

Argument over the “*Mission Manifesto*”. On Evangelical and Pentecostal Tendencies in the Catholic Church in Germany

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Anyone following developments within the Church around the world will not fail to have noticed the rapid spread of Pentecostal-Charismatic movements, which have become something of a “Christian trend religion”.³⁷⁸ While it is a phenomenon encountered mostly outside Europe, it is nonetheless highly relevant for the Church in Europe, too. Reinhard Hempelmann pointed out recently that the Pentecostal-Charismatic movements in Europe are helping to put an end to “the historical monopolies of the Latin-Catholic South and the Protestant North”³⁷⁹.

There can be no denying that Charismatic, Pentecostal and Evangelical influences are changing the face of the Catholic Church in Germany. This is readily apparent from the book lists issued by the denominational publishing houses. If you leaf through the list issued by the Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk for spring 2019, for instance, you will come across a four-page advertising spread to promote the songbook *Xpraise*, in which songs of worship are published that would be more fitting in an Evangelical, Free Church context. The following

³⁷⁸ Cf. Feneberg, Valentin/Müller, Johannes, *Evangelikale – Pfingstkirchen – Charismatiker: Neue religiöse Bewegungen als Herausforderung für die katholische Kirche. Systematische Zusammenfassung der Ergebnisse der internationalen Konferenz Rom 09. – 01.04.2013* (Forschungsergebnisse, No. 6), edited by the Academic Working Group of the German Bishops' Conference, Bonn 2014. Westerlund, David (ed.), *Global Pentecostalism: Encounters with Other Religious Traditions*, London/New York 2009. Dickow, Helga, “Zulauf für Charismatiker: Pfingstkirchen wachsen weltweit – auch in Südafrika”, in: *Afrika süd*, No. 43 (2014) 6, 17–19, here: 17; cf. Ojo, Matthews, *Pentecostal Movements, Islam and the Contest for Public Space in Northern Nigeria: Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, Abuja 2007; cf. Chung, Meehyun, “Korean Pentecostals and the Preaching of Prosperity”, in: *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft*, No. 99 (2015), 276–296; cf. Fernandez, Constantine B., “Catholic Charismatic Renewal”, in: *Asian Horizons*, No. 4 (2010), 250–253; cf. Nonis, Claude, “Living the Experience of Baptism in the Holy Spirit in the Apostolate of Charismatic Renewal in Sri Lanka”, in: *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection*, No. 77 (2013), 64–79.

³⁷⁹ Hempelmann, Reinhard, “Geistbewegungen – Pfingstkirchen – charismatische Bewegungen”, in: *Lebendiges Zeugnis*, No. 73 (2018) 4, 282–287, here: 287.

four pages, which are reserved for a prayer journal, give a general idea of Charismatic, Pentecostal and Free Church influences. In 2018, the Verlag Herder publishing house issued the *Mission Manifesto*, which was presented during a MEHR (More) Conference attended by 11,000 participants, many of them from an Evangelical, Pentecostal or Free Church background. A year previously, in January 2017, a MEHR Conference of this kind had attracted an impressive 8,000 participants. There was primetime television news coverage of the conference under the heading “Holy Fascination in Augsburg: Church as a Pop Event”.³⁸⁰ Irrespective of the substance of the conference, it was evident that it focused on a way of presenting the Church that is different from the style to which we are largely accustomed. Theresa Mertes and Chris Cuhls wrote in retrospect: “Ninety-minute lectures and nobody nods off: the keynotes [...] last for up to two (!) hours. The presentations are eloquent, entertaining, rhetorically well thought-out and very skilfully arranged. Thousands more were able to follow them thanks to live stream coverage and afterwards on YouTube.”³⁸¹

The *Mission Manifesto*, in particular, triggered a passionate and occasionally heated debate in which traditional Catholic theologians discussed with Christians whose faith involves a more Evangelical, Charismatic or Free Church form of piety. I will now examine this debate and begin by presenting the core content of the *Mission Manifesto* before going on to review the reactions to it. I will conclude by looking at the consequences of the debate for missionary work between the two opposite poles of simplification and academicism.

Mission Manifesto

The *Mission Manifesto* is a private initiative launched by Christians who, to quote its instigators, “wish to put new evangelisation at the very heart of Church life and call for a missionary awakening in the Catholic Church”. Among the initiators of the *Mission Manifesto* are Johannes Hartl, head of the House of Prayer in Augsburg; Father

³⁸⁰ Reichart, Johannes, Holy Fascination in Augsburg: Kirche als Pop-Ereignis, <https://www.tagesschau.de/multimedia/sendung/tt-4963.html>; cf. Werner, Gunda, “Vorwort”, in: id. (ed.), *Gerettet durch Begeisterung: Reform der katholischen Kirche durch pfingstlich-charismatische Religiosität?*, Freiburg 2018, 7–15, here: 7.

³⁸¹ Mertes, Theresa/Cuhls, Chris, “Die MEHR-Konferenz: Mehr als eine Konferenz”, in: *Lebendige Seelsorge*, No. 69 (2018) 4, 278–282, here: 281.

Karl Wallner, National Director of mission in Austria; Bernhard Meuser, co-author of *YouCat*; Paul Metzloff, expert advisor to the Youth Pastoral Centre of the German Bishops' Conference; Martin Iten, head of Radio Fisherman.fm; and Benedikt Michal, managing director of the coordination unit JAKOB, a youth work institution run by the Austrian Bishops' Conference. The inaugurators met in July 2017 in the House of Prayer in Augsburg and six months later, on 5 January 2018, the *Mission Manifesto* was presented at the MEHR Conference in Augsburg.

The *Mission Manifesto* formulates ten theses for new evangelisation. It starts from the premise that a missionary awakening in the Catholic Church cannot be ordained from above by the hierarchy but must have the support of the Church members themselves. The *Mission Manifesto* thus endorses the common priesthood of all the faithful. It does not regard itself as a new institution in its own right, its intention being rather to merge and coordinate existing initiatives. The initial response from large parts of the Church to this fresh initiative, in which a new style of Church is practised, was muted, however. Theologians were critical of the positions set out in the *Mission Manifesto*, which prompted its initiators to first reject any discussion of the criticisms voiced. In answering the critics Johannes Hartl said: "The fervent criticism of the *Mission Manifesto* [...] appears to have been hastily cobbled together. It vigorously refutes statements which as such are not even to be found in the manifesto. Or are we witnessing the emergence of more deep-rooted differences in the use of terms such as mission, truth and decision which require closer examination?"³⁸² There would appear to be far-reaching theological differences between the instigators of the *Mission Manifesto* and their critics. For that reason I will now take a look at the preamble of the *Mission Manifesto* in order to establish how far the statements it contains are theologically controversial.

The preamble begins by noting that "As far as anyone can see, the Church in Germany, Austria and Switzerland is about to cease to play any significant role in our societies in the years to come. The problem with that is not so much that it's bad for the Church as an organisation; rather it is a grievous loss for the people who will forfeit

³⁸² Hartl, Johannes, "Wir wollen missionieren! Zur Diskussion um das 'Mission Manifest'", in: Herder Korrespondenz, No. 72 (2018) 10, 50–51, here: 50.

God or never get to know Jesus in the first place.”³⁸³ This statement in the *Mission Manifesto* strikes me as banal and is likely to be accepted by virtually every theologian in Germany. After all, the publication of the Sinus milieu study in 2005 made it clear that the milieu of the Catholic Church in Germany has been shrinking for years and only has a solid foundation in a few milieus.³⁸⁴ Moreover, the study found that most milieus are sceptical towards, if not opposed to, the Church and that the Church has lost contact with “young” milieus in particular.

At that time Michael Ebers, a sociologist of religion from Freiburg, said: “What is serious is that the Church has lost contact with the three milieus of the established post-materialists and the modern performers. These are the leading milieus in society and they give the whole of society a sense of direction. The study can be seen as a challenge to the Church to seek ways of establishing relations with members of these milieus and engaging in an appropriate dialogue with them.” With this in mind, the preamble of the *Mission Manifesto* states: “As far as anyone can see, the Church in Germany, Austria and Switzerland is about to cease to play any significant role in our societies in the years to come. The problem with that is not so much that it’s bad for the Church as an organisation; rather it is a grievous loss for the people who will forfeit God or never get to know Jesus in the first place.”

The fact that the Church as a crucial vehicle for the communication of the Christian faith in our society is not propelled by any missionary momentum but, on the contrary, is steadily declining in influence is not under dispute. Joachim Wanke, a bishop from eastern Germany, wrote the following in an Episcopal letter dealing with the missionary task of the Church, which he published in conjunction with *Time to Sow. Being a Missionary Church*, a statement issued in 2000 by the German bishops, for which he was largely responsible: “There is something missing in our Catholic Church in Germany. It’s not money. It’s not the faithful. What our Catholic Church in Germany lacks is the conviction that it can attract new Christians.”³⁸⁵

³⁸³ Hartl, Johannes, “Wir wollen missionieren! Zur Diskussion um das ‘Mission Manifest’”, in: Herder Korrespondenz 72 (2018) 20, 50f., here: 50.

³⁸⁴ Cf. Vellguth, Klaus, “Sag mir, wo die Christen sind: Studie zum Milieuhandbuch ‘Religiöse und kirchliche Orientierungen in den Sinus@-Milieus 2005’”, in: AnzSS, No. 115 (2006) 10, 29–41.

³⁸⁵ Wanke, Joachim, “Brief eines Bischofs aus den neuen Bundesländern über den Missionsauftrag der Kirche für Deutschland”, in: Die deutschen Bischöfe, Zeit zur Aussaat: Missionarisch Kirche sein, edited by the Secretariat of the German Bishops’ Conference, Bonn 2000, 35.

Stephan Ackermann hit the nail on the head and, in doing so, rubbed salt into the wound when pointing out in his brief Saturday evening television sermon: “Germany is a mission country, but regrettably we are not a missionary Church.”³⁸⁶

In the third section of the preamble the *Mission Manifesto* refers explicitly to Pope Francis and says: “We invite everybody who seriously wishes to engage with us in a wave of prayer. We wish to bring together those who are bold enough to take unusual steps. As Pope Francis himself says, ‘The current imperative is pastoral conversion, in other words ‘The renewal of [the Church’s] structures demanded by pastoral conversion can only be understood in this light: as part of an effort to make them more mission-oriented, to make ordinary pastoral activity on every level more inclusive and open, to inspire in pastoral workers a constant desire to go forth and in this way to elicit a positive response from all those whom Jesus summons to friendship with himself’. (*Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 27)”. The preamble thus takes up a major concern formulated in the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, which is seen as programmatic for Pope Francis’ pontificate.³⁸⁷ The main purpose of *Evangelii Gaudium* is to recall the missionary spirit of the Church. Drawing on the Final Document of the Fifth General Assembly of the Episcopal Conference of Latin America (CELAM) in Aparecida, the final editing of which was undertaken by Jorge Bergoglio, Pope Francis returns to the concept of a “misión permanente”³⁸⁸ that was formulated in *Evangelii Gaudium*: “Throughout the world, let us be ‘permanently in a state of mission’.”³⁸⁹ This is an unmistakable reference to the words spoken by Cardinal Suenens at the beginning

³⁸⁶ Stefan Ackermann in Wort zum Sonntag on 26 October 2008.

³⁸⁷ The initiators of the *Mission Manifesto* also expressly refer to the concept of missionary discipleship, one of the key terms used by Pope Francis. Hence they write: “We are convinced that two terms which have hitherto played no more than a subordinate role will become increasingly important for the Church in future. These are ‘disciples’ and ‘mission’. A Church without followers of Jesus (i.e. disciples) is absurd. It is equally absurd if the Church has lost sight of its ‘mission’ or, to put it more bluntly, has forfeited its *raison d’être*”; (cf. Hartl, Johannes/Meuser, Bernhard/Wallner, Karl, *Mission Manifest: Die Thesen für das Comeback der Kirche*, Freiburg 2018, 18).

³⁸⁸ Cf. von Fürstenberg, Gregor, “Zustand permanenter Evangelisierung: Die Missionstheologie von Papst Franziskus”, in: *Herder Korrespondenz*, No. 69 (2015) 11, 582–586, here: 582.

³⁸⁹ Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* on the proclamation of the Gospel in today’s world, 24 November 2013, referred to below as EG, here: No. 25

of the Second Vatican Council: “We need [...] to put the whole Church in a state of mission [Ecclesia in statu missionis or Église en état de mission]. This means operating with a mission-oriented pastoral ministry in mind.”³⁹⁰ Pope Francis wants a Church that ventures to go forth: “I dream of a “missionary option”, that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church’s customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channelled for the evangelisation of today’s world rather than for her self-preservation.”³⁹¹ Comparing the preamble of the *Mission Manifesto* with the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, it seems to me that the manifesto adds little that is substantially new and goes beyond the theological mainstream. Essentially it moves in the same missionary and pastoral direction as that embarked upon by Pope Francis.

A similar picture emerges with regard to the ten theses set out in the manifesto. The first thesis reads: “We are driven by the desire that people may convert themselves to Jesus Christ.” This thesis emphasises that it is not enough to have been socialised as a Catholic. On the contrary, what is needed is a conscious decision to become a disciple of Jesus Christ.

The second thesis is: “We want to make mission the top priority.” Here the initiators of the *Mission Manifesto* refer explicitly to the Second Vatican Council and quote perhaps the most important statement in *Ad Gentes*, the decree on the mission activity of the Church: “The pilgrim Church is missionary by her very nature.”³⁹² This ontological statement about the Church is not the exclusive theological property of the Catholic Church but is now endorsed by the world’s major churches across the ecumenical board. The churches affiliated in the World Council of Churches made this abundantly clear in their mission statement called “Together Towards Life”³⁹³. The same is true of the Evangelical churches affiliated in the World Evangelical

³⁹⁰ Suenens, Léon-Joseph, *Souvenirs et Espérances*, Paris 1991, 74.

³⁹¹ EG 27

³⁹² Decree *Ad Gentes* on the mission activity of the Church, 7 December 1965, here: No. 2.

³⁹³ Ökumenischer Rat der Kirchen, “Gemeinsam für das Leben: Mission und Evangelisation in sich wandelnden Kontexten. Die neue Missionserklärung des ÖRK”, in: EMW (ed.), *Christus heute bezeugen. Mission auf dem Weg von Edinburgh 2010 nach Busan 2013*, Hamburg 2013, 458-494. <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/commissions/mission-and-evangelism/together-towards-life-mission-and-evangelism-in-changing-landscapes> (26.05.2020).

Alliance which have professed their belief in the missionary nature of the church in the ecumenical mission document they co-signed entitled “Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World”^{394, 395}

The third thesis states: “We believe that chances have never been better than they are now.” Instead of lapsing into a state of shock or pessimistic paralysis in view of the religious developments in Germany the authors of the *Mission Manifesto* deliberately adopt an attitude of calculated optimism.

The fourth thesis is: “We wish to address all people in our countries without making distinctions.” A statement of this kind has a fine ring to it, given that the activities of the Church often revolve around some imaginary centre or internal Church space rather than reflecting a Church which operates “from the outside in”. Such a thesis also keeps the authors of the manifesto at arm’s length from those who think they can rent our society asunder by dividing people up according to their nationality and attempting to foment hatred, envy and discord. The overcoming of national differences associated with this thesis strikes me as crucial in view of the developments in the Catholic Church in Germany at a time when a third of all Catholics in many dioceses come from an immigrant background.

The fifth thesis states: “We believe that our missionary activities will only be as powerful as our prayers are.” The instigators of the *Mission Manifesto* expressly cite Charles de Foucauld in this context and are convinced that missionary spirituality is a source of nourishment for Church and missionary activities.³⁹⁶ I regard this reference as distinctly valuable, given that we are faced with a Church in which we have perhaps forgotten to speak openly about our personal spirituality.

³⁹⁴ Ökumensicher Rat der Kirchen/Päpstlicher Rat für den Interreligiösen Dialog/ Weltweite Allianz, Das christliche Zeugnis in einer multireligiösen Welt. Empfehlungen für einen Verhaltenskodex, <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> (26.05.2020).

³⁹⁵ Cf. Vellguth, Klaus, “Gemeinsam missionarisch unterwegs: Eine vergleichende Einführung in die Missionsdokumente”, in: Biehl, Michael/Vellguth, Klaus (eds.), *MissionRespekt: Christliches Zeugnis in ökumenischer Weite: Konvergenzen und Divergenzen als Bereicherung des Missionsverständnisses*, Aachen/Hamburg 2016, 20–59.

³⁹⁶ Cf. Vellguth, Klaus, “Missionarische Spiritualität in Orthodoxie und Orthopraxis der Kapstadt-Verpflichtung: Zwölf Schritte einer missionarischen Spiritualität in ökumenischer Perspektive betrachtet”, in: Ley, Stefan/Proft, Ingo/Schulze, Markus (eds.), *Welt vor Gott (FS George Augustin)*, 190–207.

The sixth thesis reads: “We are grateful to all the Christians outside the Catholic Church who are already devoted to mission, baptising and leading people to Jesus.” This statement shows that the initiators of the *Mission Manifesto* have an open mind when it comes to ecumenism. The formulations indicate that there is a closeness in particular to the Free Churches and Evangelical movements within the Protestant church.³⁹⁷

The seventh thesis says: “We must rediscover the contents of our faith.” This also echoes mainstream theology in Germany, since it goes without saying that faith is a hermeneutical process in which Christians as subjects of the faith experience change on a daily basis and thus face the day-to-day challenge of rediscovering their personal faith.

The eighth thesis of the *Mission Manifesto* is: “We want to evangelise, not indoctrinate.” The fathers of the Second Vatican Council made it clear long ago that missionary work must never be accompanied by coercion or violence. In 2011 the Catholic Church, the World Council of Churches and the World Evangelical Alliance left not the slightest doubt in the aforementioned document “Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World” that they endorse this position as a fundamental axiom of Christian evangelisation.³⁹⁸

The ninth thesis says: “We need a ‘democratisation’ of mission.” Here the initiators of the *Mission Manifesto* are at pains to point out that, in view of the common priest-hood of all the faithful, evangelisation is the duty of all Christians and so cannot be made the exclusive task of a certain group of specialists, be they priests, deacons, theologians, religious or whatever.

Finally, the tenth thesis states: “We have to convert ourselves to the joy of the Gospel in order to be able to lead others to Jesus.” Here the authors of the *Mission Manifesto* come back to the concept of joy, which is one of the key terms in the pontificate of Pope Francis,

³⁹⁷ Cf. Vellguth, Klaus, “Ökumenische Facetten als Reichtum und Ressource: Übereinstimmungen und Eigenarten der Kapstadt-Verpflichtung, der Missionserklärung ‘Gemeinsam für das Leben’ und der Exhortatio ‘Evangelii gaudium’”, in: Brennpunkt Gemeinde (2016) 4, 122–126.

³⁹⁸ Cf. Vellguth, Klaus, “MissionRespekt: Der ökumenische Verhaltenskodex zum christlichen Zeugnis in einer multireligiösen Welt und seine Rezeption in Deutschland”, in: Verbum SVD, No. 55 (2015) 1–2, 160–179; cf. Vellguth, Klaus, “MissionRespekt: Ökumenischer Kongress zum christlichen Zeugnis in einer multireligiösen Welt”, in: Pastoralblatt, No. 66 (2014) 12, 367–371.

as is evident from the titles of the documents he has published, e.g. *Evangelii Gaudium*, *Amoris Laetitia*, *Veritatis Gaudium*, etc. Again and again he focuses on joy, which becomes a pivotal concept of the Christian faith with a radiating effect.

Reactions to the *Mission Manifesto*

Having dealt with the preamble and the ten theses in the *Mission Manifesto*, I will now look at reactions to it. First of all, the publication of the manifesto met with a positive and, in some cases, euphoric response. Writing in the journal *Kirche Heute* a few weeks after the publication of the manifesto, Erich Maria Fink and Thomas Maria Rimmel said: "The authors do not shrink from using the word mission; they see it as the key to the future of the Church in our countries. The fact that very different people who subscribe to a new evangelisation can identify with the ten theses of the manifesto and have been brought together as a result is a Pentecostal event in itself."³⁹⁹ At the time of writing, a total of 4,083 persons have signed the *Mission Manifesto*, among the first of whom were Archbishop Rainer Maria Cardinal Woelki (Cologne) and the Youth Bishops from Germany, Austria and West Switzerland: Bishop Stefan Oster SDB (Youth Bishop Germany), Suffragan Bishop Stephan Turnovszky (Youth Bishop Austria) and Suffragan Bishop Alain de Raemy (Youth Bishop West Switzerland). Suffragan Bishop Florian Wörner (Diocese of Augsburg) is also among the document's signatories.⁴⁰⁰

The publication of the *Mission Manifesto* found not only supporters, but also numerous critics. Ursula Nothelle-Wildfeuer, for instance, wrote a few weeks after the manifesto was issued: "Why am I so sceptical about the *Mission Manifesto*? It feels strange to read about what may be the last chance for Christianity. Is God at an end just because people cannot see the way forward?"⁴⁰¹ And she adds: "It sounds strange, too, to read about a Church comeback. Is not evangelisation all about preaching the

³⁹⁹ Fink, Erich Maria/Rimmel, Thomas Maria, "Editorial", in: *Kirche Heute: Monatszeitschrift für die katholische Kirche im deutschen Sprachraum mit katholischen Radio- und Fernsehprogrammen*, February/March 2018, 3.

⁴⁰⁰ <https://www.missionManifesto.online/#unterzeichnen> (26.05.2020).

⁴⁰¹ Nothelle-Wildfeuer, Ursula, "Mission und Mission Manifest", in: <https://www.feinschwarz.net/mission-und-mission-Manifest/> (11.03.2019).

hope offered by the Gospel and thus bearing witness to the advent of God's Kingdom, which the Church renders unmistakably visible while not being identical with it?"⁴⁰² Along with other theologians she also points out that the diaconal care aspect of the Church's activities hardly plays a role in the *Mission Manifesto*: "But where is the dimension of diaconal ministry in the *Mission Manifesto*? Even understood in a broad sense as a charitable-social diaconal ministry or socio-political diaconal work, it is hardly mentioned at all throughout the document. In the manifesto, at least, it is not seen as being crucial to evangelisation and the comeback of the Church."⁴⁰³ Claudia Keller agrees with her: "There is a lot of talk in the manifesto about prayer, revival and miracles but little about the social and political involvement of Christians."⁴⁰⁴ Ursula Nothelle-Wildfeuer goes further in saying: "The *Mission Manifesto* formulates clear-cut demands, but can mission be first and foremost a question of one's own achievements in prayer, fasting, in the profession of one's faith, given that God loves human beings unconditionally without specifying any minimum standards of conviction?"⁴⁰⁵

Esther Berg-Chan offers a classification which is indispensable for an appropriate reading of the *Mission Manifesto*, especially in order to grasp that the manifesto has its origins in the sociology of religion. She wrote the following at the time the *Mission Manifesto* was handed over to Pope Francis: "The rapid growth of Evangelical, Pentecostal and Charismatic movements is nothing new for the Catholic Church. [...] The apparent success of the manifesto and the initiatory House of Prayer, whose annual *MEHR Conference* was attended by a record 10,000 participants this year, make it clear that evangelicalisation and charismatisation are far from being an unknown quantity any more in Europe."⁴⁰⁶ Esther Berg-Chan sees the *Mission Manifesto* as fitting into an Evangelical or Charismatic milieu which has found a firm footing not only in Pentecostal and Evangelical movements outside the Catholic Church, but has also made inroads into the Catholic Church in Germany. Indeed, in their

⁴⁰² Ibid.

⁴⁰³ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁴ Keller, Claudia, "Viel Furor, kaum Aufbruch: Das 'Mission Manifest' gibt sich radikal und entspricht dem Zeitgeist", in: Herder Korrespondenz, No. 72 (2018) 3, 7.

⁴⁰⁵ Nothelle-Wildfeuer, Ursula, op. cit.

⁴⁰⁶ Berg-Chan, Esther, Papst nimmt Mission Manifest entgegen, <https://iwm.sankt-georgen.de/papst-nimmt-mission-Manifesto-entgegen/> (11.03.2019).

introduction to the *Mission Manifesto* the initiators deliberately point to the “experiences of the Free Churches”⁴⁰⁷ and to the “experiences of the renewal movements, communities and, not least, the reform congregations within the Catholic Church”⁴⁰⁸.

It strikes me as significant that the *Mission Manifesto* has prepared the way for the entry into the Catholic Church of Pentecostal, Free Church and Evangelical tendencies, the hallmarks of which are not primarily unorthodox or “unwieldy” theological concepts but, above all, a different theological style and way of believing. These tendencies are seen by many theologians as constituting a “break in style”, which is rejected. However, this apparent “break in style” is in fact the manifestation of a development which is transforming the Catholic Church the world over. Theologians like Margit Eckholt see in the Pentecostal forms of communitarianism a new “basic form”⁴⁰⁹ of being a Christian which has come to the fore around the world in recent years. Theologians researching into Pentecostalism warn that a lack of interest in both its religiousness and its theology could have fatal consequences for the Catholic Church in future. Instead of rejecting the break in style which is characteristic of Charismatic, Pentecostal and Evangelical tendencies in the Catholic Church, its emergence should be seen rather as a challenge to conduct a critical review of the everyday reality of the Church in Germany. For, as Gunda Werner, for example, has said: “The underlying issue, so the argument runs, is the failure of the Roman Catholic Church to date to come to terms with the modern world. Put in dogmatic terms, even now we still do not have a theoretical framework for a Roman Catholic ecclesiology which takes due account of modern developments.”⁴¹⁰ Sociologists of religion like Detlef Pollak take a look further afield which is beneficial for the Church because they point out that in many countries around the world the Catholic Church has long since turned into what might be called a “supply line” for Charismatic groups.⁴¹¹

⁴⁰⁷ Hartl, Johannes/Meuser, Bernhard/Wallner, Karl, *Mission Manifest*, op. cit., 16.

⁴⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰⁹ Eckholt, Margit, “Pentekostalismus: Eine neue Grundform des Christseins”, in: Keßler, Tobias/Rethmann, Albert-Peter (eds.), *Pentekostalismus: Die Pfingstbewegung als Anfrage an Theologie und Kirche*, Regensburg 2012, 202–225, here: 203.

⁴¹⁰ Werner, Gunda, “Vorwort”, in: *id.* (ed.), *Gerettet durch Begeisterung: Reform der katholischen Kirche durch pfingstlich-charismatische Religiosität?*, Freiburg 2018, 7–15, here: 10.

⁴¹¹ Cf. Pollak, Detlef/Rosta, Gergely, *Religion in der Moderne: Ein internationaler Vergleich*, Frankfurt/New York 2015.

In getting to grips with the substance of the *Mission Manifesto* it is important not to overlook the fact that the manifesto itself is deliberately not intended to be a systematic guideline statement and that it wishes to provoke its readers to a certain extent. That may well be necessary from time to time if organisations such as the Church have developed in a way that turns their members into captives in their own comfort zones. It can come as no surprise that we representatives of the Church – and I mean all of us together – regard the *Mission Manifesto* as disconcerting, because we all too often see the Church from our own vantage point. This has meant that the Catholic Church in Germany is far too often viewed and shaped from the standpoint of “full-time officials”. The *Mission Manifesto* pulls no punches in criticising such a standpoint. The authors say, for example: “We have no need to be afraid of the new. At worst we should feel uneasy at the prospect of everything having to stay exactly the way it is in the Church with all the old treaties, official regulations, pastoral plans and employment contracts.”⁴¹²

The *Mission Manifesto* has a conception of the Church which does not assume that full-time officials have a prominent part to play. It goes without saying that the initiators of the manifesto do not expect their approach to go down well with such officials. Nevertheless, they write: “There was general agreement that in addressing the issue of a missionary revival it makes no sense to point the finger at others, such as bishops, priests, religious education teachers and full-time officials in the parishes. The famous assertion that ‘It’s about time they got cracking!’ is an unacceptable delegation.”⁴¹³ Of course it is theologically correct that responsibility for the missions cannot be assigned to a single group of specialists, irrespective of how they are chosen, and that evangelisation ultimately poses a challenge to all Christians. So what is the reason for the vehement reactions? By attempting to “democratise” mission the authors of the *Mission Manifesto* set about gently upsetting the Church’s power structures. The same applies to the assignment of functions, which is closely associated with the identity of bishops, priests, religious education teachers and full-time officials in the parishes. No wonder such “chipping away at identities” triggers criticism. The fact of the matter is, however, that

⁴¹² Hartl, Johannes/Meuser, Bernhard/Wallner, Karl, *Mission Manifest*, op. cit., 18.

⁴¹³ *Ibid.*, 15.

there will be a fundamental change in hierarchies and functions within the Catholic Church in the years to come. This has nothing to do with abstract ecclesiological reflections but with fundamental changes in communication in society at large. Communication specialists say that the era of digitisation is accompanied by the “removal of hierarchies and gatekeepers”⁴¹⁴. Wolfgang Beck, a pastoral theologian from Frankfurt, likewise draws attention to the connection between digitality and changes in roles and hierarchies within the Church. He says that: “There is an emergent culture of digitality in which hierarchies are being largely levelled out, public relations is taking on an additional control function and the lack of professionalism within the Church is being ruthlessly exposed.”⁴¹⁵

The provocative statements made by the authors of the *Mission Manifesto* have inevitably triggered protests from full-time Church staff. However, it seems that the initiators of the manifesto not only “wish to pick a quarrel” with the officially organised Church and its full-time employees, but also have a bone to pick with academic theologians. They assert, for instance, that: “The Church can function without concordats, faculties and cathedrals. In fact it can do without almost everything it is associated with in the eyes of contemporaries.”⁴¹⁶ It was inevitable that a statement of this kind would not go down well with the holders of chairs in faculties of Catholic theology in Germany. It is equally obvious that they have little sympathy for such formulations and have rejected the initiative and its missionary intentions. It is to the credit of the authors of the *Mission Manifesto* that they have in the meantime made concessions with regard to the debate they have unleashed and are at pains to point out that evangelisation also requires theological reflection. Johannes Hartl, for example, has said: “No, of course mission needs theological reflection. There can be no evangelisation without theology.”⁴¹⁷ However, he goes on to make a remark that is crucial for an understanding of the *Mission Manifesto*:

⁴¹⁴ Cf. Büsch, Andreas, “Christus, der Meister der Kommunikation – auch digital? Herausforderungen der Digitalisierung für die Pastoral”, in: *Anzeiger für die Seelsorge*, No. 128 (2019) 2, 9–12, here: 10.

⁴¹⁵ Beck, Wolfgang, “Pastorale Herausforderungen in einer ‘Kultur der Digitalität’: Eine Chance zum Aufbruch!”, in: *Anzeiger für die Seelsorge*, No. 128 (2019) 2, 5–9, here: 7.

⁴¹⁶ Hartl, Johannes/Meuser, Bernhard/Wallner, Karl, *Mission Manifest*, op. cit., 18.

⁴¹⁷ Hartl, Johannes, “Wir wollen missionieren! Zur Diskussion um das ‘Mission Manifest’”, in: *Herder Korrespondenz*, No. 72 (2018) 10, 50–51, here: 50.

“It will be obvious to every reader that the *Mission Manifesto* is not a theological textbook.”⁴¹⁸ And he adds: “It is an open matter whether a book designed for a grassroots initiative consisting largely of new movements which has been written by practitioners for practitioners ought to satisfy academic standards or whether it will become a bestseller nevertheless.”⁴¹⁹

At this point at the very latest it becomes obvious what has also contributed to a lack of understanding or outright rejection amongst academics. The *Mission Manifesto* avoids academic language and instead uses spiritualising terms and other forms of advertising language that are alien to academic theologians. The use of such language is far from surprising in view of the professional background of the initiators and authors of the manifesto.

Bernhard Meuser, who was awarded the Catholic Journalists' Prize by the German Bishops' Conference over 25 years ago, is a journalist and writer as well the co-initiator and head of the YouCat Foundation. Martin Iten is in charge of Radio Fisherman.fm. Michael Prüller runs the Public Relations and Communications Office of the Archdiocese of Vienna. Katharina Fassler is an author and co-founder of *Nightfever*. Maria-Sophie Maasburg writes books. In other words, the inaugurators of the *Mission Manifesto* are all people with a background in journalism or have at least something to do with journalism. It would certainly be true to say that Johannes Hartl, the founder and head of the House of Prayer in Augsburg, has a certain affinity with journalism. It would be wrong to voice criticism from an academic perspective of the unusual style of the *Mission Manifesto*, which has its origins not least in the journalistic provenance of the authors. On the other hand, if you take the focus on charisms seriously, it would certainly be possible to regard the journalistic background of the authors as a charism which enriches the Catholic Church in its commitment to evangelisation.

Another probable reason for the “unwieldy” impression the manifesto has formed in the minds of many Christians is that the language it uses is not gender-sensitive. By that I do not only mean that the texts in the *Mission Manifesto* are not linguistically “gendered”. What is striking, in addition, is that one of the hallmarks of the *Mission*

⁴¹⁸ Ibid.

⁴¹⁹ Ibid.

Manifesto is the predominantly male style of the discourse it conducts, which tends to exclude rather than invite and to assert rather than to argue. At a conference on the *Mission Manifesto* held at the Study Centre for Faith and Society of the University of Fribourg in December 2018, Gunda Werner criticised the construction of dichotomies and the mixing of description and assessment as well as the assertion of the right to determine who needs evangelisation and for what reason. It would appear to be no accident that the *Mission Manifesto*, which was initiated by three men, reveals distinctly masculine traits in the expressions it uses and in the manner of its presentation. It seems to me that, if the initiative is to meet with approval in broad circles of the Church and among theologians, it will need to discard this distinctly masculine style of discussion. Let me make a comment at this point. Just how important greater sensitivity to gender issues and to the role of women in the Church is has been made all too clear by the Munich reform groups here in Fürstenried Palace who from eleven o'clock to five minutes to twelve have made clear their advocacy of a diaconate for women.

The vehement debate about the *Mission Manifesto* shows that its initiators have put their fingers into some sensitive wounds afflicting the Church and academic theology. There can be no doubt that the *Mission Manifesto* and its ten theses have raised issues which are beyond dispute. Both the preamble and the manifesto's ten theses contain little that is new or at odds with the understanding of a missionary church of the kind that Pope Francis has unceasingly called for in the last few years of his pontificate. So if the *Mission Manifesto* itself is not at issue, then what is? In terms of substance, the argument over the *Mission Manifesto* is not about the manifesto itself at all but about the contributions that have been published by individual authors in the book *Mission Manifesto. The Theses for A Comeback of the Church* which was issued in January of last year by the Verlag Herder publishing house. These contributions certainly contain statements which occasionally run counter to mainstream academic theology. However, it would be wrong to assume that the articles published in the book are concerned with academic theology. It is helpful here to take a look at the blurb, in which there is a frank admission that: "This book is deliberately intended to provide food for thought and to encourage people to join in. It is, therefore, a must for all those who really care about the Church." The authors are keen to

provoke and thus shake up a Church apparatus which they consider to be lethargic. Those who confuse provocation with academic reflection fail to do justice to the character of the work. The main concern of Johannes Hartl and the initiators of the *Mission Manifesto* is not to explain mission but to invite people to engage in evangelisation. Thus in response to the objections voiced by theologians Hartl writes: "While many of the objections might seem right at first glance, the question is: 'What would a theologically 'slimmer' version of missionary activity look like?'"⁴²⁰

The decision people face is whether they wish to be provoked by the initiators of the *Mission Manifesto* or not. I think it is helpful first of all to see that the manifesto is a provocation and to accept it as such. It is about introducing a new style of inner-Church discourse which is largely alien to both traditional Church and traditional academic circles. It is about a style of being Church that is more at home amongst Charismatics, Pentecostals and Evangelicals. In essence it is also a question of style that is under dispute. At the very latest after having read the arguments over the Sinus milieu study, which concluded that the Church with its all but dogmatic concentration on a few lifestyles has excommunicated itself from large parts of society, I would take the debate over style which has developed around the *Mission Manifesto* as an occasion to recall the Catholicity of the Church. My feeling is that the deliberate provocation aspired to by the initiators of the manifesto should be countered by a degree of sangfroid with a view to integrating styles rather than separating or excluding them.

Mission between the poles of Simplification and Academicism

In conclusion, perhaps I can express a few wishes concerning the way in which the discussion of missionary work should be conducted between the two poles of simplification and academicism. Let me begin with the inaugurators of the *Mission Manifesto*. From my point of view it is important that they should not seek a separate role for themselves within the Church but do more to win over the many Christians who feel at home in the Catholic Church and are active in associations, initiatives, parishes, etc. Should they fail to do so,

⁴²⁰ Ibid.

they will certainly foster division if they are all too confident about “who is friend and who is foe” whilst conjuring up the prospect of the “complete demise of the Church”, loudly denouncing the institution and presenting themselves as taboo breakers and martyrs.⁴²¹

My second wish is that the initiators of the *Mission Manifesto* should not ignore theology but seek a theological debate. It is not conducive to a constructive discussion if their reaction to theological criticism of their initiative is to engage in “verbal abuse” and to discredit the criticism as “booing from the sidelines”⁴²² or as “theological muddling through, but with an attitude of composure”⁴²³.

My third wish is that when it comes to missionary commitment the other religions or the so-called “world” should not be ignored but accorded the esteem due to them. For example, the “normative interpretation of salvation based on an explicitness in matters of religious affiliation”⁴²⁴, which has been rightly criticised by Gunda Werner, is far from helpful. None other than Karl Rahner pointed out in his work *Selbsterfahrung und Gotteserfahrung* that a divine experience is not an inner-Church occurrence and that it takes place in the midst of life or in the midst of the world. Rahner said: “A divine experience of this kind can always happen in an everyday setting even if the person concerned is busy with all manner of things but certainly not with God.”⁴²⁵ There should also be no pretending that the *Mission Manifesto* is not part of this world. It should be treated instead as an initiative in the midst of the world to which God has promised salvation. After all, *extra mundus nulla salus*.

My fourth wish is that the representatives of the *Mission Manifesto*, while accepting the journalistic need for reduction, should not indulge in over-simplistic formulations but take due note of the complexity

⁴²¹ Keller, Claudia, op. cit., 7.

⁴²² Hartl, Johannes, “Rezension ‘Einfach nur Jesus? Eine Kritik am Mission Manifest’”, <https://johanneshartl.org/rezension-einfach-nur-jesus-eine-kritik-am-mission-Manifest/> (11.03.2019).

⁴²³ Ibid.

⁴²⁴ Werner, Gunda, “Überall schlägt uns Angst entgegen: Das Mission Manifest zwischen Untergangsszenario und Errettung als Ausdruck fortschreitender Binnencharismatisierung der römisch-katholischen Kirche”, in: Nothelle-Wildfeuer, Ursula/Striet, Magnus, Einfach nur Jesus? Eine Kritik am Mission Manifest, Freiburg 2018, 11–33, here: 31.

⁴²⁵ Rahner, Karl, “Selbsterfahrung und Gotteserfahrung”, in: Schriften zur Theologie, vol. 10, Zu-rich/Einsiedeln/Cologne 1972, 134.

of human reality. It seems to me that there is a need for a different manner of discussion within the Church especially in times like the present, when right-wing populists are offering simple solutions to the numerous people in our society who feel perplexed by the complex changes going on around them in the age of globalisation. If we fail to bring about such a manner of discussion, we will merely see a replication within the Church of what is already being observed with concern in society at large.

My final wish is that the instigators of the *Mission Manifesto* should consciously be different and remain that way. It would be good if, while deliberately remaining different, they were to display a little more humility in their approach to discussions with others.

In response to the ten theses put forward by the initiators of the *Mission Manifesto* I have formulated five wishes that I have of them. I should now like to address five further wishes to the readers of the *Mission Manifesto*. My first wish is that others should ascertain what is different in the *Mission Manifesto* that puts a positive question mark against us as the Catholic Church. In this respect I find interesting what Theresa Mertes and Chris Cuhls wrote and published last year. Reflecting on the MEHR Conference, at which the manifesto was presented, they said: "The combination of music, presentations and prayers is in itself nothing fundamentally new, although the aesthetic and professional setting may well act as decisive factors."⁴²⁶ They refer here to the new style which can be observed. They also stress that this new style is rooted in a deeply felt spirituality. "Moreover, there would appear to be confirmation in the cautious resort to the Doctor of the Church, Augustine, and his teachings that you can only ignite in others what already burns within yourself. For there can be no mistaking the organisers' exceptional personal commitment to the event."⁴²⁷ The protagonists associated with the *Mission Manifesto* seemingly radiate a spirituality that strikes a chord with others. We should therefore allow ourselves to be provoked by the spirituality of those who wish to establish a new style of faith in the Church. The language they use, its attractive character and the sense of guidance it gives are markedly different from the linguistic styles

⁴²⁶ Mertes, Theresa/Cuhls, Chris, op. cit., 282.

⁴²⁷ Ibid.

normally encountered in Church discussions. Perhaps this different linguistic style can help to breathe new life into the customary style of communication within the Catholic Church.

My second wish is that the readers of the *Mission Manifesto* should ignore the half-baked theological notions to be found in some formulations in the book, which was published, after all, within the space of just a few months. If the remarks made by the initiators about how the book came into being are correct, the idea for it came about in the summer of 2017. The book was subsequently presented to the general public in January 2018. Anyone with an inkling of publication processes will know that the manuscript must have been produced in great haste. It is obvious that some of the formulations should be taken with a pinch of salt. Apart from which, the authors of the contributions are concerned not so much with offering an analysis as with urging other people to act.

My third wish is that there should be recognition of the challenges to our Christian spirituality that are formulated in the *Mission Manifesto*. Its instigators are not concerned primarily with theological reflection but with religious experience. We theologians certainly need to ask ourselves how personal theological reflection relates to personal religious experiences. Even if the professionalism of us theologians, with which our personal identity, our self-image and not least our social capital is largely intertwined, has a good deal to do with the professionalism of our theological reflection, this must never be allowed to obscure the more fundamental significance of religious experience as opposed to theological reflection.

Karl Rahner, a master of theological reflection, pointed again and again to the primacy of religious experience over an abstract knowledge of faith. This was something he stressed in 1969 during a lecture in Koblenz: "While it may be the case that experience as such and conceptually objectivising reflection on such experience may never be completely separable, the dimensions of experience and of objectivising reflection on that experience are never identical. Reflection never quite catches up with the original experience."⁴²⁸

⁴²⁸ Rahner, Karl, lecture given at the Catholic Academy in Koblenz on 22 October 1969, published in: *Schriften zur Theologie*, vol. IX, Einsiedeln 1970, 161–176.

My fourth wish is that the readers of the *Mission Manifesto* should think about and take up the challenges involved in a drive to evangelise. Because there can be no doubt that the *Mission Manifesto* is a book which is intended by the initiators, like Pope Francis in his missionary Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, to shake up the Church and put it “permanently in a state of mission”^{429, 430}

My final wish is that the readers of the *Mission Manifesto* should not be over-confident in their approach to the manifesto but rather enter discussions with a little more humility. The *Mission Manifesto* initiative exhibits a style which is alien to many of us and which some also find repulsive. However, given the experience that churches worldwide have gathered with Pentecostal, Evangelical and Free Church movements, it makes little sense to hastily dismiss or exclude them. The experience of other local churches, especially in Latin America and Africa, with Pentecostal, Evangelical and Free Church movements has shown again and again that: “Only an open and honest dialogue can help to find the right way to deal with this movement and to adopt a constructive approach to a coexistence that is inevitable.”⁴³¹ A debate involving polemics or exclusion is considered an ineffectual means of fostering Christian unity.

Ecumenical Challenge and Opportunity

The *Mission Manifesto* initiative can be classified as part of a movement in which Pentecostal and Evangelical religious styles are making inroads into the Catholic Church in Germany. Germany is now witnessing on a very “modest scale” a development which has been

⁴²⁹ EG 25

⁴³⁰ In his first major interview, which he granted to Antonio Spadaro, Pope Francis made clear his un-derstanding of a pastoral ministry or mission that is in keeping with the times: “Instead of being just a church that welcomes and receives by keeping the doors open, let us try also to be a church that finds new roads, that is able to step outside itself and go to those who do not attend Mass, to those who have quit or are indifferent.”; (cf. Spadaro, Antonio, “Interview with Pope Francis”, ed. by Andreas R. BAAtlogg SJ., Freiburg i.Br. 2013, 49).

⁴³¹ Feneberg, Valentin/Müller, Johannes, *Evangelikale – Pfingstkirchen – Charismatiker: Neue religiöse Bewegungen als Herausforderung für die katholische Kirche. Systematische Zusammenfassung der Ergebnisse der internationalen Konferenz Rom 09. – 11.04.2013 (Forschungsergebnisse, No. 6)*, op. cit., 26; cf. Vellguth, Klaus, “Pentekostalismus als ökumenische Herausforderung: Kontext: Afrika”, in: Ulin Agan, Polycarp, *Pentekostalismus – Pfingstkirchen: Vortragsreihe Akademie Völker und Kulturen St. Augustin*, vol. 38, Siegburg 2017, 139–159.

under way on other continents for many years now. In the age of post-modern pluralism there is not only the phenomenon of multi-religiousness, but also an increasing fragmentation of Christianity, of which Cardinal Koch has written that it must be “seen as a trend running counter to the original efforts to achieve greater unity among the Christian churches and church communities”⁴³². For a long time the increasing fragmentation of Christianity caused by the emergence of Pentecostal and Evangelical churches was seen merely as a hostile threat. In the Catholic Church and in Catholic theology this led initially to a debate dominated by apologetics in which there was talk of Pentecostal developments as an object of personal observation. This discussion was marked by reservations and insinuations, and it is perfectly understandable that the Pentecostal side responded to the way it was conducted by the Catholic side by adopting a tit-for-tat approach. It took a while for both sides to realise that mutual demonization is not useful and that Pentecostal Christians and the Pentecostal movement are not objects of personal observation but subjects engaged in discussion on an equal footing. “Only an open and honest dialogue can help to find the right way to deal with this movement and to adopt a constructive approach to a coexistence that is inevitable”⁴³³ was the consensus arrived at during an international conference on the phenomenon of Pentecostalism organised by the German Bishops’ Conference. “A debate involving polemics or exclusion was considered an ineffectual means of fostering Christian unity. Instead, a plea was issued for acceptance and mutual respect, which is ultimately rooted in the recognition of religious freedom, and a call made for a ‘pluralism of dialogues’.”⁴³⁴

The fact that Pentecostal tendencies have now found their way into the Catholic Church in the form of the *Mission Manifesto* may strike many people as out of place and some as distressing. The point, however, is to read the signs of the time and, if at all possible, to understand them. Let me, therefore, end with the question: What does Pentecostalism have that is perhaps lacking in the Catholic Church? And what does the Holy Spirit wish to tell us about the Pentecostal churches and the success they enjoy?

⁴³² Koch, Kurt, “Vorwort”, in: Feneberg, Valentin/Müller, Johannes, op. cit., 5.

⁴³³ Feneberg, Valentin/Müller, Johannes, op. cit., 26.

⁴³⁴ In view of the 35,000 churches calling themselves Christian which exist around the world, ecumenism has no other choice but to pursue a pluralism of dialogues.