

## **Caring and sharing – some intercultural challenges of HIV/AIDS exemplified at HIV/AIDS related projects supported by *missio*-Germany**

### **Introduction: the purpose of this paper**

This paper will point at some intercultural challenges which have come to the fore through the devastating effects of the HIV/AIDS-pandemic both on the global and on the local level. The special focus thereby is on the situation in Africa as it is encountered by the international funding agency *missio*-Germany.

The first part presents in some sketches *missio*-Germany, its historical background, structure and objectives as well as its actual place in the landscape of funding agencies of the Catholic church. The second part retraces the role and prominence of HIV/AIDS related projects within the policy of *missio*, especially in the years 2005 and 2006. The third and last part highlights some perspectives for the future work of partnership between local churches in Africa and *missio* as well as the lasting challenge of interculturality in facing the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

### **1. The Pontifical Mission Society *missio* in the context of Germany**

What is today the Pontifical Mission Society *missio* in over one hundred countries of the world, goes back to the first half of the 19th Century when the catholic French lady Pauline Marie Jaricot in Lyon founded the “Society for the propagation of the Faith” in 1822. Already then she combined prayer and worldly action, as the members committed themselves to pray one “Our Father” a week for the missionaries and to save one penny a week to be given for “the missions”.

In 1832, the German medical doctor Heinrich Hahn from the town of Aachen founded the “St. Francis Xavier Association” and made it the German branch of this French “Society of the propagation of the Faith”. Together with the “King Ludwig Mission Association” founded in Munich in 1838, these beginnings grew to what is now *missio*-Germany. In 1922, one hundred years after Pauline Jaricot’s foundation, the worldwide mission societies became Pontifical Mission Societies and were centralized in Rome under the auspices of the Congregation De Propaganda Fide, today Congregation for the evangelisation of peoples.

One particularity of *missio*-Germany in the two houses in Aachen and Munich is their own project administration. The collection of World Mission Sunday at the end of October – the money of which is administered by the Conference of the National Directors of all Pontifical Mission Societies once a year in Rome – is only one part in the general budget of *missio* in Germany. There are important donations conferred to *missio* by German Catholics for the support of the churches in Africa, Asia and Oceania. In order to promote donations, a professional fund-raising is part of the *missio*-administration. Furthermore, the so-called Church tax system in Germany allows for funds made available by the Association of the German Dioceses. Thus, *missio*-Germany can support projects of the local churches in Africa, Asia, and Oceania to the amount of about 70 Million Euro every year.

These projects, to quote a leaflet from the 1990ies, “range from the purchase of a small motorbike to the extension of a seminary, from the reconstruction of a destroyed church to the printing of bibles. The initiative for these projects rests solely with the partners in the Young

Churches and they too determine the priorities of their care. *missio* particularly assists in the formation of indigenous priests, of religious and catechists.”<sup>1</sup>

In 1958, the German Bishops asked *missio* to carry out a special campaign and collection “against the hunger in the world”. As in the wake of the Second World War Germany knew very well by experience what hunger means, and as the “Wirtschaftswunder” was making postwar Germany ever wealthier, the German Catholics gave generously. This Lenten campaign under the claim “*Misereor super turbam*” was the birth of *Misereor*, the “German Catholic Bishops’ Organization for Development Cooperation”. *Misereor* fuels its budget from donations, from funds of the Association of German Dioceses and to a large extent from the German Government. The “Ministry for Economical Cooperation” (*Bundesministerium für Wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit*) discloses parts of the German development aid funds via *Misereor*. The projects cover Africa, Asia, Latin America and Oceania.

The division of work between *missio* and *Misereor* in Germany is such that *missio* is supporting pastoral projects of the local churches in Africa, Asia and Oceania (in this regard, Latin America is covered by yet another funding agency, *Adveniat*), whereas *Misereor* is contributing “to the holistic and liberating human development of poor population groups”<sup>2</sup>. This division of work between pastoral and development projects has once been commented by an African partner: “You have separated body and soul”. It has sometimes proved to be a source of conflict, as both agencies tend to use the most appealing kind of projects for their fundraising campaigns (the Lenten “season” is solely reserved for *Misereor* yearly campaign, the World Mission Sunday is reserved for *missio*). But during the five decades, a certain balance and collaboration of *missio* and *Misereor* has been established. Both know, so to speak, that there is no separation between body and soul possible. Especially in view of the pandemic HIV/AIDS, it is clear that pastoral and development endeavours go hand in hand, and that from both angles, a holistic approach is required.

What is the self-understanding of *missio* and its project policy? In continuity to the “missionary movement” of the beginnings in the 19th Century, *missio* sees itself as serving a community of learning (Lerngemeinschaft), as a network of a missionary spirituality and as a community of solidarity<sup>3</sup>. Within this community *missio* aims at supporting men and women who proclaim a life-loving God and who promote development, peace and human rights. In all of these objectives, the interwovenness of the global dimension and of the local situation which is for every single context a unique one is stressed.

As the main partners of *missio* are the local churches in Africa, Asia and Oceania, it is important to note the kind of church *missio* wants to promote. This Church is called to be inculturated, dialogical, prophetic and diakonal. Thus, inculturation, dialogue with other confessions and religions, the responsibility for a just order of society and the option for the poor are integral parts of this church. Other options are the promotion of the laity as well as of gender justice.<sup>4</sup> Problems are bound to arise when the local churches understand their own way of being church differently. There is no easy solution to this conflict, but the imbalance between the materially rich churches of the North, represented by *missio*, and the materially

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<sup>1</sup> Partners for the people. A short presentation of six agencies of the Catholic Church in Germany for the “Third World”, First Edition 1990.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Leitbild *missio* from 7th September 2004.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. 5.

poorer churches of the South will always coin the relationship to which *missio* wants to give the shape of a partnership.

With the view on the challenges posed by the pandemic HIV/AIDS, I would like to quote one of the objectives of *missio* as described in the vision statement: “By faith in the risen Lord and by the promise of the Kingdom of God, men and women are motivated to work for the fullness of life even in the face of experiences of powerlessness and failure”<sup>5</sup>.

## **2. HIV/AIDS related projects within the *missio* project policy**

It was in 2002 when *missio* addressed for the first time the theme of HIV/AIDS in its annual campaign for World Mission Sunday. The motto then was “Give us hope”. And in 2006, the World Mission Sunday campaign of *missio*-Germany again addressed the issue of HIV/AIDS under the heading “I will not leave you nor forsake you” (Jos 1,5).

In 2005, *missio* spent 1,366,706 Euro in HIV/AIDS relevant projects of local churches in Africa, Asia and Oceania, 1,085,393 Euro thereof went to Africa. In 2006, it was another 728,282 Euro, of which 646,015 Euro for Africa. An annual one Million Euro for HIV/AIDS relevant projects is a lot, and yet but a small part of an overall project budget of 73 Million in 2005 and 67 Million Euro in 2006. Of course, it has to be seen that health prevention and medical programmes in general are not part of *missio*-funding. The nexus to the HIV/AIDS pandemic rather is in pastoral formation, special courses and programmes as well as in educational material.

Let me just quote some examples among the projects supported in 2005 and 2006:

- Formation session of women religious superiors and their assistants in francophone West Africa,
- support of the African Jesuit AIDS network (AJAN) for their library as well as for translation of AJAN material into English, French and Portuguese,
- Youth HIV/AIDS Education programme in Ethiopia,
- a 10 bedroom house for a Diocesan pastoral and training centre in Ghana,
- a clinical pastoral education course for priests, religious and laity in Uganda,
- courses of the “Family, Life and Youth HIV/AIDS Programme” and pastoral training in Kenya,
- a jeep for AIDS pastoral work in Mozambique,
- a HIV/AIDS prevention programme for counsellors in Kenya,
- Training of home carers, Home based care programmes and HIV/AIDS awareness courses for youth in South Africa,
- activities of the KAKAU committees in Tanzania,
- a training for workshop facilitators and peer educators for behaviour change seminars in Tanzania,
- a community based programme for prevention and care in Tanzania,
- AIDS programmes and nutritional support of AIDS patients in Zambia,
- construction works of a Clinical Pastoral Care Centre in Zambia,
- computers for another Rural Health Centre in Zambia,
- youth sensitisation programmes in Camps for Internally Displaced people in Uganda,
- salaries for HIV/AIDS prevention programmes in schools in Uganda

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid. 3.

and so on.

This list already shows that the local partners in the African churches play indeed a key role, as there is a certain variety of projects according to the different countries and as some countries are well represented, whilst others like Sudan or Eritrea, not at all. It also shows that the Catholic church in Africa offers quite a variety of support projects for people infected or affected by HIV/AIDS, and that the AMECEA Bishops' option for a HIV/AIDS pastoral plan has not been without consequences as the AMECEA countries like Zambia, Tanzania, Uganda, and Kenya are quite often on the list. Of course this does not mean that the Catholic church in the countries underrepresented has no HIV/AIDS related pastoral projects, they only are (or were in 2005 and 2006) not realized in collaboration with *missio*-Germany.

The 2005 and 2006 list of HIV/AIDS related projects seems to show also that the legal holder of quite some of the projects would not be a diocese or a National Episcopal Conference, but quite often a specific institution concerned with PLWA and run for instance by a religious congregation. Is this to mean that only few dioceses have really adopted an overall pastoral plan in dealing with the issue of HIV/AIDS, and that dioceses like Ndola in Zambia who have worked out such a plan are rather exceptions?

I shall not close this second part without mentioning some other advocacy projects of *missio* within Germany addressing the issue of HIV/AIDS and its intercultural dimension. One is the so-called *missio*-AIDS-Truck: a huge lorry which carries a permanent multi-media exhibition where two youngsters from South Africa respectively from Uganda explain to German youngsters in how far HIV/AIDS has affected their life and the life of their families. The truck tours quite successfully throughout Germany to schools, youth centres and major events like the German Katholikentag in order to sensitise the German youth for the problem of HIV/AIDS in Africa.

The second project *missio* is supporting in Germany is the "Action Alliance against AIDS" (*Aktionsbündnis gegen AIDS*) where Churches both catholic and protestant, church organizations, Non Governmental Organizations and action groups at the grassroots level cooperate, run together a small office in Tübingen and organize joint actions and advocacy work on various levels (Night of solidarity, World AIDS day, advocacy work with pharmacy companies and others). Within this alliance functions a Working group on Theology, Ethics and AIDS, concerned with theological and ethical questions in relation to the HIV/AIDS pandemic. All of this work costs money which is spent not in Africa, but in Germany in order to take up the intercultural challenge posed by HIV/AIDS.

### **3. The challenge of intercultural partnership**

Against the background of this impressive stocktaking of *missio*-activities in relation to the HIV/AIDS pandemic, there is need to address some critical issues. Of course, both the quantity and the quality of HIV/AIDS related projects can and should be further improved. Diocesan and national pastoral plans with regard to HIV/AIDS should be developed and carried out over a period of several years in collaboration with *missio*<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> This is a recent shift in *missio*'s project policy, namely, to sponsor a diocese not per every single mini-project, but by way of a list of pastoral priorities covering three years with one bigger fund allocation for this pastoral planning to be invested according to this priorities' list, cf. Yours Sincerely No. 32 (2005).

But one problem remains: the funds that *missio*-Germany is able to make available to the sister churches in the South are on decline. So if further ambitious and, in view of PWLA, certainly much needed pastoral plans are developed with funding expected from *missio*, the local churches must indicate the area of ecclesial activities for which they used to receive sponsoring and which they now will either themselves take over financially or which they are ready to reduce to some extent. And there a crucial point is reached.

The problem behind is the question of who is to finance the church we are called (or believe to be called) to build up? This question is rarely addressed in ecclesiology, yet it is a central question especially for the churches in Africa with their history of the European mission period from the 19th Century onwards and their subsequent struggles towards africanization, inculturation and autonomy. Even with the best possible intentions of both partners (in the North as well as in the South), the questions on money will always put traps onto the way towards true partnership. There is no easy solution to this problem, but we ought to keep in mind the imbalance and to reckon with the lasting unjust structures underneath when we continually negotiate the terms of our partnership and try to encounter each other on equal level. We should never get accustomed to the prevailing unjust world order<sup>7</sup>.

The theological challenge which the Institute of Missiology has been taking up since its beginnings in the 1970ies is to work on an intercultural hermeneutics where every tradition is able to partake in as an equally important partner. This includes a continued “de-occidentalization” of mentalities and church structures. It also includes a critical discernment of spirits from both the African and the European-hellenistic tradition. Not was has been established is *per se* or because it has been established, good. The history of the church is not a winners’ story, and to creatively address the future requires a critical re-lecture of the past. It is not mine to fancy what this may mean for the African local churches, but certainly the heavy structures inherited from the European missionaries will have to be revisited in order to address the needs of the African men and women today in an appropriate way.

Emmanuel Katongole even goes one step further and holds that the HIV/AIDS pandemic is a symbol of what has profoundly gone wrong “in the way we are working, living and playing“. In this line he calls for a theology of interruption<sup>8</sup> in the face of HIV/AIDS.

And there is indeed something going profoundly wrong when the average pet in Germany has more to eat than the average child in Africa, and when marauding rebels in Eastern Congo violate in a systematic manner the feminine population of entire villages, not to speak of, on the global level, the arm trade scandal and the link between poverty and HIV/AIDS, of the feminisation of poverty worldwide, and of the vulnerable groups in terms of HIV-infections as there are women and children. “HIV/AIDS is,” according to Katongole, “the open wound

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<sup>7</sup> A sharp example of this absurd situation we are likely to take for granted is described in the novel „Aux États-Unies d’Afrique” by the Djiboutian author Abdourahman A. Waberi. He turns the situation upside down: The rich nations are the African ones whereas the poor populations from Europe and North America are continuously haunted by war, ethnic conflicts and famine, and try to get some of the crumbs which fall from the rich African tables, cf. Abdourahman A. Waberi, *Aux États-Unies d’Afrique*, Éditions Jean-Claude Lattès, Paris 2006.

<sup>8</sup> Emmanuel Katongole, *AIDS in Africa, the Church, and the Politics of interruption*, in: *Heil und Befreiung in Afrika. Die Kirchen vor der missionarischen Herausforderung durch HIV/AIDS*, Echter Verlag (Würzburg 2007) 167-183.

that reveals how sick and sickening the social history that modernity has created in Africa is.”<sup>9</sup>

A theology of interruption would address the necessity to be interrupted in our normal ways of acting and functioning. HIV/AIDS is about to uphold the “fullness of life even in the face of experiences of powerlessness and failure”, so the words of the above quoted *missio*-objective. It is our illusion of power and self-sufficiency that we are called to overcome.

What does that mean for a funding agency like *missio*-Germany which wants to be a community of learning and sharing and a network of solidarity?

I think it means to very carefully listen to the experiences of our partners in Africa and to continuously try to understand better and deeper their experiences and the ensuing attitudes and ways of coping with HIV/AIDS. It also means not to stress HIV/AIDS related projects because they are helpful in terms of fund raising, but because they are of vital importance for Africans.

It also means to go deeper into the theological and pastoral discussion on what the Church is called to be both in Africa and in Germany against the background of a rampant and devastating globalization. A relationship that deserves the designation “partnership” cannot be reduced to money transfer, but has to go from sharing to caring. HIV/AIDS is a global threat with very locally down-to-earth consequences, and we all will only survive if we learn to tackle global threats together on a global level with very down-to-earth practical steps. Our vision, the network of solidarity is to be woven from Christian communities both in Germany and in African countries, supported by the local churches here and there, by organizations like *missio* and *Misereor* and their partners like Episcopal Conferences, Bishops and church institutions, but also non governmental organizations and communities at the grass roots level (community based programmes).

In the last two years, HIV/AIDS in Germany has become a marginal theme. Since there seems to be a cure (which is only a life-prolonging medication), HIV/AIDS is not in the headlines anymore. Other effects like the fact that HIV infected people with treatment show signs of ageing much earlier than non-infected, are only slowly coming to the fore. To find ways to be a healing community beyond medical treatment remains a challenge to the Church in Germany.

Especially in this situation of a lessening interest for HIV/AIDS related topics, *missio*-Germany is called to treat the subject deeper and to campaign for taking up the challenges of HIV/AIDS and the task of an ongoing intercultural dialogue. The special task of *missio* is to be in Germany the voice of the Churches in the South, and to make sure that the discussion on HIV/AIDS, for instance the debate on condom use, is led in a responsible manner and against the background of experiences in the universal church.<sup>10</sup> The differences of contexts with a different assessment of individuality and communality, the economic pressure on Africans and their struggle to survive with HIV/AIDS, – these are the elements that have to be put to the fore by *missio*. The aim is a holistic approach to the mission of the church which is to be a healing community, both in Germany and in Africa, each local church taking up the challenges of her respective context.

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<sup>9</sup> Ebd. 173.

<sup>10</sup> *missio* Internationales Katholisches Missionswerk, Positionsbestimmung von Missio zur Kondomfrag. Eine Handreichung für die Öffentlichkeitsarbeit, interne paper (2006) 6.

This also means not to focus only on the HIV/AIDS pandemic but to see the larger context of a just development for all and everyone in the South as well as in the North. Global injustice is the real issue of which the pandemic is just a symptom.

The economic interests involved in the fight against HIV/AIDS where there is a sharp competition for receiving the available funds are another issue that needs to be addressed critically.

Money is required not only for direct funding of prevention, treatment and care, but also for administration, coordination, and documentation. Especially in this regard, capacity building should be one of the most important objectives of the project policy of *missio*. This would certainly enhance the impact of the African local churches within the African societies. One element of this capacity building is good governance within the Church where auditing and accountability are key issues for a more effective coordination of HIV/AIDS related pastoral projects.

The contextuality in intercultural dialogue is a lasting challenge also to theology. Theology is not a hermeneutical discussion from one theory to another, there and back again. In a hermeneutical circle between theory and practice, practice and theory, theology never comes to an end, never comes to settle questions once and for all that burn to today. Every context opens up the debate and brings in new existential experiences of men and women that have the potential to change the way of being church and the way of doing theology.

## Conclusion

HIV/AIDS has certainly changed the way of being church in Africa, the way of coping with illness and death, the way of celebrating the liturgy, the way of counselling and helping the helpers, the way of caring for one another within Small Christian Communities. It has begun to change the way of doing theology. In biblical theology for instance, some texts like the book of Job and some narratives of women in the Old Testament have been reinterpreted. It has also challenged moral theology, certainly in the condom question, but obviously first and foremost in the way of how to understand God's gift of sexuality. Yet, there is a long way still to go. The sensitivity for gender issues in church and society has definitively to be strengthened. The unjust world order with the scandalous inequalities between North and South, between rich and poor both in the North and in the South, is a scandal which to fight we shall never get tired. We still have to look for other and new ways of "working, living and playing together" in a broken world that continues to strive towards the Kingdom of God.

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