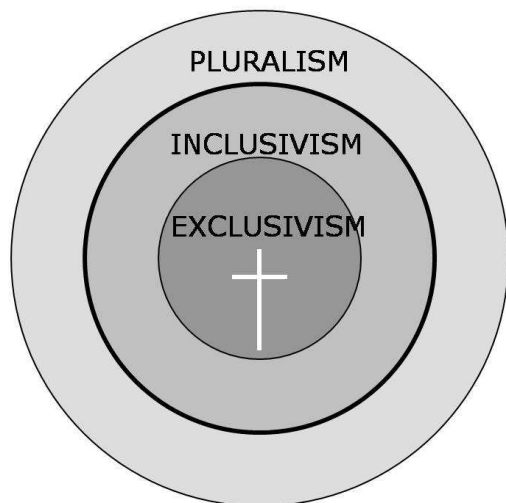
„*All religions are equal ways to salvation*”²²

Pluralism by and large is a relatively recent occurrence within Christianity. As Gavin D’Costa²³ explains, pluralism has its proponents mainly in the American and British area, however,

Three basic questions of the religions and three possible answers

WHAT is salvation?

WHO gives salvation?



HOW does man get salvation?

also Asian theologians tend to increasingly favour pluralism.²⁴ A common rationale for pluralism begins with the historical relativity of all religious traditions. Because of this relativity it is argued that no tradition can claim for itself to be superior to other likewise limited ways of salvation.²⁵ The actual historical differences among the religions are not ignored but recognized, though. This poses no obstacle to a mutual understanding since the common nature of religions consists in the common experience of salvation or liberation.²⁶

In contrast, John Hick²⁷ advances a more philosophical-theological approach to give a rationale for pluralism. The assertion that salvation is possible only through Christ contradicts, according to Hick, the doctrine of God as the one who wants to save all humans.²⁸ There are many millions of men who have never heard of Christ without their own fault, both before and after the times of the New Testament – Hick calls them the „invincibly ignorant”.²⁹ Therefore, according to Hick, it would be unchristian to presume that God would provide salvation in a manner which would reach only a small minority of mankind.³⁰ Therefore Hick advances a *theocentric* instead of a *christocentric* or an *ecclesiocentric* perspective of salvation. God himself is the goal of all religions, not the limiting link to the incarnation of Christ or the salvation body of the Christian church.³¹

2.2 Inclusivism says:

„Jesus Christ has provided salvation for all mankind of all religions”³²

Inclusivism starts from the foundational assumption that the divine grace is effective also outside the

limitation of the visible church.³³ However, here the question is, to what extent do non-Christian religions also have salvific structures. From this, again, follows the question whether man may receive salvation even without the explicit confession of Christ.³⁴

Probably the most influential proponent of Christian inclusivism in the 20th century was the Roman-Catholic theologian Karl Rahner.³⁵ He argues for inclusivism on the basis of the foundational human consciousness of the existence of God. This consciousness precedes the mental reflection. The divine being contains the divine grace, though in a concealed way, for which reason man strives toward unveiling this grace through religion.³⁶ This categorial disclosure of divine grace took place in Jesus Christ because through his total commitment to God he became the climax and central mediator of the divine grace. In this manner, Rahner tries to balance the principles of "Christ only" (*solus Christus*) and the universal salvation will of God. Christ is the only cause of salvation in the world, but this salvation grace can be mediated in history even without an explicit encounter with Christ.³⁷

In this context Rahner establishes an analogy between the Old Testament people of Israel and the non-Christian religions today. The religion of Israel was a lawful and legitimate religion in the time before the coming of Christ. The people of God experienced divine grace during their history even without the explicit encounter with Christ. This took place not before the incarnation of Christ. From this, Rahner concludes that this *pre-Christian*

religion of Israel remains a legitimate way to God for all those humans who neither *historically* nor *existentially* were confronted with the gospel: *historically*, because the gospel has never been proclaimed to these humans, respectively, *existentially*, because the preacher was not credible. Such people of other religions who were not able to genuinely encounter Christ, according to Rahner, have never really "heard" the gospel. Therefore they practice like the people of Israel in the Old Testament a lawful and legitimate religion.³⁸

This line of argumentation by Rahner is also called the „Israel-analogy“ because it is based upon a correlation between the chronological „pre-messianic condition (Israel)“ and the epistemological "pre-messianic condition (other religions)".³⁹ However, this correlation does not take into account that the messianic salvation work of Christ on the cross has generated a qualitative difference of salvation-historical significance.⁴⁰ Because the scope of the New Covenant in Christ is universal regarding the attainment of salvation. Therefore it is not possible to arrive on a pre-messianic way of knowledge at a post-messianic salvation.⁴¹

Nevertheless Rahner introduced the term *anonymous Christians* for the people who do not know Christ because they have an implicit desire for the church.⁴² Therefore, if non-Christians respond to the divine grace, this grace needs to be mediated through non-Christian religions.⁴³ Because of this perspective, inclusivism is in the position to advocate Christianity as the one true religion in the interreligious dialogue while at the same time

admitting that other religions do have a preliminary salvific status.⁴⁴

2.3 Exclusivism says:

„Only in the confession of faith in Jesus Christ there is salvation“⁴⁵

The Christian exclusivism is currently the most disputed approach to the theology of religions, not only from a systematic-theological perspective but also for historical reasons. Since exclusivism has shaped the perspective of protestant and evangelical missions work, it is charged with the accusation that it has contributed toward the foreign infiltration or even destruction of other cultures.⁴⁶ Nevertheless it is important in researching exclusivism to distinguish between the theological nature and the historical consequences of this position.

Exclusivism is based on two principles which distinguish it in an essential way both from pluralism and from inclusivism:⁴⁷ First, salvation comes through faith in Christ and only through faith in Christ (*solus Christus*).⁴⁸ Second, salvation through Christ is only available through the explicit faith in Christ. This faith comes through the hearing of the proclaimed gospel.⁴⁹

Exclusivism is based on the assumption that man is sinful by nature and therefore is only capable of idolatry and not capable of true worship of God. Therefore human religion as idolatry is subject to God's judgment because through his own religion man obscures the self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ.⁵⁰ This self-revelation of God in the incarnation happens because of pure grace, entirely undeserved by man. That is why even the particularity of the proclamation of the gospel does not impair the greatness

of the divine grace, the more so as the salvation in Christ is universal in validity and availability.⁵¹ The logical consequence of this position is not pursued further by most exclusivists, instead the urgency of missions is considered as taking precedence over the speculation about the possibility of salvation in non-Christian religions.⁵²

However, since John Stott in the early 1990s advanced the view that the people without the gospel would not experience perdition but annihilation, this question is disputed in international evangelicalism. Accordingly, this issue is until today no topic of evangelical statements of faith.⁵³ Also the evangelical missions declarations of Lausanne 1974, Manila 1989 and Iguassu 1999 do not provide a definite answer but leave this question open or ignore it. Also the self-definition „What is an Evangelical“? of the British *Alliance Commission on Unity and Truth among Evangelicals* as part of the *World Evangelical Fellowship*⁵⁴ does not contain an exclusivistic rationale for missions.⁵⁵

In answering the question of the people who have never heard the gospel, two aspects have to be considered in any case.

First: *Religions are spiritual spheres of power.* Religions are powers which are territorially comprehensive and culturally formative. Humanity is not structured in a way that each individual person would have his own individual religion (this would have been possible according to Rom 1:18ff), but that various religions as systems tie together the religious needs of man. These spheres of power, however, do not allow a competition of equal

chances between the religions but dominate the people onesidedly in their respective areas (e.g. Islam in the 10/40 window).⁵⁶

Second: *The distinction between the system and the individual within the system.* The person who is born into a religion is, first of all, a victim of a system which he did not choose for himself. Although he is shaped in his religiousness and in his faith by the ruling religion, he can still be reached and addressed by the gospel. Here, “to be addressed” again is a problem of hermeneutics. The triune God can speak to him amidst his religion and prepare him for the hearing of the gospel through a missionary. Thus whoever asks for the true God and for true salvation out of his religion, God, the father of our Lord Jesus Christ, can reveal himself to him. This happens through a missionary who is sent by God, as we can see in the story of Cornelius in Acts 10: He had to call Peter to himself so that Peter would report and explain the gospel to him. Only through this the faith was revealed to him.

3. THE INFLUENCE OF GOD, MAN AND THE DEMONIC IN THE RELIGIONS

Until now it has become clear that a Christian understanding of the religions is influenced by manifold questions and considerations, how the salvation of man is to be understood. These questions are reinforced by three basic influences which characterize every religion. These are the divine, the human and the demonic element which become transparent in the religions.

In order to facilitate the above, however, there is the need for the dimension of revelation:

3.1 *The revelation of the divine as the foundation of religion*

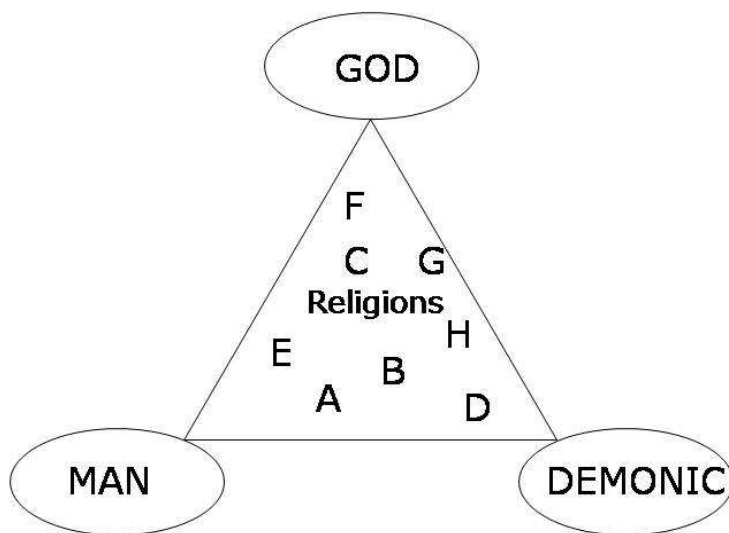
The relationship of divine revelation and human religion is aptly described by Paul Althaus⁵⁷:

„Religion is the conscious relationship of man to the God who testifies himself to him: Man acknowledges the reality of God in submission and commitment and seeks from him the healing of the distress of existence which he experiences in the presence of God and which would otherwise be non-removable. We understand religion thus as an echo of man to the self-testimony of God and as an expression of his situation under this self-testimony. This constitutes

its truth. Whichever way this is perverted and distorted in the specific religions ..., it still is foundational to it and witnesses to itself through all distortion. Insofar all religion is grounded in the “revelation” of God.”⁵⁸

The ambivalent quality of religion as described here is established by the double position of tension of fallen humans before God according to Romans 1:18-32. Because Paul explicates how the gentiles live under the wrath of God and how this wrath is expressed in the abandonment of humans into their physical, mental and spiritual perversion. Despite this condition, however, the gentiles at the same time continue to receive the *general grace* of God which follows from the *general revelation*. They have a conscience and this

Tripolar understanding of religions



conscience shows that the gentiles know the difference between good and evil. Through this the gentiles show that they have a *nomological responsibility structure* which works in them in place of an external law.

Through this responsibility structure the gentiles remain in a state of tension. They know enough about God to be condemned but not enough to be saved. This situation is the epistemological-soteriological dilemma⁵⁹ of humans without the gospel. Therefore the proclamation of the gospel is necessary because in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed which can avert and offset the revealed wrath of God. When Paul speaks of God in this instance in the Christian sense, he refers to a significantly reduced understanding of God by the gentiles. They only have a partial knowledge of God (Rom 1:19 *what can be known of God*), because they recognize only his invisible divine nature (Rom 1:20 *his eternal power and divinity*) and not his nature as he has revealed it in salvation history and in Holy Scripture. However, through this the understanding of God becomes very open and diffused, so that their experience of the divine in religion becomes a gateway of idols and demons.

Accordingly, we see three elements respectively dimensions in the religions which define every religion. Therefore we deal with a "tripolar understanding" of the religions.

3.2 *The tripolar understanding of the religions*

In the 20th century, Karl Barth (1886-1968) initially advanced a

monopolar understanding of the religions. According to his view, religion is entirely oriented toward man since it emanates solely from him. Religion is purely *anthropocentric* in orientation. For him, religion equals unbelief because religion is the affair of ungodly humans:⁶⁰

„Religion as seen from the perspective of revelation becomes visible as the endeavor of man to interfere with God and what he intends to do in his revelation and actually does; ... in place of the divine reality which is offered and presented to us in the revelation, a picture of God which man has stubbornly and arbitrarily devised himself.“⁶¹

This monopolar view of the religions, however, does not do justice to the complex nature of the religions, as Paul explains in Romans 1-3.

Accordingly, Barth's view was developed further during the 20th century by Carl Heinz Ratschow (1911-1999). He advanced a bipolar understanding of the religions. Religion is at the same time *anthropocentric* and *theocentric*, related to man and to God. For Ratschow, religions are an expression of the work of God in the world:

„... are the religions in the judgment of the Christian faith part of the world-working of the triune God ... The triune God acts also here through second causes – powers, forces, authorities and capacities – as deities. In them he shapes life, provides and completes it.“⁶²

However, also this view of Ratschow

proved to be insufficient, therefore the missiologist Peter Beyerhaus (*1929) developed a tripolar understanding of the religions.⁶³ Subsequent to Walter Freytag, who had developed already in 1954 in his article „The Demonic in the Religions“⁶⁴ the foundational thoughts on this,⁶⁵ Beyerhaus argues for an anthropocentric – theocentric – demonocentric approach. According to this, religions are spiritual manifestations within the sphere of power of God, man and the demonic:

“Man in the pre-Christian religion stands in the *intersection of three dimensions*: of his own relatedness to God, of the effort of God for him, and of the sphere of influence of the demonic powers. ... The *tripolarity* is the reason for the ambivalence of the religions. Their transcendental determination is neither exclusively divine nor exclusively demonic. But man is not free in himself to break free from this ambivalence. Sustained by the mercy and the self-attestation of God, he still remains under the lordship of the powers. ... In the proclamation of the kerygma⁶⁶ Christ offers freedom and at the same time places the religious person into the opportunity of decision.”⁶⁷

From the conscious perception of the demonic dimension in the religions follows a conscious acceptance of the spiritual warfare as a constituent part of Christian missions. Because ultimately the focal issue is which kingdoms are built: the kingdom of God, on the one hand, or the kingdom of darkness, on the other? There is a spiritual struggle taking place here between

God and Satan, and the religions are at the same time means of warfare and combat zone where man is located.

4. SUMMARY

The investigation of some of the essential systematic-theological core issues of the religions has shown that elements of both truth and lie can be observed. A distortion of understanding results in an ambivalent position of the religions toward the self-revelation of the true God who is the father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore it is the task of Christian missions to use as a point of contact the elements of truth as they have been revealed in Holy Scripture, in order to communicate subsequently with these means of help the revelatory content of Holy Scripture to the religions. Therefore the task of proclaiming the person and work of Jesus Christ remains the unchanging and decisive goal of missions. Because in this consists the truth, that Jesus is the only tangible God who became man.

This recognition can only be effected and given by the Holy Spirit who opens up to man the word of the cross of Jesus Christ in the proclamation of the gospel and liberates him to faith. These are the necessary and sufficient hopes for missions.

A beautiful and apposite picture of this hope and task is told in a story by Christian Jahreiß⁶⁸ in his book „Sunrise at Kilimanjaro“ shortly after World War II, from a journey to the Usambara-Mountains in north-eastern Tanzania:

„More Water for Missions“:

„In the meantime that station has expanded, and because of the fact that also the missions printing press was built there, the need for more water has greatly increased. Above, in the area of the headwaters which is located in the midst of thick primeval forest, there are many boulders which not only detain the pressing water, but often also divert it, so that here and there smaller or larger trickles are coming off from the watercourse, drawing their own channel. But now all the water should be contained anew and be completely forwarded downhill.

When we had climbed up the hill, winding through the forest, we found already a local person chiseling out blast holes into the boulders which were lying in the watercourse. The river bed needed to be lowered down and sliding embankments needed to be fastened again, in order to channel more water, all water toward the station, there, where engines had to be run, fields had to be irrigated and wounds had to be cleansed. – While musing, I stood between palm and fern trees, and my heart said: “More water, all water for missions!”

From the throne of God and the Lamb there flows the stream where the salvation of life grows at the shores which serves for the recovery of the pagans. Many things today want to detain the stream, maybe also our little faith which says: “What share do we Germans have in world missions since we have indeed lost our world reputation and we ourselves are bleeding from a thousand wounds and – do we not have enough pagans in our own country?” And yet: does our own need

of which we have to carry our honest share as German Christians, absolve us of our obligation toward missions? Is it possible that because of a political and military defeat, because of an economic crisis, because of housing shortage and unemployment, the word of the savior is invalidated: “Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to all creature”? Did not *t h i s* church lose its salting power and cease to be a blessing, which did no longer spare something for missions? And who is able to say which of both needs is greater, which of both imposes on us a lesser responsibility – when in our homeland thousands of “pagans” do have in abundance teachers and preachers and still many churches and worship services despite many destructions, and voluntarily want to swelter at the source – and abroad other thousands thirst for the water of life, but they perish in the barren land of the pagan nature, they swelter, because the increasing need at home would impair our interest? ...⁶⁹

Therefore we want to continue to hope, pray and work. The ditch must become deeper yet, so that the water may gush abundantly; even more firmly so that nothing will be lost! God can present to us in our time of need even unimagined opportunities, build entirely new channels through which the streams of power of our prayers and our interest will flow out upon thirsty pagan land. And beside these ditches and channels which lead out, the Lord builds another watercourse through which he reverts immeasurable blessings back into *t h o s e* churches and hearts, which do not only seek their own, those, who are impelled by holy responsibility and all-embracing love, who live in the second

petition of the Lord's Prayer and who pray: "Your kingdom come!"⁷⁰

These words which were written already in 1947, are still today – 62 years later – more up to date than ever before. Let us take up their challenge today and in the time to come.

On this note we thank all of you for your participation in our professional conference today and we would be glad to see you again next year! The theme of the conference 2010 will be: "Hermeneutics of the Old Testament and Early Judaism". Again, international experts will lecture on this topic. Thank you very much!⁷¹

MARKUS PIENNISCH (Dr. theol.), Stuttgart, is co-founder and Principal of EUSEBIA School of Theology (EST) as well as editor of STT. International teaching ministry in the area of Systematic Theology, Hermeneutics and New Testament.

ENDNOTES

¹ The creative power of faith and religion, both constructive and destructive, is demonstrated: „Faith is often part of the problem; tensions among religious communities can impede international cooperation, political stability, social cohesion and economic growth. But it is also potentially part of the solution: these communities are often among the most important forces mobilizing around core values such as human dignity, solidarity and social responsibility.” - www.weforum.org/pdf/GAC/Reports/SocietyandValues/Faith.pdf

² The *Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary* defines the verb "proselytizing". "1: to induce someone to convert to one's faith 2: to recruit someone to join one's party, institution, or cause". - www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/proselytizing

³ *Islam and the West: Annual Report on the State of Dialogue, Executive Summary*, p. 13. - www.weforum.org/pdf/C-100/Summary.pdf

⁴ On the background of the term „religion“, see the definitions and sources in the German version of this article.

⁵ Dr. Samuel P. Huntington (1927-2008) was Professor in the Department of Government at Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts/USA. www.gov.harvard.edu/faculty/shuntington

⁶ Huntington, Samuel. „The Clash of Civilizations?“, *Foreign Affairs* (Summer 1993). - www.foreignaffairs.org/19930601faessay5188/samuel-p-huntington/the-clash-of-civilizations.html?mode=print; Huntington, Samuel. *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York:

Simon & Schuster, 1996, 2002).

⁷ Huntington, Samuel. „The Clash of Civilizations?“, *Foreign Affairs* (Summer 1993). – Huntington describes the lines of conflict between Western and Islamic civilizations in historical perspective: “Conflict along the fault line between Western and Islamic civilizations has been going on for 1,300 years. After the founding of Islam, the Arab and Moorish surge west and north only ended at Tours in 732. From the eleventh to the thirteenth century the Crusaders attempted with temporary success to bring Christianity and Christian rule to the Holy Land. From the fourteenth to the seventeenth century, the Ottoman Turks reversed the balance, extended their sway over the Middle East and the Balkans, captured Constantinople, and twice laid siege to Vienna. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as Ottoman power declined Britain, France, and Italy established Western control over most of North Africa and the Middle East.”

⁸ For example, see the „cartoon controversy“ regarding the representations of Mohammed in the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* from 30.9.2005.

⁹ For example, see video-clips on the „cartoon controversy“ on youtube. – www.youtube.com

¹⁰ Dr. Peter Sloterdijk is Professor of Philosophy and Aesthetics as well as Principal of the Staatliche Hochschule für Gestaltung in Karlsruhe.

¹¹ Sloterdijk, Peter. „Warten auf den Islam“, *Focus* 10/2006, S. 84-86.

¹² Zikmund, Barbara Brown. 2000. *Reflections on My Twenty-Five Years in Theological Education.* *ats* 36/2: 23-33. Barbara Brown Zikmund was President of ATS from 1986-1988 as well as Chair of the Interfaith Relations

Commission of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA (p. 33). www.ats.edu

¹³ ATS accredits more than 250 seminaries and universities offering Master- and Doctoral programs: The Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada - The Commission on Accrediting. - www.ats.edu/Pages/default.aspx

¹⁴ Zikmund 2000, 31.

¹⁵ Zikmund 2000, 31-32. However, she does not share the view of the necessity of conversion to Jesus Christ but rather aims at a pluralistic understanding of the religions: „How can we enable Christian leaders to rethink their understanding of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and acknowledge that we are not going to (and maybe we do not even want to) convert everyone to Jesus? ... What is needed is an expansion of the meaning of salvation that can allow Christians to be open to the truths enshrined in non-Christian religions and explore ways to embrace Christianity's traditional claims about the importance and centrality of Jesus Christ to their faith.” (Zikmund 2000, 32).

¹⁶ Gnanakan, Ken. 1992. *The Pluralistic Predicament.* Theological Issues Series No. 1. Bangalore: Theological Book Trust, S. vi.

¹⁷ Dr. Bassam Tibi is Professor of International Relations at the Universität Göttingen. – www.bassamtibi.de – The Syrian sees himself as an enlightened Muslim (Tibi 1999, 68).

¹⁸ On Tibi's view of „missions“ and „cultural relativism“, see the German version of this article.

¹⁹ Tibi expresses a warning against an ideologized multiculturalism because it requires a cultural relativism which

forces the leading culture to surrender and ultimately destroy its own values (Tibi 1999, 64-65). From this follows a cultural absolutism of non-Western cultures in Europe which is dangerous because the absence of a consensus of values could lead to an ethnicisation of social conflicts (Tibi 1999, 70).

²⁰ Tibi 1999, 73.

²¹ See the „Conceptual Asymmetry“ in: Piennisch, Markus. „The Biblical-Semitic Aspect in the Basic Structure of the Word-Deed of God (*dabar*)“, *Stuttgarter Theologische Themen*, Vol. 3 (2008): 101-118.

²² In contrast to cultural-religious pluralism, this is a soteriological (pertaining to salvation) pluralism which is a partial aspect of the former. D'Costa defines pluralism as: „all religions are equal and valid paths to the one divine reality and Christ is one revelation among many equally important revelations“ (S. 627). - D'Costa, Gavin. 1997. *Theology of Religions*. In: Ford, David F. (ed.). 1997. *The Modern Theologians. An introduction to Christian theology in the twentieth century*. Second edition. Oxford: Blackwell: 626-644.

²³ Gavin D'Costa is Senior Lecturer in Theology in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at Bristol University (Ford 1997, xiii).

²⁴ D'Costa 1997, 627.

²⁵ D'Costa 1997, 628. See also Kaufman, G. 1987. Religious diversity, historical consciousness, and Christian theology. In: Hick, John; Knitter, Paul (ed.). 1987. *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness*. London: 3-15.

²⁶ D'Costa 1997, 628.

²⁷ John H. Hick (*1922) is a British philosopher of religion and very well known proponent of pluralism in the-

ology of religions, especially by editing (together with Paul Knitter) the essay collection *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1987).

²⁸ D'Costa 1997, 628.

²⁹ D'Costa 1997, 628.

³⁰ From the incarnational structure of God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ follows the limitation of access toward salvation to the understanding of the person and work of Christ. This is the „scandal of particularity“ which generates an incongruity between the necessity of knowing Christ and the possibility of knowing Christ. Cf. Anderson 1984, 138-140. This problem demonstrates again the limitation of Greek logic which attempts to allocate the salvation-historical narrative action of the Old and New Testament from a transcendental point of view.

³¹ D'Costa 1997, 628.

³² D'Costa 1997, 627, defines inclusivism as: „Christ is the normative revelation of God, although salvation is possible outside of the explicit Christian church, but this salvation is always from Christ“.

³³ D'Costa 1997, 631.

³⁴ D'Costa 1997, 631.

³⁵ Karl Rahner, SJ (1904-1984) was Professor in Innsbruck and Munich as well as official papal expert theologian of the Second Vatican Council. - www.whoswho.de/templ/te_bio.phpPID=1393&RID=1. He was one of the most influential Roman-Catholic theologians in the 20th century. A good survey of his life and work is provided by Di Noia 1997, 118-133.

³⁶ D'Costa 1997, 631.

³⁷ D'Costa 1997, 632.

³⁸ D'Costa 1997, 632.

³⁹ See Sparks, Adam. „Salvation History, Chronology and Crisis: A Problem with Inclusivist Theology of Religions (Part 1 of 2)“, *Themelios* 33.2 (2008): 7ff.

⁴⁰ Sparks aptly argues that according to Eph 1:10 and Col 1:15-20 both the original creation and the eschatological new creation are established in Christ: „The plan of God the Father involves Jesus the Son as the cosmic redeemer. The Garden of Eden is a prototype of the world planned by God, and the new creation will be superior to the original creation” (S. 13). The perspective of the presence of God as father and as son in creation is completed by the presence of the spirit of God. Through him the glory of God permeates creation as well as empowers and decorates man to be the image of God. – See Kline, Meredith G. „Creation in the Image of the Glory-Spirit”, *Westminster Theological Journal (WTJ)* 39 (1977): 250-272; *idem.* „Investiture with the Image of God”, *WTJ* 40 (1977): 39-62; *idem.* „Primal Parousia”, *WTJ* 40 (1978): 245-280.

⁴¹ Sparks, Adam. „Salvation History, Chronology and Crisis: A Problem with Inclusivist Theology of Religions (Part 2 of 2)“, *Themelios* 33.3 (2008): 48ff. As Sparks aptly remarks, the covenant relationship of the Old Testament with God was not only operative for Israel, but also the covenant relationship of the New Testament with God in Jesus Christ is operative for the Christian church (p. 49).

⁴² Lat. *votum ecclesiae*.

⁴³ D'Costa 1997, 632.

⁴⁴ D'Costa 1997, 632.

⁴⁵ D'Costa 1997, 627, defines exclusiv-

ism as: „only those who hear the gospel proclaimed and explicitly confess Christ are saved”.

⁴⁶ The historically ambivalent effect of Christian missions work, which depended theologically to a very large extent on an exclusivist position, is undisputable. On the one hand, Christian missions work cannot absolve itself entirely of behavioral patterns of racism and colonial imperialism, on the other hand it also has resisted both patterns by enriching the cultures where it was visiting. From this results the task to work through the Western guilt complex of missions work (D'Costa 1997, 629; Sanneh 1987, 330-334; Sanneh 1993). See on this William Carey in 1792 in the context of the issue of the distance of the pagans as a possible obstacle for missions: „Men can now sail with as much certainty through the Great South Sea, as they can through the Mediterranean, or any lesser Sea. Yea, and providence seems in a manner to invite us to the trial, as there are to our knowledge trading companies, whose commerce lies in many of the places where these barbarians dwell. At one time or other ships are sent to visit places of more recent discovery, and to explore parts the most unknown; and every fresh account of their ignorance, or cruelty, should call forth our pity, and excite us to concur with providence in seeking their eternal good.” – William Carey, *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens*, pp. 67-68. - www.wmcarey.edu/carey/enquiry/anenquiry.pdf. Regarding the discussion on the question „Does missions destroy culture?” see Käser 1999, 77-87.

⁴⁷ D'Costa 1997, 629-630.

⁴⁸ This condition is also shared by inclusivism but not by pluralism.

⁴⁹ Lat. *fides ex auditu*. This condition is neither shared by inclusivism nor by pluralism.

⁵⁰ D'Costa 1997, 630.

⁵¹ D'Costa 1997, 630.

⁵² D'Costa 1997, 630.

⁵³ For a summary of the discussion and arguments, see Sanders 1992.

⁵⁴ In the authorized version of 10. April 1999.

⁵⁵ The same applies to the article „What is an Evangelical?“ of the *Evangelical Alliance* in England from 28.10.08. - www.eauk.org/about/what_is.cfm

⁵⁶ The American missiologist Luis Bush introduced in 1990 the term „10/40 window“. It denotes the countries respectively people groups between the 10th and 40th degrees northern latitude, from West-Africa to East-Asia. - www.ad2000.org/1040broc.htm

⁵⁷ Paul Althaus (1888-1966), protestant theologian, was Professor of Systematic Theology in Erlangen. See also [http://lexikon.meyers.de/wissen/Paul+Althaus+\(Personen\)](http://lexikon.meyers.de/wissen/Paul+Althaus+(Personen))

⁵⁸ ALTHAUS 1962, 93.

⁵⁹ For a definition of this term, see the German version of this article.

⁶⁰ Barth 1940, 327.

⁶¹ Barth 1940, 329.

⁶² Ratschow 1999a, 302.

⁶³ For a detailed graphic of his tripolar view of the religions, see Beyerhaus 1999, X.

⁶⁴ Freytag, Walter. „Das Dämonische in den Religionen. Ein vergessener Faktor in der Diskussion über die Religionen“, in: *Reden und Aufsätze*, zweiter Teil, ed. Jan Hermelink, Hans Jochen Margull (München: Kaiser, 1961): 13-21.

⁶⁵ Freytag defines the demonic as „a supernatural power which stands in a perverted relationship to the Godhead“ (p. 15). He summarizes his view of the demonic in the religions in four theses: „1. ... Religion in itself confiscates man, it is another lordship over man as the lordship of Christ“ (p. 16). - „2. The second aspect of the demonic is *that it has the appearance of the good yet it holds on to the bad*“ (p. 16). - „3. The third feature of the demonic is, *that it can celebrate divine triumphs*. There is a real power at work“ (p. 18). - „4. ... seems that the nature of the demonic is the fact *that it lives out of God's power against God*. That is the deepest character trait of the demonic“ (p. 19).

⁶⁶ For a definition of this term, see the German version of this article.

⁶⁷ Beyerhaus 1987, 105.

⁶⁸ Christian Jahreiß was pastor and principal of the Diakonissenanstalt „Martha – Maria“ Nürnberg and principal of the missions society of the German Methodists.

⁶⁹ Regarding the question of the priority of home and foreign missions, see Carey: „It has been objected that there are multitudes in our own nation, and within our immediate spheres of action, who are as ignorant as the South-Sea savages, and that therefore we have work enough at home, without going into other countries. ... Our own countrymen have the means of grace, and may attend on the word preached if they chuse [sic!] it. They have the means of knowing the truth, and faithful ministers are placed in almost every part of the land, whose spheres of action might be much extended if their congregations were but more hearty and active in the cause: but with them the case is widely dif-

ferent, who have no Bible, no written language, (which many of them have not) no ministers, no good civil government, nor any of those advantages which we have. Pity therefore, humanity, and much more Christianity, call loudly for every possible exertion to introduce the gospel amongst them.“
- William Carey, *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens*, p. 13. - www.wmcarey.edu/carey/enquiry/anenquiry.pdf

⁷⁰ Jahreiß 1947, 104-106.

⁷¹ For further literature, see: Adeney, Bernard T. 1995. *Strange Virtues. Ethics in a Multicultural world*. Downers Grove: IVP; Dockery, David S. (ed.). 1997. *The Challenge of Postmodernism. An Evangelical Engagement*. Grand Rapids: Baker; McGrath, Alister E. 1992. The Challenge of Pluralism for the Contemporary Christian Church. *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 35: 361-373; McGrath, Alister E. 1992. The Christian Church's Response to Pluralism. *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 35: 487-501; Okholm, Dennis L.; Phillips, Timothy R. (ed.). 1996. *Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan; Wright, David F. 1988. Christianity and other religions. In: Ferguson, Sinclair B.; Wright, David F. (ed.). 1988. *New Dictionary of Theology*. Leicester: IVP:135-137.

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