

The Church “Which Goes Forth” and the Rediscovery of Partnership – Partnership as a Basic Manifestation of the Universal Church

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Introduction: The universal Church as a learning community – rediscovering partnership

In 2010/11, in conjunction with its fiftieth anniversary, the Episcopal action group for Latin America adveniat conducted an empirical study on its work within the universal Church. The aim was to improve communication with local churches in the German dioceses in the light of changes in development work and activities within the universal Church. The survey covered full-time workers and volunteers in local Catholic churches as well as teachers at Catholic schools. With regard to “Latin America’s position within the universal Church today” and “the future of work within the universal Church”, the general summary had the following to say:

“Volunteers would like to see adveniat conveying not only the misery that is so rampant in Latin America, but more of its *joyful attitude to life, amazing cheerfulness, warm-heartedness and the Latin American cultures*. Some volunteers felt that adveniat should put greater emphasis on promoting the spirituality of the universal Church within local churches (e.g. through lively, joyful worship services and vibrant faith in everyday life). Moreover, they expect adveniat to focus on exploring further ways in which we can learn from one another. Another point they regard as important is that adveniat should seek not only to obtain donations and financial support, but should also *encourage us – i.e. Christians in Germany and Latin America – to uphold one another in prayer, to exchange requests for intercession and to ensure that the work which is done takes place at precisely this spiritual level*. A greater focus also needs to be placed on the fact that *giving always enriches the giver*. After all, ‘no one is so poor that they

can't give us anything, and no one is too rich to receive something'. These two perspectives – mutually invigorating spirituality and mutual give-and-take – were given greater prominence by newly surveyed volunteers than at the first stage of the research. Other areas considered by volunteers and teachers to be vital for the survival of the universal Church beyond 2020 were global political issues, such as the environment, migration and unemployment related to international corporations [...] Universal Church activists believe that the universal Church thrives on personal contacts. They also said, however, that the religious and theological foundations of worldwide care for the poor should not be overlooked. Like other Catholic aid organisations, *adveniat* must help to ensure – through ongoing, effective PR work and by stepping up political lobbying – that universal Church issues extend beyond the narrow confines of work within the Church and are promoted on a broad, society-wide scale.⁷

This fairly long quotation shows that there has been a major transformation in the work of the universal Church affecting not just *adveniat*, but also other aid organisations in Germany as well as the work of missionary orders and universal Church liaison officers in the German dioceses. It is a transformation which has gradually emerged in international political, social, cultural and ecclesial cooperation over the past twenty years in the wake of the paradigm shift known as globalisation. In Germany, work within the universal Church was initiated in the 1950s and 1960s in connection with the Second Vatican Council and unfolded at various levels of pastoral, missionary, charitable and development practice. Until well into the 1970s this work took its cue from the paradigm of development versus underdevelopment and from the formation of sociological theories which questioned the balance of power between North and South. Such theories either had their starting point in the so-called *desarrollismo* or in criticism of it. The work of Church aid organisations was seen as a contribution to "development" in the churches of the South – in both pastoral and socio-economic terms. Above all, it was seen as helping to "raise awareness" and "liberate" those who belonged to the poorest of the poor. Over the past few decades globalisation theories have revealed new and sometimes more subtle dependencies in all

⁷ Kiessling, Klaus; Cho, Chunhee; Wagener, Hermann-Josef, *Blickpunkt Lateinamerika – Empirische Studie zur weltkirchlichen Arbeit der Bischöflichen Aktion Adveniat*, Münster 2012, 120-121.

global contexts. Global integration is fostered in a new way by information technologies, communication media and financial markets as well as by migration flows, on the one hand, and tourist flows, on the other. At the same time there also has been an increase in exclusion mechanisms, potential violence and the poverty gap, with a polarisation which is no longer manifest just in specific regions but can be observed also in the metropolitan areas and megacities of the North as they keep growing through migration.

Against this backdrop, universal Church work in Germany is concentrating more and more on education within the regional churches. The North, too, is now impacted by the need to "raise awareness" and by the "option for the poor" – concepts which, in the 1970s, were formulated primarily with a view to the South, where they had been kindled by liberation theology and liberation theory in education. The big shift towards the universal Church, resulting from the Second Vatican Council, will stop halfway if this "option for the poor" does not also mean "conversion" – a turnaround in the sense of repentance and being set free – for Christian believers and for Church practice in the various contexts of the "North". Development theories based on post-colonial critiques have unveiled the subtle discourses on power which are sometimes even inherent in development paradigms such as "helping people to help themselves". As a result voices from the "South" are meeting with fresh recognition. The new process of becoming the universal Church, which was triggered by the ecclesiological paradigm shift at the Second Vatican Council, means not only that the churches of the South are now perceived differently by the churches of the North, but also that the churches of the North are impacted themselves. The process affects their own "liberation" and "option for the poor", since their encounter with the "poor" in the South is freeing them to adopt new practices focused on the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

It is in precisely this context that the term "partnership" becomes a keyword for work within the universal Church and for a new self-image of the same. "Partners" – as the origin of the word suggests – are those who "partake" and who "contribute their part" when it comes to experience, knowledge and wealth as well as to poverty and the concerns of others. Understanding the universal Church as partnership means that we form part of a wider whole and that the Christian faith and Church practice only manifest themselves in a constant process of participation and contribution. As Pope Francis pointed out in his Apostolic

Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, we discover the Gospel, Jesus Christ and God's vital energy as we "go forth", again and again, dynamically alternating between encounters, change and growth with and through others who – even across distances – become our fellow travellers. This is how the Church becomes universal, and this is how it grows and meets its original commission to testify to the Gospel of Life.⁸

As we move forward and take the next steps, we will need to re-discover this "partnership" as a basic manifestation of Church. Founded in the biblical and patristic traditions, it faded into the background in the early modern era right up until the Second Vatican Council. However, it is now coming to the fore again, re-emerging from and through a new dialogue with the churches of the South, the former mission churches. Partnership reminds us that, as we follow Jesus Christ, we are part of a larger whole and that by participating and contributing in mutual processes of recognition, we grow in our relationship with Christ. Indeed, we grow into Him who is the gift and who is Life – unbreakable life and hope in the face of all brokenness. "Partnership" as a central theme of the universal Church means that global work within the dioceses, local churches and aid organisations is re-integrated into the basic manifestation of the Christian life, so that it is revealed to us as a "mysticism with our eyes open" (Johann Baptist Metz). In *Evangelii Gaudium* Francis outlines Christian practice and the Great Commission as follows: "Better yet, it means learning to find Jesus in the faces of others, in their voices, in their pleas. And learning to suffer in the embrace of the crucified Jesus whenever we are unjustly attacked or met with ingratitude, never tiring of our decision to live in fraternity. There indeed we find true healing, since the way to relate to others which truly heals instead of debilitating us is a *mystical* fraternity. It is a fraternal love capable of seeing the sacred grandeur of our neighbour [...] Here and now [...] the Lord's disciples are called to live as a community which is the salt

⁸ Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* of the Holy Father Francis to the Bishops, Clergy, Consecrated Persons and the Lay Faithful on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World, 26. November 2013, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html, e.g. no. 88: "Meanwhile, the Gospel tells us constantly to run the risk of a face-to-face encounter with others, with their physical presence which challenges us, with their pain and their pleas, with their joy which infects us in our close and continuous interaction. True faith in the incarnate Son of God is inseparable from self-giving, from membership in the community, from service, from reconciliation with others. The Son of God, by becoming flesh, summoned us to the revolution of tenderness."

of the earth and the light of the world (cf. Mt. 5:13-16). We are called to bear witness to a constantly new way of living together in fidelity to the Gospel."⁹

Partnership as a basic manifestation of Church: lost and found – brief overview of the history of Christian mission

It is always fascinating to remind ourselves of the Early Church's process of evangelisation and mission. The rapid spread of the Gospel through its proclamation by Paul and his companions, Peter, James, Mary Magdalene, the many other men and women and also the missionaries and theologians was the work of the Holy Spirit. Proclaiming Christ meant a new form of fellowship and edification within the churches: "We shall grow completely into Christ, who is the head by whom the whole Body is fitted and joined together, every joint adding its own strength, for each individual part to work according to its function. So the body grows until it has built itself up in love."¹⁰ The letters of Paul and the other apostles, which are read whenever a local church meets for worship, mean sharing in and contributing to the experiences, joys, hopes, anxieties and concerns of others. This is the basic experience of being within the Body of Christ where missionary Church practice serves to build up the "Body of Christ", as Jesus Christ is the one who "offered himself as a ransom for all"¹¹, so that we can have life and be set free from guilt and sin. This is a mystery and also the very origin of the Christian faith, of which local churches remind themselves when they celebrate the Eucharist – a mystery which comes to them again and again, as a gift and by grace. Partnership between the first Christian churches was firmly grounded in this proclamation of Christ. It is fruitful in word and deed, and it causes the Christian faith to "come to the fore" – a key phrase which has been used frequently by the French Church in recent years when talking about its new pastoral and missionary practice¹². It also means lively participation in the concerns of other

⁹ *ibid*, nos. 91-92.

¹⁰ Eph. 4:16.

¹¹ 1 Tim 2:6.

¹² Cf. also: Theobald, Christoph, *Le christianisme comme style – une manière de faire de la théologie en postmodernité*, 2 volumes, Paris 2007. *Ibid*, *Evangelium und Kirche*, in: Feiler, Reinhard; Müller, Hadwig, *Frei geben – Pastoraltheologische Impulse aus Frankreich*, Ostfildern 2013, 110-138. – Cf. also: Eckholt, Margit, 'Der unterbrochene Frühling' – Erinnerung an das Weltkirche-Werden auf dem 2. Vatikanischen Konzil, in: Thull, Philipp,

local churches. This is what made Paul call for a collection for the church in Jerusalem.¹³ Proclamation of the Word and care for the vulnerable are closely connected. What we can see here is a partnership model reflected in the local church, in the structure of its offices and also in the connections between the various regional churches. The five Patriarchates which developed in the Early Church, in Jerusalem, Antioch, Alexandria, Constantinople and Rome, enjoyed a lively exchange, with Rome holding the primacy in the ministry of unity and in the proclamation of Jesus Christ. There was recognition of regional and cultural differences, which was not surprising in the light of the religious pluralism at the time, i.e. the "ecumenism" of the Roman Empire and the minority status of Christianity. Recognition and partnership were based on a shared witness to Christ, remembering the mystery of the incarnation, the cross and the resurrection. It was the deeper dimension behind the missionary witness of the Church. In this respect the first Christian centuries were a time of spiritual fruitfulness, when the Church turned into a universal Church which expressed itself through partnership and was essentially mission-focused. This was a basic manifestation which in subsequent centuries gradually receded into the background as the Church continued to develop but also experienced various forms of fragmentation.

During the early modern period – and undoubtedly also partly in the wake of the breach caused by the Reformation – the Catholic Church began to define itself and its boundaries in such a way that the partnership model took a back seat. The Catholic Church now saw itself as a *societas perfecta*, in possession of the "means of grace", self-sufficient and as a hierarchical entity culminating in the primacy of the Pope, as defined at the First Vatican Council. The structure of the Church, its offices, its liturgical patterns and its educational system took their cue from the "centre". The Church of Rome saw itself as universal, and the Roman Catechism initiated by the Council of Trent became binding for the entire Church. The 1622 *Sacra Congregatio de Propaganda Fide* (since 1967: Congregation for the Evangelisation of Peoples) defined the basic principles of mission and came to supervise the newly created mission churches. During the early modern age, when the European powers expanded into other

Ermuligung zum Aufbruch – Eine kritische Bilanz des Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzils, Darmstadt 2013, 120-128.

¹³ Cf. 2 Cor. 8.

parts of the world, missionaries followed in the footsteps of the conquerors. The "aliens" they encountered were "inferior beings" who had to be "vanquished"; they were not viewed as "partners" but as beings in need of education, prosperity, culture and religion. The 19th century saw a renewed interest in non-European history, religion and culture, leading to the first Latin American Plenary Council in Rome in 1899. Centralisation was on the agenda, and mission was understood as "converting" the others, who were in need of salvation. This was coupled with the predominance of a Western model of education, administration, law and theology. Indigenous clergy were eventually admitted and trained in mission countries in the 20th century, but their native cultural and religious traditions still went unrecognised. The Church advocated a "self-focused" model until well into the 20th century and this is what Francis criticised in *Evangelii Gaudium*, contrasting it with "a Church which goes forth".¹⁴ The rediscovery of partnership forms part of the major paradigm shift which took place at the Second Vatican Council – a process of discovery which still has a long way to go and involves recognising the autonomy of cultural and religious traditions, the need for dialogue and personal encounters, the need to be converted to Jesus Christ by the others and the need for a new missionary dynamic, to which Paul VI gave such fascinating expression in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975) and which, in turn, stimulated Pope Francis.

The rediscovery of partnership – the materialisation of the universal Church at the Second Vatican Council

As the Italian Church historian, Giuseppe Alberigo, has demonstrated in his studies, the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) was definitively an "event of the Spirit", an expression of a new understanding of Church. It was also a necessary move forward at a time when the reconfiguration of the "religious landscape" was already under way on a global scale. Regions which have traditionally been moulded by Christianity and, indeed, by Catholicism, such as those in France, are now witness to massive "de-Christianisation processes". In the countries of the South, particularly since the Second World War and in the wake of the resulting geopolitical changes and liberation movements in the colonies, missionary endeavours and evangelisation have been increasingly called into question, and the

¹⁴ Cf. Francis, *op.cit.*, chapter 1: The Church's Missionary Transformation, nos. 19-49.

growing criticism of Western cultural dominance has also included religion and the Church. As early as the mid-1950s a group of African priests from Congo-Zaire asked how it was possible to be both an African and a Christian. They were seeking to find inculturated ways of expressing the Christian faith through liturgy, pastoral ministry and theology. It was a quest for a new independence of regional churches and for a rediscovery of *communio* – and thus “partnership” – of those churches.

It is remarkable that one of the most discerning and influential Council theologians, the French Dominican Yves M.-J. Congar, should have chronicled the Council as an “event” in his Council diary, describing it as a strenuous endeavour to engineer a paradigm shift within the Church. To attempt to re-design a Church model and ecclesiological paradigm which, in the course of the second millennium, had gradually moulded the hierarchical structure of the Church into a *societas perfecta* was, indeed, an “event of the Spirit”. A process bursting with tension, it marked a major move forward for the Church as it “went forth” and saw the emergence of a new “style” of Christianity. Having observed that the churches of the North had become “missionary terrain”, Congar noted as early as the 1950s that the Church “now needs to find a new style of manifesting its presence in the world”. “The Church should be more *in* the world and not so much *of* the world. It should simply be the Church of Jesus Christ – people’s conscience, shaped by the Gospel. I do wish it were so!”¹⁵ This is a Church “which not only forms the framework for people to ‘practice’ their ‘religion’, but also acts as a beacon which inspires faith and offers an environment in which people develop and nourish a mature faith.”¹⁶ The central documents of the Second Vatican Council reflect this paradigm shift away from a “self-focused” Church towards a mission-focused Church in the original sense of the word, a Church whose practice – i.e. its liturgy, catechesis and welfare work – must be understood primarily and fundamentally as coming from Jesus Christ and which manifests its true character with every new conversion. In the 1940s and 1950s Congar and other representatives of the *nouvelle théologie*, such as Jean Daniélou and Henri de Lubac, carried out studies on a new understanding of the role of bishops as

¹⁵ Congar, Yves, *Für eine dienende und arme Kirche*, Mainz 1965, 94-95.

¹⁶ Congar, Yves, *Christus in Frankreich*, in: *ibid.*, *Priester und Laien – Im Dienst am Evangelium*, Freiburg, Basel, Vienna 1965, 221-233, 229.

well as on the laity, mission and dialogue with non-Christian religions. These ideas were later picked up by the Council. Taking due account of a new "global horizon" with changes in the religious landscape and recognition of religious and cultural pluralism, the Church eventually arrived at a new definition of itself. It discovered its own "particularity", realising that it is "part" of a larger whole and that the Church, too, needs to be on the move – "to go forth" – towards this greater whole in its endeavour to impact "God's people". The Council defined this new understanding of being Church primarily by reference to the regional churches. "The individual bishops, however," it says in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, "are the visible principle and foundation of unity in their particular churches, fashioned after the model of the universal Church, in and from which churches come into being the one and only Catholic Church. For this reason the individual bishops [...] with the Pope represent the entire Church in the bond of peace, love and unity."¹⁷ The focus is on the collegiate character of the Episcopal bodies, on stimulating the foundation of bishops' conferences and on convening regional synods.¹⁸ The first and foremost task is to proclaim "the Gospel everywhere on earth."¹⁹ This is the function of a bishop, and the ministry of the Pope must be understood within this responsibility for the Gospel as a service to ensure the unity of the Church. These are the ecclesiological foundations for the rediscovery of partnership and a new understanding of the universal Church as partnership, as it derives its vibrancy from and within the dynamics associated with every new "central focus" on Jesus Christ, enabling the Church to go forth and enter new territories. The Church is mission-focused in its very essence. This means that the Christian faith can "emerge anew" and that new ways of living the faith can develop whenever there is a conversion to Jesus Christ through an encounter with Him, both in everyday life and in worship, and whenever we learn from and are challenged by others, along all the paths in this world and in the many communities which form along the way, seeking to serve others. Michel de Certeau, a French

¹⁷ *Lumen Gentium*: http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/val-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html, no. 23.

¹⁸ Das Zweite Vatikanische Konzil, Das Dekret über die Hirtenaufgabe der Bischöfe in der Kirche 'Christus Dominus', in: Rahner, Karl; Vogrmler, Herbert, *Kleines Konzilskompendium – Sämtliche Texte des Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzils*, Freiburg im Breisgau 2008, 274, no. 38.

¹⁹ *Lumen Gentium*, no. 23.

Jesuit, philosopher and religious scholar, put it like this: "Not without you as an individual", but "with all of you" – the new "style" of being a Christian manifests itself in a unremitting quest for Jesus Christ, the one who was resurrected to life by God, and in our bond with our brothers and sisters. The key to this new paradigm of "mission" is summed up in the word "partnership".²⁰

The Christological basis of partnership: contributing and participating

Pope Francis's Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* can be read as a stimulus to discover the universal Church in its manifestation of partnership. The Gospel "unfolds", faith "emerges anew" when life stories are shared, when Jesus Christ is discovered in every new encounter and bond with our neighbour, when we allow ourselves to be discovered by Jesus, when the challenge of His friendship pulls us out of all bondage, especially from self-imposed bonds that imprison us. By "being centred" upon Jesus Christ we allow ourselves to be "moved off-centre" and we rediscover the meaning of partnership: that we are part of a whole that is greater than we can imagine. Jesus Christ is the "stranger" who is always ahead of us, whom we can discover wherever there is both life and growth through and within the fellowships of so many communities along the way. That is where the Gospel is preached and where bread and wine are shared. The partnership of the universal Church grows wherever we count on God as our partner and where Jesus Christ is our companion, like the "stranger" on all the roads to Emmaus.

As the Second Vatican Council reminds us in its documents, particularly in its Dogmatic Constitutions on the Church and on Divine Revelation, it is through Jesus Christ that God made Himself a gift to humanity, sharing His very self with us. In his wisdom and goodness God chose "to raise men to a participation of the divine life."²¹ In Jesus

²⁰ Certeau, Michel de, *De la participation au discernement – Tâche chrétienne après Vatican II*, in: *Christus* 13 (1966), 518-537, 523: "[...] In the world the Church must continually discern that to which she testifies; moving along with people, she must always seek what she teaches; she can never acquire the truth nor can she have ultimate possession of it; such possession is continually removed from her in the name of that in which she believes and on which she lives. God never ceases to send her beyond her confines into exile, through encounters and through acts of care for the poor which initially throw her off balance but which then remind her of what she has always done 'in remembrance' and as a sign of the eternal covenant."

²¹ Dogmatic Constitution of the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vatii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html, no. 2.

Christ he gives us his friendship and addresses us as "friends",²² "This is my commandment: love one other, as I have loved you. No one can have greater love than to lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I shall no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know the master's business. I call you my friends, because I have made known to you everything I have learnt from my Father."²³ Jesus fulfilled this message when he gave his life for us on the cross. God's friendship breaks through all boundaries and overcomes every abyss of hatred and exclusion – this is the experience of resurrection, of life "in spite of it all", of life in abundance and of overcoming evil. This friendship challenges us to convert, i.e. to turn around, so that we go forth, contribute and participate. In the various communities along the way it means being committed to others, sharing our lives with them and in precisely this way – especially by sharing with those who hunger for love and for life – discovering and proclaiming Jesus Christ.

Regardless of whether partnership is practised at the different levels of Christian life, between local churches, religious communities and lay communities, among particular churches or in church aid organisations, it is always rooted in this process of discovery, in the love and friendship of God Himself, in the experience of the Spirit that we are "part" of God's greater whole and members of the people of God who are formed in this way. As the French Dominican, Marie-Dominique Chenu, once put it²⁴, the Church manifests its essence along many paths in the world, and that is precisely why partnership is the key word and the central element of this universal Church. It is challenging, but it is also comforting: Jesus Christ communicates himself to us through the experience of partnership, making us partakers of Himself and strengthening us in our faith, so that we experience ourselves as being "part" of the Body of Christ. It is only together, along all the paths of the world, that we grow into this Body. Whatever forms of partnership we create, they will remain fragments,

²² Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651118_dei-verbum_en.html, no. 2.

²³ John 15:12-15.

²⁴ Cf. the definition of universal Church given by Chenu, Marie-Dominique, *Volk Gottes in der Welt*, Paderborn 1968, 13: "In its search for itself, during which it employs its characteristic logic of an examination of conscience, the Church enquires about the world so that it can be itself."

i.e. partial. Just as Jesus Himself was broken for us along all the paths of His life, our own active "partaking" – or sharing – strengthens us as we proclaim the message of the Gospel in all broken, volatile and non-committed relationships, however fragmentary they may be.

Despite all the professionalism with which partnerships are handled in the universal Church and no matter how much they may be "success stories" – and we are pleased to say that there are many such stories in local churches and within Church aid organisations – they always carry the stigma of being no more than fragmentary. Yet when we expect God to act, when we open the door to the "stranger", the Gospel breaks through and we can hear Jesus Christ's cry of love as he heals wounds and opens up space for peace. By understanding the universal Church in terms of partnership, we gain a new understanding of mission where faith can come to the fore, where people can find their way into faith through their bond with others – however fragile this bond may be – and where, along the way, communities emerge that leave space for the "stranger".

Practising partnership – the universal Church as a learning community that seeks to form a new "style" of Christian identity

Practising such partnership today is essentially *provocative*. In a globalised world where every nook and cranny is covered by electronic media and GPS, a large number of new communication spaces have emerged. People move between a variety of spaces; "foreign lands" are no longer far away, and native roots have become fluid even if one's radius is limited to one's own "city". The social, cultural and economic realities of our urban conglomerations and megacities in this world have multiplied, and the city has become a space in motion for urban nomads. Everything is connected and networked, yet this situation is precisely what causes individualism and loneliness, where relationships between passers-by are fleeting, fragile, weak and marked by continuous detachment and new formation. If, therefore, Christians live in partnership, in the footsteps of Jesus Christ, not going with the flow of volatility and fluidity; if commitment is combined with responsibility and reliability; if viable networks are thus created along the many paths in this world, networks which are sustainable and conducive to the creation of communities; and if those networks question the manifold forms of economic, social and cultural exclusion and exclusiveness, then that is *provocative*: it is a visible sign that

the Kingdom of God is upon us and that the City of God is growing within the city of man. "It must reach the places where new narratives and paradigms are being formed, bringing the word of Jesus to the inmost soul of our cities."²⁵ Such partnership means "to live out our human life to the fullest and to meet every challenge as a leaven of Gospel witness in every culture and every city"²⁶. This is precisely what "will make us better Christians and bear fruit in our cities."²⁷ And this is also where the Church becomes truly universal, manifesting itself as partnership, and where it serves in a new "style" of Christian identity, a new presence of Christians in our – one – globalised world. When local churches, regional churches and the universal Church rediscover partnership, they become a "sign for the nations" in a new way – a "city on the hilltop".

This is provocative and challenging and, indeed, the reason why the partnership of the universal Church needs a diversity of expertise, professional support and, above all, the example of genuine partnership that has been lived out and practised over many years in the various networks at the levels of local churches, dioceses, religious communities and Church aid organisations in Germany. The universal Church in its partnership role assumes a variety of forms, as it is a community of prayer, learning and mutual care. The universal Church as partnership needs skilled theological support. It needs a theology which is an "essay" in itself, an exploratory movement that supports people who have their homes in different spaces in our – one – globalised world. Such a theology must embrace the intercultural hermeneutics model²⁸ presented by Paul Ricoeur. It must move along new paths of cultural translation, trusting in Jesus Christ's logic that is specific to this journey – a logic which supports a variety of ways in which we can allow others to help us abandon the focus on ourselves, to be challenged by them and thus to find our own identities in new ways.

Such a theology must unmask any lack of reconciliation and must know how to rekindle the ashes below the deep layers of culture.

²⁵ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 74.

²⁶ *ibid*, no. 75.

²⁷ *ibid*.

²⁸ Cf. also: Eckholt, Margit, *Poetik der Kultur – Bausteine einer interkulturellen dogmatischen Methodenlehre*, Freiburg im Breisgau 2002. *Ibid*, *Hermeneutik und Theologie bei Paul Ricoeur – Denkanstöße für eine Theologie im Pluralismus der Kulturen*, Munich 2002.

It must help us discover that pure spark of life which enables us to go forth. A "Church which goes forth", as Francis calls it in *Evangelii Gaudium*, is a mission-focused Church which accepts the challenge of partnership, because God Himself has partnered with man through Jesus Christ – a Church which accepts in trust that by going forth and continually bonding with others it will discover the face of Jesus Christ. This process of going forth is where mission has its starting point. In our unconditional commitment to others it means primarily "conversion", i.e. a turnaround, being set free from bonds which remove life, and going forth means entering into partnerships in which the "stranger" – Jesus Christ – joins us and our space of fellowship becomes the "sign" of the "city on the hilltop".