

The Need of Intercultural Competence in Missions abroad – *Philosophical Approach*

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This presentation will deal with three key notions in order to address the Topic of this Afternoon

A | PHILOSOPHY –

or the Love of Wisdom

B | CULTURE –

or the Love of Peace

C | INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE –

or the Love of Humanity

A | Philosophy & Reason

- Philosophy means: love (philo) of wisdom (sofia)
- Philosophy means too: to try to understand the transcendental preconditions for what is existing on Earth (Kant)
- Philosophy deals with Knowledge (episteme) not with Opinion (doxa); Philosophers do not know more than others, but all better than them (no *linear progress*, but dialectical *reflection spiral*)
- Philosophy has always an hermeneutical character: it's about understanding, finding out what lies behind, in the shadow of common sense and public opinion
- Philosophy may be divided into:
 - ▶ Theoretical Philosophy (what can I know)
 - ▶ Practical Philosophy (what shall I do)
 - ▶ Spiritual Philosophy (what may I believe)

B | Culture & Peace

- Culture – like Tradition – has to do with “Survival”.
- Culture could be addressed as a successful technique of how to survive the natural and social challenges of people
- Often also Religion – culturally seen – shows a way how to lead a substantial life with success and happiness (because God Father never would command us a unhealthy and insane Way of Life).
- If it is true (from Heraclitus up to Heidegger) that War / Polemos / Conflict is the truth of our out-of-paradise world, than Peace has to be understood as eternal struggle against War / Polemos / Conflict.
- Peace has to be realised as a product of human cultural commitment and not as an pseudo-ideal “state-of-nature”

B | Culture & Human Rights

- Culture enables the Human Survival against Polemos
- Culture is, phenomenologically said, the particular way how to survive as a human being in a particular space at a particular time in particular circumstances
- Human Rights are of universal character, the concrete person is of individual character – but there has to be something in between, if one wants to take both seriously – the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Individual Lives of the people.
- Reason is essentially dialectical: between the Universality of the Declaration and the Individuality of the concrete human being – there has to be the sphere of Particularization of the Universal down to the Concrete.

- **Is there a Geostrategic or Militarystrategic Impact of Culture at all? And is therefore a relevance of Intercultural Competence at all?**
- **Prof Samuel P. Huntington**
- 1996: *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*
- 2000: *Culture Matters. How Values Shape Human Progress*
- 2004: *Who Are We? The Challenges to America's National Identity*
- **Col Thomas X. Hammes**
- 2005: *The Sling and the Stone: On War in the 21st Century*

C | Intercultural Competence & Peace

- One has to understand that Culture is the sphere of survival, the social commitment to peace
- Therefore Intercultural Competence means to understand other nations' or regions' cultural heritage & experience.
- This heritage & experience can best be understood by understanding the challenges having to be met by the development of these cultural substance
- Eurocentric approach is therefore not only “unfair” and “arrogant”, but also “unreasonable”: it simply does not make any sense to expect everywhere on Earth the same space-time circumstances as in Europe or North America – and afterwards to be surprised that our concepts are fruitless and therefore failing

- But does that mean one has to accept – like Kismet – the cultural characters of all societies on Earth? Even if this culture is built on suppression and violence?
- Culture is reasonably necessary in order to understand the whole of Human Mankind: between the individual concrete human Being up to the Universal Principle of Human Dignity.
- And here lies the key to the problem: in the hermeneutical analysis whether some aspects of “culture” are really linking the Individual with the Universal Principle, particularizing the Universal down to the Individual – or by simply ignoring every momentum of the Universal Human Dignity in the name of cynical Power Misuse.

- The direction of a possible solution of the problem “*How to respect a foreign Culture without blue-eyed collaborating with cynical criminals*” lies in something to be established and developed in this more and more globalised World:
- Cultural Hermeneutics, a discipline of (self)criticism of Cultures in the light of the question: does (this) Culture really unite and link the Universality of Human Mankind and the Individuality of the concrete Person? Or is it only an instrument of power abuse and suppression? in short:
- Does Culture have a transcendental character? As Law has for Kant in making Human Freedom possible on a national level, Culture has to make Human Dignity possible on a global level.

- Besides the spiritual dimension of the Catholic Church one could try to take the “*catholic*” concept of the Roman Church as such a “culture sensible” approach towards the dialectical structure of Earth Cultures: to create Unity in the Diversity of the Children of God Father.
- At the End we return back to the beginning: Philosophy as the Power of Reason. It may be enough to mention “Fides et Ratio” (1998), or stress the Platonic dimension of underlying St. Augustine: It is the identity of Reason and Faith which lets “Dialectics” be not only interesting, but in the end “true” and “good” and “beautiful”. Therefore one has to really understand the other Culture before one is able really to do Peacework in this Culture and for this Culture and its people.

- But there is one precondition for that: If one wants to understand another Culture in order to be able to help substantially and sustainably in a Peace Mission ...
- ... one has first to understand one's own Culture, one has to know one's own Culture – that means to know who one really is – how one's own Culture is to be taken...
- **γνῶθι σεαυτόν** (Heraklitus, Oracle of Delphi (Apollo Temple)... the biggest problem of the „West“, indeed: due to partly educational and civilizational ignorance, partly due to a counterproductive cultural self-denial in the last 50 years – we don't dare and don't manage to know who we are (especially in the German Speaking World) – our self-understanding and our self-respect are based only on economic success here and now.....

Fides & Ratio (1998)

- „...The need for a foundation for personal and communal life becomes all the more pressing at a time when we are faced with the patent inadequacy of perspectives in which the ephemeral is affirmed as a value and the possibility of discovering the real meaning of life is cast into doubt. This is why many people stumble through life to the very edge of the abyss without knowing where they are going. At times, this happens because those whose vocation it is to give cultural expression to their thinking no longer look to truth, preferring quick success to the toil of patient enquiry into what makes life worth living. With its enduring appeal to the search for truth, philosophy has the great responsibility of forming thought and culture; and now it must strive resolutely to recover its original vocation...“

- *Thank you very much for your patient attention!*