

## Some thoughts on the book *Mission Revisited: Between Mission History and Intercultural Theology* by Volker Küster (ed.) and its relevance for the Czech and Slovak churches

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This article sees its goal as twofold. First, it seeks to critically review the recently published book *Mission Revisited: Between Mission History and Intercultural Theology*.<sup>1</sup> Second, it pursues to search for relevant points the individual essays collected in the volume might have for mission and missiological reflection of Czech and Slovak churches. Therefore, there is a list of possibly relevant issues, formulated as (sometimes deliberately provocative) questions, at the end of every discussion of respective contributions to the volume.

The publication under review is the “*Festschrift*” in honor of Pieter Holtrop’s retirement as Professor of Missiology at the then Kampen Theological University in 2005.<sup>2</sup> The book focuses on the theme of a shift from mission history towards intercultural history of Christianity which has recently been taking place in the field of mission studies. It seeks to answer the question whether missiology should really be replaced by intercultural theology (p. vii). The latter is understood as a discipline firmly rooted in missiology, but it takes into account interconfessional/interreligious/intercultural differences more seriously, thus creating “a space for dialogue with ‘the other’” (p. viii); it is interpreted as a distinctly European endeavour.

In addition, the book pays tribute to the centenary of Edinburgh 1910. In his introduction, Volker Küster, the editor of the volume, recalls the slogan “evangelization of the world in this generation” which connects both conferences, while being critical of the more recent of the two for its failure to bring “evangelicals” and “ecumenicals” into a more fruitful interaction. Küster has it that the former dominated at Edinburgh 2010, with the latter being “mere spectators” (p. viii). Even though issues such as the preferential option for the poor and the necessity of contextualization has long been on the agenda joining both wings, much progress still needs to be done in other areas, such as interfaith dialogue.

Bringing together a rather manifold selection of texts, the volume is divided into four sections. The first and, to my mind, most important section, “Theological Perspectives”, opens with an essay by **Werner Ustorf**, entitled a bit provocatively “What’s Wrong with Mission History?” The author begins with a statement that missiology in general, and mission history in particular, has from the start been a controversial discipline, always forced to prove its *raison d’être*. In many respects, however, it has succeeded in these efforts establishing itself as a rigorous and legitimate discipline. Among many assets of mission history, Ustorf counts findings such as the emergence of indigenous forms of Christianity due to a “de-Protestantizing” drive of Protestant missions, the subversion of colonialism due to educational activities of Protestant missions, the end of Christendom as a result of the active support of the vernacular, and the spreading of new worldviews due to a vast amount of cultural and religious knowledge gathered by missionaries (pp. 3f.). Thus it can be said that mission had greatly contributed to pluralization, albeit often (perhaps) unintentionally.

Ustorf offers three scenarios for understanding mission history. First, it can be interpreted “narrowly” as “a phenomenon that is particular to the religious history of Europe in the modern era” (p. 5); as such, it can legitimately and more appropriately be replaced by non-Western church history. Secondly, according to a “broad” scenario, mission history relates to “the movement of Christianity among peoples, religions and cultures in general and

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<sup>1</sup> Volker Küster (ed.), *Mission Revisited: Between Mission History and Intercultural Theology*. Series *ContactZone: Explorations in Intercultural Theology*, Volume 10. Münster: LIT Verlag, 2010, ix + 184 pages. ISBN 978-3-643-90038-8.

<sup>2</sup> A shorter version of this article has been published in *Communio viatorum*, LIII, 1 (2011), pp. 117-128.

through the ages” (p. 6). The problem with this approach is, as Ustorf rightly observes, that it is essentialist (there is no such thing as *the* Christianity) and can only with difficulties defend its legitimacy vis-à-vis the work of church history. The third scenario has to do with the “spirit of the time”; for various, more or less noble reasons the term mission history has often been replaced by intercultural history of Christianity or intercultural theology. Ustorf attempts to do justice to all of these reasons, and yet he warns against disposing of the former term too readily. He wishes to acknowledge the achievements of the forefathers (cf. p. 8). Telling the Christian story from the perspective of a local indigenous community cannot provide the whole picture. Ustorf wants to discover and understand the motives of the missionaries, too. In other words, encountering other religions and cultures, Christianity not only changed them, but also was changed by them in turn. This change, Ustorf argues, not only gave rise to new Christianities, but also had an impact on the “old Christianity”, i.e. that of European missionaries. And intercultural theology with its focus on “the translation process and the local agent alone” (p. 9) is not up to the task of coping with this complex phenomenon. Therefore, Ustorf proposes an inter-culturally informed mission history which would be able to do justice to subtle complexities of global Christianity. He can defend this position because of his rather broad definition of mission as “Christian hope in action” (p. 13).

However, such an understanding of mission calls forth numerous doubts and one instantly recalls the words of scholars such as Stephen Neill who proclaimed that if everything is mission, then nothing is mission. One is also led to ask why Ustorf does not speak of history of Christianity (or perhaps of history of the Christian movement to sustain necessary dynamics) instead, and what difference there *really* is between his proposal and the scenario no. 2. Moreover, with respect to Ustorf’s correct and important emphasis that mission history is more than just church history, there is perhaps a latent but, nevertheless, substantial risk that one will begin to see this “Christian hope in action” among non-Christians, and be tempted to baptize them in a virtual way against their will (cf. “anonymous Christians”).

Issues possibly relevant for the Czech/Slovak context:

- What significance does denominationalism play in the Czech/Slovak context? Is the situation similar to or different from the one about which speak the results of Protestant mission historiography in general?
- What role has education played in the Christian missionary work in the Czech lands and in Slovakia? For example, did it help to eliminate the “colonial structure” in form of the Austro-Hungarian hegemony?
- What place does the use of the vernacular have in Czech/Slovak Christianity? Did the Czech/Slovak language play any role in Czech/Slovak foreign mission (e.g., Czech Jesuit missions)?
- Were Slovak and Czech missionaries also ethnologists, anthropologists, scholars of religions etc.?
- Does Ustorf’s thesis that mission has been one of the greatest contributing factors of pluralization also apply to the Czech/Slovak context?
- In what sense do Czech and Slovak churches understand the term mission history? Would it be a “narrow” or a “broad” sense of Ustorf division?
- What significance does *Zeitgeist* have with respect to intercultural theology?
- Is Czech and Slovak missiology “interculturally informed”?
- Are Slovak and Czech church historians/historians of Christianity ready to admit that mission history is a broader term than church history?

**Bert Hoedemaker’s** article (“Blind Alley or Through Traffic? On the Predicament of Mission History”) touches upon the issues of culture, religion and modernity, and their

interplay. The author argues that one is not able to speak about cultures in the world we live in, because cultures in the sense of distinct and distinguishable units are disappearing and culture (singular) as “the symbolic construction of community” (the term coined by Anthony Paul Cohen) is taking over instead. Such a concept of culture is characterized by “change, conflict, negotiation and redefinition of boundaries in the context of a sharpened awareness of the vastness and plurality of the cultural project of humanity as a whole” (p. 17).

Having first made some general remarks on the nature of contemporary culture, Hoedemaker goes on exploring the relationship between culture and religion. He reminds the reader of the observations of non-Western theologians such as A. Pieris and L. Sanneh for whom “all cultural activity is fundamentally religious” (p. 18). Hoedemaker’s own understanding, then, is that “culture is characterized by a continuous tension between religion and rationality” (p. 18f), adding that culture, rather than religion, is the proper focus for mission studies. However, the reader would like to see Hoedemaker elaborate the mutual relationship between these two, to a certain extent contradictory concepts (Sanneh, Pieris: culture is basically religious vs. Hoedemaker: religion is part of culture).

At this point of Hoedemaker’s considerations modernity comes into play. Hoedemaker significantly points out that the Western type of modernity is not the only one there is, and that even the modern culture is not completely secular as the 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed. All of these observations imply that the boundaries between religion, modernity, rationality and culture are very fluid and that these realities constantly influence each other. This interplay becomes even more complex due to additional factors such as the dynamics between an official religion and a local superstition or, *in abstracto*, between supra-local structuring and a local expression.

To apply his considerations to the context of mission history vs. intercultural history of Christianity, Hoedemaker argues that it is not of primary importance what terminology one uses; what matters is not to fall back to a view of cultures as separate units, but rather to consider various aspects of the interplay between culture, religion and modernity. In this regard Hoedemaker uses V. Küster’s term and speaks of the “third space” in the sense of “the space between the traditionally neatly defined religions and cultures, the space that indicates the basic movement that encompasses all religions and cultures, the space in which human beings have become migrants” (p. 23). This is the predicament of human culture and, to Hoedemaker’s mind, the term mission no longer helps in understanding it. Here, however, one should keep in mind the words of W. Ustorf from the first essay who argues that the term mission remains essential as the history of Christianity is much more complex than the mere sum of the translation process and the stories of local agents. After all, Hoedemaker himself still argues for the abiding validity of the missiological perspective as the eschatological critique is “the proper business of missiology” (p. 25). Important as this insight might be, it deserves a more detailed substantiation and explanation than Hoedemaker provides. As it is, this last idea gives an impression of a disparate addendum to an otherwise thoughtful study.

Issues possibly relevant for the Czech/Slovak context:

- In the Czech Republic and Slovakia, can one still speak of cultures (plural) as homogenous units or only of culture (singular) in the sense which Hoedemaker uses? Or is the situation different still, and there is one dominant traditional culture? If the latter is correct, how does one realize that one needs to deal with differences/alterity?
- How has the relation between religion and culture been perceived in the context of Czech and Slovak Christianity? Has the traditional view changed in the course of time (e.g., after ’89)?
- Due to its advanced secularization, the Czech Republic has traditionally been regarded as an exemplary model of the progress of modernity (industrialization – urbanization – secularization – atheism). Is this view (still) legitimate?

- What can be said about the relation between an official religion and a popular religion/superstition in the Czech and Slovak context?
- Are there conditions for the so-called “third space” ready in the Czech Republic and Slovakia? Is it something that the churches should aim for?

The third contribution to this section is written by **Philip Wickeri** and has the title “The End of *Missio Dei* – Secularization, Religions and the Theology of Mission”. At the beginning of his article, Wickeri makes two assumptions. First, religion comes before mission and, second, secularization has been closely associated with different notions of religion in the modern age. On the basis of these two assumptions, he goes on arguing that if they are correct, the concept of *missio Dei* comes to its end (p. 27). He insists that the dominant concept of *missio Dei* has precluded other approaches to mission. Drawing on the insights of Michael Nai-Chiu Poon, Wickeri’s critique could be summarized in two following points. First, the concept of *missio Dei* deprives people of responsibility and self-criticism (“It’s God’s work, not ours...”). Second, a focus on the particular, local, concrete, on the person, is very often lost in the name of abstract principles. Thus *missio Dei* becomes, for Wickeri, a totalizing grand narrative which devours all particularities and is able to justify virtually anything Christians do in the name of God’s mission (p. 42). Wickeri does not seek to replace *missio Dei* with another sophisticated concept. To his mind, mission is a call to particular encounter with real people and as such it involves listening to one’s partner in dialogue more than abstract conceptualizations.

Even though Wickeri’s arguments concerning *missio Dei* contain some credence, I do not find them completely convincing. First of all, the concept of *missio Dei* is, I believe, fully in accordance with the biblical idea of humans being God’s representatives on the earth which can be found throughout the whole Scripture. This idea presupposes a great amount of responsibility which has been given to humans by God and now they are supposed to act in God’s name, yet freely and with autonomy. Therefore, it is not the case that God only would be fully accountable and humans would merely stand by and watch. Second, Jesus himself perceived his mission as done in the name of and from the authority given by God. This perception, at the same time, did not prevent him from entering into close encounters with fellow humans and from listening to them – those are two important points which Wickeri emphasizes. Third, Christian mission is a multivocal and complex reality, and *missio Dei*, being such a broad term, has the potential to embrace its various aspects, thus underlining mission’s holistic and integral character, and, by implication, also the holistic and integral character of God’s providential care for the world. And finally, there is a methodological problem with Wickeri’s argument. He claims that religion comes before mission and that “secularization is inevitably bound up with different understandings of religion in the modern age” (p. 27). From these two assumptions he concludes that the concept of *missio Dei* is not useful anymore. I do not quite see why that must necessarily be the case.

However, in spite of these counter-arguments and doubts, Wickeri’s suspicion towards the concept should be accepted as a legitimate corrective to the dominant model.

Issues possibly relevant for the Czech and Slovak context:

- What role does the concept of *missio Dei* play in mission theology of the Slovak and Czech churches?
- What are the threats of this concept in the Czech and Slovak context?
- Can the concept proposed by Wickeri (listening, personal encounter) be helpful for the Slovak and Czech churches?
- How can the secularization in the Czech and Slovak context be characterized? Is there anything peculiar about it?

**Mechteld Jansen's** article ("God on the Border – Missiology as Critical Theological Guidance for Crossing Borders") begins with discussing different kinds of borders. The author concludes that borders can be both identity markers and barriers. In addition, they are frontiers which challenge people to "expand our relationships with others" (p. 49). She then goes on to the core of her argument, represented by her understanding of mission and, by implication, missiology. Jansen defines mission simply as "crossing borders" (ibid.). To my mind, this definition is too broad and vague as it might refer not only to mission, but also (and perhaps more obviously so) to such various endeavors as traveling, scientific research, getting to know people, and even smuggling or trespassing. Although Jansen herself acknowledges that not every crossing of a border is mission, she still does not specify her definition anywhere in the article. Similarly, missiology defined by her as "critical theological guidance for crossing borders" (ibid.) seems to be inadequate. Even though this definition sharply and legitimately foregrounds that missiology is supposed to unmask all border crossings which oppress people and suppress their freedom it fails to show what would be specifically theological (and, for that matter, Christian) about such an assessment. On the other hand, what should be appreciated is Jansen's emphasis on relational aspects of Trinitarian theology which ought to find an echo in missiology, too (pp. 51, 53).

Drawing on these insights, Jansen goes on sketching a development of a theology of migration. She suggests that migration theology is such a project which "finds reasons to view migration as positive, whatever its cost" (p. 54). However, I personally have many difficulties finding reasons it should be unconditionally so. For instance, the very fact that there is emigration/immigration due to political reasons such as civil wars can hardly be perceived positively.

Jansen continues with the statement that a theology of migration does not look down upon migrants as outcasts, but rather views them as "people with a mission, people who have answered a call by God" (p. 55). In this respect, she interprets the Great Commission of Matthew 28:19 and its "go ye" as an appeal to cross borders of gender, skin color, birth or nationality. My question is, however, whether migrants themselves identify with such an image, whether they see themselves as called by God.

In the final part of her article, Jansen focuses on border crossing in the European context. Specifically, she offers a brief description of the Central, Eastern and South-Eastern European situation as an example par excellence for the importance of critical consideration on the topic of border crossing. She also introduces the term *orthopatheia*, i.e. "practice of the right empathy for the happiness and suffering of the other" (p. 60), which, to her mind, is to be a guiding principle for missiological reflections.

Although Jansen does not thematize the relationship between missiology and intercultural theology, her contribution to the discussion on the issue is eminent as it shows particular intercultural implications of missiological reflection on the subject of crossing borders.

Issues possibly relevant for the Czech and Slovak context:

- What significant boundaries are there in the Czech and Slovak context? Are they positive or negative?
- In the situation of the Slovak and Czech churches, is it adequate to conceive of missiology as "critical theological guidance for crossing borders"?
- Is Jansen's interpretation of Matt 28:19 relevant for our context?
- What does *orthopatheia* particularly mean for the Czech and Slovak churches?

In his essay ("Landscape Retrieved – On Mission and Missiology"), **Pieter Holtrop**, the honored person himself, does not discuss the relationship between missiology/mission history and intercultural theology either. He accepts the enduring adequacy of the concept of

missiology, while insisting on its revision/reinterpretation from a post-colonial perspective. Right at the beginning of his paper, Holtrop verbalizes what he means when he says mission: it is the church/gospel in conversation with culture, politics, economy and religions (cf. p. 64). It is a bit of a shame that he does not have more to say on this subtle, yet significant distinction between the church and the gospel.

Holtrop then goes on criticizing the “traditional” model of colonialism as a black-and-white picture of the conquerors and the conquered. Finding support in the recent historiography of mission as well as anthropology, he argues that the reality was much more complex and the encounter between the colonizers and the colonized is to be viewed as a two-way traffic of influence; in this regard, Holtrop uses the term “long conversation”, coined by Jean and John Comaroff. Another useful concept is “contact zone”<sup>3</sup> which refers to “a social space where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination – like colonialism, slavery or their aftermaths as they are lived out across the globe today” (p. 66f). These insights drive Holtrop’s argument till the very end of his paper; for example, his analysis of Johan Coetzee’s novel *Disgrace* (1999) is heavily dependent on such a perspective.

Holtrop then concludes with some thoughts on missiology. In his understanding, a new theme of “empire”, referring to the idea of a new global order (p. 77) is central to missiological reflection. Therefore, he views missiology as critical investigation of this new world order. Challenging and seminal as this notion might be, I do not think it covers the whole “working field” missiology is supposed to do. Having obvious preferences for economic and political dimensions of the reality (or, in other words, for power relations), it emphasizes the structural aspect of missiological work at the expense of the individual/personal. Bearing these reservations in mind, Holtrop’s proposal still has the potential to become an important way of doing critical and engaged missiology.

Issues possibly relevant for the Czech and Slovak context:

- What does colonialism (“the imperial eye”, i.e. the coolly contemplating eye of the colonial usurper) mean in the Slovak and Czech context? Have we taken note of the shift to a postcolonial perspective at all?
- In the context of the Czech and Slovak churches, who are the colonizers and the colonized?
- Are there any examples of “contact zones” in the Czech and Slovak context?
- What is the significance of Holtrop’s definition of “empire” for our situation?
- Is Holtrop’s concept of missiology as “critical investigation of the new world order” principal and relevant for our situation?

**Martha Frederiks’** paper (“Mission or Submission? – From Mission History towards an Intercultural History of Christianity: Case Study The Gambia”) introduces the second section of the book, “Contextual Perspectives”. In contrast to Jansen and Holtrop, Frederiks explicitly addresses the issue of mission history vs. intercultural history of Christianity, and she argues quite strongly for a replacement of the former by the latter. Frederiks offers four reasons supporting her case. First, intercultural history is more sensitive to the marginalized and minorities and it also considers quiet voices from the underside of history. Second, intercultural history takes note of unique indigenous developments. Third, it marks down not only stories of missionary success, but also those of failure. And finally, intercultural history calls for revision and reassessment of historical sources and “facts”. It means that “well-

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<sup>3</sup> Introduced by Mary-Louise Pratt, the term has given name to the whole series of LIT Verlag, pursuing explorations in intercultural theology.

known old stories” told from the perspective of missionaries are re-told by indigenous agents, taking into account newly accredited sources (oral history).

In the present article, Frederiks foregrounds this last aspect. She presents two case studies – the stories of two indigenous Gambian clergymen (Roman-Catholic and Methodist) who were labeled as disobedient and incompetent by traditional European historians of mission – and shows (to my mind, more convincingly with the case of the Methodist minister than with the one of the Roman-Catholic priest) that writing an history of Christianity from an intercultural perspective can shed new light on seemingly clear issues and cases, thus developing a new sensitivity towards the stories of individual Christians as well as Christianities.

While Frederiks’ proposal sounds thought-provoking and helpful, I would appreciate if she defined her understanding of both mission history and intercultural history of Christianity in more detail. For instance, explicitly rejecting Ustorf’s interpretation of mission and, consequently, his defense of the discipline of mission history, Frederiks never responds to the challenge posed by Ustorf that by renouncing the concept of mission history, one would lose much valuable.

Issues possibly relevant for the Czech and Slovak context:

- What significance do the four arguments Frederiks proposes in favor of intercultural theology have in the context of the Czech Republic and Slovakia?
- Is there a need and necessity to revise and rewrite Czech and Slovak mission histories as well?
- How can one make sure that a revision be not biased?

**Gerard van ‘t Spijker’s** historiographical essay (“Who Will Write the History of Christianity in Rwanda?”) seeks to review works which have been published on the history of Christianity in Rwanda. Drawing the basic outline of such an historiography and paying particular attention to denominational differences, he then goes on to discuss in detail the issue of race with an attempt to revise the racist interpretation of Rwandanese society which had emphasized the “essential difference” between Hutu and Tutsi. The main thrust of the paper is then to offer a critique of the mainstream view of the history of Christianity in Rwanda, namely, that “the missionary movement, as represented in the first place by the Roman Catholic Church, is to blame for the antagonism between Hutu and Tutsi, and thus for the genocide” (p. 99). Referring to some recent historical studies by African scholars (Gatwa, Ntihinyuzwa) van ‘t Spijker argues that writing an history of Christianity in Rwanda is a complex and multi-faceted endeavor which should always take into consideration historical roots, and cultural, ethnic, political and religious peculiarities and shades. This new approach, to the author’s mind, is an outcome of the shift from mission history to intercultural history of Christianity.

Issues possibly relevant for the Czech and Slovak context:

- In the Czech Republic and Slovakia, is there a need to rewrite church history/history of Christianity in the sense that van ‘t Spijker regards, i.e. to take into account historical roots, cultural and ethnic peculiarities, political development, etc.?
- Would it not be more appropriate to speak about history of Christianity instead of church history in the Czech and Slovak context?

Using the image of “African killerbees”, **Tinyiko Sam Maluleke** (“The Africanization of Christianity and the Fate of Mission – Ten Theses on African Christianity”) introduces his thesis that “Africanization” is an ambivalent term, burdened by, *inter alia*, many prejudices and generalizations. Africanization does not necessarily have to be perceived as something positive, and this fact, by implication, applies to African Christianity or Christianity in Africa

as well. Maluleke makes an important point that African Christianity, as a sub-division of so-called World Christianity, is regarded as idiosyncratic or obscure and exotic in relation to mainstream, i.e. European and North American Christianity. He uses an analogy from the field of music where one speaks of mainstream music (classical, jazz, rock, pop, etc.) and world music, meaning “the ethnic music of strange instruments and weird languages” (p. 110). There are, obviously, many problems connected with this view. Maluleke mentions two of them. First, as African Christianity along with all those other World Christianities is becoming the majority Christianity, it is not so easy to say what Christianity is the norm today. Second, it is often forgotten that there is not only one African Christianity, but rather “a cluster of different Christianities”, and one should always keep in mind this internal plurality and dynamics.

Afterwards, Maluleke introduces his ten theses on African Christianity. Strictly speaking, the first two (1. Christianity has become a world religion; and 2. the world is full of Christianities) are not explicitly referring to African Christianity, but rather constitute its context, together with thesis 3 (African Christianity is plural, not singular) immediately drawing on thesis 2. Thesis 4 (African Christianity exists and has always existed in dialogue), and to a certain extent perhaps also thesis 3, should, to my mind, reflect on the fact that in Africa there are also Christians who perceive themselves in exclusivist terms and discourage plurality and dialogue. The remaining theses (5. majority of the poor and marginalized; 6. central role of the Bible, Jesus and Spirit; 7. the transcending of the borders of Africa and Africans; 8. African theology as a window to African Christianity; 9. both a negative and positive potential with regard to current challenges of the world; and 10. the human is the African) complete the picture of African Christianity Maluleke draws.

In the conclusion, the author emphasizes that mission is something Christians cannot renounce, and therefore he intends on retaining missiology/mission history, too. However, these concepts must be understood anew in a way which puts accent on such aspects as dialogue, empowerment and survival.

Issues possibly relevant for the Czech and Slovak context:

- In the Czech Republic and Slovakia, can we speak of Christianity or rather Christianities?
- Are Maluleke’s theses relevant for the Czech and Slovak churches in the sense that we could analogically apply them to our own context (i.e. African Christianity – Czech/Slovak Christianity)?

The third section of the volume, focusing on “Gender Perspectives”, opens with the paper by **Gunilla Gunner and Karin Sarja**, entitled “Paradoxes and Challenges – Gender Perspectives in Mission History”. Acknowledging that there are numerous aspects the research on mission and gender can aim at, the authors choose to pursue the question, in what way, if any, women involved in patriarchal missionary structures transcended traditional boundaries, thus emancipating themselves from these patriarchal structures. Gunner and Sarja present two case studies – the stories of two Swedish woman missionaries, Hedvig Posse and Nelly Hall. The researchers discover that women of the Swedish church were “allowed to preach to black people in Africa but not to white (men) in Sweden” (p. 115). The idea behind this fact was that Africans were seen like children and therefore the required level of theological competence for their evangelization was not as high as for that of white people. Although perhaps promising in its title more than it actually can discuss on the space given, Gunner and Sarja’s paper represents a significant contribution to mission studies as it demonstrates subtle and intricate, yet important interconnections between gender and race issues.

Issue possibly relevant for the Czech and Slovak context:

- What is the situation of women in the Czech/Slovak churches and mission organizations? Are they fully-fledged missionaries/church workers?
- Does a missiological research from a gender perspective with regard to the Czech/Slovak context have a potential to bear fruit similar to the one done by Gunner and Sarja (with regard to possible interconnections between gender and race/ethnic issues)?
- Is it also possible in the Czech/Slovak context to find the examples of significant women who have overcome and/or markedly affected traditional patriarchal structures?

**Mery Kolimon's** article ("Reconsidering Mission in East Nusa Tenggara Province, Indonesia – A Feminist Postcolonial Perspective on Mission History and Intercultural Theology") has a goal to "revisit the understanding and practice of mission in the history of Protestantism" (p. 127) on the example of two Protestant Churches from the Indonesian province of East Nusa Tenggara. As far as her method is concerned, she decides to write from a postcolonial feminist perspective. The contribution of Kolimon's article is that it provides a detailed and insightful account of not only the histories of the two churches, but also a broader picture of Dutch mission in Indonesia in the colonial period. Moreover, the author identifies major problems related to Christian mission in the period under discussion (1700s – World War II), particularly the idea of mission as a one-way movement, hierarchical leadership, inferior status of women, and disempowerment of local energies. Finally, Kolimon attempts to suggest an appropriate concept of mission and missiology for today. She stresses, first of all, that Christian mission should be truly a multi-directional movement with two interrelated aspects: universal and local/contextual. Therefore, she is in favor of understanding missiology as intercultural theology, or even more precisely, as "inter-contextual" theology as context includes not only culture, but also economy, politics, environment, gender, etc. Bearing in mind her own Indonesian context – the context of the two discussed churches – Kolimon argues that mission needs to be interpreted as empowerment of the poor, and as reconciliation.

My biggest problem with Kolimon's otherwise fine essay is methodological. I do not quite see why her approach ought to be presented specifically as a "feminist perspective", something the author insists on so vehemently. I can recognize the postcolonial perspective in her method, but a uniquely feminist part escapes my understanding.

Issues possibly relevant for the Czech and Slovak context:

- What does it mean to write history of mission/Christianity from a postcolonial feminist perspective in the context of the Czech Republic and Slovakia?
- What does it mean specifically in our situation that mission is a "multi-directional movement"?
- How can be mission understood as empowerment of the poor and as reconciliation in the context of the Czech Republic and Slovakia?

The final section is labeled as "Methodological Perspectives" and it contains two articles. **Alle G. Hoekema's** essay "Wonderful Fools – 'Christ-like' Characters in Three Modern Asian Novels" aims to explore significance of analyzing literary works within missiology or, for that matter, contextual theology. Although Hoekema does not discuss the adequacy of the two terms, one can feel that he has his doubts whether it is necessary that missiology be replaced by or renamed to intercultural theology (cf. p. 159). In this paper, Hoekema pursues the theme of a "Christ-like figure" in three modern Asian novels: *Wonderful Fool* (1959) by Shusaku Endo, *Ikan-Ikan, Hiu, Ido, Homa* (1983) by Yusuf B. Mangunwijaya, and *The God of Small Things* (1997) by Arundhati Roy. Hoekema focuses on answering two questions. First, whether the authors want to be deliberately Christian authors,

and, second, whether the readers can legitimately perceive the characters from the books as Christ-like figures (p. 147). While Hoekema does, to my mind, a convincing job showing the “Christ-like” features of the protagonists in the respective books, he is far less strong with regard to the issue of the authors’ intention. For example, when discussing Endo, Hoekema only briefly notes that the Japanese author deals with many main themes from Christianity “as if it was his fate to write about these subjects” (ibid.). And from that moment on, especially in the final comparison, Hoekema takes for granted that Endo is intentionally “Christian”. Nevertheless, Hoekema’s article represents a significant methodological contribution as it challenges the traditional “hard-core” scholarly approach to theology by its willingness to take into consideration also the role of literature and art. And Hoekema believes that missiology/intercultural theology is, by definition, the most suitable of all theological disciplines to reflect on these issues because it is not “clinging to western patterns and paradigms” (p. 160) as much as other theological disciplines.

Issues possibly relevant for the Czech and Slovak context:

- In which Slovak and Czech literary works can the motive of a Christ-like figure be found?
- What other specific works of art from our context could be used for a missiologically relevant analysis?

**Volker Küster**, the editor of the volume under review, closes the whole book with his article “Folk Art as Means of Communicating the Gospel? – The Paper Cuttings of He Qi”. This essay, which is a revised translation of Küster’s earlier study, analyzes paper cuttings by the Chinese Christian artist He Qi (b. 1950). Doing his work, He Qi seeks to produce indigenous Christian art, thus helping to overcome a – in his opinion – false perception of Christianity as a Western religion (“One more Christian, one less Chinese.”). In his paper, Küster makes this emphasis his focal point, and using examples from He Qi’s paper cuttings, he explores the issue of contextualization of the gospel. Küster shows that when one pursues the relationship between the gospel and culture, the concept of accommodation (the “kernel and husk” metaphor) sometimes proves to be inadequate. The relationship between the two is more complex (the “onion” metaphor: “trying to find the kernel, only the skin remains”, p. 171); the gospel is inculturated. Therefore, Küster suggests perceiving both accommodation and inculturation in a flowing transition. While both accommodation and inculturation remain human efforts, the proclaimed gospel finds its own way, thus transcending human influence (ibid.). With such an understanding, Küster proposes a fresh and stimulating approach to the issue of the relationship between missiology and intercultural theology.

Issues possibly relevant for the Czech and Slovak context:

- Are there any authentic Czech/Slovak artistic expressions of the gospel?
- Showing parallels between symbols, used in traditional Chinese art, and in some of He Qi’s paper cuttings, Küster hopes that perhaps “Chinese Christians discover a typology of Christ rising out of their own tradition, which is already evident in the reception history of the patristic and medieval exegesis” (p. 169). Is there to be found such a distinct typology in the Czech/Slovak tradition?
- In his work, He Qi also refers to non-Christian (religious) symbols such as Yin-Yang. Is such a use of non-Christian “material” legitimate and admissible?
- Is Küster right in his claim that the relationship between the gospel and culture cannot be understood in terms of “kernel and husk” only, but also in terms of “onion”?

*Mission Revisited* is a remarkable and important book. Even though it suffers from some maladies characteristic for the *Festschrift* genre, especially a somewhat broadminded and vague understanding of the connection of certain essays from the collection to the main

theme, the book significantly moves the discussion on the future of missiology/intercultural theology as a discipline forward. It symptomatically shows that there are many interpretations of the issue and many different visions for this future; even the very definitions of the basic terms vary. Therefore, there is a certain “non-parallelism of horizons” and even some misunderstandings.

The book ends on an open note. The discussion thus goes on. And whoever wants to be part of this discussion should not miss this volume.