

Editorial

The Consortium of European Baptist Theological Schools (CEBTS - www.cebts.eu) is an important network bringing together academic theological institutions which resource baptistic communities in Europe and the Middle East. Every few years we gather together to discuss common interests and mutual resourcing and to debate papers delivered on topics relevant to theological and missiological education in Europe and the Middle East today. The 2010 meeting, hosted by the Northern Baptist Learning Community, took place at Luther King House in Manchester and had the expected feast of papers delivered on topics relevant to theological and missiological education in Europe and the Middle East today.

From amongst the wealth of theological reflection and insight presented at the CEBTS Forum we offer you two papers which should stimulate your thinking. We are privileged to have an introduction to the outstanding German missiologist, Theo Sundermeier. Though the doyen of missiological thinking in the German speaking world, he is almost unknown in the Anglo Saxon world and we are grateful to our colleague, Michael Kisskalt, Professor of Missiology at Elstal, for opening up Sundermeier's concept of 'convivence' to us. Then Wout Huizing from our seminary in the Netherlands explores the approach of Dutch Baptists to coaching theological students in the field. Both these papers have a relevance to the work of theological formation for ministry in Europe today, but we anticipate their insights will have a much wider audience and relevance.

Our third article is by John Weaver, who retires as Principal of our South Wales Baptist College next summer. John had a first career in geology, later coming to theology and ministry, and his work on the frontier of science and theology is noted amongst us. IBTS seeks to work assiduously in the area of the theology of creation care and its practical outpouring, and we have been immensely grateful to John for his support of our concerns. Here we offer to a wider public a paper he delivered at a post graduate seminar during the annual IBTS environment month. It is worthy of careful attention as we react to the aftermath of the latest Cancun summit on climate change and environmental concerns.

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Mission as *Convivence* – Life Sharing and Mutual Learning in Mission Inspirations from German missiology¹

Michael Kisskalt

The mutuality of life emerges as an essential key element of various disciplines in the social sciences. A real and happy life in the Christian sense, also in Christian education, means sharing one's life with others. This truth and experience is very present in German mission theology today. 'Learning in Community' matters, not only in education and in theological education but also in mission. The German missiologist, Theo Sundermeier,² who has been the most influential missiologist in Germany over the past twenty years, accentuated this aspect of mission by defining it as 'Convivence'. From 1964 to 1974 he served as a theological teacher in Southern Africa, and thereafter he became Professor of Mission and Religions, firstly, at the University in Bochum and then at the Protestant Faculty of the University of Heidelberg from 1983 to 2006. Sundermeier is now retired but he is still very involved in missiological issues, speaking, writing and dialoguing with many different peoples and cultures. Many young professors in mission and religion at German universities have developed within his post-graduate doctoral programmes. One of the results of his missiological research is the new mission paradigm of *Convivence*.

This paper tries to communicate the essential missiological terms of Sundermeier into the Anglo-Saxon theological context. Sundermeier succeeded in describing the present experiences and ways of mission by using the term *Convivence*. *Convivence* stands for a new paradigm in missiology. It does not simply describe a new method, but also a new attitude of mission, with huge consequences for its practice.

Sundermeier learnt about *Convivence* in the Latin-American context. He was impressed by the Christian life of grassroot churches in these

¹ Paper delivered at the European Baptist Theological Teachers' Conference, 16 – 19 July 2010, Manchester, UK.

² Publications (German): *Konvivenz und Differenz. Studien zu einer verstehenden Missionswissenschaft* (Anlässlich seines 60. Geburtstages, FS hg. v. Volker Küster, Erlangen, 1995) (contains the foundational essay concerning *Convivence*); *Den Fremden verstehen. Eine praktische Hermeneutik* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996) [what does it mean to cross one's borders to the other: Sundermeier's approach of 'Xenology']; *Was ist Religion? Religionswissenschaft im theologischen Kontext* (Ein Studienbuch, Theologische Bücherei 96, Gütersloh, 1999) (topic of primary and secondary religions). Publications (English): *Convivence. The concept and origin*, in: *Scriptura, Journal of Bible and Theology in Southern Africa*. Special issue, 1992, pp. 68–80; *Theology of Mission*; in: *Dictionary of Mission: Theology, History, Perspectives*, eds. Sundermeier/Müller/Bevans (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2006), p. 429–450.

impoverished areas. He takes their ways of surviving and sharing their life and faith as a pattern for his mission model. In this context, he learnt the Spanish word 'convivencia', which describes their ways of living together as neighbours, helping each other in their needs, and working together against unjust politico-economical structures in order to ameliorate their situation. For example, they succeeded in convincing the governor of their district to construct 'waste water ditches' in their streets in order to evacuate all sorts of dirty water to limit terrible diseases. Often the churches in these districts were catholic, but the Roman Catholic Church did not have enough priests to cover the sacramental life of these churches, so Christians had to find their own ways of surviving. Without the skilled ecclesial interpreter of the texts, they had to read and interpret the Bible for themselves, explaining their understandings of the texts to each other. One result of this situation was the birth within the grassroot churches in Latin America of so-called 'Liberation Theology'. Sundermeier was not interested primarily in this theology but in the experience of people, of Christians, who formed their life and mission in a convivial manner.

Arising from this experience, Sundermeier defined Mission as 'Convivence', meaning to share life in a triple sense: to help each other, to learn from one another and to celebrate/feast together.³

1. To help each other

There is no hierarchy between oneself and others. Everyone has something to share, is able to help, and everyone is somehow in need and needs the help the gifts and the possibilities of their neighbour. This mutual action of giving and receiving is not only limited to members of the Christian community but to all people living in the neighbourhood. Consequently, for Christians, mission means spending time with neighbours, offering help but also asking for their support.

2. To learn from one another

The roles of teacher and learner are not fixed; they change from time to time – or both may be teachers and learners at the same time. In grassroot Roman Catholic churches, the priest is not only the teacher of the doctrine of the Church; he is first called to be part of the community of the local church where everyone has to contribute something for the better understanding of biblical texts or questions of ethics and doctrine. Surely, the priest has a particular function as someone who has been educated in theological thinking and understanding, but Christian 'folk' have also received the Holy Spirit to understand and to communicate holy matters.

³ In German: miteinander leben: einander helfen, voneinander lernen, miteinander feiern.

Sundermeier especially refers to Paulo Freire,⁴ the pedagogue of the Latin American liberation movement. Freire writes about the poor who discover their roles as subjects in history. The poor do not only receive help and education and the right understanding of things from the rich and intellectual. They are no longer simply ruled and directed by the educated and rich, but they educate themselves, they form their lives themselves. In living together, in sharing life and knowledge and capacities, the poor develop wisdom and strength to live their own lives and to bring their lives forward. Convivence means to learn from one another: everyone has something to teach, everyone has something to learn. The missionary will share his/her knowledge of the Gospel and his/her faith experiences with others, but at the same time, will learn from others something new about God because his/her neighbour, being a Christian or not, is also created in the image of God.

Sundermeier adds a third element of Life and Mission in *Convivence*...

3. To celebrate together: a joint festival⁵

The communitarian life of the neighbourhood communities in Latin American slums means to celebrate life, to have common times of festivals. People living in the southern parts of the world have a special gene in their blood that enables them to celebrate festivals. Sundermeier refers to some sociologists, psychologists and philosophers who describe the values of a festival: during the time of the festival, daily life, with all its problems, stops for a moment, to continue some moments later with more vitality and vigour. Festivals provide a special atmosphere of freedom; they create a particular space for new ways of encounter that even enemies might meet in a new way when they respect the rules of the festival. The main rule in this context is that you are there as a participant of the festival: you don't play the role you play in daily life; nor do the other participants – they are there to celebrate together, to drink and to eat together. In the openness and, at the same time, the protected space of the festival, social differences become less relevant. The mutual and equal encounter of different people is possible in the context of the festival.

My **personal experience** as a missionary in **Cameroon** corresponds to this experience. I was so impressed by the festival mentality of the Cameroonians. To be together, to celebrate feasts, was more important than to sit together in sessions and produce a paper solution. The reality was that

⁴ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970).

⁵ To translate the German expression 'miteinander feiern' into adequate English is difficult, because all English expressions contain certain notions which are subsumed in the German expression 'Feste feiern'.

during their celebrations, in drinking and eating together, they also discussed their problems and, in the special atmosphere of the festival, they found ways to move forward or even find solutions to their problems. As I served as a missionary, I discovered the special, or even 'divine' value of the festival when being together with my Cameroonian brothers and sisters.

The festivals in Cameroon had certain rules. In principle, the structures of society had to be respected during the feast. As the leading pastor of the region, Director of the Theological Seminary, and as a European missionary, I always had my place among the political, economic and religious leaders of the district, but this hierarchical placing of people became less formal during the feast. After the meal, you saw the mayor of the town sitting beside the farmers, and the impoverished mother with five children sitting in the leather chair beside the local pastor. The following morning, after the feast, all hierarchical roles were back in place; society needs certain hierarchies and responsibilities, but it also needs the moments when these hierarchies are less important, and the flow of life runs differently.

This is the special point in the *Convivence*-missiology of Sundermeier, that all human hierarchy is laid aside in the situation of a festival. A new kind of communication becomes possible. According to its communication rules, everyone can communicate with everyone else, all being on an equal footing. This sort of communication reflects very well the anthropology of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The critical question here is, in what sense does the atmosphere of the festival bring social change in daily living outwith the festival?

Thus, life and mission as convivence, according to Theo Sundermeier, means sharing life in helping each other, learning from one another and celebrating together.

Not 'Church for people' but 'Church with people'!

With this new understanding of Christian life and mission, Sundermeier wants to introduce a paradigm shift in missiology. In the second half of the twentieth century it was, especially, the wording of Dietrich Bonhoeffer which was directing mission theology: 'Church is only church if it is the church for others!'⁶ What does it mean to be the Church for others? The more conservative missiologists say that this means to give witness to the word of God, the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Missiologists in the stream of the Geneva ecumenical movement put the stress on helping people in their

⁶ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison* (London: SCM Press, 1953).

present situation. The result of this latter theology was to foster the social commitment of churches and to engage in development projects all across the world; whereas the conclusions of the former, more conservative missiological philosophy was to send preachers and evangelists throughout the world.

The mistake of both movements was, according to Sundermeier, that they saw themselves as superior to the people around them. They were the witnesses, and the others were those who had to listen. They were the helpers and the others were those who needed and received help. Both sorts of mission movements ignored the fact that the Mission of God is far more than their mission activities. God was already present among people long before the arrival of the missionary and the development agent. Sundermeier feels that both mission movements find themselves in a dead-end-street. In many regions people are ready to convert to Jesus, when the representatives of Jesus take them seriously; if the evangelists are ready to listen to their stories with God; if the helpers are ready to help them with the intention that as soon as possible they may help themselves. According to Sundermeier, Christians accomplish their mission in the right way when they leave behind the concept of the missionary as the subject of their mission and the others as the object of our mission. We are all, at one and the same time, objects and subjects, of the Mission of God.

I would like to illustrate this thesis with my **own experiences and examples**. When I was pastor of the Baptist Church of Charlottenburg in the centre of Berlin, we took care of homeless people in the city. We opened our church rooms for them from Monday to Friday from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. We offered coffee and tea, water and juice and something to eat. In the middle of the morning, we had a short biblical meditation, and everyone who wanted to listen stayed, and those who didn't want to listen were free to leave for a while. These needy people were so open and engaged because we encouraged them not only to sit there and to receive help but also to engage themselves, in the kitchen or in other activities of the church. Even during the meditation time, I encouraged them to offer their opinion or to tell something of their experiences as befitting the biblical text. Sometimes, their contributions were irritating, but often they shared something which helped to better understand the biblical text. I, as pastor, learnt a lot from their contributions and questions. Through their contributions, they built bridges between the biblical texts and their lives, bridges which I did not understand as a middle-class man. One result of this social work was a series of baptisms in our church. It is interesting that those people in the 'social coffee room' wanted to be baptised and had begun to engage as volunteers in this work. In their small and often unseen encounters, they

discovered themselves as subjects of their life. First they came to receive help from us, but then they took the risk to engage themselves. We opened space for this engagement, step by step. They took part in our co-workers' meetings. They felt they belonged to our ministry before being baptised, because they felt our respect; they felt that we honoured them somehow. And many were overwhelmed by our attitude, because until then they had gone through many experiences of shame and dishonour in their status as homeless people. People opened up to the Gospel and we discovered God in a fresh new way by these experiences of mission in the spirit of *Convivence*.

Biblical foundations of *Convivence*

Sundermeier presents a number of biblical references which support his missiological approach.

His first reference in the Old Testament is that of **Gen.12**: the story of **Abraham** who arrived in Canaan and built his altar beside the altar of the Canaanites, at the oak of Moreh. He did not destroy this pagan altar. He respected it, placing his own confessional altar beside it. In the encounter with the Canaanite people, Abraham does not deny his faith, assimilating to his environment, neither does he force the Canaanites to accept his faith, rejecting his environment. As the story progresses, Abraham looks for ways of cohabitation with the Canaanites. It was finally in his encounter (Gen. 14.17ff) with the 'pagan' King of Salem, Melchisedec, that Abraham began to know the God of his ancestors as 'God the Highest' (el-eljon). Abraham lived together with the Canaanites and through this experience, his faith horizon broadened, learning the universal character of what he had previously thought of as a tribal God. Sundermeier calls this ability of Abraham to maintain his faith in a strange context; to confess it in public, but nevertheless to respect the stranger; to be open to communication and new experiences with God, and to look for ways of communitarian life, the 'Abraham Mission Model'. The 'Abraham Mission Model' is, for Sundermeier, synonymous with *Convivence*.

Sundermeier finds another biblical reference in the book of the prophet **Hosea**. In some prophetic traditions of the Old Testament, the cult of Baal is denounced as hostile to faith in the God of Israel. However, the prophet Hosea feels challenged by God to a syncretistic lifestyle: he has to marry a temple prostitute of the Baal cult. At the same time, according to results of the sciences of religion, the book of Hosea is the oldest religious text in Israel which speaks of God in terms of love: 'I led them in the cords of compassion, with the bands of love!' (Hosea 11.4). Even through the

strange and hostile religion of Baal, the prophet learnt something new about God, that he is not only the God of history but also the God of the present, bound together with his people by love.

Sundermeier's discoveries in the Old Testament concerning the topic of 'convivence' are quite challenging. Faith in the Old Testament is not only apologetic, not only a battle for the right faith, but also a smooth development of faith convictions, a kind of sensitive revelation history for the people of God in the encounter with the surrounding religions. The representatives of the people of God learn of God anew by the open encounter with surrounding adherents of other religions. On the other hand, you also find passages in the Old Testament which are quite apologetic, defending the faith in the God of the Fathers against all kinds of relativisation.

Therefore, Sundermeier has chosen quite unilaterally his first testament arguments for the convivence paradigm; you really find these convivial ways of godly revelation in the history of Israel.

The biblical arguments for 'convivence', based in the New Testament, are even stronger.

First, there is the basic revelation of God in Jesus Christ (**Incarnation**) as the brother of men and women. In Jesus Christ, God is incarnated into human nature bringing his salvation; not as a doctrine of truth hanging above human reality. In Jesus, God becomes one with we human beings. This is the strongest biblical argument for convivence theology. In Jesus, God turns upside down all hierarchical relationships between himself and his creatures. God encounters human life at eye level, the only level where humans can support the presence of God. Secondly, you also find this incarnation movement of God in the life of Jesus, when he shares his daily life with his disciples, with men and women, with the just and with sinners. He is sitting at the table with the sinners; he drinks and eats with them. In his ministry, he is serving people, but he also permits others to serve him.⁷

Being reassured by the biblical foundation of convivence theology, Sundermeier develops some conclusions concerning the present challenges for churches worldwide.

With the attitude of convivence, there are many ecological challenges facing the church. Humankind should live with 'mother earth' in a kind of symbiotic relationship.

⁷ John 13: Jesus washes the feet of his disciples; Mark 14.3-9: woman washing the feet of Jesus.

In regard to interreligious dialogue, Christians should be open to learn in the dialogical encounter with adherents of other faiths, but they should do it without denying their own faith identity. The result of convivence is not syncretism but the respectful encounter of different identities. People of different religious convictions should be open to learn from each other, to help each other and to participate mutually at their various festivals.

As we view the challenges in world mission and development, mission partners cooperating in the spirit of convivence respect and rely on each other. Together, on the same level, they can develop projects which are situated, not only in the south, but also in the north of Christendom.

A resumé

Two aspects of the *convivence* theology of Sundermeier are essential.

First, that of mutuality. All participants in mission or development projects, in evangelism and social projects, are active and passive, subjects and objects of the event. The Christian attitude is to feel superior to others but this does not correspond to the understanding of the human being as being in the image of God and to the reality of the humanness of Christians, of their needs and limitations.

Secondly, is that of the dynamic relationship between identity and openness. With his missiological approach, Sundermeier hopes to overcome the conflict between the so-called 'evangelicals' and the so-called 'ecumenicals'. If Christians are ready to get involved in the missional *convivence* of God, they will also be open to each other, to speak to each other, and spend time with each other. In their missionary engagement, they can stand up for their Christian identity without denying their convictions, but at the same time be open to dialogue with those whose lives have different convictions or religions: evangelism and dialogue do not contradict each other any longer.

Conclusions in a Baptist perspective for mission and for theological education

In principle, the mission theory of *convivence* is quite near to fundamental Baptist convictions. *Convivence* describes the ideal Baptist understanding of church. According to Baptist ecclesiology, the highest authority in the human and Christian search for truth is not a personal institution like the Pope in the Roman-Catholic tradition, neither a certain caste of theological specialists who define theological truth as in the Reformed or Lutheran

traditions. The highest authority in the Baptist sense is the community of sisters and brothers in the Church. Theologically educated people have their place, their role, their voice within the churches, but ultimately it is the whole of the Christian fellowship which has to think through and seek the view of God into the present challenges. The Baptist way to seek the truth is to open up the Bible and discuss the different interpretations in the community of the Bible readers. Baptist identity⁸ is clearly not hierarchical: Baptists orientate with the process in common discussion and prayer.

The challenge for Baptists, in the way of *convivence*, might be to open up such an attitude towards people within their societies. Surely, you should differentiate between the believers who have received the Spirit of God and the non-believers without the Holy Spirit. But the Mission of God is bigger than human 'spiritual' limits. In the Bible, and in history, God has acted through the people of God and in and by pagan emperors, even directly by his Spirit (Acts 10). It may be true that you can only see the truth of God in life and history by reading the Holy Word, and Baptist churches lose their dynamic when they stop the common reading of the Bible. But the Spirit of God, the spirit of creation, is also moving outside of our churches into the world. It is true, that, in our societies, you not only find the light in the Spirit of Creation, but also in the shadow of the sinfulness of the world. You need the gift of the 'differentiation of the Spirits', but if the goal is to bring the gospel into the different contexts of people, Baptists should open up their convivial attitude, being realised in their community life and communication, even when they encounter people from outside the church. The Christian testimony will find its way between the openness of dialogue and its apologetic and missionary intention.

So, we might list the **conclusions for Baptist mission** as follows:

1. Mission in obedience to Jesus means to become sister and brother of men and women, to live in solidarity with them, enculturated into their life experience and to witness to the Gospel in the midst of life.
2. The Church engaged in mission, according to the mission of Jesus, sends its members as Christians into their daily life, looking for ways of *convivence* in its environment.
3. The Church will look at people with the eyes of Jesus: they are not objects of Christian mission, but images of God, beloved by him; and Christians meet them in the spirit of respect and love, being open to learn something from them about God and life.

⁸ This is true at least for Baptists in the Western culture. But even African Baptists, who, according to their cultures, are more hierarchically organised, have developed typical Baptist grassroots ways to resolve their problems.

4. Mission in the spirit of *convivence* is possible if the missionary is conscious of his/her Christian identity, having the possibility to live and express that identity in missionary testimony.

Reflecting on issues of ministerial formation, we might postulate the following **consequences for theological education**:

1. Theological education, in the light of *convivence*, will not only broach the issue of the sinfulness of the world, but also the issue of the presence of God in the world.
2. Already during theological education, you offer space and time for students to develop their own identity processes. If you are aware of your own faith processes, later, in the pastoral and missionary ministry, you might concede these processes also to other people.
3. Theological education should practice *convivence* in and alongside its courses. It should always be clear, that the professors are also learners, and the students also teachers.
4. In order to learn to bring together convictional identity and life in its diversity, theological seminaries might develop structures and space where students and their theological teachers can share their lives with each other in addition to the theological content.

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Coaching Students in the Field: Pitfalls and Challenges¹

Wout Huizing

On 'You Tube' you can find an awareness test.² You have to count how many times a basketball-team in white passes the ball. The right answer is 13. But it is an awareness test, because there is something else to see – a moonwalking bear. Most people do not see the bear because they are concentrating on counting the number of times the ball is passed from person to person. The question is always: What do you see? What we see is often what we are asked to see or what we want to know and measure. If we are coaching, what do we want to see the students doing or what do we want them to know? Do we look for the right things?

In the Netherlands (and I suppose at other seminaries in Europe) we have formulated several competences for students to achieve whilst they are studying at the Dutch Seminary, such as:

1. To be or to become a balanced person, able to integrate a personal spirituality, based on the Bible and in relationship with the Church of Christ – aware of his/her vocation to ministry – with a professional attitude, and able to reflect on attitude, identity and what he/she is doing in (work) situations and thus developing personally and professionally.
2. To know how to relate the actual world of experiences of church members with the Bible and our Christian tradition. To bring the knowledge of the Bible in contact with the life of the church.
3. To be able to support, comfort, challenge, guide and communicate with individuals, pairs, families and groups in coping with religious and life questions in very diverse situations.
4. To be able to give content to religious worship and appropriate rituals for the congregation.
5. To be able to communicate their own religious tradition with other people, genuinely and enthusiastically, and to be present in an open and vulnerable way within society; and also in a cross-cultural context.

¹ Paper delivered at the European Baptist Theological Teachers' Conference, 16 – 19 July 2010, Manchester, UK.

² www.youtube.com, funny ad awareness test.