Special IAMS Europe Issue

Locating European Missions in a Wounded World

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Living and believing in an unstable and vulnerable world has become the prevailing experience and challenge for most societies worldwide, and so too for many parts of Europe, as we move further into the 21st century. Progressive thinking has been stalled for some time now, with no clear vision forthcoming for our common future, giving way to different forms of retrotopian nostalgia which pronounce revisionist hopes of an imagined past. Recent analysis, however, proposes to read the profound changes, risks, and vulnerabilities of our current world as being part of a deep transformation.

Against such a backdrop, IAMS Europe coordinated a conference entitled “Locating European Missions in a Wounded World in Deep Transformation,” held from 23rd to 27th August 2019 at the SVD Mission House compound at Sankt Augustin (Germany). Around 90 scholars and scholar-practitioners of mission studies, intercultural theology, and related fields participated and engaged in that theme in 20 plenary lectures and 25 small-group paper presentations. Some of the keynotes are assembled here in this special issue, while others will follow in *Mission Studies* 38.1 (2021).

Wounds and Transformation. To set the stage of the conference, the Board of IAMS Europe invited ROBERT SCHREITER (Chicago) to help chart the above thematic impulse in an opening keynote and to explore the current situation for engaging in mission in Europe at the present time. His paper notes that Europe is living in a situation “between the times” that is marked by breakdown of established social patterns, widening divisions, and a sense of loss of

control. He suggests that in such times, it is important to see paradox where others see polarities, and look for the clues of a new framework for understanding what the *missio Dei* means. This is explored under two rubrics: the woundedness of the world and the need for deep transformation. The deep wounds Europe carries on many fronts can be addressed by a spirituality of seeing baptism as entering into the death and resurrection of Christ. The need for deep transformation calls forth practices of ongoing conversion, kenosis, building community, and prophetic witness. Such acknowledgment of wounds and these four practices, Schreiter claims, can prepare us to seek a new framework for mission for Europe today.

Religion and Politics of the Wounds. As wounds of the past as well as our present life in a wounded world continue to shape Europe's collective memories and identities, wounds become the battle ground for various political, cultural, and religious interests and come to be seen as obstacles or resources for transformation, social, and religious change. ANDRÁS MÁTÉ-TÓTH (Szeged) explores this exemplar for Central and Eastern Europe today. Long positioned at the crossroads of major cultural and political hegemonies, Central and Eastern Europe's collective memory is marked by major haunting historical wounds (traumas), which have a determining impact on its capacity for social and religious transformations: the lack of national sovereignty; the refusal to allow the practicing of minority rights; a politically determined social mobility; the persecution of religions, churches, and dissidents; and genocides and other mass killings. His paper explores how, in midst of the presence and political instrumentalization of such wounded collective identities, present-day missionary capacity of the churches and of Christian theology can be perceived.

Ambivalences in Mission ad Vulnera. In acknowledging the wounds in various European regions and beyond, conference participants came to see how Christian missions, churches, and theologies are both complicitly entangled with wounded worlds and transformative for them. Various conference contributions, either drawing on historical and postcolonial studies or systematic theological reflections, hinted at the ambivalence of theologies of vulnerability and of missions *ad vulnera*. JUDITH GRUBER (Leuven) reflects on salvation in a wounded world. The long legacy of colonial entanglement in mission is still around when reflecting on evangelization. This has implications for the missiological and mission historical discourse, as the epistemological frames are in need of re-composition. The traditional teleological orientation of mission, salvation, and redemption require a new articulation and, according to her, "spectral" elements will play an important role in an actualized vision of mission in a wounded world. MIRIAM LEIDINGER's (Cologne) contribution delves into the ambivalences of the concept of vulnerability. There is of course

the threat and menace of pain and suffering, but it also opens another dimension: in becoming vulnerable, a capacity for communication, for solidarity, and for humanity come to the fore. Different theological approaches highlight aspects of faith and indeed of a God who has become vulnerable and thereby near to humanity.

Missionary Spirituality: Towards Deep Transformation. As the conference revisited theologies of mission, and primarily mission *ad vulnera* in light of recent shifts in theology and contexts, where vulnerability and deep transformation have long been reflected, special focus was placed on areas of a missionary spirituality towards deep transformation and samples of their cultural locations in contemporary Europe. Such spirituality is grounded in profound humility. It is carried by an understanding that the *missio Dei* will bring the world to its deep transformation and final reconciliation. Human cooperation in it is marked by kenosis through baptism, ongoing conversion, building community, and prophetic witness.

IDA MARIE HØEG (Agder) explores and reflects on new locations and meanings of baptism in the Norwegian context by focusing on the social-economic transformation of the society and how this has impacted the parents' generation and the transmission of Christian tradition. Her essay examines empirical studies of parents who are themselves baptized in the Church of Norway but have opted out infant baptism for their child. MARIE-HÉLÈNE ROBERT (Lyon) reflects on community building in rural parishes in France and their difficulties to conceive of themselves as missionary in the 21st century. She is able to show how original initiatives emerging from the laity, new communities, and bishops seek to address this challenge of church renewal. While analyzing such initiatives, new issues for ecclesiology and understanding of ministries emerge. The charisms of the laity and ordained ministries are gifts of God and articulated to each other by the Holy Spirit in the aim of communion. While the parish is a central and singular locus, it is neither isolated nor exclusive in relation to other ecclesial places or mission territories. Finally, from an Orthodox tradition, CRISTIAN SONEA (Cluj) elaborates the Orthodox understanding of Christian witness and its implications for human society, articulating the concept of the "liturgy after the Liturgy" within the wider framework of creation as the first sacrament. For him, this means that solidarity and social engagement for the transformation of the world are not separated from a sacramental and eucharistic understanding of faith: as the eucharist represents the entirety of the divine and human encounter, solidarity and social engagement acquire a sacramental dimension.

In concluding, we want to thank the Divine Word Missionaries and the Steyler Missionswissenschaftliches Institut in Sankt Augustin for having been

such generous and welcoming hosts. We also wish to thank all contributors, regional missiological networks, and various sponsors who enabled and supported the conference. Particular thanks go to the former and current members of the Board of IAMS Europe for their dedication and enthusiasm, which allow for ongoing, rich cross-regional and ecumenical missiological conversations in wider Europe: *Far Eastern Europe and West Central Asia*: Alison Ruth Kolosova (Alatyr), Pavlo Smytsnyuk (Lviv), Ani Ghazaryan Drissi (Jerevan / Geneva); *Central and Eastern Europe*: Dorottya Nagy (Budapest / Amsterdam / Münster), Klara-Antonia Csiszar (Cluj / Linz); *Southeast Europe / S-Europe*: Cristian Sonea (Cluj-Napoca), Katerina Pekridou (Brussels / Volos), Bryan Lobo SJ (Rome); *Western Europe*: Marie-Hélène Robert (Lyon), Gilles Vidal (Montpellier), Norbert Hintersteiner (Münster), Christian Tauchner, SVD (Sankt Augustin), Katharina Peetz (Landau); *North/N-West Europe*: Nigel Rooms (Leicester), Kari Storstein Haug (Stavanger), and Jonas Adelin Jørgensen (Copenhagen).

When we carried out the IAMS-Europe 2019 Conference, we did so mostly as regional European preparation and contribution towards the announced 15th IAMS General Assembly in Sydney on “Powers, Inequalities, and Vulnerabilities: Mission in a Wounded World.” At that point, we certainly did not have the slightest idea of how, only a year after the conference, experiences of wounds and vulnerability and subsequent transformations could have affected us to such extent, both regionally and globally. Certainly, with the Covid-19 pandemic, a new form of global vulnerability and social transformation has come about for all of our societies in an unexpected manner and degree. However, while we are all experiencing some aspects of this threat, not everyone is affected in the same way or to the same degree. The realities of inequality, injustice, and lack of protection in face of vulnerability have become very painful and disturbingly clear in the midst of this current crisis—challenging better-off societies as well as Christian missions, in view of their complicities and entanglements with privilege in today’s wounded and vulnerable world, requiring ongoing transformation in Christian witness.