

Comment to the Keynote of Rev. Dr Anne Burghardt

Church and society – changing landscapes

International Mission Partnership Consultation, 29 August 2024

I need to begin by quoting something that the former president of the US said only a week ago at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago: “I am the only person stupid enough to speak after her.” He was speaking about Michelle Obama – I´m speaking about Anne Burghardt. So, thank you for your inspiring keynote, madame GS.

For the information of the audience, it was only few years ago that AB and I were colleagues and members of the LWF staff. Hence, we have grown in that same soil. Maybe this is why it is so easy to recognize and agree with what you were saying.

But let me build on your thoughts and continue from there with two threads of thought: history, diversity, and then add one more thread regarding the Eucharist.

You mention history as one of the identity building or identity shaping factors of individuals and communities is history. Our identity, our theological thinking, our spirituality, are not monolithic never-changing elements of our life – but rather ever-changing, living and developing streams that is shaped by the interaction between us and our Creator, to continue the reflection of Dr, Nalwamba in her keynote yesterday.

Out of all the factors you mention – social, biological, spiritual, economic and historical the last one is probably the most misused one – just listen to the various twisted excuses called “the history” given to the violence in the Holy Land, the aggression of Russia, the misuse of power in Afghanistan, the violence in Sudan, Myanmar...

Yes, one of the biggest crisis of our times is the crisis of critical, research based information which it is challenged by hybrid operations, alternative truths, and just simple lies. As you said, it is understandable that in the middle of multiple crisis, or if I quote Dr Alexander Stubb, the president of the republic of Finland, in the middle of “the new world disorder” – we tend to seek simple answers and simplified solutions.

This is where churches can act, and indeed have acted, as counterbalance. I take the Lutheran-Catholic dialogue process From Conflict to Communion published in 2013. It is a text where we tell the history of the reformation for the first time together – not two competing narratives, but a shared history. That was and is a history that is healing memories and liberating us to witness and serve together.

Secondly, diversity. Unity in reconciled diversity. Indeed, it is unity, not uniformity. As the members of the body of Christ we all have our different gifts and different functions. But these are not based on a

group where we could be located based on age, gender, family, language, physical abilities. Our tasks and functions in the body of Christ are based on something far more subtle: the fine piece of art composed by multitude of features that makes me me, you you, each one of us, so unique, unique Imago Dei.

It is indeed communion that is the space for celebrating this diversity. And I am now talking about the Eucharistic communion.

If we look for the church, or the society, or the world where we are living and witnessing from the perspective of the Eucharistic table, none of it looks the same anymore.

Participating in Mission Dei is about inviting everyone to gather around the same table, to break the bread and to share the cup. yes, unity is a gift from God – not our choice but the new reality that exists because we all live in communion with Christ.

Gathering around the same table is a visible sign of this unity. We gather to receive Christ who gives himself for us and for the world. Today ´s theme is “Forgive us our trespasses”. When praying it, we pray for reconciliation. But when we continue the Lord ´s Prayer “as we forgive those who trespass against us” we pray that God would transform us.

Transformation takes place when the Broken Christ sends us to the broken world for the sake of healing – and not just the healing of the world but for the healing of us, the brokenness of our relationships as churches, as families, communities, human beings.

The reality of the Kingdom of God is interacting with the realities of this world. The Eucharist is the gate between the two realms. It is at the centre, and not just at the centre but in the centre, of the authenticity of the Christian witness. And everything else flows from there.