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PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN UNEQUALS - MISSION IMPOSSIBLE?

Mission Structures Revisited

Structures and theology

In 1987 the then CWME Secretary Eugene Stockwell noted that

> whenever a major deliberative assembly takes place, bringing together persons deeply committed to Christian mission, it is likely that sooner or later the discussion will turn to – and perhaps founder on – issues of structure.[i]

Clearly this has changed. The structures of mission are no longer at the top of the agenda of missiologists' or mission practitioners' meetings. "There is so personal and quiet a face to Christian mission that we can be excused some impatience with talk of structures."[ii] But nonetheless they remain highly relevant, since the situation that triggered these discussions in the 1950s to 1980s is still prevalent.

If some kind of equality (often termed 'partnership') between Western and Third World churches in the light of Galatians 3:28 is perceived as a major challenge for Christian mission in a world increasingly torn apart by economic, cultural, religious and other diversities, then adequate structures for inter-church relations are of utmost importance. It is relatively easy to develop new theological ideas. But their ultimate value lies in their practicality, and this is where structures must be taken into account. A church's annual budget tells more (and often something very different) about its theology than its verbal declarations of faith. In the same way structures tell a lot about the inherent theology of mission organisations (and churches). Structures can facilitate the overcoming of unequal (sometimes unjust) relationships or they can make it impossible.

> The fundamental issue can be stated in this way: Can one speak in credible terms of partnership between the dominant and the dominated, the powerful and the powerless, the large and the small, the rich and the poor, the black and the white, the oppressor and the oppressed?"

The touchiest (not the only) issue in this field of inequality in power is the question of money and the might that goes with it. As Konrad Raiser said:

> In the long run there can be no real partnership in regard of a lasting world-wide inequality in power, eg between rich and poor, donors and receivers. Material dependency destroys human relationships elsewhere, too, however hard one may try to achieve partnership.[iii]

Although noting this is not much more than a commonplace, theologians are often somewhat reluctant to reflect too much upon the role of 'mammon'. Unfortunately this does not keep money, and its unequal distribution, from playing a major role in inter-church relations.

Therefore the following reflections will concentrate on sharing of resources, ie money, people and ideas, even if this is not meant to say that other areas of inter-church relations (equal access to information and education for example) are not of great importance too.

It would be wrong to overlook that there have been bold attempts to draw structural consequences from missiological insights. Notably in Europe, some former mission societies have restructured over the past three decades in an attempt to create structures to enable rather than hinder equal relations between churches in North and South.[iv] The prime examples are the *Communauté Evangélique d'Action Apostolique* (CEVAA, today Cevaa), 47 member churches, formerly the Société des Missions Evangéliques de Paris, the *Council for World Mission* (CWM), 32, formerly London Missionary Society (LMS) and the *United Evangelical Mission* (UEM), 32, Rheinische Missionsgesellschaft and Bethel Mission, (RMG) from Wuppertal. They restructured in comparable ways in 1971 (CEVAA), 1977 (CWM) and 1996 (UEM). They have become much acclaimed ecumenical partnership models, thus a lot has been published on them, most of which does not need repeating here.[v] I shall in this article concentrate on less well-known facts and some findings which partly contradict some widespread assumptions. I do so in the hope that the models which these three have put into practice are still seen as a challenge to other mission organisations around the world. Looking at the history of CEVAA/CWM/UEM can be fruitful for any other endeavours geared at enabling equal relationships between North and South, East and West, rich and poor churches, majority and minority churches, growing and decreasing churches.

The way inter-church relationships are structured is an integral part of the churches' witness to God's redeeming love, ie mission. But obviously, too, mission is far more than this. For example the questions of evangelism and conversion, central as they may be, will not be explored here, because it is not in these fields that the specificity of CEVAA/CWM/UEM lies.

Due to their similarity CEVAA/CWM/UEM are often quoted together. For example the Section IV report from the Salvador de Bahia World Mission Conference in 1996 lists them together under the heading "Mutuality in Mission".[vi] At the same event there were strong voices who tried to oppose the naming of CEVAA/CWM/UEM in the report.[vii] This presumably happened because other organisations which had not thus restructured felt implicitly criticised if these three were singled out as exemplary.

In essence, the similarity between CEVAA/CWM/UEM consists in the fact that all three try to model their inter-church relationships on the communion of goods in the Jerusalem Church outlined in Acts 2:42ff and 4:32ff. To do so, all three have given themselves structures which allow the partner churches in the South full participation in all decision-making processes by allocating to them a majority of seats in their Councils, Executive Committees etc. Since this includes full control over the current budgets and assets of these mission organisations one can rightly speak of communion of goods, even though the individual member churches remain vastly differently resourced in financial terms.

However, the fact that all three organisations are frequently listed together and have been modelled on each other (CWM being influenced by CEVAA and UEM drawing on both) masks to a certain extent the great differences between them.

These differences have various causes, one of them certainly being the different cultural traditions in the countries of origin of the respective organisations (for example France and Britain operated with very different understandings of the aims of colonialism[viii]). Another is even more important: the different ecumenical periods in which they were founded. Each of these periods brought with it a different understanding of 'partnership', moving from *co-operation* to *confrontation* to *koinonia*.

CEVAA emerged from the fundamentally optimistic 1960s' notion of partnership as cooperation in evangelism. It was a logical emanation from the independence of new states and the autonomy of young churches. In this perspective the Southern partners were basically a reinforcement in the old task of winning the world for Christ. Equality in relationships was a side effect more than anything else and economic equality was just a question of time in an atmosphere of deep developmental optimism after the end of colonialism.

The LMS by contrast gave way to the CWM in the 1970s when an entirely different mood took over (Uppsala 1968, Bangkok 1973). Partnership was now, rather, a challenge to the status quo, a claim that

the mission of the Church must consist in its struggle to overcome the lasting (even growing) inequality between North and South, an inequality widely perceived as injustice. The 'Moratorium' idea questioned the presence of any white missionaries in the South. There was sometimes a tendency to put almost all Western church activity under accusation for being done in the context of capitalist exploitation.

The mood began to change again in the 1980s as UEM was being shaped in a slow and thoroughly systematic way. Recognising that a merely confrontational approach which declared equality to be the pre-condition of partnership would postpone the latter to a rather faraway future, in the New Testament concept of 'eucharistic *koinonia*' could be found a model which would allow partnership *within* a framework of lasting inequality. Nonetheless, the challenge to mould future worldly reality upon the present spiritual 'eucharistic *koinonia*' was kept alive. One becomes aware again of the creative tension between the present and the *eschaton*, the Church in the created world and the eventual divine reconciliation in a new creation. The former can never be more than a pre-emptive glimpse of the latter. It was in this phase that CEVAA/CWM/UEM were being portrayed prominently as 'acts of obedience' (San Antonio 1989), a contrast to the 'in passing' mentioning CEVAA got in the report from Bangkok 1973.

The following paper focuses more on CEVAA and CWM, UEM being as yet too young to allow much serious historical evaluation. I shall only sometimes use it as a *tertium comparationis*.

Getting started

In the past mission structures were simple. In a 'star-structure', relationships went out like beams from a centre to the various partners abroad. At the centre stood the Western mission organisation, a free association of individuals, independent of the Cchurch, relating bilaterally to each member of the periphery, ie its Southern 'mission fields', later 'partner churches'. After the 1950s, when the 'integration of church and mission' had replaced the old independent mission society with mission agencies responsible to their churches, it was Western *member* churches relating to Southern *partner* churches through the organisation. Still there were no links among the Southern partners The relationships consisted largely of the flow of funds and the sending of personnel. Although with growing political and ecclesiastical independence the Southern churches tended to be consulted more often, it was clear that the

power still lay where the money was raised, managed and distributed. When for theological reasons[ix] and due to the changing political scene this state of affairs was increasingly being seen as unsatisfactory, ways were sought to overcome the concentration of control over relationships and money in the West. The way that CEVAA/CWM/UEM chose was to fully integrate the Southern *partners* who now became full *members* alongside the Western churches. Since this repeated with the Southern churches what had previously been done with the Western churches, it is appropriate to categorise the reforms as a further step towards the full 'integration of church and mission'. The resulting structure was referred to as a 'net structure' since the partners no longer all independently related to one centre but relationships linked them all so that there ideally was not *a centre* anymore but only mutual equal relationships.

Historiography of all three organisations tends to stress the pressure from the Southern partners as a starting point for the reform, most markedly in the case of CWM, the organisation that was created in the conflictive climate of North-South relations of the 1970s.

This claim is correct *only* in so far as that in all three cases the reform was triggered by a consultation in which for the first time in the history of the organisations *all* their overseas partner churches came together with the Western member churches. This is important because the dynamic unfolded by a meeting of all churches together worked even where there was no reform intention behind the invitation to the overseas partners. These consultations took place in Paris in 1964, Singapore 1975 and Bielefeld-Bethel 1978.[x] These mutual consultations which allowed *all* the Southern partners for the first time to relate directly to each other rather than via the centre in Europe created an innovative potential that subsequently led to larger things. Consequentially all three organisations later on made the *multilateral* relationship-building a prime focus of their structure and work. This logically led to a previously unknown frequency of meetings and consultations with people from around the world and entailed criticism that too much money was spent not on mission but on meetings. All three organisations rightly countered this by saying that meetings are effective relationship-building across economic and cultural boundaries which they see as a substantial part of their mission. In fact their history shows that right from the start this visibility of the people of God gathered from all nations sets free a spirit of innovation and missionary energy.

Despite the importance of these first multi-lateral international meetings, however, a closer examination of the sources also reveals something different: In fact in all three cases the responsibility for further developing the vision and for leading the transformation of a vision into a structure must be attributed less to the Southern churches or church leaders, but rather to individual visionary Westerners. The main drive came from mission directors Charles Bonzon (CEVAA), Bernard Thorogood (CWM) and Peter Sandner (UEM) respectively.[xi] They were in different degrees backed and supported by Southern leaders (most prominently the Indonesian Soritua Nababan at UEM, to a much lesser extent also Viktor Rakotoarimanana (Madagascar) at CEVAA) but there is no doubt they should be given the credit for having the decisive idea of a structure and bringing the reform forward. Some phenomena in the current functioning of these organisations, increased not least by the fact that all three still have their administrative head quarters in Europe (albeit for pragmatic reasons) show that there is a pattern here which continues in some ways. This observation is not entirely surprising, given that CEVAA/CWM/UEM are a typically Western response to a theological and political insight: a structural reform.

Sharing money and power

CEVAA/CWM/UEM try to guarantee power sharing by adopting methods of 'parliamentary' representation. The means to do so were similar. In order to guarantee an adequate balance the Southern partners are given a substantial proportion of seats in the decision-making bodies, irrespective of the real number of Christians or churches originating from a world region.[xii] In the case of UEM and CWM the South has a majority of two thirds and three quarters respectively in Council and Executive Committee. In CEVAA it is 50% each. Numbers of representatives matter less for voting (few controversies are resolved by voting in church and mission circles) than for symbolism and atmosphere. Interestingly in all three reform processes it was not the Southern but the *Northern* partners who were most interested in having a Southern majority. This seems to reflect the fact that the parliamentary model of power-sharing adopted in all three organisations is a Western political one, while other cultures have other models of decision-making and conflict-resolution.

More important than the numerical composition of decision-making bodies is the control over money, since this is where power materialises. Arguably this is the core of the reforms of CEVAA/CWM/UEM,

despite the frequent rhetoric claiming that 'partnership' in activities and the re-awakening of an evangelistic spirit is the 'real' core. There are very few *activities* of CEVAA/CWM/UEM that are absolutely unique to them compared to other mission agencies and churches. What *is* unique is their model of *sharing money*.

One can distinguish two main elements: a) the assets including properties and b) the current annual budget, made up of churches' contributions, donations and income from assets etc. In the new set-up *all* churches own the property and all pay contributions. However, in all cases well over 90% of contributions still come from the West.

Regarding the property we find a difference between the three organisations:

In Paris the dissolution of the old Paris Mission led to the foundation of two different new organisations: CEVAA and DEFAP (Département Français d'Action Apostolique), the latter being the French protestant churches' mission department. It is little known, but more significant than one likes to admit, that the legal successor of the Paris Mission was *not* (as is generally said) CEVAA but DEFAP, and consequentially it was the latter who inherited the property which was both valuable and income-generating. Generally this is dismissed as an irrelevant legal detail. But the truth is that this double structure of French DEFAP and international CEVAA (who has far smaller reserves and annual budget than DEFAP) greatly influenced the later developments.

In London and Wuppertal, by contrast, the legal succession was directly from the old body to the new.[xiii] As a result the new international organisation inherited all the property from the old – communion of goods practised quite radically. Particularly in London, where the LMS over almost two centuries had accumulated great income-generating wealth (it was by far the wealthiest of the three organisations), this led to massive (and rarely openly acknowledged) fears that once the Southern partners took control, the so long well-managed funds would soon be squandered away – just as had happened with the inherited colonial infrastructure in most Southern countries after independence. As the first budgets over a few years showed those fears to be unfounded, that assets had in fact increased rather than decreased, this eventually increased mutual confidence.

The different financial arrangements had great influence upon the working of CEVAA and CWM. CWM gained up to 50% of its income not from church subscriptions but from returns on investments.

This element increased even more when in 1995 a Hong Kong property sale brought £100 million return which was subsequently invested. CEVAA by contrast has next to no income from assets and is entirely dependent on member churches' contributions. There are benefits and disadvantages in both ways of operating :

CEVAA at most times felt fairly insecure about its income. In theory all should own and spend together everything in the budget irrespective of who put how much in the common purse – the model of Round Table sharing. Human psyche does not quite work like this, in particular when things get more difficult. Thus everybody knows that the funds originate in the North and that he who pays the piper may ultimately want to call the tune – if not now, then later, particularly if too many things go too often against his will. The danger that the piper instinctively starts playing the other's presumed favourite tune always lurks in the background. The advantage of this system is that CEVAA can only be as significant as the member churches want it to be. It depends on the active participation of its member churches – an effect which is certainly very much in line with the original idea of the reform. The powerful mission society that controls overseas churches is gone. Over the years CEVAA has seen first a standstill and then from the late 1980s a slow but steady decline in its budget. This reflects two things: a) the increasing economic pressure under which the richer but numerically dwindling Western member churches found themselves and b) the doubts that some of the greatest contributors expressed towards the overall development of the organisation as a whole. Some members doubted the sound handling of funds and openly challenged the strategy of fund raising that CEVAA propagated. This followed the idea that funds should not be earmarked for 'projects' but channelled in the form of block grants, given in a spirit of equality between 'grown-up churches' (*'relations adultes'*) in which nobody prescribed to the other how to use their money. In the same way the funds should not be raised in the member churches by advertising particular projects, since this could lead to paternalistic attitudes among the donors. Fundraising should rather be done by advocating the partnership idea itself as it was expressed in the existence of CEVAA. The problem was that this approach – rather widespread all over the Western church scene in the 1970s and '80s – at length failed to convince the potential donors in the pew. This was repeatedly pointed out by some of CEVAA's Swiss member churches, who therefore propagated a return to more project-related funding, and who then found themselves accused of paternalism for telling a plain but disagreeable truth.

Thus one could either adhere to the theoretically correct doctrine and accept reduced income or one could adjust to reality in various ways and degrees.

One may criticise aspects in the financial set-up of CEVAA and DEFAP which weakened CEVAA from the start. But one cannot deny that the fundamental principle was consistent with the structure: if one wants a partnership of committed churches then a budgetary system relying mainly on their contributions is a very effective reflection of how committed the member churches are. The chances of re-emergence of a powerful centre *outside* the churches like the former Paris Mission Society had been is not possible. And in fact this was one of the dominant keywords in CEVAA history: the "light organisation".

CWM is very different. For a start the composition of its membership is economically less bipolar than is the case in CEVAA. Whereas in the francophone organisation the rich-poor divide runs exactly parallel to the North-South divide, the same is not true for CWM. Here notably some Asian churches are in fact rather wealthy and some British churches are dying a slow death in membership figures and finance.

Further, the accumulation of enormous income-generating assets is a cultural and legal particularity in many British charities. Hence CWM from the start was to a large, and over the years increasing, extent independent of member churches' contributions: even before 1995 up to 50% of the income came from investment return on its own property. Paradoxically, the Thatcher years, a period in British politics which basically denied all the values that CWM stood for, produced a continuous increase in the organisation's property values and hence income. Since the 1995 land sale CWM could in theory practically become financially independent from the churches. This has in recent years more and more led to the organisation being perceived as a funding body. Furthermore it can lead to an elitist spirit which sees CWM as the vanguard of revolutionary new concepts of missionary inter-church partnership – while in reality its member churches are just as ordinary and struggling as all the others.

Sharing personnel

Sending of missionaries was for centuries the primary task of mission societies. The lack of missionary candidates which resulted from the various crises of mission in the 1960s and 1970s had been one of

the reasons that led to the formation of CEVAA and CWM and encouraged new thinking for new directions in missionary sending, or rather *exchange* as it was now beginning to be seen. CEVAA/CWM/UEM all strive to put into practice the formula from Mexico 1963: 'Mission in six continents' and do so in the context of their multilateral structure, ieie they try to promote missionary exchange between all member churches, not just the traditional North-South or the newer South-North exchange but also between different churches in the South (South-South exchange). They do so with a considerably lower number of missionaries than in the past (CEVAA ca. 55 missionaries at any time, CWM ca. 40. In the past both had had over 100). The philosophies and guidelines regulating this work are rather similar:

1. missionaries are fully employed by the receiving church and are integrated into the local hierarchy like local staff;
2. the missionaries are exchanged between churches, not selected, sent out and employed by the former mission society;
3. exchange should be person-oriented, not job-oriented ie the aim should be to express the universal and global reality of the Church, not to fill costly vacancies through the money coming with the missionary;
4. to encourage this the receiving church should contribute the equivalent of a local salary to the costs, (this rule was often broken in practice);
5. all member churches should take part in the exchange, ie ie they should *all* be both sending and receiving churches;
6. South-South exchange should be a high priority;
7. missionaries should go abroad for a limited time and then return home in order to communicate in person to their home church the universal dimension of the Church. Only this principle ensures real *mutual encounter*.

This caused some considerable technical problems. a) One was the fact that this structure all the burden was put on the two churches involved, however inexperienced, and thus personnel sharing became quite a lengthy and complicated process. It could sometimes take years between submitting a request and the sending of a person – frustrating for both the church and the candidates. b) Many missionaries from the South do not return home,[xiv] thus discouraging some churches from sending their

best people, if any. c) One of the greatest and most frequent problems was caused by the new employment status of missionaries. Many of them complained that they did not receive any pastoral care from their employing church which – unlike the old mission society – was not used to this task and not experienced in dealing with the specific problems of expatriate staff. At the same time the old missionaries' conferences were discouraged because of their past function (they had been the young churches' leadership). They, too, therefore ceased to fulfil the pastoral functions of mutual care.

Personnel exchange proved to be a very conservative field where old structures survived. In CEVAA between 1971 and 1997 all seventeen overseas churches received missionaries but only six of them also sent one or more at some time. Similar were the results in CWM until 1989: 75% of Western churches solely functioned as senders and over half the Southern churches only acted as recipients of foreign personnel.

The observation stands not just generally but also in detail: missionaries were predominantly exchanged between the old mother church and her former mission field, usually at the request of both sides. This betrays a tendency to regard church relationships like old friendships, an attitude which expresses faithfulness on the one hand and runs the risk of routinely perpetuating elements of old relationship patterns which CEVAA and CWM had intended to overcome.

One big difference between CEVAA and CWM occurred in the field of South-South and South-North exchange. Both propagated this strongly. But CEVAA at no point in time had more than 10% missionaries who did not go from North to South.[xv] CWM by contrast until ca. 1989 showed a similar pattern but then South-South and South-North exchange slowly took off, so that in 1997 47% of missionaries were exchanged between two Southern churches and another 13% went South-North. Here a real reversal has taken place. The sources and the people in CWM never suggest any explanation for this. It is however noteworthy that it coincides with the return to a more pro-active role taken on by CWM's central office after a review in 1989 had revealed that the technical difficulties of direct inter-church exchange were a real hindrance to efficient personnel sending. Thus it seems that a stronger role for the 'centre', ie a return to an old pattern previously regarded as a heritage of the past era of mission societies, in fact had a positive effect so that things actually *happened* in the way that the guidelines suggested.[xvi]

What mission?

CEVAA/CWM/UEM all claim that their purpose is to *do* mission together ecumenically. By this they try to counter the accusation that they are organisations managing inter-church aid but not *acting* together any more and thus ultimately abandoning mission altogether. All three in the early days of their reforms encountered, or at least feared to encounter, this accusation from their circles of loyal supporters, the mission friends who for two centuries had supported the old London, Paris and Rhenish Missions. They therefore tried in various degrees to convince themselves and the public that the entire reform was not much more than henceforth doing internationally and ecumenically, and therefore more credibly and more efficiently, what had hitherto been done by the Western churches alone: mission.

Obviously the rightfulness of this claim stands open to argument. To begin with it depends on one's understanding of mission. Apart from the fact that every imaginable perspective on mission will be found somewhere in their publications, some aspects of basic mission theology varied between the organisations.

CEVAA emerged in the 1950s' and 1960s' atmosphere of optimistic co-operation. If the 'evangelisation of the world in this generation' was not quite as credible as it had seemed in 1910 it can still in some ways be found in the documents immediately predating the consultations that led to the foundation of CEVAA. It was not the sharing community as such that was seen as the revolutionary innovation that was CEVAA but the co-operation in evangelism by churches in the West and the South. CEVAA was meant to be an evangelistic revival of the ancestors' pioneering missionary spirit.[xvii] This was expressed in the so-called '*Actions Apostoliques Communes*' (AAC),[xviii] international mission teams drawn from the member churches (they gave CEVAA its name, too). The first two went to Dahomey (today Benin) and to the Poitou, a rural region of France. Well into the '90s the AAC were propagated by CEVAA as its core essence. Apart from the fact that they consumed no more than a tiny fraction of the annual budget, the problem is that none of these AAC very successful by its own standards.[xix] They neither led to church growth nor internal renewal in the local church. Even more important was that the international (inter-cultural) teams never worked very well together, and this touched upon the core of the community's self-understanding. These ultimately unrealistic expectations of permanent calls for pioneer mission led to a certain permanent atmosphere of dissatisfaction in CEVAA.

The revivalist rhetoric can be found to varying degrees in all three organisations, in each case particularly supported by some of the Southern churches' representatives. Yet in all three cases it cannot be doubted that in fact the reform did *not* lead to a revival of *this kind,* ieie the revival of an ancient evangelistic missionary spirit.

We need not discuss here how far the traditional understanding of mission as some kind of 'evangelism', a thing to be *done* (together or alone), is a necessary element of missiology or, as some have claimed, whether wider missiological concepts run the danger of declaring everything in the life of the church to be 'mission' so that in the end nothing is mission any more.[xx] It seems, however, clear that the huge structural reforms that CEVAA/CWM/UEM underwent I arenot primarily aimed at a re-strengthening of this kind of mission. Why should a structure that furthers equal sharing of resources and power between North and South be particularly favourable to evangelistic activity? Any increase in democratic control slows decisions down and is far more costly than a centrally controlled body. And as McGavran showed decades ago, Christian inter-cultural community is rather detrimental to church growth. People prefer to join churches formed in homogenous cultural and social milieus. But maybe the alternative is smaller but truer to the Gospel?

By comparison with CEVAA, CWM's orientation on 'mission as struggle for justice model' is more in line with the structural reform and contributed to its greater sense of satisfaction and purpose. In addition to its mission focussed on social justice, CWM in recent years engaged in some new mission initiatives in its Western member churches.

The 'family life'

CEVAA/CWM/UEM all use similar metaphors to describe their group of churches. The most widespread is the 'family' (sometimes even 'marriage') which sounds more organic, obliging and romantic than the comparably pragmatic 'partnership' (a term originally borrowed from the business and colonial world). The family metaphor expresses the mutual reliability and spiritual and material support, but most of all the group's shared history. In CEVAA there was a common cultural heritage in the French language, much stressed in the early years. For CWM the group members mostly were part of the British Commonwealth, a living monument of British cultural influence and the country's ingenious ability to

engineer a peaceful transition from the Empire to the post-colonial era, very much in contrast to the violent French experience. All three organisations additionally have a strong link in their predominantly Reformed theological heritage.[xxi]

Three things are remarkable about the 'family' groups that make up CEVAA/CWM/UEM: the processes of enlargement through new members joining (a) the formation of sub-groups with their resulting dynamics (b); and finally the relationship of these 'families' to the wider ecumenical scene and organisations (c).

a) Originally all three organisations consisted almost entirely of members who had had links far back in time, usually as former 'mission fields', then 'younger churches', now full members. Since then CEVAA and CWM both enlarged, UEM did not. There were two main motivations for enlargement: either an existing link between a member church and a prospective candidate or the will to widen the horizon of the community by accepting some 'outsider' without previous links. The first motivation played a role in both, CEVAA and CWM, the second only in CWM.

When CEVAA was founded in 1971, it had 24 member churches; by 1992 the number had grown to 47. The new members were exclusively those who had either historical or national or denominational links to an existing member. Thus the Waldensians in Latin America joined in 1985 in addition to the Waldensian Church in Italy (a founding member). All other new members come from the Reformed tradition.[xxii] The francophone Swiss churches brought the German Swiss in in 1988, and because of its historical links to French Switzerland the Presbyterian Church in Mozambique joined in 1975. The disadvantage of this way of enlarging was that it did not really widen the horizon of the community. All new members were of the same tradition, only one brought in a new continental perspective (Latin America) and none was free of the weight of previous relationships with all their burdens. All new members (except the German Swiss) were financially dependent on an existing member church, so that all the old problems this constellation carried with it were brought forward into the community.

What is more, in the process CEVAA gave up a huge advantage it had had at the beginning - its francophone orientation. In 1971 only two member churches were not franco- but anglophone (Lesotho Evangelical Church and United Church of Zambia)[xxiii], a situation which made communication within CEVAA relatively easy, although even then it was obvious that the language barrier basically excluded

those two from fully participating. With the new members German, Portuguese and Spanish speaking churches joined – a serious hindrance for the meaningful operating of the community, not only in grassroots communication. The reason for this development was that CEVAA explicitly did not want to be perceived as an exclusively francophone club, although any deeper look reveals how very much it was imbued with its French cultural and linguistic heritage.

CWM's enlargement policy was partly similar. Here, too, many new members (22 churches in 1977 and 32 in 1997) joined because of historical links with previous members or joining British member churches (thus repeatedly 'church couples' joined, for example the Presbyterian Church in Wales together with their former mission field, the Presbyterian Church in North India in 1978). The disadvantage is the same as with CEVAA. However, CWM also sometimes accepted new members that enlarged the group beyond the old networks and brought in churches which were interested in the prophetic project for international church relations that CWM constituted rather than in the maintenance of some former links This was the case with the Reformed Church in the Netherlands (1978) and the Presbyterian Church in Korea (1989).[xxiv] The first widened CWM's basis in Europe beyond Britain.[xxv] One should also note that CWM accepted newcomers from five different world regions, whereas CEVAA almost exclusively received new members from Africa. Thus the more widespread network that CWM had from the beginning (see below) was further diversified by its enlargement policy, whereas CEVAA rather strengthened its European-African bipolarity.

All three organisations at the moment do not intend to accept any new members.

b) There are great differences in the composition of CEVAA/CWM/UEM. These can partly be seen in the regional sub-structures they have given themselves. CWM has six regions (Europe, Africa, Caribbean, South Asia, East Asia, Pacific), UEM has three (Europe, Africa, Asia). CEVAA in theory has four (Africa, Europe, Latin America, Pacific) but in fact the last two consist of only one each, two churches which for want of frequent communication find themselves fairly marginalised in the organisation.[xxvi] The natural result is that there is a clear bifocal tendency. This at times leads to the temptation to see any disagreement in a North-South conflict perspective, simply because there is no real third party. Now the North-South relationship is, for better or worse, still riddled with manifold historical burdens of inferiority complexes, guilt feelings for a colonial past, massive material inequality

etc. Things become worse when such a constellation is, consciously or not, instrumentalised in arguments. Anybody involved in intercultural mission relationships knows that this is not uncommon. Things are not helped by the fact that Africa where most Southern CEVAA churches lie is that part of the Third World that has been economically least successful. For want of positive examples (as CWM has in some rich Asian churches) there is always the natural temptation to go for the European helper syndrome combined with a certain frustration at things never improving but rather getting worse.

The constellation in UEM also is not uncomplicated. If CEVAA has two blocks, UEM tends to have three. It is no secret that relationships between Africans and Asians are by no means easier than between 'theNorth' and 'the South'. 'The South' is of course not generally a block with common interests. Since the constitution splits the member churches into three equal-sized regions (each region sends eight members to the Council) such thinking in these blocks is encouraged. The danger is that in cases of conflicting interests between African and Asian churches the Germans will function as arbiters, maybe because they are seen as the ones with the least interest in finance and power from the organisation. That such a danger is no mere speculation became clear when in the constituent Assembly meeting in 1996 an African stood against an Asian candidate to become the first Moderator of UEM. Voting clearly threatened to be in continental blocks with the Germans casting the decisive vote and eventually the suggestion was made to elect a German Moderator. This only failed because the prospective candidate declined. It is to be hoped, however, that these were merely teething problems: after the Asian Moderator (Soritua Nababan, Indonesia, 1996 to 2001) UEM now has an African (Zephania Kameeta, Namibia).

Language-wise UEM has found a singular solution: its official languages are only English and French;German, not used as a colonial heritage in any Third World country, is only relevant for the Germans themselves in their region. One effect is that nobody in meetings has an advantage by speaking his or her mother tongue. If anybody it is the Southern delegates, educated in English or French, who have a linguistic advantage. Since language is a primary means of exerting power this seems a happy coincidence.

CWM operates in English (there is no choice really), so that most of the Westerners always move on home ground and of course this leads sometimes to the Southern delegates, especially in lay and youth training programmes being a bit in difficulties. A healthy element is that, of the three, CWM has the most

varied organisation. All six regions contain a substantial number of churches,[xxvii] so any issue will be discussed by people with very different backgrounds. For example CWM has member churches which are a tiny minority in their non-Christian context – an almost irrelevant element in CEVAA. Another effect is that the discussions about use of funds can be more open. It is not the same if a request for money from the common fund is challenged by another Southern church for not being in support of a really *missionary* project (as the guidelines require) or if the challenge comes from a Western church which has for centuries been in the position of prescribing the use of donated money. Thus financial control is much easier to exert in an international forum – a real benefit of the multilateral way relationships are structured in CEVAA/CWM/UEM.

c) The fact that CEVAA/CWM/UEM comprise relatively large numbers of churches which are also members of the WCC as well as Regional Ecumenical Bodies etc has led to worries even before their foundation. Will they become competitors for the WCC? Will they distract from commitment to the regional bodies, especially in smaller churches with limited personnel resources? The answer to these questions is complex and requires a deeper analysis than can be given here. Certainly some member bodies in the South have declared that they feel themselves far closer to CEVAA/CWM/UEM than to their immediate neighbour churches or regional ecumenical bodies. But then this had been the case even before when they related more to the old mission society than to their neighbours or regional ecumenical body. On the other hand CEVAA/CWM/UEM have been aware of the problem and have taken steps to ensure that their work is not a threat to wider ecumenical organisations. It seems however that in recent years the development has not been without problems and that the three organisations have become in some fields competitors with the established ecumenical instruments, occasionally even severing links with them. There clearly seems to be a need to avoid an elitist and isolationist temptation.

Whose partnership?

One of the main criticisms of the integration of Church and mission was that it would take mission away from its ecumenical origins among laypeople at the grassroots. The closer mission comes to the church the more it is sucked into the hierarchical structures, bureaucracy, denominationalism and church politics. This is a valid criticism and one cannot fail to observe that 40 years after the integration started

mission has become more 'churchy', but have the churches become more mission-oriented to the same degree?

Similar fears were uttered when CEVAA/CWM/UEM began. The logic of the organisations required indeed that the various governing bodies (Council, Executive Committee etc) consisted mainly of church leaders. This was necessary because the new organisation was no longer meant to be an entity in itself but an *instrument* to be used by its member churches. In order for the member churches to be able to engage and challenge each other in a meaningful way it was necessary to bring together people from the member churches who were in a position to make decisions for the church they represented. This included the Western partners. One of the innovations coming with integration had been that Southern church leaders no longer had to meet the Mission Society's leadership rather than their own counterpart in the Western churches. From now on the encounter ought to be between church leaders at both ends. Therefore from the beginning CEVAA/CWM/UEM particularly encouraged the delegation of church leaders as representatives to their Council meetings etc.[xxviii] The effect was predictable and confirmed some of the scepticism that critics had put forward early on. By the marginalising or dissolution of the old circles of mission friends with their often conservative mission theologies there was no longer a natural congregational basis. The new organisations were removed from the congregationallevel in all member churches. To this day CEVAA/CWM/UEM are widely perceived as something happening elsewhere or 'up there'. CEVAA/CWM/UEM have been aware of this problem and in various ways tried to counterbalance it. If the main policy-making bodies (Council and Executive Committee) are composed of church leaders how can one ensure grassroots involvement? There are three main models:

a) Extend participation in the structures: CEVAA in 1996 introduced a biennial General Assembly with a much wider composition than the all-church-leaders-Council so that participation from non-leaders (laypeople, women, youth) became possible. UEM and CWM from the start had opted for slightly larger Councils and encouraged member churches to send both church leaders and laypeople, women and young people as part of their representative delegation. There is a certain trickle-down effect through multiplicators in this but it is obvious that the numbers involved on the rare occasions of these meetings is limited.

b) Pedagogical training programmes: Another way of rooting the CEVAA/CWM/UEM vision was through pedagogical programmes intended to raise the awareness of and understanding for the worldwide Church in the congregations such as 'Education-in-Mission' programmes and 'Training-in-Mission' for young people (CWM), '*Animation Théologique*' (CEVAA), mutual inter-church visits etc.[xxix] The more practical these programmes were the more successful they were. So for example CWM's Training-in-Mission was copied elsewhere whereas CEVAA's *Animation Théologique* remained a highly theoretical and unclear concept which regularly left many participants at grassroots level with a good feeling of having 'done something together' but unable to say what that 'something' was.

c) 'Democratic direct relationships at sub-synod level' or 'bilateralism'?: Those programmes which conveyed not just information but experience, usually connected with direct North-South contact, proved most successful. In this respect the main paradigm shift in mission came with the new means of transport and communication in the last third of the 20th century. Suddenly missionaries began to travel to and fro far more frequently and a few years later it was possible to expose congregation members to first-hand experience of foreign churches. Visiting teams between churches occur in all three organisations, with different foci, often an evangelistic one (for example UEM's 'United-in-Mission Teams' that tour a member church). Their disadvantage is that they are one-off events.

This is how the idea of 'twinnings' (sometimes called 'partnerships') arose ca. 1970.[xxx] Direct long-term partnerships of congregations or church circuits in a Western and a Southern church, links that included mutual visits, letter writing, partnership Sundays (often a special service held on the same day by both partners), mutual intercession – and financial transfer. Twinnings are particularly strong in UEM (over 100 in 1999). There were two main obstacles that hindered their flourishing in CEVAA and CWM. One is the desire of many Southern church leaders to keep the overseas relationships of their church (and the fund flow) under control. It is obvious that the existence of a large number of twinnings is uncontrollable for any head of church and the safest way to avoid this is not to encourage them.

Another reason is that CEVAA and CWM were both strongly suspicious of congregational twinnings because of the fund flow often going with them. This, they fear, might lead to paternalistic relationships (the 'buy a cow for Kenya syndrome').

> Nothing vitiates solidarity more effectively than financial need-based relationships: the twinning of congregations, which was originally intended to be a way of learning from one another, has instead strengthened dependency relationships.[xxxi]

In the same vein CEVAA in its early days wanted to give up the very term of 'twinning' (*jumelage*) altogether. Thus instead of stressing their direct and democratic aspects, CWM and CEVAA tended to brand them as 'bilateralism', which was in some ways the greatest anathema in CEVAA/CWM/UEM.

But although their reasoning hints at real problems and dangers inherent in twinnings, their reaction was ultimately unconvincing. Experience shows that this defensive attitude only slows things down and lets them grow outside the influence of the organisation. The congregations at the grassroots cannot be controlled by CEVAA/CWM/UEM or others in the name of pure doctrine. UEM's strategy of setting guidelines (mainly re financial transfer) for twinnings seems more promising than trying to avoid them altogether. Despite the undeniable risk of dependency relationships, twinnings seem a promising and unparalleled field for ecumenical learning, allowing many people to participate and gain first-hand experience of the world-wide Church.

Thus attempts to make the ecumenical idea better rooted locally come from two sides: CEVAA/CWM/UEM and the grassroots themselves. CEVAA and CWM have in the past found it difficult to accept initiatives for twinnings coming from outside and to this day at least CWM is not particularly open to the idea. UEM has successfully followed the line of integrating and co-ordinating what it cannot control or hinder. Twinnings are equipped with guidelines (most of which regulate fund flow) and regular gatherings of congregations involved in a twinning. The latest development are trilateral partnerships, involving a church from Germany, Africa and Asia.

Conclusion

This article can only highlight some aspects of CEVAA/CWM/UEM. Important and complex aspects have had to be left out or could only be mentioned very briefly, such as the questions of the relationship to other ecumenical organisations, the specificity of French colonialism and its indirect influence on CEVAA, the discussions on block grants vs agreed mission project priorities, the involvement of women and youth, the evangelistic aspect, the wide variety of mission theologies and the way it is dealt with (cumulatively, complementarily, competitively) etc.

There is no doubt that CEVAA/CWM/UEM still constitute a prime example of innovative and bold new steps in mission. Structures still are an important test case for renewal in missionary ecumenical relationships. Just how serious is the ubiquitous talk of 'partnership'? What constitutes equality and what injustice, and what kind of communion is possible in the context of inequality? Peaceful inter-cultural co-existence is one of the major challenges of our time, when many people move (often involuntarily) around the world, when means of transport and communication make encounters easier. In such a context the experiences of CEVAA/CWM/UEM with their structural approach to safeguarding equal relationships can be seen as a worthwhile project. Experiences so far are mixed, clearly an inter-cultural communion is not only faithful to the Bible but also full of rewards, *as well as* of challenges and problems. Certainly the new structures are in many ways a step forward, facilitating the addressing of inherited and new problems. Nobody expects them to be perfect and therefore it remains important a) that CEVAA/CWM/UEM remain open to reform and do so in close contact and conversation with other ecumenical organisations and b) that other mission organisations explore what *their* structural responses to the new mission paradigms should look like. CEVAA/CWM/UEM are bold and positive reforms, but they are not the solution that all others must hasten to imitate.

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[i] Stockwell, E.: "Editorial", *IRM* 76 (1987), 435-39, quot. p.435.

[ii] "Learning New Models for International Mission", in: *IRM* 78 (1989), 75-79, quot. p.75.

[iii] Raiser, K.: Wie gehören Partnerschaft und Einheit zum Zeugnis der Kirche? in: *Jahrbuch Evangelische Mission* 1984, Hamburg 1984, 39-53, quot. p.43. Transl.: KMF.

[iv] 'North-South' and 'West-South' are here used generically, not geographically. Not all poorer churches are in the South, not all richer ones in the North and vice versa. E.g. the churches in Australia, New Zealand and South Africa which are members of CWM are here regarded as Western or metaphorically 'Northern' churches.

[v] This article is based upon a study on the history and functioning of these three organisations which contains an almost complete bibliography: Funkschmidt, K.: *Earthing the Vision. Strukturreformen in der Mission untersucht am Beispiel von CEVAA (Paris), CWM (London) und UEM (Wuppertal)*, Frankfurt/M. 2000, Otto Lembeck Verlag (615 pp). See also:Brown, J.: "International Relationships in Mission. A Study Project", *IRM* 86 (1997), 207-73; Evans, M.: "The Council for World Mission's Partnership in Mission Model. Experiences and Insights", *IRM* 76 (1987), 458-72; Nottingham, W.J.: "Getting to Know CEVAA", *IRM* 90 (2001) p.455-61. Up-to-date information on the three organisations can be found on their websites: CEVAA: www.cevaa.org www.cwmission.org, www.vemission.org. More recently some other mission agencies restructured in similar ways (Basel Mission, Evangelisches Missionswerk in Südwestdeutschland *et al.*) but none of them have gone nearly as far as these three.

[vi] Duraisingh, C. (ed.): *Called to One Hope. The Gospel in Diverse Cultures.* [Report Salvador de Bahia 1996] p.72.

[vii] This is reported by Ulrich Beyer: Sektion IV B: Auf dem Wege zu verantwortlichen Beziehungen in der Mission, in: Schäfer, K. (ed.): *Zu einer Hoffnung berufen. Das Evangelium in verschiedenen Kulturen. Elfte Konferenz für Weltmission und Evangelisation in Salvador de Bahia 1996*, Frankfurt/Main: Otto Lembeck, p.104-10, quot. p.105f). In San Antonio 1989 the three organisations had been quoted without mentioning their names as "acts in faithfulness" in Section IV "Towards Renewed Communities in Mission"; cf. Wilson R.F.: *The San Antonio Report. Your Will Be Done: Mission in Christ's Way*, Geneva: WCC Publications 1990 p.72f.

[viii] Cf. Gordon, D.: North Africa's French Legacy 1954-62, Cambridge/MA: Harvard University Press 1964.

[ix] The theological challenges to the question of power structures are clearly spelt out in Kosuke Koyama's paper in section IV of the World Mission conference in Melbourne (*Your Kingdom Come. Mission Perspectives. Report on the World Conference on Mission and Evangelism, Melbourne, Australia, 12-25 May 1980*, Geneva, WCC 1980 p.157-70).

[x] The years can also show the very different time spans that were needed to go from the consultation to the new organisation: seven years in Paris, two and a half in London, eighteen in Wuppertal.

[xi] In Paris one should also mention the French president of the Paris Mission, Jean Courvoisier. In Wuppertal Sandner's predecessor Gustav Menzel had in some ways preconceived the later idea in the early 1970s.

[xii] In UEM the majority of Christians live in the North and the majority of churches lie in the South. In CEVAA it is the reverse. In CWM both majorities are in the South.

[xiii] Terminology is a bit confusing, since both LMS/CWM and Rhenish Mission/UEM actually had changed their name years before the structural reform.

[xiv] "Southern envoys rarely go back home." CEVAA: Consultation on Exchange of Persons, Vallecrosia 1989 Annex 1 p.3, (brochure ed. by CEVAA, Paris 1989). The problem sometimes also occurred in reverse direction.

[xv] One should note, however, that very many African pastors working in France do not go via CEVAA, as pointed out by Zorn, J.F: Dynamisme missionnaire, une chance pour l'Eglise, *Spiritus* 31 (1990), 136-52, here p.146.

[xvi] A more detailed presentation of statistics cf. Funkschmidt op. cit. (endn. v) p. 452-76.

[xvii] Some of many examples Kotto, J.: L'action missionnaire commune des Eglises francophones, in: ders./Bonzon, C., Face à l'Avenir. Préface de Marc Boegner, ed. Société des Missions Evangéliques de Paris, Paris 1965, 37-44.

[xviii] On the AAC cf. for example: Ayivi, E.: "Joint Apostolic Action in Dahomey", *IRM* 61 (1972), 144-49. The AAC were modelled on the DWME programme Joint Action for Mission, first ideas of which emerged in Tambaram 1938. It was moulded into a formal programme in the World Mission Conference in Mexico 1963 (cf. Orchard, R.K.: "Joint Action for Mission. Its Aim, Implications and Method", *IRM* 54 (1965), 81-94; *The World Mission of the Church. Tambaram 1938*, London-New York 1939, p.40 and the reports of Sections III and IV in Mexico 1963). 'Apostolic Action' was an attempt to replace the loaded word 'mission' – a good example of the tendency in ecumenical circles to overcome problematic historical heritage by innovative language.

[xix] This statement cannot be proved here. Cf. Funkschmidt, op.cit. (endn. v) p.165-88.

[xx] The phrase is variously ascribed to either Walter Freytag or Stephen Neill.

[xxi] In UEM this is not so marked today but it is still noticeable that the Rhenish Mission comes from Reformed roots as well.

[xxii] An attempt of the two French Lutheran members to have their Lutheran overseas partners in Madagascar and Cameroon accepted was turned down twice in later years.

[xxiii] Historically even the Waldensian Church in Italy once was francophone.

[xxiv] Similarly UEM accepted the United Church of the Philippines as a new member in 1984.

[xxv] The European dimension is an important difference between CEVAA and CWM on the one hand and UEM on the other. UEM's grandly named 'European' Region consists exclusively of German churches – a very narrow vision of Europe indeed!

[xxvi] Furthermore the two Pacific churches are somewhat French churches, for New Caledonia and Tahiti are French overseas *départements*. As mentioned above the two anglophone and the lusophone churches in Africa also find it hard to fully participate in the life of CEVAA. None of the Southern Executive Secretaries in CEVAA's history ever came from a non-African, non-francophone church.

[xxvii] Except the Caribbean where there are only two churches, but these seem not to be hampered by this and play a strong part.

[xxviii] Most marked in CEVAA where every church only sends one delegate to the Council, perferably the church leader.

[xxix] These endeavours are too manifold to be presented here. Information can be obtained from CEVAA/CWM/UEM directly (see also Funkschmidt, op. cit. (endn. v) p.500-15).

[xxx] On practical experience with twinnings and ecumenical learning cf. the excellent study: Bauerochse, L.: Learning to Live Together: Interchurch Partnerships As Ecumenical Communities of Learning, Geneva/Hamburg: WCC/EMW, 2001.

[xxxi] Niles, D.P.: *CWM as a Missionary Community: Why Personnel Sharing?* (Personnel Advisory Group Meeting, 25-27 August 1995) unpublished Tpscr. London 1995 p.7.