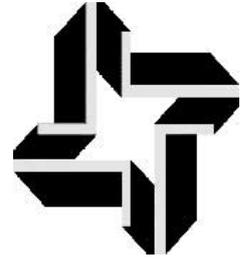


Evangelising

Protestant perspectives for the Churches in Europe



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Accepted and made its own
by the General Assembly of the
Community of Protestant Churches in Europe
in Budapest in September 2006

Mandated by the Council of the CPCE
edited by Michael Bünker and Martin Friedrich



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Preface

1. Why is evangelising a challenge for Protestant churches in Europe?

2. What impels the church to evangelise?

- 2.1. – 2.3. Evangelising as a share in God's mission (*missio Dei*)
- 2.4. – 2.6. God's message to human beings
- 2.7. – 2.11. The message of justification
- 2.12. – 2.16. Faith-awakening witness

3. What challenges do the European contexts pose for evangelising?

- 3.1 Secularisation
- 3.2 New spirituality
- 3.3 Breaking with tradition
- 3.4 Useful truths
- 3.5 Longing for community
- 3.6 "No more grand narratives"
- 3.7 Performance-orientated society
- 3.8 Change in the world of work in Europe
- 3.9 Leisure time and experience
- 3.10 The cult of health
- 3.11 Resentment against institutions
- 3.12 Religious and inner-Christian pluralism
- 3.13 International youth culture
- 3.14 "Virtual community"
- 3.15 Demographic change

4. How can evangelising become a reality?

- 4.1 Becoming a Christian
- 4.2 Extra-parochial agencies as vehicles of evangelising
- 4.3 The local church as a vehicle of evangelising
- 4.4 The member churches of the CPCE as vehicles of evangelising
- 4.5 The CPCE as a missional church fellowship

Members of the Doctrinal Conversation Group

Preface

The General Assembly of the Leuenberg Church Fellowship in Belfast in 2001 gave the topic for future study the comprehensive title “The Missionary Task of the Churches in Europe”. However, questions were to be asked in particular about the Protestant contribution to this shared task. Starting from the common understanding of the gospel and its centre in the message of justification, there was a need to clarify “how the gospel can be preached in such a way that the form chosen corresponds to the content”.

The doctrinal conversation group appointed by the Executive Committee took up this twofold aim. The title of their study already made clear that it wanted to choose a specifically Protestant approach. Theological clarification had to be the starting point; however, the group did not want primarily to carry on a theoretical discussion but to stimulate the churches and all Christians to reflect on their actions, indeed to set new priorities. Within the wide field of mission the focus was on the topic of evangelising, i.e. of ‘faith-awakening witness’. In the view of the group the greatest challenge for many of our Protestant churches in Europe lay here.

Mission is *missio Dei*, i.e. a movement of God to human beings which God makes through the church. Here the project group took up a broad current within the ecumenical movement which is grounded in the World Mission Conference in Willingen in 1952 and was described by David Bosch as an ‘ecumenical-missionary paradigm’. However, in Part 2, which describes the theological foundations, the definition of the event of justification as liberation is also central. This provides a criterion for the form and content of evangelising, indeed already for the perception of the contexts in which the act of evangelising takes place. 2. 10 says: ‘Protestant Christians ... see people in the light of the promise, that is as who they are in God’s eyes and to what God in Christ has called them’. It was therefore important for the group in Part 3 to grasp the contexts in Europe in such a way that the ambivalence becomes clear: the situation of late-modern or post-modern Europe must be described not only as a deficit and as a challenge for evangelisation, but also as an opportunity.

The focal point of the document is Part 4, which investigates ways towards realization. The option for the proclamation that awakens faith should have consequences at every level:

among individual Christians, in the communities and agencies of our member churches which transcend the parishes, and not least also in the CPCE itself.

The document, which was produced between 2002 and 2004 and revised in 2006 to take account of numerous statements from the member churches, was not presented to the CPCE General Assembly in Budapest as the result of a doctrinal study conversation in the classical sense but as a ‘project study’. The General Assembly gratefully accepted the text, made it its own, and recommended that the CPCE member churches should examine their own action of evangelising, strengthen it and develop it further on the basis of the present text. A series of further recommendations is meant to promote the exchange and networking of evangelising projects in the member churches and also beyond – in the spirit of the Charta Oecumenica.

First of all the CPCE study must be made known in the member churches. This small booklet is also meant to help towards this. In the present version of the text some of the changes desired by the Assembly or the working groups of the General Assembly have been made. The introduction to the study itself ended with a quotation from Zwingli, so it is appropriate to quote a verse from a hymn by Charles Wesley here:

“My gracious Master and my God,/ assist me to proclaim,/ to spread through all the earth abroad/ the honours of thy name” (Colours of Grace 23/2).

Vienna, January 2007

Michael Bünker

Martin Friedrich

1. Why is evangelising a challenge for Protestant churches in Europe?

1.1

In Jesus Christ God has addressed the whole world in liberating power. Therefore the gospel is not the private property of the church. Rather, the church is entrusted with passing it on. The church remains vital only insofar as it shares the Gospel with all people. “In breathing in, the church withdraws into itself. In breathing out, it goes out of itself. To stay alive, the church must also be able to breathe out.” Traditionally, this breathing out of the Gospel in word and deed is expressed by the terms “mission” and “evangelism”. We realize that these words are encumbered with baggage. They need to be restored and they need precise definition. The present paper hopes to make a contribution to this. We are led to do so, despite the baggage with which the terms are encumbered, by the conviction that: “unless mission and evangelism are or become a matter for the whole church, then something is wrong with the heart-beat of the church.” (E. Jüngel, EKD Synod 1999)

1.2

In the wrestling to fill out the concept of mission, again and again there have been questionable alternatives and one-sided interpretations. In contrast, we understand mission as talk *and* action, dialogue *and* witness. It manifests itself in preaching that awakens faith and in diaconal activity as well as in the work for justice, peace and the integrity of creation. Nor does it begin on the other side of the oceans, but right at the heart of Europe. Mission encompasses all areas of life where the church addresses people in the light of the Gospel. Thus it embraces the four commissions of the church which were included in the 1994 study on the church by the Leuenberg Church Fellowship (*The Church of Jesus Christ*, Frankfurt am Main 1995, p. 104ff): *martyria* (witness), *diakonia* (service), *leiturgia* (worship) and *koinonia* (community). Some aspects of mission call people explicitly to Christ, while others are an implicit witness to Christ. In this document, we use the term evangelising with reference to the first of these.

1.3

Our present context in Europe and the CPCE churches presents us with particular missionary challenges.

How can we convincingly invite people to faith at a time of growing uncertainty about faith? How can we as Christians, amidst a plurality of lifestyles, witness to the one truth of the

Gospel? How can we counter the breakdown of Christian traditions in church and society and open up for people new approaches to the great story of God? How can we live and witness to our faith credibly and attractively in the face of our own spiritual poverty and increasing speechlessness?

In view of the challenges posed by a pluralistic and multi-religious society, the message of the Reformation about the reconciliation of God with us human beings and the gift of freedom in Christ gains new significance. To formulate and live out this message credibly is the most important task for the church. At the same time this task causes the European churches a particular perplexity.

1.4

The perplexity arises not least from the multiple antipathies aroused by the word “evangelism”¹. People fear indoctrination that takes away their freedom, narrow individualism that cuts them off from their social relationships, zeal for conversion and pressure for decision, confrontation between those who are in possession of the truth and the objects of evangelism, an isolated word-event with no reference to social experience. Such fears are fed in part by historical experiences and in part by experiences in the present.

What this document deals with, however, is “*evangelising*”, which we take to mean a life-process of the whole church in word and deed; a process that opens up to people the Gospel’s space for freedom in which it is made possible for them to meet with the God who became human in Jesus Christ. The act of evangelising is a multi-dimensional event that explicitly pursues its goal of awakening faith and making sure of it. In our Reformation churches, special emphasis is placed on the proclamation of the Word which awakens faith.

1.5

From the very beginning, Europe was shaped by the Judaeo-Christian tradition as well as the culture of classical antiquity. Christianity, originating in the East, found a place in Graeco-Roman culture, then in Celtic and afterwards in Germanic and Slavonic culture. Through this link, European culture has emerged. From this we recognise that Christianity has always been a movement of translation and contextualisation. In modern times, through missionary movements, Christianity has spread from Europe, in its European form, all over the world. Today it is growing especially in areas where it has freed itself from its European form and

¹ Translator’s Note: In this paper, “evangelism” stands for the German “Evangelisation”, whereas the unusual German term “Evangelisierung” is translated with “evangelising”. This seems to be the only way to mark the terminological difference, although “evangelism” has quite other connotations than “Evangelisation”.

where the Gospel is contextualised in each local situation. In Europe, the old Christian continent, the social significance of churches and the public awareness of Christian culture have declined perceptibly over recent decades. Europe is the most strongly secularised continent. Can there be a re-Christianisation of Europe? Some churches hope so, others consider this hope to be illusory, yet others reject such an aim. Will structures of establishment continue in future? Will structures develop all over Europe which tend more towards a voluntary church? These questions are still open. It is crucial that we as church present and represent the Gospel irrespective of what future structures we may prefer.

1.6

The Gospel has been and is always determined by the contexts to which it addresses itself. Conversely the contexts are not to be understood as neutral. As Christians we always see and interpret them in the light of the Gospel. The relationship of gospel to context is therefore circular, although our paper treats the two successively.

European contexts are not uniform. They display, however, common features which are rooted, amongst others, in the emancipatory movement of the Enlightenment of the 17th and 18th centuries. This evolution is ambivalent. The liberation of people from heteronomy, promoted also by Christianity, has in part led to a notion of self-determination that holds that one can do without God. There is then a dual task in defining the relationship between Gospel and context: on the one hand, to demonstrate the ways in which the modern or post-modern age hinders the proclamation of the Gospel. And on the other, to describe the opportunities offered by our contemporary European context for the proclamation of the Gospel.

1.7

Before describing in Part 3 of this document the contexts in which our churches work in present-day Europe, we return again in Part 2 to questions on the theological basis of evangelising. This means that we shall trace the movement of God's mission, describe the content of our proclamation, and determine the criteria for our evangelistic activity. The message of justification which "as the message of God's free grace is the measure of all the church's teaching" (LA 12) must also determine the form and content of its evangelising. So Part 4 sets out guide-lines for a church which in its entirety has been taken up into the mission of God in all the expressions of its life. In accordance with contemporary missiology we describe such a church as a "missional church". It is not possible in a short space to develop strategies for every country in Europe which can be implemented in churches and con-

gregations. Nevertheless we do make some suggestions about the levels at which changes should be made in the churches so that we can perform the missionary task better.

This document addresses all those who are responsible for mission in churches in Europe – from members of parish councils to bishops, from professors of theology to each individual church member. It is not first and foremost intended to be an academic contribution to the theology of mission. For this reason it is concerned neither with the history of mission nor with new methodological approaches. Nor does it intend to add another paper to the plethora of position papers written over the last decades by ecumenical organisations, councils of churches, and churches. As a study group, we have certainly profited from the use of other documents. Our main concern however, is to remind ourselves, as Protestant churches in Europe, of our specific strengths in the common missionary task of all churches. We would be content if we had succeeded in formulating an understanding of mission which the CPCE churches can recognise as their common understanding.

Our document will fulfil its purpose if it stimulates to action the churches of the CPCE and individual Christians in it, congregations and leading committees. We have therefore tried to produce a short text accessible also to non-theologians. It is our goal to stimulate a dialogue in our churches. So we present the outcome of our study to the Protestant churches in Europe for discussion with the invitation: “the children of God do their work freely, cheerfully and without reluctance” (Huldrych Zwingli).

2. What impels the church to evangelise?

Evangelising as a share in God's mission (missio Dei)

2.1. God's love for human beings sets God himself in motion: the Father sends the Son, Father and Son send the Spirit. The church of Jesus Christ owes its origin and its life to the fact that the Holy Spirit, wherever and whenever God wills, inspires faith ever anew amongst those who hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is in keeping with the Holy Spirit's nature for it to communicate in convincing fashion God's love for people in their social contexts and in their concrete life-situations.

2.2. The dissemination of the Gospel includes the call to a committed community. The use of manipulation and pressure in the proclamation of the Gospel is ruled out, in that the Gospel is a call to freedom. The Protestant churches have to admit that this principle has not always been observed in their history. However, they may trust in the transforming power of the Holy Spirit, and it is their duty to give shape to the loving courtship by God of his people.

2.3. God's will is to reach all men and women by the Gospel, to touch their hearts and to direct them to the kingdom of God. The church believes that God will bring to completion its efforts in witness and service to which he calls it. Even if there is a lack of confidence in the world in which we live and the church in which we believe, God's promise that his word shall not return empty (Isaiah 55:11) encourages his church to evangelise.

God's message to human beings

2.4. The aim of evangelising is to arouse the response of faith. The theme of proclamation that awakens faith is, as the Bible tells us, the history of God's longing for us. This began with creation and the election of his people Israel, and has been revealed in Jesus Christ (cf. Leuenberg Documents 6 "Church and Israel", II.2.1, pp.126ff). The goal of this history is the universal appearance of the kingdom of God.

2.5. The churches of the Leuenberg Agreement witness to Jesus Christ as him who became human, in whom God has bound himself to humanity (LA 9). For this reason evangelising, when rightly understood, always sees in others the face of Christ, not human beings with all their actual defects. The message of justification addresses them on the basis of the reality

which has already been opened up through Jesus Christ. It invites people to be reconciled with God and to celebrate that in the community of believers (cf. 2 Cor. 5:20).

2.6. In the crucified and resurrected one, God placed himself on the side of human beings, in order to disclose their lack of reconciliation and to make it his own concern. At the same time God reconciles human beings in Christ and calls them to communion. Thus transformed, people can desist from the arrogance of wanting to be God themselves, from the inertia of remaining fixed on themselves, from the delusion that they do not need any communion with God.

The message of justification

2.7. According to Protestant understanding, justification is the acquittal of sinful men and women by God and the gift of a new life in Christ that is grasped in faith. Faith is not a “new good work” but God’s gift of freedom.

2.8. The fact that God accepts human beings out of pure love and grace is the only thing that can free them from the God-complex that makes them think they have to make everything themselves, and perfectly. God’s reconciliation opens people at the same time to reconciliation with their fellow human beings and shows that life in community can be possible.

2.9. The freedom given in justification is the root of a new life which embraces and moulds the whole person. A person who is thus justified will at the same time oppose all rules and powers that want to be like God in this world, and will also seek communion with those who likewise live God’s freedom and witness to it. And so he or she is freed to share a common commitment to justice, the option for the poor, the endeavour for peace and the integrity of creation.

2.10. Protestant Christians believe that God in his unconditional love already has a history with all human beings. The churches have to respect and honour these histories. They see people in the light of the promise, i.e. as who they are in God’s eyes and what God in Christ has called them to be. Evangelising speaks to them of this calling and makes it attractive to them.

2.11. Although the New Testament witness also makes other statements, the church of Jesus Christ may expect the Last Judgment according to 1 Cor. 3:13-15 as a confirmation of the justification of sinners by faith alone. It will also include a judgment on our works. But evangelising may not anticipate this Judgment, either in asserting a universal reconciliation or with threats of a “hell”. Evangelising speaks of God’s judgment in order to change people’s present lives for good, not to make them anxious.

Faith-awakening witness

2.12. Evangelising opens up ways to faith and calls people into the community of the churches. Faith in Christ leads people to a new “freedom of the children of God” which frees us to praise and thank God. In baptism we celebrate the fact that God liberates us from all godless attachments which imprison us in loneliness and emptiness, indifference and coldness, and injustice and violence. Even if this cannot always be experienced directly, baptism remains a liberation for a new beginning with God. Baptism accepts the baptised into the fellowship of the church. It arouses hope for a fulfilled life and makes us speak up as disciples of Christ for the dignity of our neighbour. It encourages people themselves to become witnesses to the Gospel out of gratitude, and to share the fullness of life with others. In a context of pluralism and individualism, the churches of the Reformation in Europe want to offer the space in which people can find their bearings and the message of liberation can be passed on.

2.13. Evangelising does not mean passing judgment on the belief or unbelief of other people. To separate belief and unbelief is the work of God alone. He stirs up the faith hidden in people’s hearts “where and when he wishes.” It follows that, as the action of God, this act of separation is beyond the reach of human beings. It is one of the basic insights of all churches of the Reformation that the dividing line between belief and unbelief always runs through every Christian. “The old Adam must be drowned daily” (M. Luther). It follows that all human beings continue to be directed towards the proclamation that awakens faith.

2.14. Evangelising takes human beings seriously in their creatureliness. Human identity is always socially constituted. Evangelising therefore depends on those who engage in it becoming credibly involved in the social contexts in which Christian faith is to be made plausible, in which it can be learned, appropriated and handed on. Only in this way can

evangelising also take up and give appropriate shape to the longing of people remote from the church for places where spirituality is lived out.

2.15. Evangelising respects people as they are. Just as it mourns with those who mourn, so it rejoices with those who rejoice. It lets the strong points of men and women be strong and respects them. It does not attempt to belittle people. Because it lives by faith in the suffering and crucified Christ, evangelising does not ignore people's weak points, deficiencies and limits either, but it does not exploit these to force people to believe. Rather it makes space also for one to confess one's own need.

2.16. In all evangelistic activity, Christians need to keep in mind that God's love for us humans goes beyond the work of the church and makes liberated life and service to the world grow also outside the visible church.

3. What challenges do the European contexts pose for evangelising?

God approaches people of all times and contexts. No context in itself is categorically closed to God or in itself particularly near to him. Every context has specific affinities to the Gospel and at the same time particular barriers to it. This ambivalence is plain everywhere, including the contexts of present-day Europe. We maintain that these contexts are not in principle resistant to the Gospel and in consequence we do not meet them with any pessimism about the culture or the *Zeitgeist*. In what follows, we will highlight some ways in which the European contexts challenge our churches to missionary activity and the new opportunities which they open up for the offer of the Gospel.

3.1. Secularisation

European societies are largely shaped by a distinction between the religious and the secular sphere. The state, legal systems, science, culture and the economy have largely detached themselves from church control. Some people within the church interpret this development in negative terms and feel it to be godlessness, a denial of transcendence and a loss of the church's power. It is true that both in the West and in post-socialist countries – for different reasons – people have almost completely lost access to religious questions or categorically reject religious coinages out of an ideologised secularism.

However, secularisation can also be understood as a process of emancipation. Indoctrination is rejected, ideologies are unmasked, comfort from another world and a flight into it have disappeared. Secularisation is creating new room for an authentic rendering of faith, often with a biographical stamp. The churches are challenged by this to reflect on their specific calling in society, constantly to check their shape (cf. the document "Shape and Shaping") and give new expression and celebration to faith in an elementary form and in secular language.

3.2. New spirituality

A new religious longing is also becoming evident in parallel to secularization. The apparent "God-gap" is turning out to be a breeding-ground for a new flowering of very different, sometimes questionable, forms of religion and spirituality. However, this often presents itself in a purely individualistic manner, detached from social solidarity and responsibility, as for example in esoteric tendencies.

Public and private events are also increasingly given religious connotations, especially within the framework of sports events, other great happenings and life-history celebrations.

The churches see themselves faced with the task of bringing out the religious dimensions of such phenomena without condemning them over-hastily, and at the same time building bridges between people's religious longing and Christian spirituality

3.3. Breaking with tradition

To be a Christian today is no longer a "cultural destiny". The break with tradition that goes hand in hand with secularisation means a forgetting of history and a loss of what has been up to now a load-bearing foundation. At the same time it liberates from heteronomy through "imposed truths". The individual really has the possibility of finding his or her own world-view or religious path, probably in greater freedom than ever before in Europe. On the other hand, the "agony of choice" also overburdens many and leaves them susceptible to new ideologies. As having to choose is taken for granted as a normal part of life, Protestant churches have no need to be afraid of offering the Christian life as a conscious option.

3.4. Useful truths

The post-modern "patchwork religiosity" often tends to regard truth only in utilitarian terms: "Truth is what helps here and now!" This utilitarian way of thinking is often bemoaned, because it contradicts the unconditional claim of the Gospel and puts the binding nature of the community of faith in question. But it does keep the churches from making false claims about the absolute. It challenges them to describe the truth of the Gospel in terms of its everyday value, and to show how faith helps one cope with life.

3.5. Longing for community

The process of civilisation in Europe has led to a high degree of legal and social regulation in European societies. These regulations aim at protecting and promoting people's freedom and independence. Coping with such freedoms often makes excessive demands and gives rise to anxiety about relationships and the inability to relate. This can lead to isolation and awaken a new longing for the experience of community, in which the solitary "I" can again experience itself as part of the whole.

The longing for freedom and for an experience of community is in accord with the offer of the Gospel. Evangelising must show itself to be something that can give freedom as well as community.

3.6. “No more grand narratives”

The hopeful story of socialist liberation and the optimism about progress nourished by capitalist promises have not proved themselves to be sustainable. In the view of some observers, religions are also affected by the end of these “grand narratives” (Lyotard). Evangelising therefore has to reckon with Christianity also being declared irrelevant.

But the loss of this-worldly ideas about society can also make people receptive to the story of liberation in the Gospel. Life-stories of men and women can find their place in the great history of God with his world. The Gospel is an invitation to accept the fragmentary nature of one’s own life-story and that of the world and to relate it to the great story of God and the coming of God’s kingdom.

3.7. Performance-orientated society

It is a characteristic of modern European society that the capacity for particular achievements in an individual can contribute to the development of the personality. The result is technical, medical and social progress which we welcome both as individuals and as churches.

On the other hand, however, the pressure to achieve arising from the demand for continuous economic growth and increasing returns places severe strains upon our lives. Wherever the performance-orientated society has become the prevailing ideology, many people are showing reactions to stress. Some cannot keep up with the pace demanded and drop out of work and thus out of social integration.

The “tribunal” of the performance-orientated society brings all its members to the bar, and many feel devalued and condemned. In this regard the Protestant proclamation of justification by grace alone offers an important alternative and an opportunity, in several respects:

- churches in Europe can adopt a public, political commitment to ensuring that this social stance which rates people according to their performance turns into an attitude of solidarity stemming from the unlimited worth of every human being.
- The preaching of the church can give new encouragement for life to those who are overstressed or unemployed, irrespective of their achievement, through the message of their unconditional acceptance and appreciation by God.
- churches and congregations can make plain that they accept in their human dignity those who are threatened by breakdown under the pressure of the performance-orientated society, giving them material support and opening up new opportunities in life for them.

- People who are suffering from alienation or the loss of employment can discover a new meaning for their lives through their (voluntary) work in local churches and church-related institutions.

3.8. Change in the world of work in Europe

Europe is changing. More and more countries are becoming part of the economic “Europe”. That is changing the world of work in positive and negative ways. Markets are being newly opened up in one place and disappearing in another. Jobs are being newly created on the one hand and destroyed on the other. Moreover the gulf between poor and rich is widening: more and more people can no longer support themselves with paid work. This gulf is widening both within individual European countries and between them, but above all on the eastern frontier of the EU.

The churches are employers too, and see themselves increasingly compelled to shed jobs. The diaconal work of the church in particular is in a state of flux. The effects of globalisation and of harmonisation within the EU (under the heading of service sector guidelines) cannot yet be clearly seen.

Traditional parish structures are often in no position to react to these upheavals. Social, let alone political, engagement is often scorned. Unemployed people feel themselves unwelcome in many churches. The churches are experienced as part of the economic and political system. But the churches can do more than lament the constraints of globalisation. If they can send creative stimuli into the labour market; if they champion a human right to work on biblical grounds; if in the light of the message of justification they give human beings back their dignity in the face of unemployment and impoverishment and proclaim God’s transforming righteousness, they take their place in God’s mission.

3.9. Leisure time and experience

Large segments of the population in many European countries now have more leisure time at their disposal than formerly. At the same time some have the financial means to make an “experience” of their leisure. This becomes a pressure on many people always to get the most up-to-date excitement or enjoyment out of their leisure time. But this tendency can also take on features which endanger the person involved and others.

For the churches, the changed leisure behaviour of large parts of the population is a challenge, the consequences of which we have still to realise. To line up the work of the church with the

‘event culture’ would not be advisable: the latest fashion and continual intensification are the hallmarks of this culture, which thrives on constantly looking for new experiences.

Nevertheless it is important also to create possibilities for participation at particular times. Through “event-type” activities with a high publicity appeal, churches can also reach people who are otherwise distanced from Christianity. In this way participants can have their attention drawn to Gospel content and come into contact with local churches.

3.10. The cult of health

One of the hallmarks of present-day Europe is the religious colouring of the theme of health. The postmodern “religion of health” is characterised amongst other things by the idolisation of youth, the fitness culture with its sacrificial rituals, and excessive expectations of cure from the health service.

Christian faith takes a stance that is not indifferent to questions of health. Linking healing and the forgiveness of sins, Jesus devoted himself to sufferers in a holistic way. Since early Christianity, the care of the sick has been an expression of the life of the community. The professionalisation of medicine has long concealed the fact that health relates to the whole person. Only in the last decade have the churches of Europe become more aware of the inner connection between body and soul. Healing and salvation have only newly come onto the agenda of the churches of Europe (LWF General Assembly Winnipeg 2003, World Missionary Conference Athens 2005).

But Protestant churches must at the same time point to the fact that “health above all” cannot be a meaningful motto for life. So evangelising aims, among other things, to reconcile people with the broken-ness and limitation of their life. This happens when evangelising intertwines a limited human life with God’s everlasting salvation. What counts is not giving life more and more years, but giving the years more life.

3.11. Antipathy to institutions

The churches are not exempt from the growing antipathy to institutions. The “official churches” are often regarded with mistrust. It is difficult to convey the fact that institutions are also guarantors of consistency and reliability.

But we can also regard positively the fact that all formal authority must demonstrate its personal credibility. This constitutes a new challenge for the witnesses of the Gospel in their own credibility. In view of the increasing criticism of institutions, churches are facing the task

of discerning other forms of the presence of the Gospel and developing them as spaces for the experience of faith not exclusively bound to the existing parish structure.

3.12. Religious and inner-Christian pluralism

Globalisation and migration bring in their train increasing religious pluralism. In several European countries today there are more Muslims than Protestants. Islam has now once again become a European religion which appears every day not only in the media but in our immediate neighbourhoods. Other religions too belong in the everyday world of people living in the great conurbations alongside various manifestations of Christianity and Islam. Religious pluralism is experienced by some as a dangerous irritant and a threat to Christian identity. This often leads to attempts to safeguard one's own identity by exclusion and retreat. This also gives rise to fundamentalist attitudes.

Globalisation and migration also reinforce a pluralism within Christianity. This inner-Christian pluralism offers on the one hand the opportunity of perceiving and sharing with one another the wealth of the Christian traditions in all their breadth, On the other hand there is a danger that different Christian traditions will again find themselves rivals in a way which damages the credibility of the common witness.

The churches are again called on to grapple with the faith of others and other traditions of faith. In this way a capacity for dialogue is exercised which sharpens one's own witness to the faith and gains new perspective on the divine reality.

3.13. International youth culture

A central aspect of globalisation is the emergence of an international youth culture. This culture readily assumes cultural and also Christian features from outside itself. In this way the Gospel is reaching the young generation "from outside", i.e. in forms of Christian faith from many and diverse cultural contexts. As long as churches have the courage to provide space for youth culture, they will themselves be enriched and enabled to engage in unaccustomed forms of evangelising. Churches, diaconal agencies and church fellowships can offer independent forms of encounter and spiritual experience (Taizé, festivals, Kirchentag, Jesus-House) and so contribute to the development of lifestyles with a Christian character.

3.14. "Virtual community"

The new media landscape opens up unsuspected possibilities for uninhibited and anonymous exchanges at any time about personal faith and questions of life. To be permanently on-line is

an illustration of the increasing individualism. The virtual community is a formative influence on the younger generation. Churches should use this virtual world for the communication of the Gospel in conjunction with offers of real community on the spot.

3.15. Demographic change

In the EU the age-group between 55 and 64 will increase by about 20 per cent in the next fifteen years, and the number of those over 80 will increase by about 50 per cent. This is a consequence above all of the decline in birth rates in the late 1960s and a markedly higher life expectation. One of the consequences of this development is that because the number of those in work is declining, the existing contract between generations can no longer be fulfilled within the current framework. Moreover the number of one-person households is constantly increasing in all age groups. Evangelising will have to respond to this structural change by approaching older people and single people in a new way and inviting a conversation between the generations on questions of faith and life in solidarity. Here it will be important particularly to address the competences of older people and what they can offer to the service of the church.

In present-day social contexts the churches in Europe are also being confronted with their own history. Europe has been essentially moulded by Christianity. At the same time Europe is a multicultural and multireligious continent.

Great as the passion for evangelising may be, a “re-Christianising” of Europe in the sense of a so-called *Corpus Christianum* is neither realistic nor from a Protestant perspective desirable. On the one hand, the opportunities for stable relations offered by the national churches must be appreciated and used. On the other hand, the minority situation of many churches makes it easier for them to create a new profile without being shored up by the social “mainstream.” All churches have a duty to be humble and to abandon any “missionary imperialism.”

Protestant churches have the task of presenting and representing the Christian faith in a credible and appealing way in the market of opportunities, which includes religion. Their contribution to a Europe of nations and regions is the inviolability of human dignity, which has its roots in the Judaeo-Christian tradition. According to Protestant understanding, human dignity has its deepest ground in God’s love for humankind.

Furthermore, new opportunities for ecumenical learning are emerging in the field of evangelising through the shift of focus of global Christianity to the southern hemisphere. European churches that are weary of mission are experiencing a challenge and an enrichment

coming from the southern churches and from local communities of immigrants. Whether they are capable of and ready for co-operation with communities from other continents is a question for the future of the churches in Europe.

4. How can evangelising become a reality?

Mission is always God's mission: *missio Dei*. In his mission to the world, God involves the church. It is, as a whole, a vehicle of mission in all its aspects. Everything the church does, at all levels of its life, must be determined by mission. The more strongly these refer to one another, the more extensive is their sphere of influence.

4.1. Becoming a Christian

Evangelising begins with its bearers hearing the Gospel themselves afresh again and again. For all that the church does grows out of the Word of God.

Today one becomes a Christian more often on a long "Emmaus road" than through a one-off "Damascus experience". For this reason, we need local churches which value the seekers and enquirers, the undecided and sceptics, without putting undue pressure on them. The traditional sequence, "first find the way to faith, then into a church", seems to be being reversed: finding a home in a church often precedes finding oneself at home in faith in Christ. So we need churches which can put up with the stressful conjunction of belief and unbelief and do not draw distinctions too quickly.

4.2. Extra-parochial agencies as vehicles of evangelising

People do not encounter the Gospel only in the course of life in their traditional local community. They also hear the Gospel through the work of extra-parochial agencies, like *Kirchentags*, diaconal and evangelising institutions and the educational work of the church as a whole. Moreover the communication of the Gospel takes place not only in traditional forms of speech, in services of worship, in pastoral conversation and in instruction for confirmation, but also in the different phenomena of high and popular culture, both in local churches and contexts which transcend the parish. We therefore need churches that do not distinguish too sharply between the parish and trans-parochial acts of service, between worship and cultural spaces. Rather, churches must commit themselves to the multi-faceted processes of engagement with the Gospel, to make these their own, to link them together and to support them.

4.3. The local church as a vehicle of evangelising

The local church will remain an essential evangelising agent in the future by seeking and promoting the missional dimension in all its activities. The following descriptions can serve

as orientation and encouragement in the development of a distinctive evangelising profile. An evangelising church may present itself as ...

- an *adoring and worshipping* church which celebrates God's presence in its midst;
- a *praying* church which entrusts itself and the world to God;
- a *witnessing* church which encourages faith, and represents the Christian faith without false modesty in dialogue and argument
- an *outgoing* church which has a public presence and tries to be close to people in a friendly way;
- a church which *shares life with the people* around it and thus learns to understand God's history with them;
- a *culturally flexible* church which can present its witness in the framework of a variety of contemporary cultures;
- a *patient* church which stays calm in its passion for mission;
- a *confident* church which does not allow itself to be discouraged by experiences of failure, but holds to the promise that the word of God shall not return empty;
- a *generous and hospitable* church which reflects God's love for human beings;
- a *counselling and pastoral* church which, out of the strength of the Gospel, supports people in their daily worries and the adversities of life, above all at the turning points of life;
- a *healing and blessing* church in which the promise of the Gospel can be experienced by people in personal and concrete ways;
- a *serving* church which reacts to the need for help in a committed way without asking questions about a readiness to receive the Word of the Gospel;
- a *reconciling* church in which assurance of justification is given, compassion is experienced and the peace of God is celebrated;
- an *ecumenically open* church which lives out and promotes the fellowship of the whole church of Jesus Christ;
- a *teaching* church which has a contribution to make to the process of education and upbringing in various places of learning;
- a *prophetic* church which discerns its social and political responsibility, stands for Christian values and tries out alternatives to concepts of society which are hostile to life.

4.4. The member churches of the CPCE as vehicles of evangelising

Each church in the CPCE recognises that it has a responsibility for evangelising and declares this to be a priority. Setting such a priority includes financing it in an appropriate way. Local churches and church institutions are directed to the network of the church as a whole and to its support. The following are steps on the way towards an overall missionary orientation of the church, i.e. a church that in essence lives out of mission and for mission and evangelising:

- the enhancement of the evangelistic competence of stipendiary and voluntary staff in all areas of church life through an appropriate review of training courses or by offering further education; this aims at enabling stipendiary and voluntary staff to communicate the gospel in a credible and trustworthy way;
- the creation and promotion of academic institutions to carry out research on evangelising and on developing local churches;
- the initiation of processes of agreement which are binding on all the churches about the formulation in concrete terms of the missionary task (e.g. model processes);
- the specific promotion in the wider church of arrangements for giving advice to local communities
- the regular and systematic exploration and promotion of competent mission by local churches and church institutions;
- the creation of financial incentives for the development and implementation of model church profiles and projects (model communities);
- the examination of regulations of ecclesiastical law to find out whether they support the development of churches into a missional church;
- the promotion of ecumenical and international co-operation along the lines of *Charta Oecumenica* II.2 ('to discuss our plans for evangelisation with other churches, entering into agreements with them and thus avoiding harmful competition and the risk of fresh divisions').

4.5. The CPCE as a missionary church fellowship

As a fellowship of churches, the CPCE is also responsible for the promotion of evangelising, thus serving God's mission. Its strength is in bringing different cultural and ecclesiastical contexts into dialogue with one another in a well-balanced manner. This strength must be used to strengthen the missionary competence of member churches. The following steps seem to be important for this purpose:

- In connection with the current exchanges in the field of liturgy (“We celebrate the diversity of churches....”) an internet market for projects will be launched in which examples of evangelising are collected. A dedicated area for this will be created on the internet portal of the CPCE, www.leuenberg.eu. All member churches are invited to post their own ideas in this area. There are further references on the relevant internet page.
- The consultation process initiated in the CPCE on the theme: “Training for ordained ministry in Europe” should also include the development of missionary competence.
- We consider the organisation of exchange programmes to be important for the enhancement of missionary competence at all levels. In this regard we think of arranging meetings between churches and the exchange of students and church and social work employees. Areas of experience embracing all professional groups will be of particular importance. Access to these programmes should be ensured irrespective of the financial capacity of member churches.
- The CPCE network can be used for the creation of international teams of visitors. The CPCE member churches should have the opportunity to let themselves be encouraged and advised by these teams in their own missionary activity.
- The CPCE must keep in mind that the missionary task transcends evangelising. The connection of various forms of church life, in particular that between witness and service (martyria and diakonia), must be considered further. We suggest that a theological study or consultation takes up the question of diakonia in Europe and clarifies the relationship between mission and service.
- Europe has become a home for people from other continents. Numerous migrant communities have formed and these are often active in mission. The dialogue between the CPCE member churches and migrant communities can give an important stimulus to the joint responsibility of the local churches in one place and the overall missionary orientation of the churches in Europe. This requires the development of new forums for meeting.

Just as the CPCE churches attempt in the European context to live out their call to mission in general and to evangelising in particular, so too do churches and fellowships of churches on other continents in their contexts. As the one church of Jesus Christ we are called to support one another, to learn from one another and work with one another, in order to give shape to the body of Christ.

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