

Dear reader,

this is the peer reviewed version of the following article:

Claudia Jahnel

Discipleship in Creative (Un)Certainty. The Potential of the Interdependence of Mission from the Margins, the Agency of the Spirit in Mission, and Transforming Discipleship

in: International Review of Mission 107 (2018), pp. 428–442

© Wiley 2018

which has been published in final form at <https://doi.org/10.1111/irom.12241>

This article may be used for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Wiley Terms and Conditions for Use of Self-Archived Versions. This article may not be enhanced, enriched or otherwise transformed into a derivative work, without express permission from Wiley or by statutory rights under applicable legislation. Copyright notices must not be removed, obscured or modified. The article must be linked to Wiley's version of record on Wiley Online Library and any embedding, framing or otherwise making available the article or pages thereof by third parties from platforms, services and websites other than Wiley Online Library must be prohibited.

This article is published in accordance with Wiley self-archiving guidelines:

<https://authorservices.wiley.com/author-resources/Journal-Authors/licensing/self-archiving.html>

Your IxTheo team

Claudia Jahnel

## **Discipleship in Creative (Un)Certainty**

The Potential of the Interdependence of Mission from the Margins, the Agency of the Spirit in Mission and Transforming Discipleship

“The place of encounter between peoples is the centre of mission; it is God’s space. It is the place of the heart – the centre of our lives where transforming discipleship happens. We do not want to argue for this or that but to listen to each other and hear the voice of God speaking to all of us.”<sup>1</sup>

### **1. Missiological Tensions as Salutory Disturbances**

A World Mission Conference is not the place for developing a sophisticated mission theology. It rather offers an opportunity for encounter. By this it demands from its participants to listen to each other, as the above cited passage claims. The quotation derives from a paper that the Mission from the Margins Working Group had prepared for the conference in Arusha and that underlines the theological centrality of the margins as place of encounter. At the same time a conference like that in Arusha also calls for becoming more sensitive to the plurality of the particular and self-dependent hybrid forms of Christianity and their respective concepts of mission. One important goal is that the participants develop empathy for other forms of Christianity and Christian identity and develop the capacity to share their own particular version of Christianity.

Last but not least a World Mission Conference seeks to confirm the unity in the midst of diversity, and pursues mutual assurance that Christians worldwide and from different denominations are one in God’s mission. Churches are not free from the temptation to compete for devotees and to present themselves as attractive and desirable choices on the market place of religious promises. In light of this fact it is amazing – or maybe a sign of the act of the Holy Spirit – that since the first World Mission Conference in Edinburgh 1910 the World Christianity meets regularly in order to discuss and clarify its practice and understanding of mission, to reassure each other of their unity in mission and to strengthen it.

This said, neither means that a World Mission Conference does not contain theology (characterizing a mission conference as place of encounter already indicates theological interpretation), nor that it is free from tensions. It is precisely these tensions which deserve special attention. They indicate not only what is not running smooth and straight-lined in the Ecumenical Movement. They are also most valuable with regard to central missiological challenges because they point to fractures in the debate on mission, and prefigure new aspects that disturb conventional assumptions and conflicting positions in salutary, innovative and theology generating ways.

This article focusses on two telling tensions that gave direction to the World Mission Conference in Arusha 2018. First, the tension between empire and church and, second, the tension between Holy Spirit and discipleship. These two tensions are, I argue, intertwined,

---

<sup>1</sup> Mission from the Margins Working Group, *Moving in the Spirit – Called to Transforming Discipleship. Theological Reflections from the Margins*, in: Joseph Keum (ed.), Resource Book. Conference on World Mission and Evangelism. Moving in the Spirit: Called to Transforming Discipleship, 8–13 March 2018, Arusha, Tanzania/Geneva, WCC publications, 2018, 50–61, 50f.

and analysing them together can help to assess main challenges for the understanding of mission today. The first tension – the relation between church and empire – has been an issue of discussion since some decades. The second tension, by contrast – the correlation of the Holy Spirit, who has evolved as main actor of mission in the last decades, with the relatively new topic discipleship – is a recent endeavour in the field of mission theology. This latter connection of Holy Spirit and discipleship holds, I suggest, the potential to either reinforce misleading conceptions of the mission of the church “in the midst of empire”,<sup>2</sup> or to correct them. In any case it provides, as will be shown, new perspectives for elaborations on the mission paradigm that grew out of the empire-center-periphery debate: the “mission from the margins”.

## 2. Mission in the Midst of – or Against – Empire?

Our strategy should be not only to confront the empire, but to lay siege to it. To deprive it of oxygen. To shame it. To mock it [...] The corporate revolution will collapse if we refuse to buy what they are selling; their versions of history, their wars, their weapons, their versions of inevitability”.<sup>3</sup>

Mission means “turning the contemporary world upside down”, resisting the “powers of death” and the “new incarnations of Caesar”, the “avatars of Herod” – all the “new emperors” and the “numerous ‘little empires’ [that] are being created within the orbit of a ‘mega empire’ that is working in hegemonic ways”. These passages from the opening address of the moderator of the Commission of World Mission and Evangelism (CWME), Mor Geevarghese Coorilos, reveal a high impact of anti-empire rhetoric that marked not only Coorilos’ speech but were pervasive throughout the whole conference up to the final “The Arusha Call to Discipleship” (from now on mentioned as the “Call”).

The meaning of empire is polyvalent difficult to lay hold of. Some speakers at the World Mission Conference associated empire with the neo-colonial ideology of the global market system that pushes millions of people to the edges of life and survival, the so called “margins”. The Canadian theologian stemming from Jamaica, Michael Blair, e.g. called the empire a „biest“ that since the times of the slave trade has been exploiting people of African descent, has turned human beings into a commodity available for trading and has thereby dehumanized people.<sup>4</sup>

Other, predominantly North-American including Afro-American presenters, linked the empire precisely with the current president of the United States, his racist domestic policies and his exclusive foreign affairs. Jim S. Kim from North America stemming from South Korea e.g. used the metaphors „imperial demons“ and „sick society built on the evils of racism, sexism, militarism, exploitation, ecocide and destructive competition“ and claims that „our

---

<sup>2</sup> For the discussion on church and empire see e.g.: Karen L. Bloomquist (ed.), *Being the Church in the Midst of Empire. Trinitarian Reflections* (Theology in the Life of the Church, Vol. 1), Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA, Lutheran University Press, 2007.

<sup>3</sup> Arundhati Roy, „On a quiet day I can hear another world breathing“, Speech before the World Social Forum (21. Januar 2003), <http://www.workersliberty.org/story/2017-07-26/world-social-forum-arundhati-roy> (April 2018).

<sup>4</sup> Michael Blair, *Holy Disruption and Transformative Discipleship*. Contribution to the warsha/workshop „Navigating Uprootedness and Displacement: Called to Transforming Discipleship in a Context of Racism and Xenophobia“, Arusha, Tanzania, March 9, 2018 (notes from author).

mission will include the casting out of imperial demons and the healing of bodies and souls“.<sup>5</sup>

Empire denotes various intertwined and intersectional forms of oppression like economic exploitation or injustices related to gender, race or sexual orientation. Definitions of empire therefore rather stress its dynamics and means. Joerg Rieger for instance describes empire as

“massive concentrations of power which permeate all aspects of life and which cannot be controlled by any one actor alone [...]. Empire seeks to extend control as far as possible; not only geographically, politically, and economically [...] but also intellectually, emotionally, psychologically, spiritually, culturally, and religiously [...]. The problem with empire has to do with forms of top-down control that are established on the back of the empire’s subjects and that do not allow those within its reach to pursue alternative purposes [...]. Empire displays strong tendencies to domesticate Christ and anything else that poses a challenge to its powers.”<sup>6</sup>

As critical empire studies denote an interdisciplinary field influenced by postcolonial theory it is not astonishing that in his opening speech Coorilos, who is also Metropolitan in the Syriac Orthodox Church of India, quoted the passage cited above from the speech, which his fellow countrywoman, the well known postcolonial writer and activist, Arundathi Roy, had held at the World Social Forum 2003. What is remarkable though is that Coorilos and other presenters in Arusha drew a clear contrast line between empire and church and thereby recalled the dichotomic order of church and mission on the one hand side against the empire on the other side that is apparent already in the mission declaration that of the CWME “Together Towards Life. Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes” (TTL). This document was approved by the Central Committee of the WCC at its meeting in Crete in September 2012 as an official statement of the Council and was presented at the mission panel of the 10<sup>th</sup> assembly of the WCC in Busan, South Korea, in October 2013. A pervading theme of TTL is the Holy Spirit as Spirit of life in fullness as opposed to the Spirit of “the individualized, secularized, and materialized world” (8). By this binary logic the document creates a continuous tension between church and world which Theodor Ahrens had characterized as “gross soteriological pattern of contrast”:

„On the one hand, here is the good world of those who signed the declaration – it is dynamic, just, diverse, and, of course, transformative (11); on the other hand, there is the individualized, secularized and materialized world (8). Intermediate stages and levels of gray are being airbrushed out.”<sup>7</sup>

Five years later, many contributions in the plenaries of the World Mission Conference in Arusha as well as the final declaration of the conference, the “Call”, breathe the air of TTL and are therefore very much in line with this pattern of contrast. Even the new topic “transforming discipleship” was used as reinforcement of the contrast pattern by aligning discipleship with anti-empire resistance, as the “Call” demonstrates:

---

<sup>5</sup> Jim S. Kim, *A New Reformation. Evangelism as Life Together, Moving in the Spirit: Called to Transforming Discipleship*, presentation held at the World Mission Conference in Athens, Greece, 9 March 2018, <https://ext.oikoumene.org/wmc/Shared%20Documents/PLEN%2003.4%20A%20New%20Reformation%20-%20Evangelism%20as%20Life%20Together%20J%20Kim.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> Joerg Rieger, *Christ and Empire: From Paul to Postcolonial Times*, Minneapolis, USA, Fortress Press, 2007, 2–3.

<sup>7</sup> Theodor Ahrens, *Erwägungen zur neuen Missionserklärung des ÖRK*, in: Missionsakademie an der Universität Hamburg (ed.), *Gemeinsam für das Leben: Mission und Evangelisation in sich wandelnden Kontexten. Eine kritische Auseinandersetzung*, Hamburg, Germany, Verlag der Missionsakademie Hamburg 2013, 13–26, 24.

„We are called to worship the one Triune God—the God of justice, love, and grace—at a time when many worship the false god of the market system (Luke 16:13). We are called as disciples to belong together in just and inclusive communities, in our quest for unity and on our ecumenical journey, in a world that is based upon marginalization and exclusion”.

Without question the empire-critical statements at the World Mission Conference express a prophetic critique that is absolutely essential in face of the worldwide political and social situation with its disastrous neo-liberal economic developments. Yet, the way in which this critique was presented in Arusha tended to support the binary logic, that divides the world into good and bad, joined by a high moral appeal and pretension: Christians as disciples are called to position themselves on the “better” side.

The theological problem here is that this pattern of contrast, again – like before mission was understood as *Missio Dei* – tends to conceptualize a triumphalist understanding of church and mission. The habitus of diastase, that separates Christians living a “just and inclusive community”, as the “Call” states, from a beastly world, is not only arrogant. It also reveals the assumption of a superior self-positioning that completely contravenes the demands of the mission from the margins. Furthermore, it evokes thorough theological, ecclesiological, and anthropological objections. What tends to be overseen is that the church exists as a community of sinners and saints and thereby always as *corpus permixtum*. It is, at once, a community called out of and thrown into the world. Christians live, like all human beings, under the condition of evil as well as of good, in “flesh” and in “spirit”. The tension between “already” and “not yet” marks the core of the Christian identity.

The tendency to overemphasize the difference between the world of the Holy Spirit and the material world disregards that living in the Spirit of God is tied to the Logos incarnate who by becoming flesh and body has overcome the diastase, the border between God and world and who has placed himself in relation to and in “interdependence”<sup>8</sup> with the world.

Therefore, Christian discipleship cannot be realized in a habitus of diastase and of complete difference from the world. Christians are not called into dissociating from the world but into incarnation, too. The title of the Conference „transforming discipleship“ reveals precisely this tension of “sinner” and “saint” because *transforming* does not only mean that the disciples transform the world but that they also depend on being transformed.

Another important objection against the pattern of contrast is that it follows the same logic of “In” and “Out” that cuts across various fundamentalist and “authenticity” searching populist movements that have become stronger worldwide. The Biblical witness counters this logic: The Spirit of Pentecost overcomes borders and tears down the fences between groups of people (Acts 2).

### **3. Moving in the Spirit – Transforming Discipleship**

In the opening service of the World Mission Conference in Arusha the president of the World Communion of Reformed Churches, the Lebanese Reverend Najla Kassab, referred to Galatians 5: 25 – “Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit” – as biblical reference for the topic of the conference. In Kassab’s words: “To live in the spirit and to walk in the spirit is to live like our Lord and to have a life-style and a way of life that reflects Christ.”

---

<sup>8</sup> The use of term “interdependence” is derived from Hyeran Kim-Cragg, *Interdependence. A Postcolonial Feminist Practical Theology*, Eugene, Pickwick Publications, USA, 2018. Kim-Cragg stresses the attitude of interdependence and contests the idea of independence and self-sufficiency as goal of life.

Kassab's word display that after having put emphasis on the Holy Spirit as the true agent of mission in the last years it is very reasonable to ask the question what "living in the Spirit" implies as consequences for the life of churches and Christians. How does the fact that the Holy Spirit as subject of mission moves us impact the life of churches, Christian communities and individual Christians? As response to this question the term transforming discipleship was introduced: Christians participate in the mission of the Spirit of God as disciples that are being transformed and transform.

The search for the role and meaning of human action in God's mission is not new. It has rather accompanied the Ecumenical movement from its very beginning. It expresses the creative tension between the *Missio Dei* and the participation of the churches and Christians in this mission. Yet, it now arises again in a special historical situation which is shaped – besides social, economic and political factors as well as by disillusion – by the already mentioned growing attention to the Holy Spirit. Looking back to the last World Mission Conference 2005 in Athens, a mainly orthodox context that by traditions stresses the Holy Spirit, and comparing the way in which the relation between the mission agency of the Holy Spirit and human mission agency was conceptualized there with "The Arusha Call for Discipleship" discloses important and surprising shifts.

### ***From "Messianic" to "Pastoral" Missiology: Athens 2005***

"Come, Holy Spirit, Heal and Reconcile: Called in Christ to be Reconciling and Healing Communities," was the topic of the 12<sup>th</sup> World Mission Conference in Athens. Designing a conference theme as prayer is not unusual.<sup>9</sup> But it is nevertheless telling. It makes "a more humble approach to what Christians and churches can accomplish in the world today" visible.<sup>10</sup>

Looking back to the World Mission Conference 2005 Matthey observes that an important shift took place in Athens "from 'Messianic' to 'Pastoral' Missiology".<sup>11</sup> This shift results in the attitude that "we do not pretend that this new creation, this life with divine quality, will be the result of our transforming actions and political wisdom, however important and essential these are". The "messianic" missiology in contrast is driven by the idea – and by the hope – that human engagement will help to realize the kingdom of God on earth. This idea can lead to the extent of developing a "God-with-us" spirituality that becomes as binary as the above mentioned anti-empire model of mission.

One of the documents most telling for Athens' shift to a "pastoral" missiology is the final declaration of the conference under the already humble title "A Letter from Athens to the Christian Churches, Networks, and Communities". Of course an important idea behind the form of the letter was to align it to the letters Paul wrote from and to Greece. The letter as an important means and metaphor for communication brings into account that a globalized and highly differentiated and polycentric Christianity depends on communication, on keeping the contact and on building and cultivating sustainable forms of communion. But the form of a letter exhibits also a more modest attitude than e.g. a "Call" which carries hierarchically demanding and centric connotations. Reflected in the light of the "shift of paradigms in the Ecumenical Movement" that Konrad Raiser has analysed in the late 1980ies the format of the letter is indicative of the fact that the goal of the Ecumenical Movement is

---

<sup>9</sup> See e.g. the conference theme of the Assembly of the WCC in Porto Alegre, Brazil, in 2006 "God, in your Grace, Transform the World".

<sup>10</sup> Jacques Matthey, *Some Reflections on the Significance of Athens 2005*, in: EMS (ed.), *Vom Geist bewegt – zu verwandelnder Nachfolge berufen. Zur Weltmissionskonferenz in Tansania, Hamburg, Germany, Verlag des EMW 2018, 11–29, 13.*

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

no longer the centric ideal of a unity of the churches but rather the polycentric and more fluid yet accountable search for “community, koinonia, communion.”<sup>12</sup>

With regard to contents the “letter from Athens” drew attention to the churches’ own contribution to oppression and marginalisation as well as to the divisions between churches:

“We have become conscious of our own tendency to reinforce barriers by excluding and marginalizing on grounds such as race, caste, gender, or disability or by tolerating the continuation of oppressive practices within our own societies and our own churches [...] It is a source of pain to us to recognize that God’s mission is distorted by the divisions and lack of understanding that persists in and among the churches. In our longing for a fuller and more authentic participation in God’s mission, we continue to carry the pain of our inability to overcome the barriers that prevent us from celebrating together the most healing and reconciling of sacraments, the Eucharist—the Lord’s Supper. The conference theme, therefore, has been a call to a humble acceptance of our own need for healing and reconciliation.”<sup>13</sup>

### ***“The Arusha Call for Discipleship”: Critical Impacts***

“The Arusha Call for Discipleship” is based on a completely different tenor. The appellative format of the “Call” alludes to the fact that the document focusses on action directed to “others” and neglects the self-critical reflections and the own need for reconciliation that were predominant in Athens 2005.

The “Call” is structured into three parts. The first part outlines the challenges faced by Christians and churches today. The Spirit of God is calling for a movement that promotes life – the key concept of TTL –, it calls for conversion and changing discipleship, it renews Christian spirituality and missionary life.

The second part lists a total of twelve subject areas that more or less sketch the different emphasis of the work of the WCC and require the engagement of Christians. They are each initiated by “We are called”. The third part is in the form of prayer to the Trinitarian God with the request for faith and courage to accomplish these tasks and blessings on the common “Pilgrimage for Justice and Peace”.

What is surprising and underlined by the tripartition of the text is how little the Holy Spirit is being related to Discipleship and vice versa. Furthermore, the Holy Spirit as “former” main agent of mission is being degraded to the role of a supporter of the “disciples” in the “Call”. There are, I argue, at least three critical impulses revealed in this missing connection between Holy Spirit and Discipleship:

*First: Shift back from a “pastoral” missiology in which the Spirit of God is the main actor of mission to a “messianic” understanding of mission*

The emphasis that the “Call” puts on the participation of man in mission, the “discipleship”, reverses the direction taken by the World Mission Conference in Athens in 2005 by 180 degrees and brings back the temptation of a “God-with-us” (not with the others) spirituality together with the theological problems that I have already mentioned.

One of the reasons for this reverse shift is indicated in the “Call”: “The issues [meaning the various evils in the world] are not new for 2018, but the Holy Spirit continue to move at this time”. The sentence carries along a great disappointment and disillusionment with regard to

---

<sup>12</sup> Konrad Raiser, *Ökumene im Übergang. Paradigmenwechsel in der ökumenischen Bewegung?* München, Kaiser Verlag, 1989.

<sup>13</sup> “A Letter from Athens to the Christian Churches, Networks, and Communities”, in: Jacques Matthey (ed.), “Come, Holy Spirit, Heal and Reconcile! A Report of the WCC Conference on World Mission and Evangelism”, Athens, Greece, May 2005, Geneva: WCC publications 2005, 325.

changes in the world. Facing the persistence and increase of global injustices today it is hard to develop a euphoric Spirit-filled atmosphere of departure. Rather a long breath is needed. In this situation the development of a messianic missiology that conceptualizes discipleship as enduring human action and resistance to the forces of empire is understandable, but nonetheless theologically highly objectionable.

*Second: Exclusive definition of the community of Christians vs. conviviality with the world, vulnerability and being human?*

Dissociating the appeal to action in part two of the “Call” from the work of the Holy Spirit in part one tends to underline the “otherness” of Christians from the world and thereby overlooks a central aspect of the *Missio Dei*: that God is already present in the world before the missionary comes. The declaration thereby gives critical impetus to pondering whether the call of the Spirit to discipleship leads to a radical break from the world in obedience to God, as Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s strict interpretation of the discipleship sets forth. Or whether the call into discipleship is a call into conviviality in the world which is at the same time a call into vulnerability and being human, resembling Bonhoeffer’s wider interpretation of discipleship:

“To be a Christian does not mean to be religious in a particular way, to cultivate some particular form of ascetism (as a sinner, a penitent or a saint), but to be a man. It is not some religious act which makes a Christian what he is, but participation in the suffering of God in the life of the world.”<sup>14</sup>

Bonhoeffer’s wider understanding of discipleship underlines the profound worldliness of discipleship. Following this line the call to discipleship in mission comes close to the demand to live conviviality. Yet, this is not meant in the sense of a model that can be applied and implemented. Rather to the contrast: the core of conviviality is that “nobody stays who he or she is. Everyone is changed”.<sup>15</sup> Therefore discipleship in mission means to live in conviviality with the world in which God is already present, and to let oneself be changed in this encounter with others.

Unlike this interpretation Arusha’s “Call” tends to refuse conviviality, at least with those who further dynamics of the empire and who – far from living at the margins – benefit from the empire, churches and Christians included. This is one of the most provocative aspects of the declaration which brings to mind other moments in the Ecumenical Movement where conviviality between churches had been refused. One of them is e.g. the publication of “Road to Damascus. Kairos and Conversion”.<sup>16</sup> This document signed by Third World Christians who were linked to liberation theologies worldwide refused conviviality to supporters of the empire and shocked churches in the global North that were and are not used to being rejected conviviality.<sup>17</sup>

There is a profound tension in Arusha’s “Call” that becomes obvious here and could be interpreted as double moral standard: on the hand the “Call” demands discipleship in the strict understanding as radical break with the world of empire. On the other hand, by

---

<sup>14</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison, July 18, 1944*, in: Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison* (New York: Simon&Schuster) 1997, 222–223.

<sup>15</sup> Theo Sundermeier, *Sich verändern durch Zusammenleben. Konvivenz zwischen Nord und Süd*, *Evangelische Kommentare*, 19, 1986, 14–6, 16.

<sup>16</sup> Center of Concern and Christian Aid (CHR), *The Road to Damascus: Kairos and Conversion*, London, England/Washington, USA, Catholic Institute for International Relations, 1989.

<sup>17</sup> For further analysis of the document see: Hermann Brandt, *Konvivenz und Konfrontation. Missionstheologische Erwägungen zum Dokument “Der Weg nach Damaskus. Kairos und Bekehrung”*, in: Hermann Brandt, *Vom Reiz der Mission*, Neuendettelsau, Germany, Erlanger Verlag für Mission und Ökumene 2003, 73–109.

refusing entanglement with the world it also neglects and rejects humanness and “participation in the suffering of God in the world”.

The challenge that the introduction of the idea of transforming discipleship brings into the missiological debate is how these two sides of discipleship – breaking with the world on the one hand side and participating in the suffering of God in the world and conviviality on the other side – can be seen and lived together.

### *Third: Lack of confidence in the movements of the Spirit of God.*

The pneumatological turn that is apparent in mission theology today is due not least to the increased participation of Pentecostal Christians in ecumenical processes. One question arising in the dialogue with Pentecostal theology is how the Spirit of God operates. Andy Lord states that there are in principal two different concepts: the first presumes that the Spirit works through growth, which it “gives to the good things that are already happening in this world”;<sup>18</sup> this position is e.g. represented by Jürgen Moltmann. The second supposes that the Spirit works by breaking in unexpectedly in order “to challenge the status quo and start something new”, as e.g. Frank Macchia stresses.<sup>19</sup>

The “Call” from Arusha with its emphasis on human action is inclined to the first position. This is not exceptional. Traditional theologies of discipleship in the overall are rather untrained with regard to the idea that the Spirit breaks in unexpectedly and uncontrolled, blows where it wants and disturbs the knowledge of the world as well as the power of circumstances in just one instant when – roughly following Søren Kierkegaard – eternity brakes into temporality and becomes tangible.<sup>20</sup>

Now, by degrading the Spirit of God to a supporter of the disciples the “Call” displays a lack of confidence in the movements of the Spirit of God that is not uncommon in mainline churches but also highly contested by Pentecostal theology. A theology of discipleship in mission has to take seriously, I argue, these conflicting interpretations of the way how the Spirit works and has to relate them to the two concepts of discipleship mentioned above. One impulse for further reflections on this topic comes from Wolfgang Huber’s effort to interpret Bonhoeffer’s “costly discipleship” for today.<sup>21</sup> Stressing that the aspect of freedom is central in the contemporary world and in the daily life of people Huber highlights that Bonhoeffer himself understood discipleship as costly realization of freedom as he closely links freedom with discipline, action and thereby implicitly with discipleship, as the following poem shows:

“Do, and dare to do, not what is arbitrary, but what is right.  
Do not linger in possibilities, bravely grasp what is real.  
Freedom does not reside in the flight of thoughts, but only in action.  
Step out of fearful hesitation into the storm of events,  
supported only by God's commandment and by your faith,  
and freedom will cheerfully receive your spirit.”<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> Andy Lord, *Missions-Eschatologie. Ein Grundgerüst für Mission im Geist*, in: Jörg Haustein, Giovanni Maltese (Hg.), *Handbuch pfingstliche und charismatische Theologie*, Göttingen, Germany, Vandenhoeck&Ruprecht 2014, 451–563, 454.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *Der Augenblick*, SV XIV 349/350, Düsseldorf/Köln, Germany, Eugen Diederichs, 1959, 326f.

<sup>21</sup> Wolfgang Huber, “Nachfolge heute”. *Vortrag bei der Jahrestagung der Internationalen Bonhoeffer-Gesellschaft, Deutsche Sektion, in Berlin, 15 September 2006*, [https://www.ekd.de/060915\\_huber\\_berlin.htm](https://www.ekd.de/060915_huber_berlin.htm).

<sup>22</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Stations on the Road to Freedom*, in: Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s *Prison Poems*, ed. by Edwin Robinson, Grand Rapids, USA, Zondervan 1999, 73–4.

By bringing Bonhoeffer's understanding of discipleship as realisation of the freedom of a Christian in correspondence with the concept of the Spirit of God as Spirit of Freedom that blows subversively uncontrolled by political and church authorities, in unexpected places like prisons and other margins, an important parallel becomes apparent: Both, the discipleship as costly realization of freedom as well as the experience of the Holy Spirit as Spirit of Freedom, are marked by human action as well as by passivity, by human determination and by surprise, by struggles and by comfort initiated by the Holy Spirit. I suggest to call this coincidence of human and Spirit activities a momentum of "creative (un)certainty".<sup>23</sup> This term not only tries to connect anew Missio Dei and the human participation in God's mission and to keep and live the creative potential of this tension. It also opens ways to the theological benefit of the paradigm of the mission from the margins that is up to now theologically underexposed.

#### 4. Mission from the Margins and Discipleship as creative (un)certainty

"I am waiting for them to stop talking about the 'other,' to stop even describing how important it is to be able to speak about difference. It is not just important what we speak about but how and why we speak. Often this speech about the 'other' is also a mask, an oppressive talk hiding gaps, absences, that space where our words would be if we were speaking, if there was silence, if we were there. This 'we' is that us in the margins, that 'we' who inhabit marginal space that is not a site of domination but a place of resistance. Enter that space [...] Let us meet there. Enter that space."<sup>24</sup>

bell hooks impressive essay on marginality as site of resistance resembles and illuminates the reflections of the Mission from the Margins Working Group cited above. The paradigm of the mission from the margins does not only call for a new attention on how people are marginalized. Nor does it primarily claim that marginalized people need to be cared for, and that their interests need to be forwarded in public by those who have the power and voice to do so. The crucial point of the mission from the margins is an epistemological shift and a move to the margins as places of knowledge, wisdom, creativity and resistance, as God's space, as the Mission from the Margins Working Group stresses: margins are "grace-filled space" and "transforming places", places of "holy disruption" and "heart of the matter, where matters of the heart mean something".<sup>25</sup>

Special inspiration for the further development of the mission from the margins can be derived from de- and postcolonial thinkers like Walter D. Mignolo, Madina Tlostanova, Dipesh Chakrabarty or Joerg Rieger who argue, that the knowledge from the margins implies a radical epistemological shift because it displaces the European modernity and "empower[s] those who have been epistemically disempowered by the theo- and ego-politics of knowledge."<sup>26</sup> Border thinking, as this approach is called, stresses epistemic disobedience<sup>27</sup>

<sup>23</sup> For Luther and other protestant reformers certitudo is the product of the Holy Spirit and faith means to trust in the Holy Spirit who authenticates certainty. Certainty is distinct from security – securitas – which is the projectable, foreseeable part of certainty whereas certainty implies unpredictability and therefor also un-certainty. In light of the fact that it is the Holy Spirit who authenticates certainty uncertainty and certainty are the same. Yet, I chose the term creative (un)certainty in order to prevent the confusion of certainty with security and to stress that discipleship is an attitude of trust.

<sup>24</sup> bell hooks, *marginality as site of resistance*, in: Russel Ferguson et al (eds.), *Out there: marginalization and contemporary culture*, New York, USA, The MIT Press 1990, 341–3, 343.

<sup>25</sup> Mission from the Margins Working Group, *Moving in the Spirit op. cit.*, 51.

<sup>26</sup> Walter D. Mignolo/Madina V. Tlostanova, "Theorizing from the Borders. Shifting to Geo- and Body-Politics of Knowledge", *European Journal of Social Theory*, 9/2, 2006, 205–21, 206f.

<sup>27</sup> Walter D. Mignolo, *Local Histories / Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2000.

and challenges the assumption of a fixed and unchangeable body of truth. Joerg Rieger summarizes this thesis:

“Border thinking does not claim firm foundations [or] universal access to truth, or the cool objectivity of the social and natural sciences, but grows out of the perspective of those who experience the pressures of colonialism and imperialism in their own bodies [...] Border thinking – and its truth – emerge, ultimately, from the wounds of the colonial histories, memories, and experiences”.<sup>28</sup>

Border thinking and mission from the margins therefore demand that those who are not margins give up control and learn from the margins “nothing less than a new way of knowing the truth: [...] to be radically ‘fragmentary’ and ‘episodic.’”<sup>29</sup> In light of the tensions and dichotomizations elaborated in this article the paradigm of the mission from the margins in the delineated understanding appears as an antagonism:<sup>30</sup> it cuts across the logics of empire and anti-empire because it resists the definitions of the margins as opposed to the centres. The call to the margins as call to be radically fragmentary and episodic questions the dichotomic and universal truth claims of empire and anti-empire.

At the same time the invitation to the margins as invitation to letting go of universal truth claims and to accepting fragmentations as opportunity to new ways of learning and Spirit-filled encounters calls for an attitude and “strategy” of the above mentioned *creative (un)certainty*. In concluding I propose creative (un)certainty as a fundamental attitude that holds the potential to support Christian discipleship in the mission of the Spirit of God in the meaning explored throughout this article.

What this means can be summarized in six theses: a mindset that welcomes the “frisson of uncertainty”<sup>31</sup> – and questions dichotomizations and universal truth claims as well as the current ideologies of unambiguous authenticity; the liberating courage to decolonize the knowledge of the centres and to participate in a prophetic mission; an openness to experiencing the free blow of the Holy Spirit in unexpected places; the frankness to follow the invitation to the margins as places of resistance; the curiosity and joy to live in prophetic conviviality and solidarity; and the freedom supported by the Spirit to be human in the participation in the suffering of God in the life of the world.

#### Abstract:

The theme of the World Mission Conference 2018 brings together theological terms that do not link with each other easily: Mission under the main agency of the Spirit of God, transforming discipleship which involves human participation in God’s mission and, last but not least, mission from the margins. The article highlights some marks that this tension has left on the conference in Arusha and especially on the final declaration of the mission conference, “The Arusha Call to Discipleship”, and states that there is an apparent move to a new “messianic” understanding of mission. Unfolding that this understanding presents a

---

<sup>28</sup> Joerg Rieger, *Liberating God-Talk. Postcolonialism and the Challenge of the Margins*, in: Catherine Keller/Michael Nausner/Mayra Rivera, *Postcolonial Theologies: Divinity and Empire*, St. Louis, Christian Board of Pubn 2004, 204–20, quoting from Mignolo, *Local Histories op. cit.*, 37.

<sup>29</sup> Rieger, *Ibid.*, quotation from Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Radical Histories and Question of Enlightenment Rationalism*, in: Vinayak Chaturverdi (ed.), *Mapping Subaltern Studies and the Postcolonial*, London: Verso 2000, 256–80, 275. Truth, in this postcolonial understanding, is therefore neither the one universal truth nor is it located (exclusively) in the Cartesian “Cogito”. It is rather to be found at the margins, in the specific contexts of oppression, in bodily experiences of suffering. It is experienced through thoughts, deeds and sensations in the midst of the brokenness of lives and in search for liberation and reconciliation.

<sup>30</sup> It must be admitted though that during the conference in Arusha the margins as well as mission from the margins were also presented essentialistically as “the other” of empire, sometimes even in form of folkloristic exhibitions.

<sup>31</sup> Laurel C. Schneider, *Crib Notes from Bethlehem*, in: Catherine Keller, Laurel C. Schneider (eds.), *Polydoxa: Theology of Multiplicity and Relation*, Abingdon, New York, Routledge 2011, 19–35.

one-sided interpretation of mission and strongly contrasts the idea developed in the last decades that the Holy Spirit is the main agent in mission the article continues by exploring how the theology of discipleship with its wider and stricter interpretation deriving from Dietrich Bonhoeffer, as well as inspirations of Pentecostal pneumatology and finally the paradigm of the mission from the margins as epistemological shift bear the potential of correcting misleading concepts of mission and give new impulses for the understanding of mission today.

In conclusion the author proposes creative (un)certainty as an attitude that keeps the balance between the agency of the Holy Spirit in mission – including unforeseen disruptions evoked by the free blow of the Spirit – and human discipleship.

Keywords: Discipleship, creative (un)certainty, mission from the margins, empire, Missio Dei, conviviality, vulnerability, postcolonial critique, Pentecostal theology