

## Missionary Self in Cross-Cultural Mission: A Cultural Psychological Analysis of Protestant Mission Practice

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# Missionary Self in Cross-Cultural Mission: A Cultural Psychological Analysis of Protestant Mission Practice

*Maik Arnold*

## 1. Introduction

Religiously motivated missions are part of a long historical tradition in various world religions. Missions are usually regarded as undertakings to propagate, spread and communicate religious beliefs, values and convictions across social, ethnic and cultural boundaries. Missionaries as the agents of mission attempt to convert and proselytise non-believers or those with other cultural backgrounds and religious traditions. In this transformative process, experiences of cross-cultural difference, alienation and otherness undoubtedly play a crucial role. These kinds of experiences have not yet been systematically analysed nor has research on cross-cultural mission and intercultural communication<sup>1</sup> provided the necessary knowledge in terms of culture-related learning and the psychological and sociological implications for mission practice. Although various models of acculturation<sup>2</sup> have demonstrated some evidence for sojourners' adaptation to foreign cultures and have stimulated empirical research on different professional groups,

they have also perpetuated an essentialist (nation-bound) concept of culture as well as a normative outlook on „adjustment“ that is neither fully compatible with current cultural-anthropological concepts of culture nor with the complexity of today's globalized societies and multi-cultural identities.<sup>3</sup>

Despite the huge importance of and the need to explain and understand the psychosocial facets of acculturation and cross-cultural transition of different groups of sojourners (e.g. managers, students, development aid workers),

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<sup>1</sup> For an overview to research on sojourners' acculturation and cultural adjustment in foreign cultures as well as the need of cross-cultural and cross-sectional competences and skills in the field of intercultural communication see e.g., Deardorff, *The Sage Handbook*; Matsumoto, *APA Handbook*.

<sup>2</sup> These have been extensively discussed in research literature on cultural adjustment and culture-shock, cf. e.g. Sam and Berry, *The Cambridge Handbook*; Ward, et al., *The Psychology of Culture Shock*.

<sup>3</sup> Weidemann, *A Cultural Psychological Approach*, 1.

very little is known about the changes in the self-concepts of missionaries which often occur implicitly in transition to other cultural environments. Experiences in cross-cultural mission may not only refer to clashes of different, partly incompatible, cultural life forms, but can also provoke transformations in the agents' personal identity and, furthermore, even enlarge their opportunities and potential for culturally appropriate action. For this reason, Colleen Ward defines intercultural learning as the holistic process that is initiated by 'cultural contact', involves affective, cognitive and behavioural psychic identity management and aims at achieving certain 'adjustment outcomes'.<sup>4</sup> Insofar, intercultural learning in cross-cultural mission can be regarded as a process of change in missionaries' dispositions, behaviour and potential for action because of experiences of cultural difference in cross-cultural encounters. According to Geoffrey Navara and Susan James, such processes of acculturation and strategies of coping are no different for missionaries than for other groups of sojourners.<sup>5</sup> Although the effects of missionaries' religious orientations to their coping in stressful situations have not been sufficiently empirically analysed, the present study will provide some evidence in that direction.

It aims at countering the theoretical, practical and methodological limitations of research on acculturation by means of a cultural psychological analysis of intercultural learning in the mission with regard to the transformation of the missionary self. The basic research question is this: how do missionaries experience cross-cultural differences and, more specifically, how do these experiences affect the self in the process of acculturation? To meet this research objective, first we need to open up scientific investigation of the missionary self to the insights of cultural psychology, thereby shedding light on how a missionaries' personal identity is shaped by the experiences of cross-cultural difference and alienation in the field. Second, within the scope of this investigation post-mission narratives from German Protestants are analysed against the background of their experiences and expectations, actions and orientations in cross-cultural ministry. These autobiographical narratives contain a rich collection of lived experiences of being and acting in missions. Our elaborations will focus on German Protestants, an experienced group of missionaries which has been part of the authors' own empirical research.<sup>6</sup> Lastly, this article discusses the empirical results and the implications of this kind of research for mission practice.

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<sup>4</sup> Ward, et al., *The Psychology of Culture Shock*, 187.

<sup>5</sup> Navara and James, *Acculturative Stress of Missionaries*, 52.

<sup>6</sup> Arnold, *Das religiöse Selbst in der Mission*, 349-553.

## 2. Interculturality, Acculturation and the Self

In order to understand the missionary self we need to approach cross-cultural mission from an interdisciplinary perspective. Mission studies and cultural psychological research are considered as two complementary fields of scientific investigation which provide adequate access to the analysis of missionary action and experiences. In this context, cultural psychological research aims at an understanding of the cultural meanings of missionary action and experiences and helps to moderate the discussion about the challenges and competences of missionaries in cross-cultural ministry. A mutually beneficial dialogue between theology and psychology needs to be promoted, inasmuch as acculturation is part of both the religious life and everyday practice.

Culture is referred to in this article as a ,social, knowledge-based, symbolically imparted practice.'<sup>7</sup> A symbolic, knowledge and orientation system on the one hand enables individuals to belong to a certain group, tradition or society to coordinate and orient action according to commonly shared social norms, practices, values, etc. On the other hand, culture is the basis of the constitution, development and transformation of a person's self-image and worldview. In encounters between cultures something like the so-called ,third', ,inter' or ,in-between' of cultures often evolves. For example, Alois Wierlacher and Ursula Hudson-Wiedenmann consider interculturality as a relational concept that gains its meaning from the interplay of at least three criteria: (1) the reciprocity of mutual understanding, (2) the cooperation in the process of understanding, and (3) the intermediate space that leads to changes on both sides of a discourse: in one's own position and in the others' position.<sup>8</sup> In the context of mission we can talk, first, about reciprocity with regard to the communication of the gospel across cultures. The addressees of the mission can only understand the inherent meaning of the Christian belief system if it is narrated in their own language and accords with their own system of thought. This requires an understanding of the missionaries' position located within their historical setting, tradition, community and practice. Second, the process of intercultural understanding in the context of mission is characterised by cooperation with local churches, other missionaries and even with secular institutions. Third, the intercultural encounter is marked as an intermediate place. In order to communicate the gospel properly a new way of understanding needs to be developed in dialogue between the missionaries and their addressees.

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<sup>7</sup> Straub, *Understanding cultural differences*, 174.

<sup>8</sup> Wierlacher and Hudson-Wiedenmann, *Interkulturalität*, 228.

In the literature we can find various concepts that help to describe the process of missionaries' acculturation in other cultures and help to explain the relationship of the sojourners with the host culture. Because of space restriction we will stress here only two concepts of acculturation with which missionaries are usually confronted in their foreign assignments: accommodation and contextualisation.<sup>9</sup> Generally, people in the host society consider a missionary not as a neutral person but as a 'representative' of another and foreign culture – especially of the Western culture. Missionaries are not part of the host culture. Often they remain different to the culture and society to which they are sent. In this context, an *accommodation* strategy means that a missionary becomes the subject of the transformative process. A missionary seeks *for* the local community an interpretation of the gospel. In contrast, *contextualisation* means that it is the host society itself which is the subject of the incorporation of the gospel in its own culture. In this case, members of the host society are regarded as experts in their own culture and of the call to mission, whereas the missionaries act as dialogue partners and critical companions of the local community and accommodate the process of translating the gospel into the indigenous people's system of thought and belief.

With regard to the acceptance and appreciation of the missionaries' cultural background in the host society we can speak of an *unequal relationship*. On the one hand, the missionaries cannot share everything with the local community: they cannot directly communicate the critical aspect of their culture of origin to the indigenous people, because the latter do not know the culture of the missionaries. Vice versa, members of the culture of origin also cannot understand the new relationship the missionary has established with the local community. The missionaries leave their home society and sacrifice a huge part of their life: their families, friends and colleagues. In other words, this psychological dilemma in the acculturation process is part of the missionary *self*-regulation. The missionary self is referred to in this article as the subject of a transformational process. In order to establish their own selves missionaries need to answer this question: who am I, who have I been and who will I be? Possible answers are inherent in the persistent inner relationship with God, who is the ultimate unit of value in everyday life: an intrinsic motivation to fulfil the mission task, unconditional following of Christ, commitment to transform the world with respect to the Kingdom of God and spiritual development.

The (conscious) *intentions* and (unconscious) *motives* with regard to becoming a missionary can be very varied. In missionaries' narratives purely altruistic motives such as charity to others, mercy, compassion or support and caring for socially disadvantaged people are often of paramount im-

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<sup>9</sup> For an overview see e.g., Oborji, Concepts of Mission, 67-8, 112-13.

portance. These motives are linked not only to theological but also to social pedagogical and development objectives. For many missionaries, the aim of mission is to deepen their already well-founded Christian belief, which is constantly challenged by the vagaries of the mission field and coping with doubts and crises. Self-reflections are the logical and necessary consequence of these challenges. Sometimes the encounter with another person results in an unforeseeable turn in the life of the missionary. Last but not least, wishes, imagination and longings for an adventure or a job in a distant and foreign place are important motives for becoming a missionary. Occasionally, a decision to go to mission promotes the retraining and vocational reorientation of missionaries after many years of professional experience in a 'profane' profession.

A missionary often views her/himself as a project manager. Co-workers for her/his project are usually recruited in the field: the addressees of the mission in the local community, insofar as the missionary task in the field is shaped through the members of the other and foreign culture and through the religiously motivated leadership of the missionaries. The missionaries' potential for action oscillates between their ability to adjust to other life forms, on the one hand, and the enforcement of their own cultural self, on the other: transformations of the self that are initiated on both sides through concrete others. Experiences of cross-cultural difference occur on 'both sides' of missionary practice. Misunderstandings, difficulties and conflicts occur in intercultural communication and rattle the missionary self. Sometimes, habitual elements of life also common to Western culture such as alcoholism, fashion and consumerism may be viewed as objectionable by the missionaries and create a barrier between them and the life of the addressees of mission. Such encounters are frequently related to psychological and social stress and can cause disorientation and challenges to missionaries' identity. In the next Section we demonstrate the results of a cultural psychological analysis of cross-cultural experiences in mission.

### **3. Missionary Self of German Protestants in Foreign Assignments: Results of Cultural Psychological Research**

#### *3.1 The Present Study*

What is presented in the following is the result of a systematic interpretation and comparative analysis of narrative-biographical interviews with German Protestants about their cross-cultural experiences in mission.<sup>10</sup> The missionaries belong to different mission societies and denominations. These

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<sup>10</sup> For detailed results see Arnold, *Das religiöse Selbst in der Mission*, 399-507.

married males and single females, aged between 25 and 55 years, worked in various countries, including Russia, France, Spain and the Philippines. With respect to the variety of Christian denominations, confessions and congregations, the term Protestant herein refers to all movements of modern Christianity that regard themselves as belonging to the 'third' line of Christian tradition distinct from the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church. Despite the widespread use of the term 'Protestant', also meaning in the German context a member of the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD), this sample includes members of affiliated Christian congregations or other traditions: two describe themselves as Evangelical Lutheran and three as Evangelical in a wider sense who belong to different institutions such as Liebenzell Mission International, Youth With a Mission and Campus Crusade for Christ. Similarly, the term 'missionary' is only used in this study to describe a group of people who serve with e.g. mission societies, developmental aid organisations and local churches in other societies, countries and cultures and are convinced of their 'missionary calling'.

In the interviews the missionaries talked about their educational background, preparatory training, experiences of cross-cultural differences abroad, activities, personal expectations, success and failure in relation to their assignments in foreign countries. This is by no means an exhaustive presentation of all results in the study, but will provide some answers to the questions of how German Protestants experience cross-cultural differences in the context of intercultural exchange and how their lived experiences and expectations, actions and orientations affect the missionary self and identity in cross-cultural ministry. While on furlough in Germany, respondents from German Protestant mission societies and churches participated in narrative-biographical interviews that lasted from one to four hours and were conducted in 2004 and 2005.

All interviews were non-structured, face-to-face inquiries and were conducted in German. Afterwards, the interviews were transcribed verbatim and translated by the author. Participants were open in their responses to initial questions, thus eliciting narratives during the interview that covered more than just a few episodes. The interviewees were asked to talk about their experiences during missionary practice. They were not simply asked to look back on their life abroad, but were encouraged to begin their story at the time of their initiation into missionary work. Thus, the narratives represent in high degree the narrators' point of view as well as their linguistic and expressive abilities. Hence, they constituted a rich fund of telling experiences, events and themes ranging from motivational factors for their religious mission to experiences during their activities and post-mission reflections, tracing a path towards involvement with issues other than religious.

Interviews were analysed for very different reasons, including the psychological explanations and meanings of the missionaries' experiences and actions.<sup>11</sup> The purpose of the analysis was to focus on particular types of activities in mission and on possible sub-differentiations. The evaluation method of interpretation follows the approach as suggested in the 'documentary interpretation'<sup>12</sup> and 'grounded theory' methodology<sup>13</sup> which is usually referred to as *the constant comparative method* of qualitative analysis. Each text sequence was paraphrased and coded by the key message of a statement. All codes were gradually and subsequently extended to other interviews and thematically differentiated, refined and interlinked with the articulations of all other participants.

The focus of the narrative analysis is on the missionary self, and the missionaries' biographical narratives also present the numerous 'significant others' (George H. Mead), e.g. members of foreign cultures and societies that are more or less engaged with missionaries in communication and cooperation. Research is guided by an interest into a *psychology of beliefs*. Particular attention is given to an analysis of the psychosocial meanings and functions of missionary experiences and expectations, actions and orientations in the intercultural mission practice that bind Protestants to their values, beliefs and convictions and are in a way also linked to their religious calling. Such meanings almost always refer to the constitution, shaping, stabilising and development of the personal self and identity as well as to the various I-world relationships in which a missionary is constantly involved. Consequently, the missionary intent to propagate the Gospel is obviously fundamentally shaped by culture as well as by personal meaning.

Because of space restrictions we will limit our investigation to a single case study of a young professional and experienced mission worker. At the time of the interview, Anne-Kathrin was single and 25 years old. Anne-Kathrin belongs to the Evangelical Lutheran Church and is a member of the Youth With A Mission network. From childhood she has lived with her parents in a suburb of a medium-sized town in East Germany. She will shortly finish a university degree in social studies. In 2000, she decided to undertake mission-practical discipleship training for six months in the Philippines. On completion of the course she started a three-year leadership training course there. She acquired basic language skills in Filipino and improved her English as well. In order to finish her studies, she came back to conduct an internship, working with migrants from Russia in a charitable institution.

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<sup>11</sup> For details see cf. Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann, *Rekonstruktion narrativer Identität*; Schütze, *Biographieforschung und narratives Interview*.

<sup>12</sup> Bohnsack, *Documentary Method and Group Discussions*, 99-112.

<sup>13</sup> Glaser and Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*.



She attended Bible courses and received language training as well as practical preparatory missionary training. We present a few aspects of Anne-Kathrin's evaluation and interpretation of her experiences of cultural difference in the mission and how these experiences have shaped her self.

### 3.2 *Positive Alternative Counter-Horizons to Cross-Cultural Experiences*<sup>14</sup>

Besides the experience of joy and pleasure in the success of mission, in the following we describe the critical experiences in everyday life and professional work that the interview partners evaluate as positive alternative ,counter-horizons'<sup>15</sup> to the experiences of cross-cultural difference related to mission. The missionaries' interpretation of cultural contrasts is recognised as beneficial for their personal development and helps to broaden their horizons for the ministry and potential for action in general. The missionaries interpreted their inner resistance to the prevailing living and working conditions in the host culture as challenges and as beneficial to their development and action. We would like to point out, however, that the positive alternative counter-horizons are not simply comparisons of positive and negative aspects of mission, but the missionaries' own explanation and interpretation of the current situation in contrast to their culture of origin which they often reject as too ,individualistic', ,secular' or ,meaningless'.

#### 3.2.1 Abandonment and Deprivation as a Counter-Horizon to the Criticism of a Depersonalised Consumer Society

A criticism of expansive prosperity and extensive consumerism in the culture of origin can be found in many of the missionaries' narratives. The interviewees often regard consumerism as the new idol of modern societies and it is usually rejected. Even from a distance, they cannot escape the social inequality and injustice perceived in the home culture and they find more or less the same in the field, which again was what they criticised the most. In the mission, however, they experience to a greater extent cultural contrasts such as the ,fake worlds of glamour' in city life in contrast to the traditional lifestyle in rural areas and insanitary living conditions in more impoverished districts. Although the missionaries need to shift from their comfort zones and overcome inner barriers like feelings of disgust and fear, they put up

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<sup>14</sup> The main categories in section 2.2 have been developed in workshops for doctoral students and also refer to an invited talk of Jürgen Straub at the symposia ,Autobiography and the Psychological Study of Religious Lives' (Lund, 2006). The ideas developed in this section of the article are an abbreviated version of thoughts presented elsewhere, cf. e.g., Straub and Arnold, *Acting as Missionaries*, 339-342.

<sup>15</sup> For the term see Bohnsack, *Documentary Method and Group Discussions*, 119.

with the situation. Additionally, it is precisely these challenging personal limitations that help the interviewees to legitimise their own potential for action and vice versa increase their scope of activities. Nevertheless, the interview partners left the assignment with a positive impression. Anne-Kathrin talked about the ‚enjoyment‘ and ‚fun‘ she experienced during her work with the poor:

That in any case is something which I have often experienced, that I really had fun doing this, that I also like it, sitting in one of those huts sometimes, and really there is nothing I find disgusting, nothing which I can say except that I rather like being there. (laughs) Well, so this was, it was really different, and what I now recall, well, there simply is a lot of joy, I have to say, just getting to know these people, getting to know a little bit of the culture, which is very colourful, too, very lively and very, well, perhaps it's just this gypsiness, you know? I just had a whole lot of fun being among these people or being part of them.<sup>16</sup>

Even the inevitable social inequality and extreme privations do not spoil the fun of the assignment and the excitement over the ‚foreign‘ others. Anne-Kathrin talked in various parts of the interview about the poor living conditions in the local community such as the lack of toilets and sewage systems, high child mortality, illiteracy, inaccessible medical care, etc. Sometimes, she had almost no money and was dependent on others. Yet no challenge was great enough to make her leave.

In sum, as regards the missionary self of Anne-Kathrin, a lifestyle shaped by selflessness, self-discipline and charity to others is somehow not only the logical consequence of missionaries' inner beliefs but also a positive alternative counter-horizon to the social conditions in the country they live in. On the strength of only one single case we can conclude that in the mission the interview partners want to change living conditions for the better and ensure that the dignity of people is protected and they see that life is valued as shown by the care of the poor. Further analyses and examination will have to proof this hypothesis.

### 3.2.2 Stress Avoidance and Calm as a Counter-Horizon to Meritocracy

The lifestyle of the other people in the ‚foreign culture‘ is often perceived as pleasant and appealing. This sometimes helps the missionaries to bridge predominant cultural contrasts. With regard to the habitus of the Filipinos, Anne-Kathrin gives an example of cultural contrasts:

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<sup>16</sup> Anne-Kathrin, Transcript, line 113. All the following quotes are taken from the unpublished interview transcript and translated to English by the author.

Well, somehow, there is for example this difference where you, where the Filipinos, are actually much more relaxed and it's really easy to learn that from them.<sup>17</sup>

Although she is aware of the fact that she can only grasp the Philippine habitus as a stereotypically represented ‚cultural standard’<sup>18</sup> and that the drawbacks of such a relaxed lifestyle need to be acknowledged, the foreign others, nevertheless, challenge her thinking and self:

Yet she sees it as a challenge to her own self, an opportunity and a chance to learn, to have experiences, which for different reasons (strict time regulations, achievement and efficiency orientation) are hard to come by in „Germany“, where they are rather the exception.<sup>19</sup>

In the words of Anne-Kathrin, the ‚Filipinos’ need to learn to make efforts (‚take steps’), because sometimes they ‚often live a bit from one moment to the next’ and ‚are relatively aimless’, whereas the ‚Germans’ are ‚very goal-oriented’.<sup>20</sup> As much as we all agree that not all Filipinos and not all Germans fit into this simple social and cultural category, there is some empirical evidence that the habitus of members of the German culture is likely to differ in some situations from the Philippine way of life. In many South-East Asian cultures people will adopt a collectivistic way of thinking and a relationship-oriented behaviour and communication style, whereas the German communication culture is characterised by a factual orientation (Sachorientierung) and meritocratic principles that indicate a more individualistic way of thinking. For Anne-Kathrin these cultural contrasts are not distinctive. She prefers a position we could call a ‚combined way of life’ that enables her to integrate elements of both cultures in order to find ways to balance the contrasts from situation to situation and, eventually, integrate the cultural contrasts in her own self.

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<sup>17</sup> Anne-Kathrin, Transcript, line 33.

<sup>18</sup> ‚As cultural standards we understand all kinds of perceiving, thinking, judging, and acting that in a given culture by the vast majority of individuals are considered for themselves and others as normal, self-evident, typical and obligatory. Cultural standards regulate behaviour and guide individuals to assess observed behaviour’ (Thomas, *Kulturvergleichende Psychologie*, 381 cited in Fink, et al., *The Cultural Standard Method*, 10; transl. by that authors). For limitation of this concept see section conclusions.

<sup>19</sup> Straub and Arnold, *Action as Missionaries*, 341.

<sup>20</sup> Anne-Kathrin, Transcript, line 33.

### 3.2.3 Hospitality and an Open Attitude as a Counter-Horizon to Difficulties in Initiating Contact

The missionaries normally experience hospitality and an open attitude in encounters with other cultures, which makes it easy to establish new contacts and to increase their social network. Anne-Kathrin talks about another cultural difference as she found that doors were opened to her more often than she would have expected from her German cultural background:

I always found it really nice that the people there live very openly and are incredibly welcoming and cheerful, really not so typically Asian but very loud, they like to sing and laugh, they like to dance, and somehow it often happened that I was invited by complete strangers into their home or someone talked to me on the street or at the market or somewhere like this. When I go to the market, then I can't help but attract attention and then they immediately ask my name, where I come from, if I'm married. (...) It (the missionary work; M.A.) takes you into many homes, and many people invite you, and then something always comes up somehow (...), which is great, too. (...) Here you wouldn't, not if you did not know the people, if you stood before their door, they would not let you in, not just so (laughs), but that is also different there, the whole attitude.<sup>21</sup>

Generally, all interview partners experienced something that we could call a welcome. The missionaries interpret this as confirmation of their calling. It is perceived as a generous gift as it increases their social network and becomes a reason for not returning home prematurely.

### 3.2.4 Community as a Counter-Horizon to Loneliness and Isolation

Successful mission also requires a community of cohabitation and religious practice, because missionaries sometimes live sequestered lives in isolation from their familiar environment, culture and other missionaries from the same church or society. Missionaries are no longer lone fighters. Against the backdrop of a high dropout rate, a community and group of likeminded people provides the opportunity to communicate about successes and failures in order to overcome spatial and spiritual isolation and distance from a foreign culture and people. This aspect appears in all the narratives of the missionaries, where they emphasise the necessity of pastoral care, advice and prayer for evangelistic activities, psychosocial support, group meetings, worship services and exchange of experiences and even their life in the community. During her furlough in Germany while she was living in her parents' house,

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<sup>21</sup> Anne-Kathrin, Transcript, line 33.

Anne-Kathrin aptly noted that what she missed most was communal life with the Filipinos in the discipleship training school:

And then we maintain a lively German-Philippine exchange. There we live together with many young people and, recently, elderly married couples and families too, but they usually live outside. Staff mostly lives in the school, they are single and their average age is between twenty and thirty-five. And for two to two and a half years I have been living there. In the last year I lived in a house outside the campus, but always and, from the very beginning, with co-workers on the team. I've always shared a room with others. At the beginning I couldn't imagine it (laughs), but I miss it when I am now alone in my room and I miss the diversity of cultures.<sup>22</sup>

The missionaries admired the communal life, which meant living together in one house and room and travelling together to a remote place to pursue their work. The constantly changing students, teams and staff over periods of months and years also need to be taken into account. Like the others, Anne-Kathrin considers her experiences as positive and never made a secret of the fact that sometimes problems occurred in intercultural communication.

### 3.2.5 Spiritual Impartiality and Emotional Authenticity as a Counter-Horizon to Rationalist Thinking

As mission encourages spiritual experiences and religious feelings, their emotional and public articulations are also part of the interview partners' narratives. With regard to the rationalist mind culture of the German people, Anne-Kathrin expresses the typical tension between belief and reason:

But when I see Filipinos coming to this place (to Germany; M.A.), then I think that they indeed have something to give that a German simply cannot give. And somehow they contact people whom we Germans did not contact. Maybe anyone can do this on a different level and do it well, but they bring something along that comes only from them, which is really good. For example, simply through their friendly nature or with a song, what they sing, and through their poverty, they sometimes open the hearts of people differently. Or maybe they cannot open their hearts but maybe they make it easier for people. Or it is easier for people to follow or it opens people's mind, which is different from what one would do with Germans. And then, when I realize that

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<sup>22</sup> Anne-Kathrin, Transcript, line 33.

they have simply an alternative distance. They have a quite different way of thinking, thus certain things may happen.<sup>23</sup>

Anne-Kathrin is pleased that the Filipinos make effective contact with other people on the basis of their 'emotional authenticity'<sup>24</sup> and their friendly nature. The Filipinos' privileged access to other people helps to 'open their hearts'. As Anne-Kathrin appropriates the attitudes of the Filipinos, she is able to overcome the distance to other beliefs and to spirituality, which is supposed to be a culturally specific aspect of rationalistic and reason-oriented thinking in Western cultures. As a Christian she has adopted a different way of thinking because of her experiences of cultural difference and otherness in the mission field:

Well, when I come back to this place (Germany; M.A.) then I do notice that I am familiar with the way of thinking here and I am used to doing things in a certain way. As a Christian, let me put it this way, my thinking simply changed, or it is changing more and more to how God sees the world and not how I see the world or how my culture sees the world or how my own thinking sees the world. And I must say that my thinking has already changed and my perception of things has changed too and so on and so forth. However, I also notice especially here (in Germany; M.A.) there is a German, no, not German, but this thinking and reasoning and humanistic thinking or whatsoever. There are certain opinions that are often against God or, in general, strongly reject God and I realise that this rejection affects me more when I am here and it is much more present. And this feeling is sometimes more difficult to deal with than for somebody who does not think like this. Somebody to whom this is something completely different may recognise it but face the problem differently and also have no fear. (...) Well, that's what I have learned there – that we as Germans are often troubled with reasoning (laughs); let me put it this way, many combat with reason, what many really do not understand, what happens when we encounter people. Sometimes this can be good, I mean both things are good to have and I think it is simply their nature that gets things across.<sup>25</sup>

She notes that her thinking needs to be much more determined by God. The whole narrative shows how her way of thinking has gradually developed over time and how she experienced in the mission field and during her training a broadening of her horizons. Yet she regards the others' thinking and

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<sup>23</sup> Anne-Kathrin, Transcript, lines 181-3.

<sup>24</sup> Salmela, What is emotional authenticity?, 210-2.

<sup>25</sup> Anne-Kathrin, Transcript, lines 183-9.

the action of the foreign others as a cognitive concept different from the rationalistic and humanistic thinking of Western culture. As Anne-Kathrin says, a non-rationalistic perspective has emerged from cross-cultural communication with the Filipinos. Such a new perspective is characterised by the Filipinos' encounter of other people without fear. In other words, Anne-Kathrin feels, thinks and acts less from a rationalistic perspective which would reject God and which is becoming more and more alien to her. For Anne-Kathrin, the newly developed perspective is associated with an encounter with spirituality and religiosity without fear and appears in her narrative as non-humanistic and non-rationalistic thinking and acting. Eventually, she opts for a synthesis and a complementary interaction of both concepts. Each concept is linked to positive and negative qualities which need to be balanced from situation to situation: humanistic thinking versus openness in terms of emotional authenticity that was long lost in Anne-Kathrin's own reductive, rationalistic culture. We will come back later to the limitations of such subjective experiences.

### *3.3 Mission as Self-Realisation: The Core Category*

The results of the present study can be condensed into an empirically grounded 'core theoretical category'<sup>26</sup> that can be summarized as: the time in mission allows the research partners for 'self-realisation'. The missionary role and the experiences of German Protestants related to it aim at realisation of the missionary self. In psychological terms, the missionary action elucidated in the interviews is an actualisation of aims and strategies that the missionaries themselves interpret as mental performance and personal gain and enrichment.

Such mental performance is realised, on the one hand, with regard to the spiritual activity and creativity of storytelling which helps the narrating self to elaborate its biography and the lived experiences of missionary work. On the other hand, missionaries also strive for an individual lifestyle characterised by the tension between a selfless service offered as charity to others and the realisation of the strategic aims of the mission. Furthermore, missionaries need to strike a balance between their cultural adjustment to the host culture and the preservation of their own self and faith. At the centre of this tension the missionaries look for self-realisation.

The results of this empirical investigation support the hypothesis that the missionaries' cross-cultural experiences, perceived cultural contrasts, the necessary confrontation with the others and the expertise linked to their assignment cannot simply be reduced to the theological aims of Protestant

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<sup>26</sup> Strauss and Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research*, 146.

mission. Rather the experiences of cultural difference and otherness structure daily life in the mission field. There are explanations and interpretations of intercultural mission practice, cultural demarcations made by the missionaries and the relevance of cross-cultural experiences, which cannot evolve without the subjective perspectives of the research partners. In the course of this investigation a specific type of Protestant identity is evidenced which can be regarded as a (post-)modern Western idea that shapes the missionaries' perception, thinking and action. Even in remote places the missionary self strives for individuality, self-internalisation and freedom of conscience in terms of religious experiences and activities.

#### **4. Discussion of the Results: Implications for Mission Practice**

##### *4.1 Aptitude Diagnostics and the Definition of Suitable Competence Profiles*

Although various studies focus on the psychological acculturation and cultural adjustment of missionaries to foreign cultural environments, there are only few studies about the efficiency of missionaries during their foreign assignments that develop and describe suitable sets of criteria for aptitude diagnostics. The personality traits investigated in the present study are largely identical with the criteria described by Pattye W. Kennedy and Ralph M. Dreger.<sup>27</sup> The desired missionary profile includes criteria such as empathy, capacity for project and team work, ability to promote the personal development of others, emotional authenticity and ability to act and reflect. The ideal missionary, however, also needs to have persuasive powers, understand things quickly, resolve problems in everyday life and be adaptable, flexible, modest and sincere. Furthermore, s/he should also be prepared to collaborate with others, have interpersonal communication skills and be able to build long-term relationships. The varied checklists of personality traits and skills of the ideal missionary profile are very similar to the profiles of other groups of sojourners in secular professions and occupations. So far, these lists do not contain other important abilities and skills such as cross-cultural communication competence.

Too little is still known about psychological resilience during work assignments and the spiritual life of missionaries. There are currently only a few studies which investigate the relationship between the spiritual requirements and the psychological stress perceived during assignments abroad.<sup>28</sup> The most decisive factors are job satisfaction and the stability of

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<sup>27</sup> Kennedy and Dreger, Development of Criterion Measures, 72-3.

<sup>28</sup> Barnett, et al., Psychological and Spiritual Predictors, 37; Trimble, Organizational Commitment, 358.



the missionary's relationship with God. This could be extended further, not least by the role orientation of missionary women and psychosocial well being. In the longitudinal study by Amy E. Cousineau and colleagues the ideal personality of a missionary is described as follows:<sup>29</sup> the more practically oriented, conservative, group-oriented and perfectionist they are, the more likely the mission leader is to send these people to the mission field; the more the potential missionary couple is satisfied with their relationship, the more emphatic will be the advice of the mission leader to become missionaries. The required competences of missionaries do not entail any significant difference from the key qualifications and social competences which other groups of sojourners need. But we need to acknowledge that missionaries engage in a more intensive dialogue and more direct personal exchange with people of the host culture. The purpose of mission is not just the accomplishment of the proclamation of the gospel or the completion of a development aid project; the missionary is constantly observed by alien others with regard to her/his whole personality, abilities and skills, both privately and professionally. It is probable that missionaries' religious convictions have a significant impact on their acculturation in the host culture. Prospective studies need to show that the relationship between the missionary task of proclaiming the Gospel in the world and cultural adjustment to the conditions in the respective country cannot be investigated fully with a cultural psychological approach.

#### *4.2 Intercultural Training, Coaching and Reintegration of Missionaries*

Specific requirements must also be laid down for preparatory programmes that are similar to action-oriented<sup>30</sup> intercultural trainings for managers, developmental aid workers, students as well as employees in health professions and education. With such training missionaries not only acquire professional competences, but also cultural and theological knowledge about how to complete the assigned task in the field. Case studies like those presented in this article could also be helpful for analysing critical interaction situations. The stability of their own faith is one of the best guarantees of a missionary's success. Furthermore, psychological stress management should also be part of intercultural education, especially designed to enable missionaries to deal with, for example, ambiguities, frustration, isolation, distance from the next mission station, culturally different values, critical

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<sup>29</sup> Cousineau, et al., The 16PF and Marital Satisfaction Inventory, 324.

<sup>30</sup> We speak of an 'action-oriented' intercultural training if learning processes are designed of such kind that conscious actions and routine event could be reflected. Additionally, teaching should also support and give orientations to participants' future actions in everyday professional life. Action-orientation is based on learner-activating teaching and is guided by products of action.

events in life and cancellation of mission assignments and to acquire psychological resilience and skills for pastoral care. Most mission assignments include mentoring and coaching services. Contact with the next regional mission leader in the host country and coaching during the assignment has a positive impact on the success of the whole mission. Additionally, as evidenced by various studies, mission societies and agencies need to take care of the reintegration of missionaries after the assignment: e.g. a new job and financial security after retirement. Missionaries should be encouraged to contribute their cross-cultural knowledge and experiences to the development of the home church where they have to play an active part in the future. Returnees have excellent knowledge about other cultures, language skills and know how to cope with anger, frustration and isolation. With regard to clinical and therapeutic practice as well as supervision there is an additional need, because of high workload, job dissatisfaction, frustration, critical life events, financial insecurity, concern about health and availability of spiritual resources, *inter alia*.

## **5. Conclusions**

The present study demonstrates that experiences of cultural difference in the mission field affect the missionary self in the process of acculturation to foreign cultural environments and structure the daily life of these Protestants. The results of the cultural psychological analysis support the hypothesis that the missionaries' experiences and actions in Protestant mission that are perceived as cultural contrasts cannot simply be reduced to the theological or spiritual objectives of the missionary task itself. Rather, the mission is a place of intercultural learning that can be understood as a change process in terms of missionaries' dispositions, behaviour and potential for action thanks to experiences of cultural difference in cross-cultural encounters.

The results of the study have several limitations that may restrict its interpretation. First, the categories of cross-cultural experiences are constituted as counter-horizons that raise the question of whether the dualisms are necessary. The experiences of cultural contrast that the research partners describe in their autobiographical narratives, however, should not be regarded as exclusive categories. Although we agree that in reality there are many nuances in such experiences, there is no robust empirical evidence indicating otherwise. The comparative analysis (by means of minimum and maximum contrasts) has been conducted for all categories developed and takes into account all cases, but no further aspects and text sequences have been found that differentiate the codes further and we reached a state of

,theoretical saturation'.<sup>31</sup> Therefore, the comparative analysis achieved its goal of developing case-based typologies of missionary experiences and actions.

Another limitation of the results is related to the understanding of qualitative social research. Our investigation was interested in the *subjective experiences* and culturally distinctive meanings related to the mission field. A validation of the interviewee's statements was performed at the end of every interview to ensure that the subjective perspectives of the research partners were adequately covered and intersubjectively traceable.<sup>32</sup> This procedure allows for the validation of the results and the reliability of the interview data, gives the participants in the study the opportunity to call attention to possible omissions or additions to the self-narratives and, eventually, helps to evaluate the interview method.

A third limitation of the results is linked to the critique of the cultural standard method.<sup>33</sup> With regard to the contrasting cultural standards of German and Philippine culture we need to acknowledge that all such social and cultural categorisations involve bi-cultural definitions that are formulated in the process of data collection by bi-cultural experts. In addition, there is a range of tolerance, meaning that the cultural standards deviate to a certain extent from the status quo of normality. Cultural contrasts regularly deviate from the norm.

Last but not least, we can conclude that the results are relevant to mission practice. In preparatory training, coaching and mentoring during field assignments as well as during the reintegration of missionaries the aforementioned limitations can only be overcome if cultural dualisms and cultural standards are relativised to the situation, context and culture in which they were formulated. Therefore, the results presented in this study are not ultimate categories but the first tentative marks on a scale with many extremes that help to orientate missionary perception, thinking, action and self in cross-cultural ministry. In terms of becoming an interculturally competent missionary, however, nothing compares with one's own experiences and reflections.

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<sup>31</sup> Glaser and Strauss, *The Discovery of the Grounded Theory*, 61-2.

<sup>32</sup> For 'communicative validity' cf. Kvale, *The Social Construction of Validity*, 30-2.

<sup>33</sup> For a critical evaluation of the cultural standard method see Krewer, *Kulturstandards als Mittel der Selbst- und Fremdrelexion in interkulturellen Begegnungen*.

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