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Mission and Its Three Pillars

Translation, Transmission and Transformation

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Abstract

The missionary movement in the 20th century started with the Edinburgh World Missionary Conference in 1910. At that time the aim was to evangelize the world in that generation. Examining the next Conferences on World Mission and Evangelism, especially Willingen (1952), reveals a paradigm shift in the understanding of mission. Mission is not about conversion, but about the three Ts: translation, transmission, and transformation. Since Arusha (2018) it has become even more obvious that mission theology needs to translate the gospel – also figuratively – into different contexts and cultures, including subcultures in our own culture and in secular contexts. It needs to transmit the gospel. Being witnesses of Christ in our world by being able to speak about our own faith is crucial when we consider the Western contexts and the distancing of the younger generation. The third T defining mission is transformation – a far more radical term than we may have wished, as it is about "turning the world upside down" (Acts 17.6). By focusing on these three Ts, mission becomes "a way of life" (Together towards Life 29).

Keywords

Edinburgh, Conference on World Mission and Evangelism, mission, translation, transmission, transformation

Is it still possible to talk about mission in the 21st century? Is mission not all about imposing one's own culture and worldview on others? Is it not about converting others? A Conference on World Mission and Evangelism? Are you planning to Christianize the whole world? The participants of Arusha talked about discipleship, but who today understands such an antiquated term – especially extra muros ecclesiae*?*

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These are the questions I was welcomed home with after Arusha by a secular German friend, who was unable to feel any empathy for what took place in Arusha at the Conference for World Mission and Evangelism (CWME) from 8 to 13 March 2018. In my view, these types of questions come up because we as church people and missiologists have failed in giving a comprehensible answer to the question of what mission is all about today, or to define properly what it means when we talk in our Christian setting about discipleship.

We return from the Arusha Conference equipped with the content of the powerful speeches we heard[1] and fruitful conversations we had. Inspired by the workshops and prepared by the readings of *Together towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes*[2] and the "The Arusha Call to Discipleship,"[3] we are, I think, well prepared to identify a helpful definition of the term discipleship and develop a contemporary but biblical definition of mission.

I will begin by offering an overview of the CWMEs, starting with 1910 in Edinburgh. As a result of the analysis of these conferences, I will show how a paradigm shift of the term "mission" and the idea behind it has taken place over the past 108 years. I will then set out a contemporary mission theology, considering the outcomes of the CWME in Arusha. Here, my centre of focus will be the term "discipleship," or even more specifically, "transforming discipleship." The latest mission document published by the World Council of Churches (WCC) in 2013, *Together towards Life* (TTL), will be a helpful tool in my search for a definition. This document was the foundations of the CWME in Arusha and is intended to be used in academic institutions, as well as in congregations and in church settings.[4] It makes clear that mission is no longer about conversion but is an act of the Holy Spirit. The final section will be my summary and conclusion.

Mission Conferences and Their Contributions

Slightly more than one thousand participants attended from 8 to 13 March 2018 the Arusha Conference. Quite a few participants were from non-WCC member churches,

[1] These are all published at www.oikoumene.org. Some are published as longer versions in this issue of *International Review of Mission* 107:2 (2018).

[2] Jooseop Keum (ed.), *Together towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2013).

[3] "The Arusha Call to Discipleship," World Council of Churches Conference on World Mission and Evangelism, Moving in the Spirit: Called to Transforming Discipleship, 13 March 2018, https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/commissions/mission-and-evangelism/the-arusha-call-to-discipleship.

[4] See *International Review of Mission* 106:1 (2017) on missional formation.

such as those from the Roman Catholic Church and the charismatic and Pentecostal movement. Of the participants, 45 percent were women and – including the participants of the Global Ecumenical Theological Institute (GETI) – 30 percent were youth.

Looking at the CWMEs chronologically, it makes sense to start with the Edinburgh conference in 1910, under the leadership of John Mott. It had a very pragmatic character. Rather than focusing on mission theology and dogmas and their approaches, it offered a comparative survey of the existing mission fields. The overall theme was "Evangelising of the world in this generation."[5] Every missionary was called to evangelize and to convert heathens to Christianity. This was their mission.[6] One central outcome of this first conference was the formation of the Continuation Committee, with John Mott as chair and Joseph H. Oldham as secretary. Its responsibility was "to confer with the Societies and Boards as to the best method of working towards the formation of such a permanent International Missionary Committee,"[7] which resulted in 1921 in the creation of the World Missionary Council. Another important outcome of the 1910 conference was the publication of the *International Review of Missions* starting in 1912.[8]

> The Review immediately took its place as the outstanding supra-confessional international journal in the field of missions. Its wide range of contributors and reviewers, from many lands and differing ecclesiastical and theological traditions, its extensive bibliographies, and its annual surveys of world mission, covering as they did Roman Catholic as well as Protestant developments, contributed notably to the nourishment of the ecumenical spirit.[9]

Since then it has become a barometer of thinking about mission, including voices from the Orthodox churches as well the charismatic and Pentecostal movements.[10]

Jerusalem was the setting for the second conference in 1928. After the First World War, the European sense of superiority, predominant in Edinburgh, had dissipated. There

[5] John R. Mott, *The Evangelisation of the World in This Generation* (New York: 1900), cited in *Classic Texts in Mission and World Christianity*, ed. Norman E. Thomas) (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1995), 74–77, at 74.

[6] A helpful overview on the CWME is to be found in Henning Wrogemann, *Theologies of Mission*, Vol 2 (Westmont, Il.: IVP Academic, 2017).

[7] World Mission Conference, 1910, The History and Records of the Conference (Edinburgh, 1910) 96.

[8] The journal is now called *International Review of Mission* – without an "s" on "Mission", which implies a clear change of content and focus.

[9] Kenneth S. Latourette, "Ecumenical Bearings of the Missionary Movement and the International Missionary Council," in A History of the Ecumenical Movement 1517–1948, ed. Ruth Rouse and Stephen C. Neill (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1994), 351–402.

[10] On mission and the Pentecostal movement, see *International Review of Mission* 107:1 (2018).

had been attempts, successful and otherwise, toward independence in the Western colonies; the First World War and the Russian Revolution had shaken Europe and other parts of the world; and there was an awareness of other religions. The rise of secular ideologies could be seen on the horizon, prompting the emergence of possibilities that religions should act together. This could be seen as a starting point for the dialogue of religions.[11]

Ten years later (1938) in Tambaram, India, the main focus was on mission and the church. A new orientation of mission theology concerned with church life was needed. Hence, through the mission agencies, issues of church unity were increasingly on the agenda. The focus at this conference was no longer so much on the spread of Christianity and how to become or "to make" a Christian. It was rather about the theological question of how church and mission are related. Burning issues included the question of what the role of mission agencies would be if the new established churches in the global South became independent. Hendrik Kraemer even asked about the essence of the church and its engagement in the world – also in view of the other religions.[12] And the designated general secretary of the WCC, Visser't Hooft, discerned as early as 1938, during the Tambaram conference, that it was essential he develop a close relationship with the younger churches as equals: "I found that the younger churches were eager to come into a body in which they would be on a footing of full equality with the older churches."[13]

After the Second World War, the 4th conference in the line of Edinburgh took place in Whitby, Canada (1947) with a focus on partnership: *partnership in obedience*. Many so-called younger churches had been established. The "older" together with the "younger" churches were asking themselves how far cooperation could go and how far a partnership with equal rights could be developed. Nevertheless, there was still a great power imbalance.

The main paradigm shift in mission theology came with the conference in Willingen, Germany, in 1952: mission "ultimately has its origin in God himself. God himself is the

[11] H. J. Margull, *Zur Sendung der Kirche: Material der ökumenischen Bewegung* (München: 1963). It deals with the following topics: the Christian life and message in relation to non-Christian systems, religious education, the relation between the younger and the older churches, the Christian mission in the light of race conflict, the Christian mission in relation to industrial problems, international missionary co-operation (17–30).

[12] Hendrik Kraemer, *Die christliche Botschaft in einer nichtchristlichen Welt* (Zürich: 1940), 9. (German edition). Original English version: *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World* (New York: International Missionary Council, 1938).

[13] W. A. Visser't Hooft, *Memoirs* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1987), 82.

ground of mission. Mission is ultimately God's affair. The plan of salvation is God's plan of salvation in which God uses the church and its mission as his instrument in the interim period. It is God's kingdom here and now to which the church bears witness in its discipleship."[14] The understanding of mission and of conversion was no longer that human beings were the ones doing mission and converting others; rather, it was God's task, or more precisely, mission was started by the triune God and conversion takes place through the Holy Spirit. Hence, in the final statement of Willingen we read, "The missionary movement of which we are part has it source in the Triune God Himself. Out of the depths of His love for us, the Father has sent forth His own beloved Son to reconcile all things to Himself . . . On the foundation of this accomplished work God has sent forth His Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus."[15]

Since then, we talk about the "*missio Dei*" – the mission of God – even though the term as such was not used in that conference.[16] Alongside all the different perspectives and interpretations, as well as criticisms, that were raised regarding this new understanding of mission[17] and the paradigm shift it entailed, the fact of knowing that the Holy Spirit is the trinitarian instrument of conversion leads to a certain tranquility and serenity. The Holy Spirit is the one dealing with conversion. As a Christian I am invited to be salt and light to the world (Matt. 5) – and thus to shine into the world and bring some "light in the darkness of the world" and saltiness through my words and deeds, actions, and activities – nothing less, but also nothing more. The believer is invited to give witness about their faith to the world.

In 1958, the International Missionary Council met in Achimota/Accra, Ghana. The keyword can be described as "independence." Many African countries were on their way to independence from colonialism, as were the churches of African origin. They had their own leadership, their own structure and theologies, and their own missionary enterprises. The main achievement was the decision that the International Missionary Council, which was founded after Edinburgh to unite the mission boards and initiatives, should become one with WCC. This structural change was implemented at the WCC assembly in New Delhi in 1961.

[14] W. Günter, "The History and Significance of World Mission Conferences in the 20th Century," *International Review of Mission* 92:367 (2003), 521–37, at 529.

[15] In Norman Goodall (ed.)., *Missions under the Cross* (Edinburgh: International Missionary Council, 1953), 189f.

[16] See John G. Flett, *The Witness of God: The Trinity, Missio Dei, Karl Barth and the Nature of Christian Community* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2010).

[17] Günter, "History and Significance of World Mission Conferences," 530.

In Mexico City in 1963, one was aware of the diversity and the wide spread of Christianity "on all six continents": mission took place on all continents. The Indian theologian M. M. Thomas even went a step further by talking about the "secular-ecumenism" – looking for a movement of human solidarity (not limited to Christian adherents).[18]

At the two conferences at Bangkok in 1973 and Melbourne in 1980, salvation, the aim of mission,[19] was mainly seen horizontally as a dimension of human relationships, changing one's life situation from a social point of view. It was not surprising that it was in this decade that the evangelicals started the Lausanne Movement in 1974. They organized the Lausanne Congress for World Evangelization, which resulted in the Lausanne Covenant.[20] The critic that was directed towards the WCC and its conferences was that its focus was too "horizontal." The same point of criticism could have been addressed the other way around toward the evangelicals: that is, that their understanding of salvation was oriented vertically. Salvation was seen only in view of the coming kingdom of God, stressing only the communion with God.

San Antonio in 1989 remains important in view of salvation and the role of the Holy Spirit. It was specified: "We do not know any other way to salvation than through Jesus Christ; at the same time we cannot set boundaries to the salvific work of God." The Holy Spirit cannot be limited by we humans, with our restricted theology and delimited worldview. Therefore, the dialogue with people of other faiths needs "to lead to a dialogue of life, which is necessary because the whole of humanity is responsible before God and Humankind."[21]

In San Salvador de Bahia in 1996, the focus was the diversity of Christianity: the contextualities, and even the pluritextualities and diverse ethnic identities. One had become aware that Christianity at the end of the 20th century was a polycentric phenomenon, where a polyphony of Christian liturgical and ritual expressions emerged in the midst of a globalizing world challenged by fundamentalism and ethnocentrism.[22]

[18] M. M. Thomas, „Die Welt in der wir Christus predigen," in *In sechs Kontinenten. Dokumente der Weltmissionskonferenz,* ed. Theodor Müller-Krüger (Stuttgart, 1964), 28f.

[19] See T. Engelsviken, "*Missio Dei*: The Understanding and Misunderstanding of a Theological Concept in European Churches and Missiology," *International Review of Mission* 92:367 (October 2003), 481–97, at 485.

[20] See John Stott, *The Lausanne Covenant: Complete Text with Study Guide* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2012).

[21] F. R. Wilson (ed.), *The San Antonio Report. Your will be done: Mission in Christ's Way* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1990), 31.

[22] See H. Wrogemann, *Missionstheologien der Gegenwart: Globale Entwicklungen, kontextuelle Profile und ökumenische Herausforderungen* (Gütersloh, 2013), 156.

As the result of influences by the Pentecostal movement, as well as the active cooperation of Orthodox churches, the Athens conference (2005) emphasized the role of the Holy Spirit in mission. Healing and reconciling mission were put at the centre of discussion. Since then, we have been able to speak of a pneumatological dimension of mission and the mission topics that were dealt with. This became obvious in TTL, as well as in the recently published "The Arusha Call to Discipleship," which discusses the "Holy Spirit (which) continues to move in our time."

The main challenge that we face with the term "mission," specifically in the Western European world, is that people still associate with it colonialism and ideas of expansion and empire, and especially that it is all about conversion. In church and mission settings, we have realized since Willingen 1952 that the act of conversion as such, either as a process or a special moment, has the Holy Spirit as the driving force of all actions. This has become common sense and is also to be found in theological documents like TTL, which often refers to the "Mission of the Spirit."

This review of the World Mission Conferences reveals that the content of mission and mission theology shifted from "making disciples" through personal endeavour (Edinburgh) to other topics and aims. Mission is rather about how to face the secular world (Jerusalem); how to live peacefully with people of other faiths and how to cooperate as religious people (Tambaram); how to partner with Christians of very different types of Christianity (Mexico City); being moulded by pluritextualities (Bahia de Salvador); how to include oppressed and poor people (Melbourne) and to acknowledge a mission from the margins (Arusha); how to accept that the Spirit is moving wherever it wants (San Antonio); and that it is about a holistic healing, including repentance (Athens).

In short, the triune God is the one who sends the church and each believer. They can only shine in and salt (Matt. 5) the world. Conversion takes place through the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the role in mission of Christian believers, led by the Holy Spirit, is about hermeneutics, *translating* the gospel into different contexts; secondly, it's about *transmission*, about witnessing the gospel and communicating it; and thirdly, mission is about *transformation* of life circumstances: being repentant and hence becoming a transformative disciple.[23]

In the following, I will elaborate on the three pillars of mission that I have deduced from the topics dealt with at the Conferences of World Mission and Evangelism – especially

[23] It is obvious that those three pillars are not to be seen consecutively. Rather, they are all to be considered at the same time, if one talks about the meaning of mission.

the Conference in Arusha, whose title was "Moving in the Spirit: Called to Transforming Discipleship" – as well as from the content of TTL and "The Arusha Call to Discipleship." The focus on pneumatological mission is obvious, as are the challenges posed by the terminologies used in the second part of the title.

Mission and Discipleship after Arusha

Translation

The earliest missionaries were translators, in a literal as well as a figurative sense of the gospel. When Paul was giving his sermon in the Areopagus in Athens (Acts 17), he was reminding the Hellenistic population that the unknown God they had long venerated was already the Christian God. In many of the cultures to which Christianity was brought, the message had to be translated in both senses to find points of contact. We have to translate the gospel into the contexts in which we want to speak, or that we want to address in one way or other. Unlike classical theological hermeneutics, where one is fixed on the text and wants to move toward understanding it as if one is the author, understanding of the text in early mission was entirely about the text itself, and about trying to be changed by the text (following Bultmann).

Today, we need to consider diverse contexts. A different perspective in hermeneutics emerged through the inclusion of the theological conviction of loving our neighbour: The hermeneutic circle was broken and opened to the other and the stranger – beginning an intercultural hermeneutics. Now it was time to appreciate the other person, even if they were a stranger and coming from a different cultural background – because now it was about love, and love accepts the otherness.[24]

The notion of discipleship is also closely related to hermeneutics of the stranger: it is about empathy, about trying to understand the other in their otherness. Being a disciple of Christ means that one is led by love toward others. The encounter with the stranger, the other, the foreigner sometimes also changes one. Translation in a figurative sense is never a one-way street – it is always about reshaping and changing yourself. It is not about yes or no; it is not about false and true. The disciple acting out of love knows that following Christ is not a question about having the truth. They know that *truth* in the New Testament – especially in the gospel of John, where it is related to the metaphor of the way – is to be understood not in a Hellenistic but in a Hebrew way. That is, in the

[24] M. Trowitzsch, *Verstehen und Freiheit: Umrisse zu einer theologischen Kritik der hermeneutischen Urteilskraft* (Zürich, 1981), 47.

Hebrew context "ÄMET." This term, often translated by truth and understood in a Hellenistic and Roman way, is more a relational term, focusing on a relationship between two: in our case, between Jesus and the disciple.[25] The "truth" of Jesus is his invitation to join him on his way, on his pilgrimage, and it contains the promise that this way is reliable and animates to fullness of life.[26]

Knowledge of the truth is not a requirement for walking on the Christian path/pilgrimage and asking for baptism and becoming a disciple. It is rather the other way around: moving on that way is the requirement to recognizing the truth. This is nicely explained in the gospel through the disciples: the 12 were not chosen as witnesses because they possess the true faith that they can distribute like their own. Rather, they are chosen because they were willing to accompany Jesus. Discipleship is not about claiming to have the truth, but about being together on the way, on a pilgrimage of justice and peace.

This leads us to another important aspect of translation, that is, contextuality. Since the 6th CWME in Mexico City in 1963, with the topic "Mission in six continents," we have been aware that Christianity is multicentred and represented in many different types of cultures. It is, therefore, quite diverse. Contextuality (pluritextuality and diversity of Christianity) has therefore led us to the terminology of "World Christianity" to describe the multifacets of Christianity and its polycentricity.[27] Hence, it is also important to focus on the subcultures in diverse societies. If Christianity wants to be understood in subcultures, such as youth or marginalized groups, it needs an effort of translational work – an effort of intercultural hermeneutics and also an effort in listening to and including them. As TTL states, "marginalized people are reservoirs of the active hope" (3).

Looking at all those different contexts in which Christianity is lived, one has to realize that discipleship is always context linked. All disciples are called from within a certain context. If Jesus says, "Come, follow me," he is addressing people in a certain circumstance and context. This is still valuable today. In every intercultural communication, the context needs to be respected and carefully analyzed. It is that context that requires the use of hermeneutics. This leads us to the second pillar of mission.

[25] See Benjamin Simon, "Justice, Zedeka and Ubuntu: A Relational Understanding," *Teologia. Revista Facultatii Teologie Ortodoxa* 68:3 (2016), 9–22.

[26] See Theo Sundermeier, *Den Fremden verstehen.: Eine praktische Hermeneutik* (Göttingen, 1996).

[27] Klaus Koschorke and Adrian Hermann (eds), *Polycentric Structures in the History of World Christianity / Polyzentrische Strukturen in der Geschichte des Weltchristentums*, StAECG vol. 25 (Harrassowitz: Wiesbaden, 2014).

Transmission

The term "mission," from the Latin *mittere*, already implies that something should be shared, something should be communicated, something should be transmitted. Mission is about witnessing – more precisely, witnessing Christ. Witnessing is a central topic of Christian life – being salt and light in the world. Witnessing Christ can be done in various ways. It is not only about the preached word. It can be done through the way of life, the societal engagement, the ecumenical *diakonia* we are involved in, the option for the poor. This last way was stressed vehemently at the World Mission Conferences in Bangkok 1973 and Melbourne 1980, and furthermore – the mission from the margins, where vulnerability and exclusion become existential for the rest of the world by becoming "reservoirs of the active hope" (TTL 39).

If we left more space to generation Y – the younger generation, which likes to scrutinize and question everything (therefore: "Y/Why?") – we would perhaps not have lost them in our church milieus in the Western world. "Third spaces," as sociologist Homi Bhabha refers to them, are spaces where something new and independent of former ideas and structures can be developed.[28] This is even more important in areas where secularism is an increasing phenomenon. The younger generation is more flexible and willing to cooperate with youngsters of other denominations, even other religious youth organizations. While they are not that interested in organizing themselves in church structures, they are "value-driven" and do see themselves as active missionaries.[29] This accords with the idea expressed in TTL: "Mission spirituality resists and seeks to transform all life-destroying values and systems wherever these are at work in our economies, our politics, and even our churches" (30).[30]

Every single Christian is called to the ministry of witness. That ministry can have many different appearances, as we have seen. Pope Francis, in his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (EG) of 2013, speaks about the "missionary discipleship" (EG 119). We are all called to evangelize (EG 120). Similar ideas are expressed in TTL: "Participating in God's mission, therefore, should be natural for all Christians and all churches, not only for particular individuals or specialised groups" (67).

[28] Jonathan Rutherford, "The Third Space: Interview with Homi Bhabha," in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), 207–11. See also TTL 75: "All churches can create space for different cultural communities to come together and embrace exciting opportunities for contextual expressions of intercultural mission in our time."

[29] See Michael Biehl, "Zur Nachfolge berufen," in *Vom Geist bewegt – zu verwandelnder Nachfolge berufen. Zur Weltmissionskonferenz in Tansania* (Hamburg: 2018), 105–17. at 113f.

[30] See also TTL 90: "be guided by life-affirming values."

In sharing this witness, conviviality plays a crucial role. It is not about an aggressive witnessing – it is about sharing the love of God in a respectful dialogical way. The document published by the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA), the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID), and the WCC, entitled "Christian Witness in a Multi-religious World: Recommendations for Conduct," states clearly how we should approach each other: "Christians should continue to build relationships of respect and trust with people of different religions so as to facilitate deeper mutual understanding, reconciliation and cooperation for the common good."[31]

The idea of conviviality,[32] with its three aspects of sharing with each other, learning from each other, and celebrating together, appears helpful in an interreligious and secular context. It is one way that dialogue can take place such that the two parties do not lose their identity. In this way, an aspect of "The Call from Arusha" can be fulfilled: "We are called to be faithful witnesses of God's transforming love in dialogue with people of other faiths in a world where politicization of religious identities often cause conflict."[33]

Transformation

Already from homiletics we know that the reading of the biblical text transforms the reader – in that very case, the preacher – through the power of the Holy Spirit. They should be the first listener of their sermon and they should be transformed by it. When this takes place, a sermon becomes convincing and credible and might transform listeners, bringing them into a "new existence."[34] This happens through the power of the Holy Spirit. Along this line, one could see the theology of the "liturgy after the Liturgy" in the Orthodox tradition. The believer is equipped for mission in the world through having celebrated the Holy Liturgy, ready to put it into praxis.[35]

A very powerful biblical image of transformation used at the CWME by H. E. Metropolitan Geevarghese Coorilos, moderator of CWME, was the idea found in Acts 17:6 that "transforming discipleship should be about turning the contemporary world

[31] Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation, "Christian Witness in a Multi-religious World," 28 June 2011, 12, https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/interreligious-dialogue-and-cooperation/christian-identity-in-pluralistic-societies/christian-witness-in-a-multi-religious-world

[32] See Wrogemann, *Theologies of Mission*, Chapter 4.5.

[33] "The Arusha Call to Discipleship."

[34] D. Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995).

[35] Ion Bria, *The Liturgy after the Liturgy: Mission and Witness from an Orthodox Perspective* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1996).

upside down. Nothing less would qualify Discipleship as Transforming."[36] Both terms, "transforming" as well as "discipleship," are challenging. Changes, reformation, and transformation in church milieus are always like a thread. Church people are not the most flexible; we like to stick to our traditions. Discipleship and church are more or less quite heterogeneous ideas.

Discipleship has something very revolutionary about it, turning everything upside down. Even if the term is not well understood and used in the Western non–English speaking world, the biblical origin and the idea behind it is of crucial importance.[37] In the New Testament, discipleship is found in different contexts. In general, discipleship (*matheteutein*) and being a disciple of Jesus are always related to the kingdom of God (*he basileia tou theou*). This implies at the same time that one is not underlying the power of worldly rulers anymore. This does not lead to a flight from the world; it rather focuses on a change of this world in looking at your surroundings – if necessary, turning them upside down. The announcement of the kingdom of God is politically non-neutral. Following Jesus in times of the Roman Emperors was a clear statement against the ruling Roman class, undermining their power. Christians want to live in their communities as an alternative model of society, orienting themselves on values of the kingdom of God: justice, loving the neighbour and the enemy, and reconciliation.[38] This echoes the Arusha call: "We are called to break down walls and seek justice with people who are dispossessed and displaced from their lands, including migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, and to resist new frontiers and borders that separate and kill."[39]

Looking again at the New Testament, the notion of discipleship is often related to the following characteristics. First, people are usually not deciding themselves to follow Jesus and to become a disciple; Jesus calls them with authority (*exousia*). Second, this call to follow Jesus is connected to cutting off commitments and ties: "The call for discipleship is connected to a cut of ties."[40] Third, followers of Jesus are sacrificing and are ready to suffer. Their main interest is that the kingdom of God might be spread and they try to live the values of the kingdom of God. And fourth, Christ is always the

[36] Geevarghese Coorillos, *CWME Moderator's Address*, March 2018, Document No. PLEN 02.0, Geneva/WCC.

[37] Very often the content of discipleship follows the ideas that Dietrich Bonhoeffer shared in his book on "Nachfolge"; Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Nachfolge* (Gütersloh, 2008). The English translation is unfortunately shortened: "The Cost of Discipleship" (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995). Bonhoeffer focuses on three aspects of the "Nachfolge": first, answering the call of Jesus Christ obediently; second, the decision to live your life as he did; and third, being transformed in his image.

[38] See Karl Werner, "Nachfolge im Neuen Testament. Nachahmung Christi und die Gestaltung solidarischer Lebensgemeinschaften der Verschiedenen," in *Vom Geist bewegt – zu verwandelnder Nachfolge berufen. Zur Weltmissionskonferenz in Tansania* (Hamburg, 2018), 143–48.

[39] "The Arusha Call to Discipleship."

[40] Karl Barth, CD IV/2, 614, quoted in Werner, "Nachfolge im Neuen Testament," 147.

model of their new life. They know about their temporary task and being dependant on the support of the Holy Spirit.

By looking more in-depth into the biblical passages, we discover two aspects. The first is that those characteristics of discipleship are never all to be fulfilled. It is rather just one – but that one is transforming us by turning everything upside down, including our way of life. The second is that all four characteristics have to be seen contextually. As with every story in the Bible, the context needs to be taken seriously and therefore needs some translation in a figurative sense.

In the context of the 14th CWME, the term "discipleship" is used with the terminology of transformation – transformative discipleship. The term "transformation" first appeared in theological contexts in 1983 in the Wheaton declaration: "The Church in Response to the Human Need."[41] In that context, transformation described concrete changes, which became visible on earth through the coming of the kingdom of God and which were of relevance for the whole human life.[42] Indian missiologist Vinay Samuel describes transformation as the realization of the vision of God of a just world in social, economic, and spiritual matters. The aim is that God' s love is experienced in all societal groups – subcultures – especially from the poor.[43]

If we talk about a transformative discipleship, it is about turning the norms, standards, and customs of the society we live in upside down. Christian individuals and Christian congregations are therefore called to deal with their neighbours and surroundings, and this in a quite critical, I would even use the term radical, way where necessary.[44]

[41] Vinay Samuel and Christopher Sugden (eds), *The Church in Response to Human Need* (Grand Rapids, Mich./ Oxford, UK: Eerdmans/Regnum Books, 1987), xi. The Consultation on the Church in Response to Human Need met in Wheaton, Illinois, in June 1983 as the third track of a larger conference sponsored by the World Evangelical Fellowship under the title "I Will Build My Church." The statement "Transformation: The Church in Response to Human Need" that was produced as an outgrowth of the consultation does not attempt to be a comprehensive statement of the whole counsel of God on the issues of development. Rather, it reflects the thoughts of consultation participants as they were expressed and modified in the papers and discussion that followed.

[42] Johannes Reimer, "Transformative Nachfolge," in *Vom Geist bewegt – zu verwandelnder Nachfolge berufen. Zur Weltmissionskonferenz in Tansania*, 123–32 (Hamburg, 2018), 128.

[43] Vinay Samuel and Christ Sugden (eds), *Mission as Transformation: A Theology of the Whole Gospel* (Oxford: Regnum, 1999), 225f.

[44] See Ulrich Duchrow, *Radicalising Reformation*, https://www.radicalizing-reformation.com/index.php/en/theses.html.

Conclusion

This brief look at the CWMEs has shown how much the understanding of mission and the role of the disciples has changed. From mission as converting heathens, with the task of each disciple toward mission being the duty of the churches, Christianity has become a worldwide phenomenon investing energy toward social change in a world of structural sin, moving toward a more and more pneumatological understanding of mission that has culminated in the conferences in Athens and Arusha.

Through these developments, especially the paradigm shift that started in Willingen, I detected the three pillars – translation, transmission, and transformation – that help to define the vast field of mission and mission theology. In fulfilling this mission, which is "a way of life" (TTL 29), we become transformative disciples. Being a transformative disciple means sometimes turning the world upside down, and as a result is not always the most welcomed characteristic of a Christian. As the Arusha Call states, "We are called to break down walls" and to "follow the way of the cross." This is not always the most pleasant or the easiest task, but it is all so that all "may have life, and have it abundantly" (John 10:10).