



Frank Kürschner-Pelkmann

## Reinhard Bonnke's Theology

### A Pentecostal preacher and his mission – a critical analysis

translated from German into English by Cynthia C. Lies

#### Introduction

The impulse for this short study came primarily from colleagues in Africa. Over the past few years our African partners have spoken with increasing frequency about Reinhard Bonnke to us, i.e. to those responsible within the churches and mission agencies in Germany for maintaining relations with African churches and ecumenical institutions. They congratulated us, (as the representatives of German churches), on having such an effective preacher and evangelist doing this good work in Africa. When it became obvious that we were reluctant to accept such praise, and apparent that our reservations were of a theological nature, our partners found this difficult to understand.

My colleague (Volker Faigle), of the Africa Secretariat in the EKD church office, and I recall a similar scene at one of the Round Tables of the All African Church Conference (AACC) and its ecumenical partners a few years ago. Outside the agenda, the Nigerian Chairman of the Finance Committee of the AACC reported with great approval on one of Bonnke's evangelistic campaigns in his country. We attempted to explain our reservations about Bonnke's methods and theological viewpoint. We agreed to differ in our assessment of Bonnke's effectiveness. As a result, our African partners requested us to take time to explain our criticisms of Bonnke in more detail, and to provide them with further opinions and information about Bonnke and his campaigns that were not available to them in Africa. We agreed to send them texts that reflected critically on what Bonnke was doing and saying. But that was easier said than done.

A further impulse for this study came from the evangelistic campaign of „Christ for all Nations“ (CfaN) that took place in northern Germany a few years ago, which was however far less successful than comparable actions in African cities. German

church agencies at that time requested the Association of Protestant Churches and Missions in Germany (EMW) to make material about CfaN available to them. This was no problem, as CfaN sent out a lot of material and circular letters, and the EMW brought out a brochure containing the papers presented at a study day organised in 1993 by the EMW and the Missions Academy at the University of Hamburg, „Fundamentalism in Africa and America“. In this publication, unfortunately now out of print, Frank Kürschner-Pelkmann took a first critical look at the work of Reinhard Bonnke.

No recent evaluation of the work of the evangelist Bonnke has taken place written in either English or French – apart from a short description of Bonnke’s campaigns in the monograph by Paul Gifford, „African Christianity – Its Public Role“ published in 1998. We therefore requested Frank Kürschner-Pelkmann to take a closer look at the theology of Reinhard Bonnke.

The study presented here is based on the findings of various observers, on literature written by Bonnke himself and on further secondary literature. Every reader must make his or her own judgement about the content and the approach of the study. Throughout it, Frank Kürschner-Pelkmann brings together information, description and quotations linking them with helpful comments which invite the reader to further critical considerations. In this respect the study makes no final judgement. But one point should be underlined what according to the study is dangerous from a theological point of view. It is the way that Bonnke presents exciting experiences of salvation. The truth of these is, it is claimed, proved by the people who are healed. In this way the spirit is to be experienced tangibly and in an accessible way. This raises the question how we interpret and live with the biblical message.

The interpretation Frank Kürschner-Pelkmann offers us is, in my opinion, consistently fair. At certain points he even defends Bonnke against misunderstandings and unacceptable comparisons with US-American evangelists and their promises of prosperity and riches as a result of being „born again“.

When we commissioned the study (here in the EMW-office), I couldn’t help thinking that it could well in the end be a question of our understanding of mission. In his concluding chapter „Perspectives“ the author quite rightly raises questions about the understanding of mission and evangelism in our western tradition. He refers to the problems and embarrassment we experience with regard to imparting theological knowledge and our great reluctance to deal with various subjects: for example healing, the working of the Holy Spirit, the reality of evil, alternative methods of evangelisation, to name but a few. How easy it is to refute Bonnke’s methods from a theological point of view – but how irresponsible it would be if we were to leave it at that.

We must continue ecumenical discussions on these subjects. Some readers of the German version have already started this debate and written or spoken to us mentioning two different aspects. The first one refers to the methodology. Has this study not been written from a typical „western“ theological perspective? The second one is even more radical questioning the assumption of this study that Bonnke has any valid theology.

Finally a word about what the study cannot and does not wish to offer. It would certainly have been informative to have found out something about the financial sources for Reinhard Bonnke's huge evangelistic campaigns, so as to answer the question, who finances it all? Published annual accounts are not available. Nor was it possible within the framework of this brief study to carry out and evaluate interviews, for example with persons who have directly experienced Bonnke's campaigns or even with those who have experienced healing.

Keeping in mind these limitations I wish that this book will find many readers and serve as an impulse for further discussion and research.

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The Association of Protestant Churches and Missions in Germany would be very pleased if this publication were to open a debate on this subject. Please send your comments and opinions to:

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We plan to publish the contributions to the debate in one of the next editions of „EMW-Informationen“ and on our homepage [www.emw-d.de](http://www.emw-d.de).

# Reinhard Bonnke's Theology

by Frank Kürschner-Pelkmann

„Bonnke Raises Man from Death in Onitsha“. That was the headline in the Nigerian daily newspaper „The Post Express“ on December 8th 2001. Pastor Daniel Ekechukwu had been very seriously injured in a car accident on November 30th. When he was brought into the hospital the doctor declared him dead. But the pastor's wife refused to give up hope, and the following day she had the corpse transferred from the mortuary into a church in Onitsha, where Pastor Reinhard Bonnke was to preach. The body of the dead man was laid on a table in the basement while the evangelist was preaching in the church. While the sermon was being preached above him Pastor Ekechukwu's rigor mortis left him and he returned to life. It is also reported that he was completely healed of all the injuries that had led to his death. Reinhard Bonnke's reputation in Africa will have been further consolidated by this occurrence in the Nigerian city. Yet there is also criticism of his evangelistic methods and of his theology. What is the basis for this? Is it appropriate anyway to criticise an evangelist, during whose campaigns many sick people have been healed and now a dead person is even said to have been raised from the dead?

He is the most famous evangelist in Africa and during his campaigns preaches to hundreds of thousands of people, and yet in Germany, even though the brochure „From Minus to Plus“ was distributed to every household, little is known about him. This study sets out to deal mainly with Reinhard Bonnke's theological positions. They alone do not explain his success, but without knowing them it is not possible to understand the extent of his success in Africa and in other parts of the world.

In this study therefore I wish to make a critical appraisal of Bonnke's theology, without condemning it categorically. In order to do this, it is necessary to take a short look at the pattern of Reinhard Bonnke's life and work and evangelistic activities. It is particularly fascinating to see how his understanding of theology had a formative influence on the style of his evangelism and to a large extent was responsible for Bonnke's success.

Reinhard Bonnke belongs to the Pentecostal movement, the most rapidly-growing movement within Christianity. There are only very rough estimates as to the total number of Pentecostals in the world but it can be stated with certainty that there are several hundred million, perhaps five hundred million. Taking into consideration that the Pentecostal movement only came into existence at the beginning of the 20th Century (in the USA), this is enormous growth such as no religious movement beforehand has ever achieved. It is possible that by the year 2025 they will make up 44 percent of the world's Christians.<sup>3</sup> Today the Pentecostals have already established themselves as the fourth greatest Christian force besides the Catholics, Orthodox and Protestants. Yet within the Pentecostal movement there is an enormous variety of positions, both theological and ecclesiastical. For this reason it would not be appropriate to think of Bonnke's theological standpoints as typical of the Pentecostal movement, and the same is true of his style of evangelism. However the things that are important for all Pentecostals are important for Bonnke, for example, the importance of healing, the battle against demons, being born again and the

baptism of the Holy Spirit. And as with many other Pentecostals there is an obvious affinity with charismatic and evangelical positions. Throughout the world it is becoming more and more difficult to differentiate between these three movements within Christianity, and many Pentecostals, like Reinhard Bonnke, do not do so. Perhaps the situation can best be described in this way: the Pentecostal churches have many things in common with the other two Christian movements, but in addition they emphasise certain different features, for example speaking in tongues, which play practically no role at all for the others.

As Reinhard Bonnke is mainly active in Africa, it is important to briefly outline the religious situation on the continent where these mass evangelistic campaigns take place. During the last two centuries Christianity has become the largest or one of the two largest religious communities in most African countries, often in competition with Islam. There is a tradition of peaceful co-existence between Christians and Moslems but also unfortunately a growing number of conflicts and some violent confrontations. The Sudan and Nigeria are two countries where in the past few years there have been frequent conflicts between members of the two religious communities, although these conflicts cannot be seen merely as religious clashes. In these situations many intensive efforts are being made to encourage and maintain dialogue, in order to work out which articles of faith the two sides have in common and where they differ, and to encourage and enable members of both sides to cooperate with each other in a practical way.

Within the Christian community there is a continual and increasing tendency for new churches to spring up. At first the only churches to exist were the Ethiopian-Orthodox, the Coptic and those that had come into being through the European and North American Missions. However as the 20th Century progressed innumerable independent African churches were formed, often in protest against Protestant and Anglican churches which were dominated by European and American ideas and also against the Roman Catholic church. The ability to read the Bible for themselves opened up the way to developing theological concepts of their own; these centred around a very strong identification of their own situation with that of the people of Israel and the early Christian congregations. Thus the story of the exodus from slavery in Egypt became an inspiration for their own anti-colonial struggle.

Revival movements occur frequently within the independent churches and within the churches that developed out of the Mission churches, and many ideas that can be summarised under the headings evangelical, charismatic and Pentecostal have been adapted from overseas and developed independently.<sup>4</sup> Every day new churches are founded throughout the continent, especially Pentecostal churches<sup>5</sup>, and it is true to say that the religious field is one of the few fields in Africa that has for many years been experiencing a boom.<sup>6</sup> But there is great competition on this "market" and healing people is a very important factor in winning more people for one's own church. When Reinhard Bonnke carries out an evangelistic campaign on such a large scale it also alters the balance of power between the local churches, which explains in part why many churches decide to join in, in spite of the reservations of some of their leaders and members, in the hope of gaining new members through the campaign.

Furthermore there have always been attempts to look on Christian ideas and traditional religious ideas as an equally valid spiritual basis for one's life, i.e. to live in harmony with both the one God and the traditional gods, and to keep demons at bay

with the power of both. This process, known as syncretism, can be found in all religions throughout the world. When Reinhard Bonnke speaks about Satan, demons, and the Holy Spirit who is stronger than all the demons together, he is speaking to an audience for many of whom Satan and demons are something very real. And this applies to many Christians, as well as followers of the traditional religions and Moslems. Birgit Meyer makes the point that it is not only the case of fighting the old demons, but also new ones: „Pentecostal churches are popular in Ghana just because they offer the people an image of ‘evil’, which not only demonises the traditional gods and spirits but also the negative aspects of the capitalist world economy.“<sup>7</sup> In this context I must add that many people in Africa experience the dominant world economy and its effects on their lives as an inscrutable demonic force against which they are powerless. It is not only that the cultural and religious system of values has begun to falter, but also that people are searching for a power that will enable them to withstand the new demons. The Holy Spirit appears to be a more reliable power than the remedies offered by the economists, who preach adaptation to the predominating – and dominating – world economy. The tragic thing about this is that although demonising the forces of the global economy can offer emotional release, it can also in itself prevent them from developing strategies for resisting and coping with the everyday consequences of the globalisation process.

When Reinhard Bonnke holds an evangelistic campaign it not only brings together many different people, but also a great variety of traditions, convictions, beliefs and expectations. If only for this reason, it is fascinating to consider why and how Reinhard Bonnke manages to appeal to so many people in Africa and to so convince them. A critical consideration of Reinhard Bonnke’s evangelistic work inevitably raises the question: „What is mission today?“ And this question concerns not only Africa but also in Germany.<sup>8</sup>

In the final analysis, not only Reinhard Bonnke himself, but also the Pentecostal movement growing throughout Africa, challenges the churches that have grown out of the mission movement to show how their involvement in society and their concern for development can be integrated more strongly into the witness of the church as a whole. In 1991, during an evangelistic campaign in Nigeria, Reinhard Bonnke accused the churches of being so preoccupied with questions of politics and development that he questioned whether they were spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ at all.<sup>9</sup> One could counter this by asking what evangelists like Reinhard Bonnke are doing in concrete terms to help overcome the poverty and deprivation affecting many millions of people in Africa. But still the questions addressed to the churches and their development departments remain. What do they understand by the term „development“, and how do they intend to continue with their development work on a continent that over the last twenty to thirty years has been deeply disappointed in the „development“ they were promised? This question is particularly urgent with regard to the work of the church in the field of health care. There are therefore many questions to ask of Reinhard Bonnke, and also of the churches themselves. But first of all we must ask who this person is, who wishes to help to save Africa from Cape Town to Cairo.

### **Excerpts from Reinhard Bonnke’s history**

Reinhard Bonnke was born into a family influenced by the Pentecostal movement. His grandfather had been healed of his rheumatism by a Pentecostal preacher and

so won over to the Pentecostal faith. His father, Hermann Bonnke, was a professional soldier in the Weimar Republic and a convinced Christian at home in the Pentecostal congregation, who could speak in tongues. In 1933 he married the organist of his Pentecostal congregation, Meta Scheffler.

Reinhard was born in Königsberg on April 19th 1940, as the fifth child in the family. The first years of his life were deeply influenced by the war and then the dramatic flight from East Prussia. Together with his mother and his brothers and sisters he escaped on board a ship to Denmark, where they were interned at the end of the war. His father also managed to escape to the west and was taken prisoner of war by the British. It was several years before the family was re-united and were able to move to Glückstadt in Holstein. Here the parents and six children lived together in one room at first.

An occurrence with far-reaching consequences was when Reinhard stole a small amount of money from his mother's purse. When she found him out, his mother did not smack him as he expected, but rather she said: „Reinhard, you know it is wrong to steal. Doing this means you are on your way to hell.“<sup>10</sup> Reinhard Bonnke confessed later that at that moment something changed in his life. He never stole again, and from this point onwards his life was determined by the belief that Jesus had come into the world to save sinners, but also that hell was a real threat. Even today being saved from hell still plays an important role in his theology and his sermons, while his integrity in money matters has saved him from the problems that have confronted many famous American television preachers in recent years.

Another far-reaching event in the family history was the early retirement of his father from military service, enabling him to concentrate all his energy on building up a Pentecostal congregation in Krempe, a small place a few kilometres away from Glückstadt. On Sundays he rode over there on his bicycle while the rest of the family continued to attend services in the Pentecostal congregation in Glückstadt. Here, soon after his tenth birthday, Reinhard had another formative experience. A missionary visited this congregation and talked about his work in foreign lands. Reinhard was deeply impressed and heard, according to his biographer, „another voice in his own heart telling him very clearly that one day he would preach the gospel in Africa“.<sup>11</sup>

At the end of 1951 the Finnish Pentecostal preacher Pfarrer Kukula came to Glückstadt. He was famous for helping people to achieve baptism with the Holy Spirit. Reinhard Bonnke later wrote about that service: „He carefully explained the truth of the baptism in the Holy Spirit. We had hardly knelt down, when the power of God began to pour into and over me. Joy unspeakable filled my heart and I began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave me utterance. It was like a heavenly fountain opening up within me and it is flowing even today.“<sup>12</sup> He later commented on the importance of his speaking with tongues: „My own faith was activated by the initial sign of tongues which led me into this present ministry of evangelism.“<sup>13</sup> Elsewhere he wrote about what effect this experience had on him: „I spoke with tongues also and it was such a marvellous thing to me that I've never doubted since that miracles are for today.“<sup>14</sup> The baptism in the Holy Spirit as Reinhard Bonnke experienced it in Glückstadt, was one of the formative experiences in his life.

When he was about 14 years old, he joined his father every Sunday and attended the services in Krempe, and it was here that he performed his first act of healing. Reinhard Bonnke was attending one of the services, „Then I began to get an impulse to do something my father would not like. For no reason at all I could not stop thinking about a woman in the church who sat on the opposite side ... It wasn't just in my head. It seemed all over me, and I tingled with it, more and more, too much, like voltage steadily increasing. I tried to push it out of my mind, but the tingling current became worse. I would have to do it, but what would she say and what would Father do? So I crouched down behind the seats and step by step went across to her. Then I said 'I want to pray for you.' She looked at me and said ‚All right – pray for me!' I put my hand upon this grown-up woman and something happened. The current in my body seemed to jolt right out into her. At that point, Father couldn't help but notice, and asked, 'Reinhard, what are you doing?' The lady answered for me. 'Reinhard put his hand on me and I felt the power of the Lord go through me, and look! – I am well, I am healed!'"<sup>15</sup>

When Reinhard Bonnke was 17 years old he had a vision, in which he saw Johannesburg marked on a map of Africa, and the „little missionary“, as he was already called<sup>16</sup>, took his calling to be a missionary even more seriously. When he was 19 years old he began a two-year training course at a Bible-school in Wales. Besides gaining theological knowledge he also learnt here to trust that God takes care of everything if one really prays hard enough. His biographer Colin Whittaker is able to report that on several occasions Reinhard Bonnke received the exact amount of money that he required for a bus or train ticket in a totally unforeseeable way.<sup>17</sup> The encouragement given by the teachers at the Bible school, to trust in God and believe that God answers prayer, fell on fruitful ground with Reinhard Bonnke and influenced both his theological texts and sermons.

After returning to Germany in 1961 Bonnke worked as an evangelist in northern Germany and gained his first experience in tent mission. At this time acts of healing already played an important role in his evangelistic meetings, gained him respect from the public and the media and helped to bring many people into the mission tent. This was also the time when Reinhard Bonnke was looking for a partner for his life and a decisive factor was whether the young woman would be prepared to go to Africa with him. In Anni Sülzle, who conducted a church choir, he finally found the right person. They got married and together built up a Pentecostal congregation in Flensburg, a town near the Danish border.

But Africa remained their goal and in 1967 the young family were commissioned by the Velberter Mission and set off for Durban in South Africa. There Reinhard Bonnke was attached as a preacher to the „Apostolic Faith Mission“, one of the oldest Pentecostal church unions in South Africa. However the white preacher, with whom Reinhard Bonnke was supposed to work, was firmly rooted in apartheid thinking and refused to call the black people to whom he preached Brothers and Sisters, or to shake hands with them. Reinhard Bonnke and his wife, who loved the African people, were deeply shocked by this behaviour and they parted from him.

Reinhard Bonnke received permission to move to Lesotho with his family and to begin his own mission work here. In Maseru Bonnke preached at the bus station and was slowly able to build up a Pentecostal congregation with fifty members. Bonnke's first great success was a Bible correspondence course, in which 50,000 persons

finally enrolled. In order to produce lesson materials he built up his own small printing press, which also printed an evangelistic magazine. The magazine and other religious tracts and publications were distributed by cycling evangelists, colporteurs, who sold them throughout Lesotho. Soon he was also able to found a small Bible-school.

Perhaps Reinhard Bonnke would have remained a preacher of local importance in Lesotho, if one night he had not had a dream, in which "he saw a map of Africa, and as he watched he saw it being washed in red blood. The Holy Spirit told him it was the blood of Jesus and whispered into his ear, 'Africa shall be saved!'"<sup>18</sup> It was as a result of this dream that the decision was taken to found the evangelistic enterprise that was to take the message of Christ from Cape Town to Cairo.

Gradually it became clear that the new mission movement was to be called „Christ for all Nations“. But Reinhard Bonnke's very ambitious plans in view of his very limited means brought him into conflict with the Velberter Mission, and they parted company. Now Reinhard Bonnke learned the lesson that evangelistic campaigns were particularly successful if they succeeded in reaching large numbers of people and making the power of the Holy Spirit visible through acts of healing. Working at first from Maseru and then from Johannesburg, Bonnke carried out the first major evangelistic campaigns in large auditoriums and football stadiums, one of them in Gaborone in Botswana<sup>19</sup>. Quite consciously he made evangelism his central aim and not healing, for evangelism was his calling, and has remained so.

As part of the evangelistic campaign in Johannesburg around 100 evangelists were equipped with bicycles and literature and visited families in Soweto over a period of eight months. „The team planned the campaign with military precision“, writes Bonnke's biographer Colin Whittaker.<sup>20</sup> He continues: „Throughout these eventful months rumblings of unrest against apartheid had been mounting through the nation. Then on 18th June 1976, not long after the last evangelist had fulfilled his mission, large-scale rioting broke out in Soweto and many were killed. Only then did Reinhard fully appreciate God's urgency to reach the township ... God's timing is always perfect.“<sup>21</sup> The brutal suppression of a pupils' revolt is only described here in relation to the possibilities for Bonnke's own evangelistic work. The biographer Ron Steele writes about this conflict „lawlessness reigned for several weeks“<sup>22</sup>, whereas others spoke of an important phase in the black South Africans' fight for freedom. Nor does the expression „rabble-rouser“<sup>23</sup> indicate an identification with the oppressed.<sup>24</sup>

How political every word and action was in that tense situation can be seen in the fact that in 1977 Reinhard Bonnke carried out an evangelistic campaign in the Venda-Homeland; one of those artificial types of states created by the apartheid government to rob the black South Africans of their citizenship and make them citizens of non-viable dependent small states, set up as they saw fit by the powers-that-be in Pretoria. In Venda-Homeland a large evangelistic campaign took place. That was in itself a highly political act. Colin Whittaker reports: „One afternoon when Reinhard was alone praying in his caravan, God told him to go and buy a beautiful gift for the country's President ... On his return he found a message waiting for him. The President wanted to see him at 4 pm! This Holy Spirit guidance thrilled Reinhard and his team.“<sup>25</sup> The reception really took place and in the course of it the „President“ spoke of his "nation". The „President“ and his ministers confessed their faith in God. Ron Steele writes about what then occurred: „It was an unusual scene when

Reinhard and his staff laid their hands on the President and his staff and prayed with them. Shouts of 'Hallelujah' and 'Praise the Lord' rang out as the leaders of the nation accepted their salvation in Jesus."<sup>26</sup> That these „leaders of the nation“ were only puppets of a racist regime is not revealed to the readers of the biography.

Further insights into Reinhard Bonnke's relationship to the politics of apartheid can be gained from the autobiography of Frank Chikane, who was one of Bonnke's staff in 1975 and 1976; later, as General Secretary of the South African Council of Churches he became one of the best-known speakers of the movement against apartheid in South Africa. Looking back he writes: „I spent a very painful yet exciting year with Pastor Bonnke, a gifted man who had certainly been called by God. But he served within the system of apartheid and this led him into difficult conflicts."<sup>27</sup> Frank Chikane gives a graphic example of this in his autobiography: Bonnke and his staff had their offices in an old church, in which the youth workers of a white church also had their offices. Bonnke himself was often on the road, and so Chikane was frequently invited to have a cup of tea with the staff of the youth office on his own. While the other members of staff drank their tea out of normal cups, Chikane, as the only black person present, was given his tea in a tin cup. When Reinhard Bonnke also joined one of these tea-breaks on one occasion, he noticed this racist discrimination. He said to Chikane, they would go shopping. Chikane writes: „He bought two cups for us and so avoided the conflict with these racist Christians."<sup>28</sup> However Bonnke did not say anything about the fact that these white Christians prevented their black fellow Christians from using the same toilet as they did, by putting a padlock on it.

Frank Chikane left him after a year. One of the reasons was the letters that Pastor Bonnke received from white South African Christians inviting him to come and preach and saying things like: „Please come to us and hold an evangelistic campaign, for we have so many communists and terrorists here."<sup>29</sup> The role anti-communism played even later, at least in the eyes of his biographer Ron Steele, is reflected in these sentences taken from a book that was published in 1986 in English and 1987 in German: „Although there are such great opportunities for us to operate here, there also obstacles, and our task in Africa is dangerous ... Besides which the forces of Islam and Marxism are at work."<sup>30</sup> Reinhard Bonnke was no champion of the apartheid regime, rather the opposite, but he worked within the rules determined by the system. The fact that the whole of his work was orientated towards the task of evangelism meant that he considered all other questions to be of secondary importance.

Soon „Christ for all Nations“ had grown to such an extent that in 1978 they were able to order a 10,000-seater tent, in which the evangelistic rallies now took place. Bonnke said at that time: „The day of the sickle is past, this is the day of the combine harvester!"<sup>32</sup> The image of the combine harvester continued to be used frequently by Reinhard Bonnke, which earned him the name "God's combine harvester" in the media.<sup>33</sup>

In 1984 it was even possible to consecrate a tent able to hold more than 30.000 people, the biggest tent in the world, and the interest of the media and the believers in this tent and the work of „Christ for all Nations“ was correspondingly high. In Colin Whittaker's Bonnke-biography, he mentions that Pat Robertson, a famous US-American TV preacher was among those who gave a generous donation for this

tent.<sup>34</sup> Reinhard Bonnke had been interviewed on his television station CBN and this had made the evangelist much better-known in the USA. Soon after this Bonnke and Robertson met together.<sup>35</sup>

A lot that could be said about Pat Robertson. He is one of the most famous TV evangelists in the USA, battles against liberal and humanistic ideas and even tried to become President of the United States in 1988. This political commitment came about as a directive from God, he explained. However it compelled him to change his 1972 autobiography, where he had written that God had told him he should not candidate for a political office.<sup>36</sup> Pat Robertson was not involved in sex or financial scandals, as some other US TV-preachers were. However he frequently made the headlines with his political comments, for example his positive statements on the Pinochet-military rule in Chile that he visited after the coup, and whose brutal military takeover he praised as a “sensible” course of action.<sup>37</sup>

Robertson has come under criticism in connection with the occurrences on 11th September 2001. In his programme „700 Club“ after the terror attacks, he interviewed the television preacher Jerry Falwell, most certainly one of the most enigmatic personalities in the religious TV-preacher scene and well known for his right-wing ideas. Falwell said that civil-rights activists, feminists, homosexuals and anti-abortionists shared in the responsibility for the terrorist attacks because they had brought God’s wrath down on America through their actions. „God continues to lift the curtain and allows the enemies of America to give us probably what we deserve.“ And Pat Robertson answered: „Jerry, that’s my feeling.“<sup>38</sup> Jerry Falwell had to apologize publicly for what he had said, so great was the indignation among the American public.

Recently the Anglican Bishop of Edinburgh, the leading bishop of the Scottish Episcopal Church said of Pat Robertson: „Those of us who’ve known Pat Robertson’s record have been pointing out that the man is an apostle of prejudice and bigotry. This is a man who has dismissed many of people, and many of the things he has said would be of doubtful legality in this country.“<sup>39</sup> The occasion of his making these comments was a disagreement over Robertson sitting on the board of the famous Laura Ashley company, into which according to the company the multi-millionaire „a very successful businessman (who) brings global experience“.<sup>40</sup> In December 2001 Pat Robertson resigned as President of the „Christian Coalition“ and used the occasion to claim that without this political coalition George Bush would hardly be sitting as President in the White House.<sup>41</sup>

Reinhard Bonnke not only maintained links to Pat Robertson, but also for example visited the evangelist T. L. Osborn. Ron Steele wrote about this encounter: „The two men parted from each other in the spirit of love and partnership.“<sup>42</sup> Paul Gifford, a renowned authority on evangelical and fundamentalist groupings wrote about T. L. Osborn: „Osborn was originally another ‚healing evangelist‘. His contribution was that he was the first prosperity preacher to live in a luxurious style himself, something which later prosperity preachers have continued in order to prove that the teaching works.“<sup>43</sup>

Bonnke’s connections to these preachers and also to Billy Graham, for example, are interesting for several reasons. On the one hand they show the religious environment he works in, and on the other, several of the American preachers have also become

active in Africa among other things through their religious television programmes and shows.<sup>44</sup> In 1992, after an evangelistic campaign in Zaire (Congo) Pat Robertson was given a present of three farms with several hundred hectares of land by the then dictator Mobutu.<sup>45</sup> What is in the end important is how Reinhard Bonnke in his theology and the style of his evangelistic campaigns differs from these preachers but also resembles them. In one place in his book „Evangelism by Fire“ Bonnke writes: „This (the Spirit of God) is what we are to rely upon, not television, radio, money or education, as necessary as these things may be, but on the miracle power of Jesus.“<sup>46</sup>

## **Evangelisation in Africa**

After a very short time, the tent for 30.000 people was destroyed by a storm in Cape Town. But Reinhard Bonnke's plans were not held up by this. Some of his gospel meetings now reached such an enormous number of people that they would never all have fitted into the tent anyway, more and more frequently even football stadiums proved too small. He learnt that a very special atmosphere was created in such huge meetings, which could be intensified even more through acts of healing, and that increased people's willingness to give themselves to Christ.

A concept of mass evangelism was developed that is still being practised successfully today. Preparations begin weeks or even months before the evangelistic campaign. „Christ for all Nations“ decides where evangelistic campaigns shall be carried out and Reinhard Bonnke often claims to have been commissioned directly by the Holy Spirit to go there.<sup>47</sup> With this authority local churches are then approached and their support gained for the undertaking, especially churches where „born again“ Christians meet, but also other Christian churches. Then the congregations and the rest of the local population are got into the right mood for the coming event, often using modern media methods. The spectrum of activities stretches from television spots through telephone invitation campaigns, to the distribution of specially embossed baseball caps.

The evangelistic campaign itself takes place on a large piece of ground with space for hundreds of thousands of people, who can hear what is being said over very powerful loudspeakers. An enormous logistical and organisational effort is necessary to get the equipment to the place by aeroplane or heavy lorries, to set it all up there and then to ensure that everything goes according to plan. In the year 2000 according to Bonnke a total of six million people participated in a six-day evangelisation in Lagos.<sup>48</sup> In 2002 „Christ for all Nations“ wants to win 10 to 12 million people for Christ, according to Bonnke, and in the first ten years of the 21st century a total of 100 million people.<sup>49</sup>

Reinhard Bonnke and some of his staff stand up on a high stage and preach and pray. Bonnke himself writes about his style of preaching: „In Africa I preach the purest and most direct gospel I can possibly express, and it has the most extraordinary effects. It breaks upon people's hearts and minds with all the freshness of an ocean wave. I know no techniques, no crowd psychology, no tricks, and we water nothing down. I preach a gospel about heaven, hell, repentance, faith, sin and forgiveness.“<sup>50</sup> Paul Gifford, a critic of Bonnke, writes about the evangelist's preaching: „It is obvious that Bonnke not only talks the language of ordinary Africans (dreams, visions, revelations) but he also addresses real concerns. He refers to

concrete realities like loneliness in the city, teenagers away from home, daughters involved in prostitution.<sup>51</sup>

After the prayers for the sick, those who have been healed are requested to make themselves known. If the acts of healing can be proved, if for example a neighbour can witness that someone who had so far been blind can now see, then individuals who have been healed are requested to come up onto the stage and tell the people how they have been cured.<sup>52</sup> Subsequently the people are invited to confess Christ as Saviour. Whoever decides to do this is approached and spoken to by one of the many counsellors and is given a brochure with basic information about the Christian faith written by Reinhard Bonnke. A card is also filled out with information about the converted person, which is passed on to one of the congregations working with the campaign from the place near where the person lives, so that after the campaign they can speak to them and invite them to come to services.

The confession to Christ is linked to the rejection of all forms of superstition and witchcraft so that at all evangelistic campaigns amulets are thrown into a heap and set on fire. The acts of healing have proved that the God of Reinhard Bonnke is stronger than the traditional gods and spirits.

Many evangelistic campaigns are combined with „fire conferences“ to which pastors, evangelists and spiritual leaders of the congregations are invited and receive further theological training. In this way the long-term effect of the evangelistic campaign is to be reinforced. The theology that is taught is of course that preached by Reinhard Bonnke and the men and women who support him and work with him. The long-term effect of such conferences, and of the theological texts distributed at them, on the Pentecostal churches in Africa, the independent churches and also the denominations stemming from the work of the European Missions cannot be overestimated.

Finally we must note that the famous evangelist meets with the President of the country in question where possible and speaks to the parliament, which increases his standing in the place itself and, above all contributes to increasing public awareness of the gospel campaigns through the state-controlled media. In various countries the evangelistic rallies are transmitted via TV and radio which means that more and more people attend from meeting to meeting.

In countries where there is great tension between Christians and Moslems there have been outbreaks of violence between the members of the different religious communities during Reinhard Bonnke's evangelistic campaigns, especially in Nigeria, most recently in December 2001.<sup>53</sup> There have also been conflicts on the occasion of Bonnke's evangelistic campaigns in Sudan, most recently at Easter 2001.<sup>54</sup> I shall show later how Bonnke's theological convictions, which form the basis of his preaching, contribute to a polarisation that can favour the outbreak of such conflicts. Another factor is the religious tension that already exists in countries such as Nigeria, that has been triggered to a large extent by Islamic fundamentalism. Whether huge evangelistic campaigns are the right form of Christian witness in such situations is a cause of controversy between Bonnke's supporters and his critics.

Another short return to the eighties: the fact that „Christ for all Nations“ had its main office in South Africa proved increasingly problematic. While Reinhard Bonnke was

able to enter all African countries with his German passport, his staff with South African passports were not. In 1986 therefore, Bonnke decided to move the main seat of the organisation to Frankfurt am Main, where they moved into offices close to the airport. This move pleased neither the staff nor the financial supporters in South Africa<sup>55</sup>, but Reinhard Bonnke claimed that it was a commission from God.<sup>56</sup> The move made it possible to increase the number of major gospel campaigns in Africa and also in other continents in places such as India, Trinidad and the Ukraine.

The transfer of the site of the head office made the question of what „Christ for all Nations“ could contribute to evangelism in Europe and North America even more acute. It was clear that they could not carry out major evangelistic campaigns as in Africa. Individual trials such as on the „Heiligengeistfeld“ in Hamburg in 1989 were not very encouraging<sup>57</sup>; it was not possible to mobilize the masses in countries like Germany. Meanwhile in several countries, including Germany, a brochure with the title „From Minus to Plus“ had been sent to every household. Anyone who filled out a card received the brochure „Now that you are saved“ and upon request was put in touch with one of the congregations or churches that had registered with the campaign. Opinions differ about the effectiveness of sending out millions of brochures by post, but the great expectations of some of those who supported the campaign were not fulfilled. This was for example the case in Great Britain where only around 60.000 people returned a „decision card“. According to the evangelical press service „idea“, Bonnke had expected about five million Britons to take this opportunity.<sup>58</sup> Congregations that wanted to take part in the campaign in Great Britain had to sign up to the creed of the Evangelical Alliance of the country.<sup>59</sup>

In Germany churches were also expected to sign up to a creed similar to the British model. This aroused open criticism and the regional churches in particular disassociated themselves from the campaign.<sup>60</sup> Even the Evangelical Alliance in Germany did not support the mailing campaign of „Christ for all Nations“. <sup>61</sup> Nevertheless Reinhard Bonnke wrote in one of his letters: „In spite of some opposition, an inter-church cooperation has developed that could hardly be better.“<sup>62</sup> The campaign as a whole came under severe criticism and had little response.<sup>63</sup> By the beginning of 1966 a total of just 41,000 decision cards had been received<sup>64</sup> – even less than in Great Britain.

However „Christ for all Nations“ succeeded in winning a large number of „mission partners“ in Europe and North America who support the evangelistic work financially. The focal point of Reinhard Bonnke’s evangelistic efforts remains in Africa “that shall be washed clean with the blood of Christ”. Here he is the best- known missionary, gaining much support but also a lot of criticism.

### **The language of battle**

A particularly difficult chapter is Bonnke’s sometimes extremely warlike language, which overlooks the fact that Jesus Christ came into this world as the Prince of Peace and that the Pentecostal movement developed at the beginning of the 20th century as a pacifist movement.<sup>65</sup> „Witnesses should witness; it is our nature. Soldiers are not fitted with uniforms and equipped with weapons simply to go on parade; their true place is on the battlefield.“<sup>66</sup>

„We either recognise it (the Gospel) or perish. When you grasp what we are saying here, then you join the army with the battering ram of the Word of the Cross. It will pulverise the strongholds of the devil. It is the drum-roll thunder of God's invincible army on the march.“<sup>67</sup> These sentences remind us of the church's triumphalist traditions. But the following one is really shocking: „No matter how brilliant a sermon may be, in a form as perfect as the bullet case of a tank cartridge, if you do not fill it with explosives it will simply bounce off the hardened hearts of the unbelievers.“<sup>68</sup>

Bonnke's publications speak of „Gospel-crusades“<sup>69</sup> he writes „the Holy Spirit is the explosive ammunition for our artillery“<sup>70</sup>, of an „extended religious war“<sup>71</sup>, he speaks of „CfaN's weapon carrier“<sup>72</sup> and the „army of God“<sup>73</sup> (even if these expressions are sometimes put in quotation marks this does not disguise their military origin). But as far as I can tell, we must note that Reinhard Bonnke no longer speaks of crusades in his German publications?. It was different at the beginning of the 90s when a large number of copies of a brochure were printed in English on which the sender's name on the title page was given as : „Reinhard Bonnke Gospel Crusade“. <sup>74</sup> The fact that he is now apparently avoiding the use of the term crusade with all its historical baggage, at least in his German publications, differentiates Bonnke in a positive way from many North American evangelists. But what remains are expressions that remind one of the military world or originate from it, for example: „God calls us up for mobilization.“<sup>75</sup> In a contribution titled „World War“ the evangelist writes: „Call it what you will, total war or divine mercy ... The devil has put his legions into the field. Let us go get the enemy!“<sup>76</sup>

### **The Great Commission always at the centre**

Reinhard Bonnke's theological ideas always lead to the one focal point: the urgent need to spread the Gospel. From this point of view he follows in the footsteps of the missionaries of the 19th century, who left Europe to go out into the world. Even his language sometimes reminds us of mission preachers of former times: „The Church is to concern itself with one aim – the war with Satan and the campaign for souls.“<sup>77</sup> In his determination to put evangelism right at the centre of Christian work, Bonnke is more radical than most missionaries: „Let me spell this out as clearly as I can: until this major command is put into effect, everything else is irrelevant.“<sup>78</sup> Bonnke continually exhorts his supporters with such sentences as: „Evangelism should have absolute priority over everything else! The salvation of a lost world depends upon it.“<sup>79</sup>

Reinhard Bonnke's theology and evangelistic work is deeply influenced by his firm trust in God: „If God wants you to do something He will give you the ability to do it.“<sup>80</sup> This belief, together with the conviction that he acts upon direct guidance from God, gives Reinhard great authority among his supporters: „God underwrites his own schemes. ... Move with God and nothing can stop you. Nothing can go wrong with His plans. They don't fail or derail.“<sup>81</sup> Reinhard Bonnke believes in God's support and the absolute priority of evangelism, and this gives him strength and persuasive power.

All those who do not give evangelism top priority find themselves accused in the end of supporting the work of the devil: „A favourite subtle weapon he deploys is to redirect our priorities. Satan doesn't mind how hard we work for our churches, as long as our work keeps us from wreaking havoc on his evil kingdom by spreading the gospel.“<sup>82</sup> In another book he writes: „Satan doesn't mind how hard we work for our

church, as long as it keeps us from spending the mischief that the power of the Gospel brings on his evil kingdom. Watch out! We can major in doctrine, in fellowship, in prosperity, or in cultivating our own soul, in ways that bear no relation to preaching the Gospel to every creature!<sup>83</sup>

For Bonnke the urgency and absolute priority that he gives to evangelism stem from two religious convictions: the conviction that everyone who does not accept the Gospel is lost, and the expectation that Christ will return in the near future. In a report on an evangelistic campaign in Sri Lanka Reinhard Bonnke wrote: „I always have to think what a dreadful mistake it would have been, simply to have stayed at home. It would of course have been easier and ‘cheaper’, but great droves of people would have been lost for ever. We cannot just live for the day without a care! Christ’s mission command makes us responsible for our generation.”<sup>84</sup> For him there are only two possibilities: „If a person dies, who is already dead in sin, then he remains dead in sin. But in comparison, if a person dies who is alive in Christ, then he remains alive in Christ. These are the two alternatives available to us.”<sup>85</sup> This leads to a clear understanding that those who do not accept the Gospel are „chaff“: „Frequently I have spoken about harvesting with the combine-harvester. I was referring to the following: this agricultural machine does not only cut the standing grain but at the same time separates the chaff from the kernels.”<sup>86</sup>

In his book „Evangelism by Fire“ Reinhard Bonnke writes of Christ’s approaching return: „But let me tell you, it is the last hour ... With the microseconds running out like fine sand in an hourglass, they would see what was really important to them.”<sup>87</sup> The return of Jesus is directly linked to the spreading of the gospel: „When the Gospel is preached in all the world for a witness, then Jesus will come, He said. The Lord of the Harvest! So, to work, let us hasten His coming!”<sup>88</sup> Bonnke writes dramatically: „It is the last hour.”<sup>89</sup>

Reinhard Bonnke does not join those groups who speculate about a definite date for the coming of Christ, for example those groups who have recently been speculating that it will be the Year 2000 („But God does not hang our printed calendar on His wall.”<sup>90</sup>), but he promises his supporters that Christ’s return is not far off. In this context the aim of the evangelisation of the world is closely linked to Reinhard Bonnke and the work of „Christ for all Nations”.<sup>91</sup>

Here Bonnke refers expressly to a call from God: „So, He was waiting for us, and – I couldn’t get away from it – that included me. ...In addition, a vision followed me. Night after night I saw the entire African continent washed in the Blood of Jesus, country after country.”<sup>92</sup> Two paragraphs further on there is a report about a large evangelistic campaign and then Bonnke writes: „A mass baptism in the Holy Spirit, accompanied by many healing miracles, took place. I wept like a boy and vowed to the Lord that in obedience I would move across all of Africa to bring the vision to pass. I reasoned that if God can do that to 10,000 people, He could do it to 450 million.”<sup>93</sup> He shows on a map how „Christ for all Nations“ preaches the Gospel in one African country after another. While the reports speak frequently of the importance of the local churches, the evangelistic work of Reinhard Bonnke and „Christ for all Nations“ is nevertheless at the centre of it all.

The local churches are brought in when the decision has already been taken to carry out an evangelistic campaign in a country. In a report on an evangelistic campaign in

Rwanda in 1999 by Brent Regis in CfaN's „Missions Journal” it becomes quite clear how the mission organisation understands its role: „During the preparatory meetings the CfaN director for Africa, Steve Mutua, came across congregations that were just vegetating apathetic and disheartened... Through preaching the cross of Jesus, the same cross that decorates so many graves there, real hope, reconciliation and forgiveness came into innumerable people's lives. During the six day campaign the light of the Gospel shone over Rwanda and drove out the darkness, the devil and even death itself.”<sup>94</sup> Not a single word about all the pastors, church leaders and lay people who have been working for years in Rwanda, helping the people to come to terms with their traumatic experiences, and helping to make genuine reconciliation possible. A long-term and very painful task, but one that is bearing fruit. This is surely an extreme example of how necessary the local churches are for the evangelistic campaign, but how their contribution over many years to building the Church of Christ in the world, to reconciliation and to justice is completely overlooked.

It is worth considering a report by Rudi Forstmeier on an evangelistic campaign by Bonnke in Munich in April 2001, printed in the „Materialdienst“ (Information Service) of the Protestant Centre for Religious and Ideological Issues (EZW): „I learnt that Bonnke had planned the event, decided what was to take place and made the arrangements without speaking to the congregations in the close vicinity of Munich at all. The hall was booked, and the date and the programme had been fixed before the charismatic congregations and circles in Munich were informed about it. There was no great enthusiasm as a result – they felt that they had been ignored and presented with a fait accompli. But they did not want to distance themselves completely...”<sup>95</sup>

Thanks to the evangelistic campaigns of „Christ for all Nations“ hell is being plundered and heaven populated, as Reinhard Bonnke does not tire of repeating.<sup>96</sup> He not only claims to save individual people in this way, but also whole nations, justifying it from the Bible: „The biblical outlook on evangelism is not just for individuals but entire nations.”<sup>97</sup> Elsewhere Reinhard Bonnke writes: „The Gospel is for the whole world. That is what we are aiming for in Africa – a blood-washed continent. Africa has a choice: either be washed in the blood of tribal conflict or washed in the redeeming blood of Jesus.”<sup>98</sup>

Starting from this position he feels entitled to carry out evangelisation that stops at nothing. Thus he reports on one of his evangelistic campaigns: „In Nigeria the military had to protect us; during the sermon there were soldiers with loaded machine guns standing on the stage.”<sup>99</sup> These words make it apparent how seriously he takes his commitment to the cause of Jesus: „There is nothing grander than that, nor is there a more glorious way to die, than fighting on that victorious battleground.”<sup>100</sup>

Bonnke's ideas about the task of evangelism cannot be separated from his self-confidence in face of his success. For example, he writes: „Then I saw more converts in one night than a whole African mission station saw in a hundred years.”<sup>101</sup> And elsewhere: „... but our primary concern in evangelism is effectiveness”<sup>102</sup>. Whether this was Jesus' main aim can at the very least be called into doubt, for he did not use his power to reach as many people as possible, but rather moved through the villages and small towns. Sometimes he even forbade those who had been healed to speak about it. „Effectiveness“ is not a word used by the Bible, but has only gained in importance in modern industrial society. This does not mean to say that Jesus didn't care whether he could win people over to build the Kingdom of God with him or not.

He was sad when they turned him down, as the story of the rich young man demonstrates, but the Gospels do not prove that he made great efforts to reach as many people as possible. He did not carry out an evangelistic campaign.

Reinhard Hempelmann from the „Protestant Centre for Religious and Ideological Issues (EZW)“ wrote about Reinhard Bonnke’s understanding of mission on the occasion of the campaign „From Minus to Plus“: „Bonnke understands mission principally from two points of view, from that of saving souls and from that of a success story. Both aspects contain grave omissions: mission as the saving of souls neglects the wholeness of God’s concern for the world; and also neglects a holistic view of human beings as suggested by biblical anthropology. Mission as a success story forgets the experiences of mission history and does not recall the brokenness and provisional nature of our missionary witness.“<sup>103</sup>

The evangelistic work of „Christ for all Nations“ contrasts positively with a whole set of other evangelistic initiatives, in that it is directed towards congregations „Probably the best step you can take now that you have become a Christian, is to find a church where you can feel at home.“<sup>104</sup> Reinhard Bonnke justifies this biblically: „But I knew I must work with the churches. ...Every worker needs the Church like a fisherman needs a boat. The evangelist cannot sail away in waters of his own. God has set evangelists in the Church.“<sup>105</sup> Elsewhere he refers to the congregation as the „battle-axe of Jesus“.<sup>106</sup> But as has been already pointed out, this does not answer the question of the relationship between the evangelistic campaigns of „Christ for all Nations“ and the local churches.

In his mission work Reinhard Bonnke sees himself as following in the tradition of Jesus and the Apostle Paul, but his style of evangelisation differs considerably from theirs. While many disputations involving Jesus and Paul have been handed down, and Paul quite deliberately went onto the marketplaces and into the synagogues to enter into debate with those who had other convictions, Reinhard Bonnke’s great strength lies in preaching to huge meetings. This is also reflected in his publications: „To offer the gospel in terms of debate or argument can be self-defeating. Faith does not stand on logic or come by the wisdom of words. If we assert the truth and if we know the truth and if we know Jesus then that will do.“<sup>107</sup>

Elsewhere Bonnke writes: „Preaching must ... deal honestly and positively with sin, judgment, righteousness, the salvation of the Cross and the power of God. It is not open for debate. It is for proclamation.“<sup>108</sup> In the same tone he writes in a different place: „The Gospel is not a discussion point. It is a Proclamation of Deliverance. Dialogue? The Gospel is not open to modification.“<sup>109</sup> And: „Don’t argue – shine! You can’t conquer darkness by arguing with it. Just switch the Light on.“<sup>110</sup> Referring to criticism of his evangelistic work Reinhard Bonnke comments: „Otherwise we are not interested either in the world’s applause nor in its criticism. We are and we remain God’s servants!“<sup>111</sup> However Reinhard Bonnke does acknowledge that criticism has some importance and that an evangelist needs advice and correction.<sup>112</sup>

On the subject of gospel and culture that has very much occupied the world mission movement in recent years (for example at the World Mission Conference in 1996 in Salvador da Bahia/Brazil), Reinhard Bonnke takes up a clear position: „The greatest force for change ever known did not set out to change cultures, but to drive the devil out of them.“<sup>113</sup> He speaks out firmly against the idea of „westernising“ the freshly

converted. He agrees with the China-Missionary Hudson Taylor that faith in Christ can express itself in every form of culture, Christ belongs to all nations.<sup>114</sup> With such ideas Reinhard Bonnke differs sharply in a positive way from many North American preachers who continue to hold and to propagate the idea that the „American Way of Life“ and the Gospel form a continuum.

However Bonnke does not claim that the Gospel is always accepted with reference only to a specific cultural context, that the message can be understood by different people in a very different way, that there is no one way of understanding Holy Scripture, and that we must enter into dialogue with those who read the Bible in a different way.

The final impression is that evangelism is seen as very strongly related to his own work, and this gives rise to the danger of a new Christian triumphalism: „Only one thing can stop our march forward; the simple fact that unless we have the means to pay our bills, we cannot move. Otherwise we are an unstoppable force.“<sup>115</sup> This is justified by the way God has worked so far and prayers are requested for this work. That it is also a question of money is apparent from the following quotation: „The fields of harvest are overripe and must be harvested. God has given us an effective combine harvester but month by month we are dependant on Him for new fuel in order to be able to carry out our task... Please continue to pray for us and support us as workers for Christ. You will be richly rewarded in heaven.“<sup>116</sup>

The mission partners are assured: „Those of you who work in the background will receive the same reward as those who stand in the limelight. Unknown people form the ‘safety lines’ of a evangelist. Without them no fruitful work would be possible. I wish to thank you, my dear partners in mission, that you obey God’s call.“<sup>117</sup> Similar statements can be found in very many of Reinhard Bonnke’s publications. His supporters are promised a divine reward, and they are assured that through their prayers and their donations they are sharing directly in the work in Africa and other parts of the world. However only in individual cases is it possible to get information about the costs and the means of financing evangelistic campaigns. Nowhere could I find an overview of the annual income and expenditure of „Christ for all Nations“, such as regional mission agencies in Germany for example are required to publish as a matter of course in their annual reports.

## **The Truth of the Bible**

„Scripture has been our final authority.“<sup>118</sup> Very many Christians would most certainly sign up to this statement by Reinhard Bonnke, and yet there are many different ways of understanding the Bible. Was it dictated word by word by God and does it describe precise historical occurrences, as some people believe, or can the whole truth of the Bible only be discovered by finding out what the authors of the biblical texts wanted to tell us in their stories and how they used these stories to try to impart God’s great truth to us. For Reinhard Bonnke, all biblical texts relate something that actually happened. Here are two examples from his writings: „Though most people are acquainted with Jonah, many (including some Christians) don’t believe the story presented in this book.“<sup>119</sup> And: „Well, we know they (Adam and Eve) did, and the first sin brought knowledge, but the knowledge of evil... This is how it seems to go on.“<sup>120</sup> The story of Adam and Eve is seen as historical, just as here in another

example: „After the fall of Adam, only occasional flashes of the supernatural were seen until Jesus came.“<sup>121</sup>

It is therefore hardly surprising that the massacre of the innocent children in Bethlehem is also presented as an actual occurrence.<sup>122</sup> The Bible is to be preached „unabridged“ and it is not so important to know who wrote which book of the Bible: „But it is a major occupation of some in the Church to spend time merely trying to find out who wrote it and when, as if it mattered.“<sup>123</sup> In the publications that I have read, Reinhard Bonnke never mentions the contradictions between various biblical texts. However he differs from some other biblicist preachers in that he frequently rejects the habit they have of restricting the message to individual Bible verses or parts of them: „Our message to the godless world is therefore enshrined in the entire Word of God.“<sup>124</sup>

As other theologians, Reinhard Bonnke concentrates with particular intensity on certain biblical texts and books of the Bible. He returns again and again to the texts of St. John's gospel and writes, after having counted a few of these verses: „These are treasures, gems in the jewel box of the Gospel of John.“<sup>125</sup> By contrast, I have not found anywhere in Bonnke's writings Jesus' words on the cross as written down in Mark's gospel, „My God, my God, why have you forsaken me“ (Mark 15,39). Reinhard Bonnke has – just as each one of us – a certain understanding of Jesus, and he concentrates on the biblical texts that support this understanding. This can be justified, but only if other understandings of Jesus are not apodictically rejected. Reinhard Bonnke however writes in one of his „Ministry Letters“: „He was neither a humanitarian nor a political nor social activist. He never gave anyone a penny because He Himself never possessed any money. When he once required a coin in order to illustrate what he was saying, someone had to lend him one.“<sup>126</sup>

Reinhard Bonnke offers no proof for his first claim, and the second claim belongs in the realm of speculation, for the fact that Jesus once borrowed a coin in order to illustrate something does not prove that he never possessed any money. The stories of the feeding of the multitudes on the other hand show that his disciples, with whom he lived in a kind of economic community, most certainly had money, even if not enough to feed such large numbers of people. We simply do not know whether Jesus had money or not, nor whether he gave some of it to others. It has not been written down, just as so many other things about the life of Jesus were not recorded. Even Christians such as Reinhard Bonnke, who build their theology on a literal understanding of the Bible, offer only one interpretation among many other interpretations of biblical texts, but are in danger of regarding their own position as the only one that is biblically sound.

This literal understanding of the Bible may meet with opposition in Germany, but in the world-wide Pentecostal movement and throughout large sections of African Christianity it meets with approval. The historico-critical understanding of the Bible has so far only influenced a minority of theologians here and even fewer evangelists or members of the congregations. The Bible is God's word, and that means word for word, and everything that is described there actually happened in that way. This interpretation gives biblical texts great power, as Bonnke's sermons prove impressively. But there are also problems with such an understanding of the Bible as this example shows: „Adam's sin-contamination runs in the veins of us all ...“<sup>127</sup> This kind of phrase creates an understanding of man, as someone who is sinful almost

from the beginning, whose blood is „contaminated“. But it is possible to contrast this with a picture of the children of God, who are part of His creation, which is good and yet is threatened again and again by conscious sinful actions of human beings. Every person, regardless of his or her faith is a creature made in the image of God. Through sin our relationship to God and to our fellow human beings is disturbed. But all men and women can trust in the grace of their Lord, can live in hope that God will create a new heaven and a new earth.

The picture of the blood of human beings contaminated through sin presents us with a problem; the fact that Jesus became man. Was his blood also contaminated? Reinhard Bonnke finds his own answer to this: it does not surprise us that he is convinced of the Virgin birth, but what does he say about Mary's blood? „Regarding Mary's blood type, a woman can bear a child which has a blood group completely incompatible with her own. In the womb, a child develops its own blood, possibly the opposite type to that of his mother. The blood of Jesus was His own Divine blood and this is the secret of its power!“<sup>128</sup> Even if for once we leave the medical questions on one side, we are faced here with the problem whether Jesus really did become man, a man of earthly flesh and blood. The assumption that the story of Adam and Eve actually took place in this way has grave consequences for theology and our understanding of Jesus.

Perhaps this example already makes it clear that there is no bridge between Bonnke's biblicist position and a faith based on the fact that the Bible is the whole truth for the very reason that it is not an actual description of what happened in former times. We can almost sense a kind of defiance when Reinhard Bonnke writes: „Many recent studies of Jesus have one thing in common: They strip Him of all that is supernatural – no virgin birth, no miracles, no physical resurrection, no ascension. ...I don't care what scholars may say. I know Him. I know what He is to me and I know what He can do.“<sup>129</sup>

Reinhard Bonnke's great success even in the „mainline“-churches in Africa and other parts of the world also stems from the failure of many theologians to help believers to find an „adult“ faith. Many insights into the history of the Bible and the understanding of biblical texts in their context are formulated in theological treatises in such a way that they will never reach the majority of Christian members. In their services too, many preachers hesitate to pass on what we know today about the origin and genesis of biblical texts. They apparently fear that people's faith will be destroyed or that everything will appear much too complicated. They prefer to preach as though Adam and Eve had really existed as historical persons. Yet many of the congregation know that the pastors themselves do not believe this, and for their part the preachers know that many people in the congregation know this. In these circumstances it is not possible to preach a wholly credible powerful sermon.

The great wisdom of the biblical stories and all the insight into and understanding of God that they offer, only become apparent when they are not misinterpreted as historical occurrences, but when they compel us rather to ask ourselves what the people who wrote these stories down in this way wanted to tell their fellow human-beings, and what they can say to us today. The massacre of the children in Bethlehem is then no longer the description of a brutal deed of a Roman ruler, but rather a symbol of how people's lives are endangered from the outset by brutal despots, and how God protects them from these dangers. In a world where millions

of children die before their time, the story of the massacre of the innocents then becomes an indictment of all the forces that destroy life or that profit from a system which accepts such destruction, and alleges that it cannot change it. When it is not seen as a description of a historical event the story becomes really relevant and meaningful for the world today.

Similar things could be said about many other biblical texts. The fact that there are two stories of the creation in the Bible and four very different Gospels is also no longer a problem if one understands the biblical message in this way. They are all true in the sense that they can tell us something about God's great truth, provided that we do not read them as historical descriptions.

To take leave of our „childhood faith“ means just the opposite of destroying what is wonderful in the Bible and sacrificing it for wrongly understood rationalistic thinking. The stories of the Bible are stories of God and of people; how people in spite of all obstacles and all misgivings and earlier disappointing experiences set off again and again to create a world that should be pleasing to God. They journeyed through deserts, not even losing their faith in the one God during times of slavery, and over and over again they began to build a new city and create a new society where both God and the people could feel at home. With the feeding of the five thousand they experienced what miracles are possible when people share the little that they have with each other. And in Golgotha they experienced that the cross is not the end, but that after suffering they may confidently await the resurrection and new life. The powerful and the tyrants of this world do not have the last word, that is a message of hope that everyone can understand.

Such an approach to the Bible demands courage, because the security of a biblicist-based faith must be given up and the search begins for the insights and experiences of faith gained by the authors in their search for their God. Reinhard Bonnke's sermons and his theology are a challenge to read the Bible anew, in Africa and also in Germany, and to develop a new sharing together between congregation members and theologians. This way of working with and understanding the Bible includes all the knowledge that we have available today about the way it came about and the way biblical texts were written down; it links spirituality and academic disciplines, and is based on reverence for the one God and his infinite love as reflected in the biblical texts. The best way for critics of Reinhard Bonnke to respond is to find new forms of theology and theological dialogue, that include everyone. Essentially it is a question of whether we are prepared to further the historical process of „enlightenment“ in the positive sense of the word, and to see that European Christians include it in their ecumenical dialogue with Christians in the South of the world. I shall return to this question at the end of this study.

### **Holy Spirit**

It is not surprising that the Holy Spirit has a central meaning for Reinhard Bonnke, who is at home in the Pentecostal movement. The Holy Spirit is „God in action“ for the preacher.<sup>130</sup> In a follow-up brochure Reinhard Bonnke writes: „The Holy Spirit is the person who puts us in touch with God. He brings God's presence, God's love and God's power into our lives. He gives us the strength to live as Christ lived, and he gives us the inner certainty we need about our faith.“<sup>131</sup>

According to Bonnke's understanding, the Holy Spirit is not an abstract power, but rather intervenes actively in this world: „There is no non-miracle Holy Spirit. To claim to possess the Holy Spirit and deny the very work which has always distinguished Him can only grieve Him.”<sup>132</sup> These sentences make quite clear that the acts of healing during Reinhard Bonnke's evangelistic campaigns are not only an instrument to convince people of God's greatness, but also proof that the Holy Spirit is present and active in a meeting. The authority to baptise in the Holy Spirit is made visible, in order that the people can become active Christians filled with the Spirit.

Reinhard Bonnke reports again and again how the Holy Spirit spoke to him and gave him directions for concrete decisions to be taken. In his book „Mighty Manifestations“ for example he writes: „One afternoon in a hotel room I was praying and the Holy Spirit began to speak to me...”<sup>133</sup> By laying claim to instructions given directly by the Holy Spirit, Reinhard Bonnke and all those who support his evangelistic work can be absolutely sure that they are on the right road. Critics may see this frequent reference to the Holy Spirit as a way of religiously legitimising anything that the evangelist himself considers to be right, and securing it against criticism.

Allegedly the church teaches that „such power was only for the apostles and the early disciples.”<sup>134</sup> . Actually, there is no argument as to whether the Holy Spirit works in this world or not; however, it is a fact that many churches have reservations, when individual members of the congregations claim that the Holy Spirit has spoken to them and they themselves are now proclaiming what the Holy Spirit has told them to say. Even Reinhard Bonnke admits that careful examination is needed to see whether the Holy Spirit is really speaking through an individual or whether they are simply „spiritual thoughts“.<sup>135</sup>

In Reinhard Bonnke's understanding, rebirth and baptism with the Holy Spirit play a very important role. Rebirth ensues when a person surrenders his or her life to Jesus. This can occur for example when at a certain moment someone comes forward at a major evangelistic rally and declares his or her decision for Jesus. What happens then is described by Bonnke in a follow-up brochure in this way: „You have been born again - what has happened to you is so important that the Bible describes it as being 'born again' (John. 3:3). Your life has been changed forever because God now lives in you by his Holy Spirit.”<sup>136</sup> The difference is made even clearer in the following wording: „We are born again; we have divine genes.”<sup>137</sup>

This makes it clear why Reinhard Bonnke speaks on many occasions to the born-again Christians, whom he differentiates quite clearly from other Christians. For this reason he also carries out evangelistic campaigns in countries such as Ethiopia and Argentina in spite of the opposition of the major churches that have existed in these countries for centuries. According to Bonnke, whoever has not been born again, lacks the „divine genes” and must be saved. It is questionable whether the biblical promise to be born again, must inevitably be linked to taking a decision such as is demanded at Bonnke's evangelisation rallies or in his brochure „From Minus to Plus“. It is most certainly one possibility offered by the Gospel, but it is not the only way open to follow Jesus. For many of the people who attend Bonnke's evangelistic campaigns it is undoubtedly a spiritually enriching experience and it can also have a unifying effect. „In our gospel meetings we want people to be born into a warm environment of love.”<sup>138</sup>

While born-again Christians can also sin, according to Bonnke's understanding there is still a difference: „Born-again believers may sin also, but there is a difference: They stay inside the family of God.“<sup>139</sup> With reference to St. John's Gospel he claims a difference between individual sins committed as a Christian and sin as a principal.

According to Bonnke, baptism, as celebrated in churches throughout the world, is not sufficient on its own: „Baptism with water is important, but the focal point of Christianity is fire. There is really so much watered-down religion, sometimes it is even mixed with ice. Water and fire; the contrast could hardly be greater.“<sup>140</sup> This position is justified biblically: „The third ingredient is Jesus, the Baptiser into the Spirit, Jesus the Baptiser – but in fire, not in water.“<sup>141</sup>

In his book „Mighty Manifestations“ Bonnke writes about baptism in the Holy Spirit, the precondition for which is being born again, according to Pentecostal understanding<sup>142</sup>: „The ‚baptism in the Holy Spirit‘ is a New Testament expression used by both John the Baptist and Jesus. The personal experience of millions conforms to the New Testament promise whether it is called baptism or anything else.“<sup>143</sup>

On the meaning of baptism in the Holy Spirit today, Bonnke writes: „The baptism in the Holy Spirit is something that one cannot keep to oneself. It is often a public event. It does not serve for personal self-attestation or spiritual calm. Quite the opposite; it can offer cause considerable disquiet. We do not receive the Holy Spirit so that we can sit back comfortably, but rather in order to drive us out of our warm comfortable hideaway into the raw reality of this world. The aim of our life should be to serve only one purpose, to save people from the stormy seas.“<sup>144</sup>

Speaking in tongues (glossalalie) is considered a sign of the baptism in the Holy Spirit, with reference to the pouring out of the Holy Spirit at the Feast of Pentecost in Jerusalem. Yet it is just this gift of speaking in tongues that sparks off contradictory debates, particularly with those evangelical Christians who have reservations towards the Pentecostal movement. When in the Acts of the Apostles it is written that the apostles preached in different languages, it is nevertheless remarkable that in the following verse it says: „for every man heard them speaking in his own language“. The miracle of speaking in other languages therefore enabled the followers of Jesus to preach the Gospel to the people each in his or her own language. But this is not the case with those who speak in tongues today, here it is always necessary for another person present to interpret what has been said. Reinhard Bonnke does report however that some people preach in languages that are well-known in other parts of the world, but they are speaking then to an audience who do not know that language.<sup>145</sup> This is therefore not a repeat of the miracle of Pentecost either. In later passages in the New Testament there is mention of speaking in tongues in the sense of glossalalie, but the importance this charisma had and should have is disputed.<sup>146</sup>

The Devil and Hell

For Reinhard Bonnke the devil is extremely real, with his own will and his own ideas. He writes for example: „The world is in a critical condition, desperate for the transforming power of Christ; meanwhile the devil schemes to hide this obvious fact from us.“<sup>147</sup>

Reinhard Bonnke is convinced that Satan is definitely at work in the world and very many of his listeners in Africa and elsewhere are also convinced of this. The leading East-African theologian John Mbiti writes about this: „Recognising Satan in connection with evil in the world fits directly into the traditional African pattern of thought. Most African people believe that evil and suffering are caused by magic, witchcraft, sorcery, misuse of mystical forces, the evil eye, a curse or the spirits (if they act with evil intention and are by nature malicious towards human beings) ... Within the context of this deep consciousness of spiritual reality in connection with evil and suffering, it does not require much persuasion to convince African Christians to consider or recognise Satan (or the devil) as the arch-enemy of mankind.”<sup>148</sup>

The sermons preached by many missionaries have strengthened the conviction of many African Christians that there are sinister evil powers and demons in the world, and that Satan influences people's lives. This corroborative approach is most certainly one of the reasons why Reinhard Bonnke appeals to so many people in Africa. Those with the opposite standpoint have a hard time of it. The Bible frequently mentions Satan, and the theology and church teachings that push him to the fringes or simply ignore him may be plausible in Europe, but not in other parts of the world. We return here to the question how a post-enlightenment theology and way of preaching can be discovered that convinces people and inspires them. Reinhard Bonnke and those who follow his ideas see themselves as supporting God in the battle against Satan, whose power is visible in that he also hinders the work of the evangelist and his supporters. After the death of one of his staff in an accident, Bonnke wrote: „How could that happen? The answer is that we have an adversary, the devil, who leaves nothing untried that could put us off track.”<sup>149</sup>

But those who oppose the evangelistic campaigns are also seen as being close to Satan. In his book „Mighty Manifestations“ for example, Bonnke writes: „Four times recently our evangelism campaigns have been cancelled. We were going to confront evils, but those evils were what brought about the withdrawal of visas and permits.”<sup>150</sup>

„We are on a real battlefield with Satan, who would like to destroy us.“ Reinhard Bonnke writes in one section of his book „Evangelism by Fire“.<sup>151</sup> He also reports how he once spoke with the devil when a storm was threatening the evangelisation tent: „I said aloud to the devil, ‘If you destroy this tent I shall get a bigger one.’ ... I raised my voice and ordered that storm to leave us alone, and then watched it divide, passing north and south of our tent area. The ground remained safe and dry.”<sup>152</sup> Later however Bonnke became convinced that he had made a mistake and so he spoke once again with the devil to tell him that he would make no deals with him but, come what may, would obtain an even larger tent. According to his biographer Colin Whittaker that was the inception of his plans for a tent holding 30.000 people.<sup>153</sup>

Satan is also brought into play when dealing with people who criticise Christianity: „Satan thinks as men think. This means that men think as the devil thinks. They, too, find the Cross foolishness ...”<sup>154</sup> It is most certainly necessary and sensible to enter into discussion with those who reject the message of the cross, but any insinuation that they think like Satan, will end a discussion before it has begun. Identifying the other's way of thinking with that of Satan is in the true sense of the word to demonise him.

The conviction that Satan exists, can in certain circumstances be liberating, as the guilt of individuals, perhaps even one's own guilt, and the injustice resulting from structural causes become less important in themselves. It is Satan who is responsible. He is active and also takes possession of people: „The failure of believers under the attacks of Satan is common.“<sup>155</sup>

Perhaps Reinhard Bonnke was also thinking of some American TV evangelists, who have hit the headlines with sex and finance scandals, when he wrote these lines: „Christians who are at the forefront are prime targets for Satan – and for attacks of the media, as well. Neither the devil nor the press are shining examples of accuracy or mercy. Weakness in response to Satanic hatred has caused stumbling by some of God's servants lately. The tragedies of sin have been welcome copy to the scandal sheets, which covered the indiscretions with full orchestration and glee.“<sup>156</sup> In these sentences it is Satan and the media who are the protagonists, the Christian leaders have merely not been strong enough in repelling Satan's attacks. Reinhard Bonnke, who repeatedly emphasizes the sinfulness of the world, is here criticising the fact that inappropriate behaviour is shouted from the rooftops. Here I must emphasise once again that he himself, as a person of integrity with a simple life-style has always stood out from the style of life maintained by various TV preachers in the USA.

Despots are also under the influence of the devil: „People of all nations have had to suffer greatly under tyrants who have exploited them mercilessly, oppressed them, slaughtered them and left them to starve, but it is Satan who is really behind all this. He is the arch terrorist and murderer. If this monster, this evil dragon did not exist, the world would truly be liberated.“<sup>157</sup> Such an understanding of the work of the devil can obscure the fact that there is structural injustice and structural violence, and it can prevent people from seeing that social conditions threaten people and enslave them, and despots maintain and uphold these conditions. This preoccupation with Satan must not be allowed to lead people to overlook and even consciously ignore these unjust structures. An interpretation of Christianity that contributes to such an attitude in highly political, even, and especially when it claims to be apolitical.

The idea that a Satan exists, who rules over large parts of the world, also polarises and sharpens conflicts, for where it appears that there is only a choice between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan, people with other religious convictions, or no religious convictions at all, feel that Bonnke assigns them to the kingdom of evil. Under such circumstances, it is quite clear that a dialogue between the religions is impossible.

Reinhard Bonnke believes in the horrors of hell, but he is not one of those preachers who delights in describing hell in horrific detail in his sermons in order to frighten people: „Hell is an awful and mysterious place. It is not a subject given us to enjoy. We are not meant to dangle men over the pit to see them squirm, simply because they are enemies of righteousness.“<sup>158</sup> Elsewhere he makes this recommendation to evangelists: „Directness – a straightforward account of the truth in Christ – that is the spirit of a true evangelist. This spirit contrasts with the evangelistic style many people are familiar with – a fire-and-brimstone type pointing a menacing finger at his listeners and preaching at people.“<sup>159</sup>

The evangelist Bonnke sees everything as subordinate to the great goal of preaching the good news. Hell appears as a warning, but above all he wants to lead

his listeners to the delights of the Kingdom of God. Bonnke does not advocate frightening people off, but rather winning them over: „Love is the true spirit of evangelism. We should warn people about the danger of hell as if they were our own children walking on the brink of a volcano.”<sup>160</sup>

His belief in hell and the conviction that all those who do not confess Christ will land in this hell, has convinced Bonnke of the urgency to reach all people with the Gospel in this generation. In one of his books he writes: „These chapters are written because I do not believe that God’s plans call for hell to be bigger than heaven.”<sup>161</sup>

## **God and the World**

„The prodigal planet“ (in German “Der verlorene Planet”) is the title Reinhard Bonnke has given to a sub-section of a chapter in his book „Evangelism by Fire”<sup>162</sup> And in a different place he maintains: „In fact, the world is of no importance if it does not relate to God.”<sup>163</sup> Even more explicitly: „The world is insane.”<sup>164</sup> And: „The world the disciples of Christ tackled was hopeless ...”<sup>165</sup> He speaks of „our sad world”<sup>166</sup> and in face of criticism he comments: „The world has not given us anything and the world cannot take anything from us!”<sup>167</sup> „picture of the world“ becomes explicitly clear in the following sentences: „The world is occupied territory in rebel hands. Once the whole world lived under satanic rule and oppression (see 1 John 5:19), but when Jesus entered the fray the forces of the kingdom of God began to assert themselves.”<sup>168</sup> This raises the question of whether ancient Israel, the Promised Land, was under the power of Satan before the coming of Jesus. Reinhard Bonnke takes a determinedly opposite standpoint to all those who are convinced that God also works through other religions. And indirectly he also questions the value of any social commitment if it has nothing to do with discipleship to Jesus and evangelism.

From the perspective of people of other faiths, statements such as the following can only mean confrontation: „The kingdom of heaven is the superpower demanding surrender.”<sup>169</sup> Now while Bonnke will most certainly say that this confrontation is inevitable, because it is a case of either one or the other, yet we must at least be aware that such a theological position has great potential for furthering social conflict.

In the publications of „Christ for all Nations“, it is frequent to find the great contrast demonstrated in a country before and after an evangelistic campaign. Pastor Siegfried Tomazsewski described the campaign „From Minus to Plus“ in Greenland in this way: „Greenland is a country in deep darkness. Suicide, rape and alcoholism are here the results of sinister occult practices. In these days the light of the Gospel has been brought into every house and every igloo from the far North to the Southern tip. Believers have taken great pains to reach even the most isolated corners of the country.”<sup>170</sup> To portray Greenland before the evangelistic campaign in such a negative way is problematic, even if one has a very positive view of the effect on society of brochures such as „From Minus to Plus“, and of Bonnke’s evangelistic efforts. The people there are shown in an extremely negative light, and the efforts of the churches over centuries in this part of the world also appear totally unsuccessful, compared to the changes which „Christ for all Nations“ has managed to bring about with its brochure campaign.

Bonnke’s view of the world can favour a distancing from „the world”, as is sometimes found in a more extreme form within sects and some fundamentalist Christian groups.

„The world is a vast brainwashing establishment to destroy faith in God.“<sup>171</sup> This negative view of the world is coupled with an expectation that the end of the world will come in the near future, and that of course justifies the great importance of spreading the Gospel: „The spirit of antichrist permeates human thinking and society. It is causing moral collapse. Hostile elements are raging worse and worse, like the early moments of a gathering storm. It is indeed the last hour.“<sup>172</sup> The world appears to be lost, what value then have small steps taken to protect the environment or in the social field? „Christian onlookers see the present world progress as a development backwards, into the darkness, wondering and wandering.“<sup>173</sup>

This negative judgement of „the world“ also has to do with the fact that worldly goods are not of great importance to Reinhard Bonnke. He himself lives very modestly and rejects evangelistic campaigns that promise people great material wealth: „He (God) does not promise to fill our wallets and bank accounts. He has never undertaken to make His servants rich, with rings on our fingers flashing as we drive our luxury cars.“<sup>174</sup> Here he distances himself quite clearly from a „Gospel of Prosperity“ as is preached, especially in North and Latin America. Many preachers promise great wealth, if one only prays enough - and puts enough money into the collecting boxes. In contrast Bonnke says to the evangelists: „Mammon and ministry don't mix too well. He profits most who serves best.“<sup>175</sup>

## **Sin and Guilt**

„My message is more than absolution. It is deliverance!“<sup>176</sup> How can people cope with guilt that continues to haunt them? All world religions – and all psychologists - search for answers to this existential question. In their belief in God, Judaism and later Christianity have found a way to help people to deal with sin and guilt. Today Christians summarise this message under the motto, justification by faith, that we also find in Reinhard Bonnke's message.<sup>177</sup> For him, as for many other Christians, Jesus' death and atonement is at the centre of his theological convictions. Jesus took our sins upon him, suffered for them and died for them. If we profess our faith in Jesus our sins and our guilt are forgiven us.

This is a liberating message and it doesn't stop at forgiveness: „Christ not only forgives, but reconciles us to God. He brings not only forgiveness of sins, but He brings us back to God, brings us home and sheds the love of God abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit (see Romans 5,5). Making us love what we hated and hate what we loved. He breaks down the walls which separate us from God.“<sup>178</sup> What is not mentioned here is reconciliation with the people towards whom we are guilty. While Reinhard Bonnke will certainly not dispute the importance of such reconciliation, it is significant, that this dimension is missing in his book „Time is running out“.

Another example: in the follow-up brochure, distributed in large numbers „Now that you are Saved“: „Imagine a courtroom filled with serious-looking officials, a prosecutor, judge and two defendants – a man and a woman – standing in the dock. The jury returns with a verdict of guilty. The defendants stand condemned. They must suffer the penalty and pay the price ... Now picture a different scene. The defendants stand before the highest judge of all, God. Acting against them is 'the accuser', Satan, who demands a verdict of guilty. Acting for them is their advocate, Jesus... Then Jesus steps forward and challenges the accuser: 'Where is your evidence?' That

causes quite a stir! ... The evidence of our sin has been destroyed! Jesus Christ gathered it all up and carried it into the fires of God's judgement, which swept across the place where he was crucified. During the terrible hours of Jesus' death, the record was consumed, leaving no trace."<sup>179</sup> Within the framework of this example there is also no reference made to the fact that justification through God's grace can instruct people and enable them to confess their sins and to confess the injustices committed to their victims, to hope for their forgiveness and to make good the damage they have caused.

The reports that thieves have repented of their deeds and brought huge amounts of stolen goods to the place where the gospel campaign was taking place, are doubtless true, but in these reports by „Christ for all Nations“ I miss indications that these former thieves have also confessed their guilt and made good the damage done towards those whom they had robbed and often violently attacked. I am reminded here of the biblical story of Zaccheus, the tax collector, who repented and promised not only that he would give half of his goods to the poor, but also that he would pay back many times over to those whom he had cheated. That means that he would confess his wrongdoings towards those who had been his victims.

The prerequisite for reconciliation is not only a profession of Jesus as Lord and the belief in divine grace, but also the willingness to enter into a new relationship with one's victims in a quite concrete way. An example of this is the South African Commission for Truth and Reconciliation, chaired by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, which moved many victims and perpetrators to speak to each other, to confess their guilt and if possible to forgive. These were often very painful processes but they were based on the knowledge that God's forgiveness of our sins does not free us from building up a new relationship between victim and perpetrator, but rather gives us the freedom to do just this.

This is a lengthy process, which when successful is truly a miracle. It is also perhaps a process that requires confidential conversations in small circles, patient listeners and silent prayer. Therefore it is quite irritating when Reinhard Bonnke begins his „Mission-Report“ on the evangelistic campaign in Rwanda several years after the genocide with the lines: „God conquers the world with the Gospel! The result is salvation: forgiveness of sins, understanding between peoples, the end of crime, lorries full of returned stolen goods, restored marriages, reunited families, villains transformed into saints, death-bringing addictions cured and all kinds of miraculous healings.“<sup>180</sup>

## **Suffering and Healing**

„People suffer for chiefly one reason: They have chosen to ignore God's rule book, the Bible, and everything has gone terribly wrong as a result.“<sup>181</sup> Reinhard Bonnke does not relate all illness to disregard for the Bible, but he does say: „We wage war against sickness, since it is a mark of evil.“<sup>182</sup> The identification of sickness with evil is problematic, for in this way it appears as though those who are sick are tainted with „evil“, something that can only increase the stigmatisation of people sick with AIDS. Nor does it exactly help to do away with the widespread discrimination against handicapped people, when such links are made. When he identifies sickness with evil, Reinhard Bonnke's understanding of health is diametrically opposed to that of those who accept sickness as a part of human existence. Sickness must be fought

against, but is part of man's finite nature on earth, is a part of the life that God has given us. To accept one's sickness can be a step on the way to God's kingdom, an expression of the belief that we can only achieve a state of perfection in the Kingdom of God and that until such time no people are either physically or spiritually „whole“, even those who do not suffer from acute illnesses. However, if sickness is seen as a sign of evil, the question necessarily arises as to how the affected person or others are responsible for this evil.

In his writings Reinhard Bonnke does not simply state that everyone is to blame for their own sickness, but sentences such as these could at least give that impression: „The Gospel is not addressed to guilty spirits, but to guilty men and women, suffering in their bodies for their sins. Jesus forgives and heals as part of the process.“<sup>183</sup> Salvation and physical healing seem to belong inseparably together: „Salvation, forgiveness and physical healing are closely linked in Scripture. Jesus forgave sin and removed the judgment upon sin. Healing is a sign of forgiveness. The name of Jesus means salvation from sin (see Matt. 1:21), and the name of Christ is inextricably linked to physical deliverance.“<sup>184</sup>

Reinhard Bonnke is not the only one with such convictions, it rather indicates that he is a part of the world-wide Pentecostal movement that reckons with healing through powerful authoritative prayer and sees a very close connection between healing and salvation.<sup>185</sup> However healing through prayer also has a central place in evangelistic work even outside the Pentecostal movement. It is estimated for example that at least half of the Christians in rural China have turned to the Christian faith as a result of experiencing acts of healing.<sup>186</sup>

This understanding of sickness and healing has of course consequences for the work of evangelism: „We must heal as well as teach ... We have not a hair's breadth of a warrant for splitting His teaching from His healing ... Jesus spent half his time healing.“<sup>187</sup> Once again we must ask how Reinhard Bonnke knows that Jesus spent half of his time in healing people. The Gospels contain no detailed survey of Jesus' daily routine that could serve as a basis for such calculations.

Acts of healing are a central component of the evangelistic rallies of „Christ for all Nations“. As an example, here a report on an evangelistic campaign in Benin: „God's tremendous liberating power poured out over the masses. Innumerable people suffered terrible pain, were sick, possessed and some mentally ill. But when we began to pray tremendous miracles happened as in biblical times; blind people could see, deaf people could hear, cripples could walk again, people sick with cancer were healed and mentally sick people became normal again. In face of these proofs of divine power the crowd broke out into loud jubilation. All around us the Acts of the Apostles came alive, that not even Hollywood could beat in its drama.“<sup>188</sup>

„Cancer begone! Tumour begone! Rheumatism, headaches, all pain should go away! Doctor Jesus takes it away! Tinnitus – be healed! Depression, sleeplessness – be healed in Jesus name!“ Reinhard Bonnke used these words at an evangelistic rally in Munich in 2001 to command the diseases of those who had come forward hoping to be healed, to cease.<sup>189</sup> According to the report on the meeting, several people came forward who reported that they had been healed of flu, asthmatic symptoms, pains in their feet, inflammation of the middle ear and squinting.

The evangelist Teresia Wairimu (who has herself worked together with Bonnke at some rallies) reports on an evangelisation in Kenya, in which Reinhard Bonnke was involved: „We were able to see how hundreds of people were transformed to HIV negative from HIV positive after we had prayed for them.“<sup>190</sup> She adds that these cases have been confirmed medically, but I must comment here that some of the simple AIDS-Tests that are carried out in Africa do not offer reliable results, and a second test can very well lead to a different result. But above all in Africa, where thousands of people die of AIDS every day, such reports can awaken expectations that cannot be fulfilled, and in the worst case they contribute to a carelessness regarding the infection, since a cure seems to be possible after all.

It would be simplistic to see a direct connection between the decline of the health system in many African countries and the huge successes of Reinhard Bonnke's evangelistic campaigns in which people are healed, but the fact that modern medicine is not available for most people in Africa, because they cannot afford it, has contributed to the search for alternatives. Western medicine has not been able to fulfil its promises in large parts of Africa, and when the fees for treatment constantly increase, even in many of the church health centres and institutions (because state subsidies are not being paid among other things), then it seems only fitting, even vitally necessary, for the poor to look for possibilities of healing elsewhere. I would like to qualify that however by saying that church institutions in Africa working on principles of western medicine have also achieved great success and continue to do so. They have saved the lives of millions of children through preventive vaccination, have given countless people their sight back, and healed them from other sicknesses. Not least, they have fought against the demonisation of sickness and have convinced people that they themselves can do something to prevent sickness, whether by building latrines, maintaining a healthy diet or even preventing infection with AIDS. In spite of all spectacular miracle healings, we must not overlook the fact that, day by day, very many more people are cured of their sickness thanks to the unspectacular service of people in the Christian health services in Africa.

We must also take into account the fact that very many Africans are convinced that divine power plays a great role in healing and are therefore very open to miraculous healing. The famous African theologian John Mbiti puts it this way: „... much more attention is paid to the field of miracles in an African congregation than is normally the case in a European or an American congregation ...“<sup>191</sup> There is a broad spectrum of possibilities for healing on offer, beyond those offered by western medicine, whether by traditional healers, Christian healers or Pentecostal congregations.<sup>192</sup> As already mentioned, acts of healing have become an important element in the competition between the churches. Against this background it is understandable that the Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Tanzania holds services of healing and includes prayers for healing in their evangelistic meetings.<sup>193</sup> Reinhard Bonnke is not the only one who includes healing in his evangelistic campaigns, but he does it with particular intensity.

In Bonnke's theology healing has a very central status: „The Kingdom of God has been introduced on earth and healing shows it... Without healing it (the Gospel) is stripped of a powerful element of its self-authentication.“<sup>194</sup> And: „Deliverance includes divine miraculous healing.“<sup>195</sup> Bonnke emphasises again and again, both at his evangelistic rallies and in his publications that it is not he who heals, but God. He

also emphasises that healing is not something that is subject to human availability<sup>196</sup>, but he reckons steadfastly with it: “Miracles will pop up like popcorn when we dare to preach that Jesus Christ is still the Healer.”<sup>197</sup> Elsewhere he writes: „Believers inherit the kingdom, ‘lock, stock and barrel’. The kingdom power which rested on Christ Jesus was to work signs and wonders ... The Spirit endowed Jesus and endows His people with the same power.”<sup>198</sup>

Just as it is clear that many people are healed at Bonnke’s evangelistic rallies, it is also clear that other people who hoped for healing and prayed fervently for it, were not healed. This was already apparent at the first major evangelistic rally with acts of healing in Lesotho.<sup>199</sup> The biographer Colin Whittaker reports that Reinhard Bonnke called upon all blind people to stand up. Half a dozen people stood up and the evangelist prayed that they would be able to see again: „Your eyes are going to be opened”, he proclaimed, and one woman really could see again, but the others could not. They are not mentioned again in the report.<sup>200</sup> The evangelist himself says of the task of healing: „This is not a commission to heal all and sundry, but only such as the Holy Spirit gives a manifestation for.”<sup>201</sup> And he says to everyone but perhaps particularly to those who have not been physically healed: „The greater works Christ promised included more than physical cures. The greatest thing was that the disciples were to be witnesses.”<sup>202</sup>

However the disappointment still remains for those who had hoped in vain to be healed. To them Bonnke says: „Many go unhealed despite prayer and faith, but healing is not everything. Sickness is not the ultimate evil, nor are cures the ultimate good. It is absurd to lose faith when healing does not come.”<sup>203</sup>

In this context Reinhard Bonnke answers his critics, something that is relatively rare: „If you pray for the sick, you will find accusations being made that you are heartless, building up hopes and sending some home unhealed.... I know many German clergy who practise on this high moral ground, showing compassion on the sick by not praying for any of them!”<sup>204</sup> That many pastors in Germany do not pray for the sick is an unproven claim. What is true is that many pastors pray for the sick and with the sick, but do this in the „quiet of their room“ and not on the stage of a huge evangelistic rally. They pray for and with the sick without expecting or announcing miracles, but rather on order to comfort them and hope together with them that God will help them to recover or to die in peace. This pastoral counselling is not spectacular, nor does it lead to mass conversions, but it is part of a Christian tradition that recognises healing as a gift of God for which we can pray. The kingdom of God has begun for these Christians even if no miracles occur. In contrast, Bonnke makes a clear relationship between the two: „... the miraculous is an essential, ongoing feature of the kingdom of God. If the Kingdom is among us, there will be wonders.”<sup>205</sup>

I must admit however that prayers for the sick are missing in many Sunday services in Germany and that the subject of health is more likely to be a subject of conversation in the old people’s meeting than a matter of concern for the whole congregation. There are, however, groups in many congregations, for example, whose members regularly visit sick members of the congregation.

Moreover, many theological contributions on this subject in Europe have shortcomings.<sup>206</sup> The specialist on mission work, Dietrich Werner, writes on this subject: „In Jesus’ great mission, proclamation and healing are inseparably linked

together. The healing miracles cannot simply be spiritualised and their meaning reduced to an individual's faith. They are rather an expression of Jesus' practical concern for the bodily existence of men and women, and their welfare. The 'demythologisation' of the stories of healing in the New Testament has for a long time led to suppression of the fact that Jesus – like other charismatic personalities at that time – possessed special gifts of healing and interpreted his experiences of healing as signs of the approaching Kingdom of God.<sup>207</sup>

## Social Changes

After what has been said so far, it is not surprising that Reinhard Bonnke places greater importance on evangelism than on a Christian's involvement in society: „Social, environmental and moral issues are not trifles to be dismissed lightly. We ought to be angry about many of the abominations perpetrated by modern society. But what about the issue of eternal salvation? ... Are we more disturbed about endangered species in the North Atlantic than by the eternal danger in which Christ-rejecters stand?“<sup>208</sup> The following sentence makes Bonnke's position even clearer: „The apostolic commission is to reach the lost of this world, not to address environmental projects, wildlife issues or social engineering.“<sup>209</sup>

Reinhard Bonnke particularly likes to quote verses from St John's Gospel, but he also refers to St. Luke's Gospel, about which he writes: „Luke's Gospel is the book that many have turned to in support of the "social gospel". Yet Luke really stands aside from issues of class ...“<sup>210</sup> Yet while Luke warned the rich clearly and unambiguously in his Gospel, many of Bonnke's texts only hint at this. An example : „... Luke with his concern over the faceless, the forgotten, the outsider. Evangelism brings in the lost and makes them part of the family.“<sup>211</sup> Here the poor are apparently „integrated“ into a world in which injustice and glaring differences between rich and poor are not central themes. It is true that Jesus loved the rich person just as he loved the simple fisherman John, as Bonnke writes<sup>212</sup>, but he called upon the rich to repent and promised the poor the Kingdom of God. All the texts, for example, that play an important role in Latin American Liberation Theology are sidelined in Reinhard Bonnke's speeches and writings.

A final example of how Bonnke deals with Jesus' warnings to the rich: „Jesus used humour when he spoke of a camel going through the eye of a needle, as he warned the rich about the difficulty they would have entering the Kingdom of God.“<sup>213</sup> No, that wasn't humour, that was dead seriousness in face of the stubbornness of the rich. Jesus didn't say that a camel goes through the eye of a needle, but rather he warned that it would be easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God (Mark 10,17-27). Nor did Jesus speak of the „difficulties“ hindering the rich, but rather of their hardness of heart and the fact that they put their trust in riches instead of in God.

Reinhard Bonnke cannot be accused of not seeing the social problems and the poverty in Africa: „Likewise, if we who are made in God's image know about the hungry in the world, we need to do something about it.“<sup>214</sup> In some cases he has started small aid programmes in emergency situations, but the effort he puts into this contrasts sharply with that put into his mass evangelistic campaigns. In a report on an evangelistic campaign in Dodoma in 1997 he writes: „We were deeply affected by the effects of the continuing drought in this part of Tanzania ... The people were

literally starving. We helped spontaneously as well as we could by giving 100 families 50 Dollars each to at least help them a little over the worst.”<sup>215</sup> A much larger aid action for Mozambique and Zimbabwe took place in 1985 with two large lorries.<sup>216</sup> But in face of the material poverty and hunger in Africa, such initiatives play an unimportant role in the work of „Christ for all Nations“, as can clearly be established by reading several of the publications of the organisation.

Now „Christ for all Nations“ is not an emergency aid or development aid organisation, but nor are many of the mission agencies, who are much more committed to improving the material welfare of the people and helping to ensure their survival. It is also remarkable to me what a low status, initiatives for practical compassion and brotherly love have in the writings, and above all, in the theological publications of Reinhard Bonnke. As the commandment to love one’s neighbour as oneself was of such central importance to Jesus and he also talked about real practical examples and forms of neighbourly love, it is remarkable that this central dimension of Christian witness – apart from acts of healing – seems to be of secondary importance to Bonnke. It would be good for example to find a firm recognition of the commendable work of organisations such as „Bread for the World“, which receive a great deal of support also from most of the protestant churches of different denominations in Germany. To be sure, one can find a sentence or two in which church social and diaconal work is positively mentioned, but this is then usually qualified by pointing to the much more important work of evangelism, the saving of souls.

Reinhard Bonnke sees the poverty and the need for social changes, he makes that quite clear in his publications, and he believes that individual people have to be changed in order to solve the problems of the African continent and the rest of the world: „The Gospel goes to the roots of the trouble. People sin because of what they are, so they need a change of nature ... you won’t solve the root problem by healing or education or the redistribution of wealth.”<sup>217</sup> Bonnke makes the claim that the police have often established a sudden dramatic decrease in crime after his evangelistic campaigns.<sup>218</sup>

And there really are examples of people, who profess themselves to Christ after evangelism by the Pentecostal movement, who do change their way of life. There are reports, especially from Latin America, that men stop drinking alcohol, do not beat their wives anymore and work very hard. If Pentecostal preachers can bring about such changes, they can of course in the long term start to change the whole of society. Thus Andreas Kusch writes in an EMW-publication on healing in mission and ecumenism: „The experiences of the Pentecostal churches and charismatic groups also show that concentrating on spiritual forces among those around us does not automatically mean turning away from the world. At first they may only succeed in responsibly changing their own lives and the lives of the people directly affected by them with new values and norms, and have little chance of changing the socio-political structures immediately in this way. But in the long-term view it is justifiable to expect that the Christian ethics that have brought about this change can also be made fruitful for the political and economic restructuring of the whole of society.”<sup>219</sup>

Reinhard Bonnke also expresses the conviction that social change results from the work of evangelism: „The oppressed need the Gospel to achieve salvation and liberation, and in order to end hostilities and blood-shedding. That is more important than any economic aid or charitable support.”<sup>210</sup> It is certainly true that the Gospel

can motivate people to change their social and political circumstances. There are enough examples of this in history. However in situations of conflict such as those during the time of apartheid in South Africa, the message of the Gospel was clearly related to the actual injustice that was occurring, and the Gospel became an inspiration for social commitment. The “Kairos-Document“ in South Africa is one such example of how faith in a liberating God can move Christians to commit themselves to work towards making it possible for all people to live in dignity as God’s creatures.

But Reinhard Bonnke rejects sermons that speak out against deplorable political and economic circumstances: „Pulpit essays, homilies, moralizing or preaching about how you think the economy of the country should be run – all that is glacial work.“<sup>211</sup> And in the same vein: „When people go to church, they want Jesus. Not politics.“<sup>212</sup> Of course some Christians do not want to hear about the political and economic crisis in their country when they go to church, especially if they themselves profit from the situation. But others long to hear the church speak out clearly against poverty and injustice. In Africa particularly there is a long tradition of the church speaking out clearly about the desperate situation of individual countries. With such courageous statements the churches contributed decisively to a wave of democratisation in Africa at the beginning of the nineties, and helped these processes to occur peacefully in most countries. The contribution courageous men and women of God have made to peace and reconciliation in countries such as El Salvador and Guatemala is also widely recognised. Finally, the many Peace Prayers held in the churches must be mentioned; they were a crucial factor in bringing about peaceful change in the former German Democratic Republic.

Above all, Bonnke’s statements fall short in dealing with the social structures of injustice. This is reflected particularly in the fact that Reinhard Bonnke counts among his friends politicians whom „amnesty international“, local churches and many other organisations make responsible for massive violations of human rights: Frederick Chiluba<sup>223</sup>, President of Zambia until the beginning of 2002, and Daniel Arap Moi<sup>224</sup>, President of Kenya. While Bonnke objects to politics in sermons, he uses his publications to disseminate positive views about these politicians. The election of General Obasanjo as the President of Nigeria was welcomed by many people in 1999, but it is nevertheless a clear political statement when Reinhard Bonnke describes the election as „another wonderful piece of news“ in one of his „Evangelist Letters“.<sup>225</sup> When, in the eighties, the President of Togo, President Eyadema invited Reinhard Bonnke to hold an evangelistic campaign in Kata, his home town, the evangelist was dubious at first, but apparently not because Eyadema is a notorious despots in Africa, but rather „because we, as a mission agency are much more geared to the larger centres of population.“<sup>226</sup>

It apparently did not give the evangelist food for thought, when, during an evangelistic campaign in Nairobi, President Moi ordered that Bonnke’s two final evangelistic rallies should be transmitted live in radio and television and the following evangelistic campaign in Nakuru actually in its entirety.<sup>227</sup> The fact that a President has power of decision over the programme of the radio and TV stations as though they were his own private stations was apparently not seen as a problem. In a publication in English in 1988 he had already written that it was a great privilege for a country to be ruled by a head of state, who had been born again.<sup>228</sup>

That was shortly after an election campaign during which Kenya's ruling party had used very dubious means to take action against every form of opposition. These close connections to President Moi, who has been criticised frequently and with good reason by the Catholic Church and the National Council of Churches in Kenya, represents definite and very dubious partisanship on Bonnke's part. President Moi frequently takes the opportunity to present himself in a good light at services and the events of other church and mission groups, who accept the political status quo or even praise it. Thus he frequently attends services in those evangelical churches where he knows he is safe from criticism. These events are then made known to a broad public through the state-controlled media. Against this background the close connections between this president and the evangelist from Germany are even more problematic. One such example is that at Moi's invitation Bonnke preached in a High School in Nakuru and was invited afterwards to lunch with the President.<sup>229</sup>

### **Western Theology and the Churches**

„A foundation reinforced with Bible faith is what distinguishes nations – and will extinguish them if abandoned. Something like this happened in my country, Germany. Centuries of liberal and rationalistic thought and biblical criticism diluted the Christian faith in my homeland. Weak and unstable as water, the region could not excel (see Gen. 49:4). Given these conditions, it was easy for an amoral regime to take over. The barbaric policies of Hitler and the Third Reich met with little resistance.”<sup>230</sup> A sweeping criticism of liberal theology and the liberal body of thought in Germany are to be found in various places in Bonnke's publications. It would be an interesting subject for debate, whether a share in the responsibility for Hitler's rise to power can be ascribed to those who spent their energy fighting these liberal spiritual trends and not for example the anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism of many conservative church circles.

Unfortunately Bonnke does not seem able to look at theology and church life in the western world in a differentiated way when he considers it to be „liberal“. He makes sweeping judgements without presenting any proofs. Here is another example: „...we have to say that the gospel is being reinterpreted today in ways that take the heart out of it – and out of us. Liberal and rationalistic thought is based on the shifting sand of biblical criticism, speculation and philosophy. No assured grounds for the frightened millions have ever been offered by this new thought.”<sup>231</sup> Even the following sentences are presumably directed against a more liberal theology: „Why was Jesus exalted to the right hand of God? In even the greatest of commentaries, far too little is written. Christ's ascension seems to be a neglected study.”<sup>232</sup> In fact there is a huge amount of theological literature in the Western world on the subject of the resurrection, but many of the views represented do not go along with the opinions expressed by Reinhard Bonnke.

His criticism of theologians is particularly pointed in the following quotation: „Western thinking has also been dominated by secular and godless theories. Satan has planted agents in the highest educational establishments, and even in theological seminaries.”<sup>233</sup> In view of such massive accusations, that teachers in the theological faculties are in league with the devil, one would at least expect some watertight proof. But he offers none, instead he talks sweepingly about a „Bible-doubting cult of intellectualism“ in Germany since the Enlightenment.<sup>234</sup> Congregation pastors also find themselves exposed to sweeping criticism: „Today a church pastor has become

a cheap-rate psychiatrist and social welfare officer – counselling, officiating at weddings, burying the dead, blessing new babies and so on. No apostle ever functioned like a modern minister! The first apostles had one job only: to bring the knowledge of Christ to every man and woman everywhere.”<sup>235</sup> Here the pastor’s role is understood in a specifically defined way and everyone must conform to it if they do not wish to face Bonnke’s accusations that they are “cheap-rate psychiatrists and social welfare officers”. There is, for example, no proof that the apostles did not feel responsible for funerals, they most certainly did feel responsible for blessing the children.

The mystical traditions in the churches are also condemned out of hand: „No New Testament Christian was a contemplative. Mystics usually end up with new teachings which are error.”<sup>236</sup> Elsewhere he states that divine life cannot be experienced through mysticism, but only through the Gospel<sup>237</sup>, as though Christian Mysticism considers the Gospel as finished and done with and no longer relevant.

Such criticism is always linked to the claim that he proclaims the truth of the Gospel, as though this truth could be proclaimed independently of one’s own theological, cultural and social position: „As ambassadors we have no right to impose our own ideas upon people; we only have the right to announce what our King wants to say. The essential thing is that we are heralds with authority to proclaim the Word of God. Our job is to announce the truth of the gospel.”<sup>238</sup> The word „proclaim“ reflects what he is really saying, it is not a question of discussing with others what they believe and struggling together to find a right understanding of Scripture, it is rather a claim of possessing the truth. Reinhard Bonnke is nothing short of unmerciful to Christians who live their faith in a different way from the way he considers right: “Some people may like to celebrate solemn services with all the splendour and vestments that go with them. Jesus does not demand them of us, nor do they serve for our salvation. However important they may be for individual Christians they are totally meaningless before God.”<sup>239</sup> Here we must raise the question how Reinhard Bonnke knows with such certainty what is of no importance to God. In the context of an evangelistic campaign in Tanzania Reinhard Bonnke wrote again in such a derogatory way: „But where the gates are opened for God’s Holy Spirit, He blows in and blows the hackneyed Christian traditions out.”<sup>240</sup>

Sentences such as these are also part of his criticism of other theological schools of thought: „The efforts of rationalistic scholars to produce a non-supernatural Christianity have produced something that bears no more resemblance than a rag doll to the palpitating energy and life of the Gospel that carried the apostles into the pagan world 2,000 years ago.”<sup>241</sup>

Bonnke stands in opposition to all the theologians throughout the world, who have come to the conclusion that we always read and interpret the Bible through the glasses of our own religious, social, cultural and economic situation, and therefore need to discuss it with other Christians in order to come closer to the truth of the Gospel. In this context it is particularly important to talk with those who represent different traditions and theological positions. Theologians in the South of the “Third World”, who have joined together to form the „Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians“ (EATWOT), are firmly convinced that we do not possess the truth of the Gospel, but rather must seek together for it.

Reinhard Bonnke's interpretation of the Bible is also influenced by his own ideas, and these are the ideas of a Christian, who understands himself as a born-again Christian and as part of the Pentecostal-charismatic movement. Thus he writes: „Our CfaN Mission organisation nestles softly in the bed of international charismatic Christianity. This means that the harvest of our evangelistic campaigns will continue to bear fruit.”<sup>242</sup> This is the side from which he also expects especially strong support for his evangelistic work. In connection with issuing new video programmes on the evangelistic campaigns, Reinhard Bonnke writes: „The charismatic Christians and their 450 million supporters at present are our target group.”<sup>243</sup>

This influences his theology of course, but it also influences his understanding of the existing churches. Bonnke makes a positive contrast to preachers of certain sects who call upon people to leave the existing churches and to join their own religious sects. Quite the opposite, Bonnke calls upon people again and again to join a congregation. The aim of his evangelism is the building up and strengthening of the congregations, and he is strongly against Christians quarrelling among themselves.<sup>244</sup> However he does make differences between the churches and within the churches, although these are often only hinted at in his publications. This sentence is one of his clearer statements: „The Methodist Church is the name given to Methodists worldwide, which is a convenient term, but the actual ekklesia is wherever born-again Methodists meet.”<sup>245</sup> His differentiation between Christians who are born-again and those who are not, is also apparent in this statement: „Every born-again believer is connected „in Christ” with all others.”<sup>246</sup> Christians who are not „born-again” must necessarily ask themselves whether, according to this understanding, they are not connected together „in Christ”.

In order that their evangelism can be as successful as can be, „Christ for all Nations“ seeks to cooperate with as many churches and congregations as possible on the spot. The reports on evangelistic campaigns often include a list of how many churches have supported the campaign. Bonnke claims for himself that he strengthens the cooperation between the churches<sup>247</sup>, but that only applies to those churches prepared to join in his mission initiative. In fact Bonnke succeeds in winning many churches for his evangelistic campaigns, for example whole Lutheran and Anglican dioceses, or at least many of their congregations. Perhaps some join in because they are afraid that otherwise the Pentecostal churches will gain even more members from among the many thousands of people who flock to the evangelistic meetings, whose “decision cards” are passed on to those churches officially supporting the campaign. Reinhard Bonnke can rely especially on the Pentecostal-charismatic movement, about which he writes in one of his books: „... the revival has exceeded all previous religious growth and is likely to embrace 620 million believers by AD 2000.”<sup>248</sup>

But Bonnke is also closely associated with evangelical movements and churches, as was shown in the project „From Minus to Plus“ in Great Britain; whoever wished to be part of the project had to put their name under the Creed of the Evangelical Alliance of the country (an association of the Evangelicals). In the context of an evangelistic campaign in Ethiopia Reinhard Bonnke spoke of the „evangelical-charismatic churches“, with whom he sought to cooperate.<sup>249</sup> In a report on a campaign in Sri Lanka in 1997, Dr. Lalith Mendis is quoted as saying: „We know of exactly 20,000 decisions for Jesus. In Sri Lanka beforehand there were around 80,000 evangelical Christians. We can therefore say that the congregation of believers has grown by 25

percent!”<sup>250</sup> The others who did not join in, or who openly rejected this mass evangelism, found themselves made to appear as the „enemy” or confronted with accusations such as „Christian Pharisees“.<sup>251</sup>

In his publications Bonnke rarely makes comments on the Roman Catholic church, and only if they have spoken out against his evangelistic campaign in a certain country. In 1992, for example, he wrote about an evangelistic campaign in Gabon: „Religious Christianity reacted with all their might. Letters from the Archbishop were read out in the churches, threatening whoever might attend one of our evangelistic meetings with excommunication...”<sup>252</sup> In Colin Whittaker’s Bonnke-Biography, he says of the mainly Catholic Philippines that this is a poor nation that has had to fight for centuries against oppression and „dead religious traditions“.<sup>253</sup>

When Bonnke declares that Jesus does not convey religious feelings such as can often be experienced by visitors to churches and cathedrals „while they stand respectfully before the relics of some saint or another”<sup>254</sup>, he is most probably referring to the Catholic tradition. And Catholics are not likely to be very pleased to read the following: „We are not beggars asking the glorified saints to send us a few scraps of help. We don’t need to collect their bones hoping some of their holiness or grace will brush off on us and stand to our credit. Believers are not bone pickers.”<sup>255</sup> When Reinhard Bonnke was invited to hold an evangelistic campaign in Cochinchina/Indochina he reports that he asked himself: „Can I accept an invitation from Catholics?”<sup>256</sup> He did accept, but in the twentieth century, where more progress has been made in ecumenical cooperation between the churches of the world than ever before, the question seems strange to me. In this context I must mention an intensive dialogue taking place between the Pentecostal churches and the Roman Catholic church.<sup>257</sup>

Relations to the Ethiopian-Orthodox church become tense when Reinhard Bonnke holds an evangelistic campaign in this country, which is proud of its many centuries-old Christian tradition. In face of the opposition to an evangelistic campaign in Ethiopia in May and June 2000 Reinhard Bonnke wrote: „Here again was confirmation of what I have often said, that the Gospel can best be defended by exposing it to its enemies. Only then does it develop the power that is within it so that the enemies of God become friends of God.”<sup>258</sup> It appears from a further report that in this case the enemies of God were not the Moslems, for Bonnke wrote in a report on the campaign: „However it appeared that the Moslem Town Council welcomed us and offered us every support, whereas representatives of the Ethiopian-Orthodox church threatened us with violence and murder.”<sup>259</sup> And writing about a follow-up campaign in the town of Nazret Reinhard Bonnke states: „The great majority of the population belonged to the Ethiopian-Orthodox church. They had tried everything, but really everything, to prevent this evangelistic campaign ...”<sup>260</sup> The evangelist also wrote about a campaign planned for 1995: „However when the technical team was setting up the equipment for the evangelistic meeting, there was serious rioting by fanatical supporters of the Orthodox church ... The Government withdrew its permission and so we were not able to bring in this harvest of souls for Jesus Christ.”<sup>261</sup>

## **Israel and the Jews**

The history of the Church and her theologians has been one of militant and sometimes subtle Anti-Judaism throughout the centuries. To a certain extent this is still the case today. But since the Holocaust people, particularly in countries such as Germany, have become more conscious of the injustice Christianity has perpetrated against the Jews over the centuries. And it has also become apparent what a fatal role theologians and preachers have played, defaming „the Jews“ as Christ’s murderers and understanding the Gospel as a broadsheet against the Jews.

Under these circumstances it is particularly distressing how the Jewish people are referred to in Bonnke’s publications. One example: „He (God) had come down to deliver an ungrateful rabble of slaves from servitude. He was set only on giving them nationhood and a new country. Such a task would make great demands on His inexhaustible patience.“<sup>262</sup> Elsewhere we can read: „The Book of Numbers is perhaps the prime Bible lesson in that subject, where Israel is exhibited for its failures.“<sup>263</sup> And: „The prophets struggled in vain to bring Israel back to God.“<sup>264</sup>

In his book „Evangelism by Fire“ he claims that God loved the people „for no reason at all“, but rather „The reason for love is love, which is God Himself. Love is not God, but God is love.“<sup>265</sup> And what was the Israelites answer from Bonnke’s point of view? „The Old Testament is the greatest exposure of human failure ever written. From Genesis to Malachi it points to men and women and declares them to be fundamentally failures.“<sup>266</sup>

The subject of God’s disappointment with his people occurs again and again: „God made Jonah a remarkable exception. He coerced him into doing what Israel was supposed to do but never did. God raised up Israel to make the name of the Lord known throughout the whole earth.“<sup>267</sup> Here is an indication of what is at the heart of Bonnke’s thinking; God’s love to the people of Israel is virtually just the first step on the way to the evangelisation of the whole world. Thus he writes: „One striking difference between the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures is that the New Testament brings the world into focus. The Old Testament is confined largely to Israel’s disappointing history.“<sup>268</sup>

When looking at Old Testament texts therefore, he does not consider the central issue to be God’s promise to the people of Israel that they are His chosen people: „Israel had declined since the days of its pristine glory. Everyone trusted in his or her national identity. If you belonged to Israel you were safe. The Israelites all supposed they had favoured-nation status with God, as if God were theirs by birthright.“<sup>269</sup>

The Old Testament appears – apart from certain exceptions – as the story of a people falling away from God. Even exceptions can be turned against the Jewish people. The fact that no-one except David was prepared to take up Goliath’s challenge is taken to prove how ineffective the majority of the people’s faith in their God was: „The David and Goliath episode (see 1 Sam. 17) is a perfect example of the difference between active and passive faith. Israel had a faith. They declared that Jehovah was God. It was a tremendous truth for them. But they may just as well have said – and believed – that the moon was made of green cheese. Their statement of faith in Jehovah God may just as well not have been true, because it did nothing in their lives.“<sup>270</sup>

Nor are such statements just isolated statements, but can be found frequently in Bonnke's publications. Here is another example: „But Israel had a tendency to expect the work of God to take place tomorrow – tomorrow the Kingdom would come; tomorrow the Samaritans would repent; tomorrow the Romans would leave; tomorrow God would appear again in power like He did in the Exodus and at Sinai. They had a God for all their yesterdays and for all their tomorrows, but nothing for today.”<sup>271</sup> And also: „But through the centuries, the learned men of Israel had twisted the meaning of the Sabbath into a command.”<sup>272</sup> However I must add that on occasion Reinhard Bonnke also writes positive sentences about ancient Israel, for example: „Think of the unique history of the people of Israel, their tremendous Exodus, God's care for them, the way he looked after them, led them and protected them, God's blessing on the tribes of Jacob until they finally represented a mighty nation.”<sup>273</sup>

Bonnke gives a different meaning to history: „The TRUE son of Abraham was not Isaac but Jesus. And the TRUE son of David was not Absalom or Solomon but Jesus. This is the son who does not disappoint.”<sup>274</sup> And with reference to the covenant between God and Israel, Bonnke states categorically: „This covenant has passed away.”<sup>275</sup> Reinhard Bonnke is not alone in his efforts to make a big difference between the Old Testament and the New Testament, and we still find this tendency in many theological texts today. In this respect Bonnke's sometimes drastic wording is also a challenge to present-day theology to reconsider their understanding of the Old Testament and the people of Israel.

Reinhard Bonnke views the almost traumatic process that several generations of the followers of Jesus went through in separating from the Jewish congregations of that time, as if it were merely a process of breaking away from strict Jewish ideas: „But the Lord sent Peter a vision which helped change his strict Jewish mind-set, breaking down taboos and traditions.”<sup>276</sup> He goes even further when he writes in one of his Evangelist's letters: „Two thousand years ago the dark night of paganism lay over all nations.”<sup>277</sup> He does not exclude the Jewish people here except for those who joined Jesus and his disciples.

The First Testament is viewed from the perspective of the New Testament: „The Old Testament and the revelation contained therein was, in fact, the beginning of the gospel.”<sup>278</sup> And elsewhere: „We have already seen that the good news began in the Old Testament. The prophets generally spoke of troubles and evils befalling Israel, but in the midst of all the trouble Israel had brought upon itself there was good news.”<sup>279</sup> In certain points he makes extremely sweeping statements concerning the Old Testament: „All the prophets spoke of was judgement with only the most distant rays of hope.”<sup>280</sup>

In my reading of many of Reinhard Bonnke's publications I have noticed that there is very little mention of the Jews of today. It is Christians who appear virtually to be the heirs of the promises of the Old Testament: „The voice of God to the nations today comes through the whole body of the church. What Isaiah was for Israel, the whole church is to Germany, Britain or America.”<sup>281</sup> I only found one place where reference was made to present-day Jews: „For all classes, no matter how cultured or how primitive, there is one Word of truth – the Cross – to the wise, the barbarian, to Greek and Jew, to everyone.”<sup>282</sup>

That he more or less ignores the Jewish people of today is again reflected in the fact that I found no clear statement by Bonnke concerning mission to the Jews. Although he never excludes the Jews when he states that all people are lost who do not confess Christ as Saviour. The above quote about Jews and Greeks can also be interpreted to mean that all Jews are also lost if they do not confess to the message of the cross. This is also the direction that his interpretation of the story of Cornelius takes: „Cornelius needed the gospel, even though he was as good a man as anybody in those days could hope to meet. He is described as devout, a God-fearer – a man who believed in the Jewish faith. He gave generously to charity and always prayed to God ... Nevertheless he needed Jesus.“<sup>283</sup>

Reinhard Bonnke visited Jerusalem in 1995 to attend the „World Pentecostal Conference“. He was one of the main speakers at the conference. His biographer Colin Whittaker writes that Bonnke considered it a miracle that he was able to preach in the city of Zion. Whether he also preached before Jews and Christians in Israel is not clear from the biography.<sup>284</sup> In his theological contributions it is apparent that the New Jerusalem, which is of such central importance for many Pentecostals, seems not to play such a large role for Reinhard Bonnke. His entire concern is that the Gospel must be preached to all peoples before the coming of Jesus.

## **Other Religions**

Most religions of the world claim to reveal the truth and therefore find themselves in competition with each other. It makes a great difference whether believers say, „This is the truth for me and I have found my God or my gods“ or whether they say, „My religion is the only one that reveals the whole truth and therefore all other religions are false“. There are a number of different consequences resulting from this second interpretation but Reinhard Bonnke is undoubtedly among those who presume that all the others are in total darkness: „Until they find and accept the truth, the inhabitants of this world will wander the wastes of the wilderness, scanning the horizons where dawn never breaks, looking for the elusive elixir of happiness.“<sup>285</sup> This position is reinforced by the following statement: „In what sort of way are unbelievers happy? In no sort of way I think. Christians are happy in God’s way, the originally intended way. The God scene is the only scene.“<sup>286</sup>

When Bonnke turns his attention to other religions it is often with such sweeping statements as this one: „Every religion offers a superficial lifestyle, but true Christianity offers much more. For example, Muslim clerics and religious police regulate the way their followers eat, wash, dress, conduct relationships and pray, going to great lengths to enforce their rules. The Bible properly understood does nothing of the sort.“<sup>287</sup> Such an understanding has consequences for theology: „The business of comparative religions is really the business of contrast. There is little to dovetail.“<sup>288</sup>

Bonnke is very sceptical about a dialogue between the religions, that many see as a decisive step towards preventing a new world war: „Has Hinduism, Islam or Buddhism got a Saviour like Jesus, the Son of God? If not, any dialogue is a waste of time. Such a discussion would only deal with superficial issues and not with the thing that really matters. Unless there is another Christ, no debate is even possible.“<sup>289</sup>

As Christians are in possession of the whole truth, according to Bonnke, („Christianity, however, is a dogmatic religion.“<sup>290</sup>), they have no need for dialogue: „If you want to dispel the darkness, there is no use arguing with it. Just switch the light on! Polemics is no substitute dynamic for truth and the Holy Spirit. No amount of darkness can extinguish the light of a single candle.“<sup>291</sup> Elsewhere Bonnke admits that he has nothing against a dialogue, if it means he can tell others about Jesus and listen to their religious beliefs, and as long as there is no intention of it influencing him.<sup>292</sup> His judgement of the other religions is already fixed anyway: „Christ’s teaching slashes through the wisdom of this world – whether it’s the wisdom of Aristotle, Plato, Buddha or Lao Tsu.“<sup>293</sup>

Bonnke does not however attack other religions directly in his sermons<sup>294</sup> and justifies it in this way: „There is no need for us to attack Islam or any other religion. There is no need to attack anybody’s way of life, whether they live in the West, East, North or South. All we need to do is simply let people see for themselves what Jesus really is ... Jesus always wins the day. People can say nothing against Him.“<sup>295</sup> After an evangelistic campaign in Gambia a local pastor, Pastor Aganaba, established: „As a result of this campaign the people now know that Christianity and Islam are totally different.“<sup>296</sup>

But where there is apparently only light and darkness, believers and non-believers („The entire world stands on one side or the other of the line of faith.“<sup>297</sup>), a polarisation takes place and people cannot help feeling that they are being attacked, even if their faith is not explicitly named. It is therefore not surprising that Reinhard Bonnke’s major evangelistic campaigns in Africa have often led to confrontations between Christians and Moslems and, especially in Nigeria, have led to violence.<sup>298</sup> Bonnke’s goal, to preach the Gospel and convert all the peoples of Africa is viewed by many Moslems as a threat to their faith and their identity. The fact that in former times, as already mentioned, the word “crusade” was used more often in connection with Bonnke’s major evangelistic campaigns<sup>299</sup>, can only cause negative feelings for Moslems with a sense and knowledge of history. Nor do other formulations in Bonnke’s publications contribute to furthering religious peace. For example when the sub-title of an Evangelist’s Letter in connection with an evangelistic campaign in the Nigerian city of Ibadan reads: „Ready to conquer Ibadan for God“<sup>300</sup> and in a further letter „God calls us up“, and the word „general mobilization“ occur.<sup>301</sup>

In a letter to the friends in April 2000 Bonnke wrote: „Our next evangelistic campaign takes us into an Islamic country. Please pray intensely for the campaign! God has opened a door here for us in a miraculous way and we wish to march through it in faith and take the country.“<sup>302</sup> With reference to the conquest of Jericho Bonnke writes: „We now go in over those fallen walls with the sword of the Word, to preach the Gospel and to take the city for God! Every wall has fallen in Jesus’ Name. Now go and possess the land!“<sup>303</sup> So that the impression should not arise that this is a single quotation, here is another example: „Like a raging flood pouring in and filling all the ditches and crevices, the Christian faith floods Satan’s territory.“<sup>304</sup>

Bonnke’s vision „From Cape Town to Cairo“, as is presented for example in his book „Mighty Manifestations“<sup>305</sup>, can well strengthen the fears of people of other faiths that they are about to be confronted by an invasion. Nevertheless Bonnke has already been able to carry out major evangelistic campaigns in several mainly Moslem

countries in Africa and has even been received by their presidents. They apparently otherwise fear that they will be accused of limiting the freedom of religion.

Bonnke's view of evangelism determines the question of his relations to other religions: „I was told that America is a society composed of two main groups, the religious and the nonreligious, and it is very hard for the religious group to make a real invasion of the other group.“<sup>306</sup>

## **Perspectives**

This consideration of Reinhard Bonnke's theology and evangelism raises many questions. Mainly questions directed towards the churches in Europe and in Africa. In view of the great response to Reinhard Bonnke's evangelistic campaigns and the growth of the Pentecostal and charismatic churches, the „established“ churches in Africa must face the challenge and consider why the evangelistic campaigns and Pentecostal services so appeal to so many of their members. What do they miss in the Lutheran or Anglican services, what topics and assurances are lacking for them? How can the role of healing be strengthened in the life of the congregation without taking over the style of miracle-healing practised in some Pentecostal churches? How can church medical services be so restructured that they reach more people, and especially those people who cannot afford modern medicine at present? But also, how can church medical services better succeed in bringing together qualified medical work and spiritual support for the sick, to a much greater degree than at present?

Many of these questions also face the German churches. It is therefore urgently necessary to initiate an intensive discussion about new forms of congregation work and congregation services and about the contribution church congregations and church health services can make to the healing of the sick. This will make apparent that certain theological subjects must be given more attention, both at the universities and seminaries and in the congregations. For example subjects such as a present-day understanding of the devil and of miracles. Which „serious“ Western theologian nowadays concerns himself or herself with the subject of the devil? It seems more like a subject for church history in the Middle Ages. But the biblical statements about Satan and the devil cannot be permanently ignored, at least not as long as we are aware that in other parts of the world-wide church this is a subject that is being discussed very controversially at present. European protestants have their own special problems with miracles, but that is no reason to avoid the subject and to leave it to Pentecostal preachers such as Reinhard Bonnke.

Both European and African churches have the task of helping their members to become “mature” believers. In this context, mature means that they do not only learn set things about individual bible stories but rather that they learn to look independently at biblical texts and to use them to strengthen their faith and regulate their lives. That is a demanding challenge and it requires not only intensive efforts in the local congregations but also a rethinking in the minds of many theologians and professors in order to meet it. How can biblical statements and biblical truths be explained in a way that is understandable for lay people, without trivialising them? And the congregations must also be included in the difficult discussions as to how we can read the Bible today. In order to do this it will be necessary to extend theological

education both here in Germany and in Africa, and to create more opportunities for further training, both for theologians and lay people.

Such a study of the Bible also requires willingness to reflect in a new way on the effects of the Enlightenment on faith and theology over the last two centuries. It also requires that the knowledge gained from the process of the Enlightenment be brought into the world-wide ecumenical dialogue. A short while ago in an interview, in which she was questioned about the Pentecostal churches, the Bishop of Hanover, Bishop Margot Käßmann, stated: „... And I am convinced that the Pentecostal churches, just as the other churches in Africa, and the Orthodox churches, still have the Enlightenment ahead of them. In our modern world, faith and reason simply must be brought into relation with each other. This is for example what the historical critical method tries to do.“<sup>307</sup> With reference to the final dissertations of students in theological training at a university in Tanzania, Hermann Brandt has demonstrated just how difficult this is in practice.<sup>308</sup> Although several students are aware of the method intellectually, when they begin to interpret biblical texts they nevertheless frequently return to a biblicistic approach.

This shows how important it is not only to teach the individual method of dealing with biblical texts, but also to communicate the world of ideas that gave birth to this method; and that was, above all, the Enlightenment. Helmut Grimmsmann comes to the same conclusion, writing in the journal of the Evangelical-Lutheran Mission in Lower Saxony, after working for 18 years as a lecturer at a theological seminary in the Central African Republic. At the end of his article he writes about the gulf between people who live with knowledge of the Enlightenment and those who have never heard of it: „Our situation at the end of two and a half centuries of Enlightenment is a different one from that of people who have never come into contact with methodical doubt or the unconditional validity of law. But how should people in Africa get to know such possibilities, if not through people who have internalised it and are therefore able to talk about it and pass it on? Only, is that what we really want?“<sup>309</sup>

If alternatives to Reinhard Bonnke's methods of evangelisation are being looked for, they are not to be found by carrying out major evangelistic campaigns in competition to him, but rather by supporting the African churches to help their members become mature Christians. And here the European churches are also still in the middle of a debate, in spite of the Enlightenment, and have no patent remedies or easy answers. But perhaps that is not such a bad starting point for a world-wide ecumenical dialogue that must concern itself with establishing what dimensions of faith were pushed to the fringes by a theology that was influenced by the Enlightenment. The Pentecostal churches in particular can make us aware that Christian existence is more than an intellectual occupation with questions of belief. Walter Hollenweger, a well-known expert on the Pentecostal movement, emphasises here: „In the congregations we must not only have an exchange at a cognitive and discursive level but also at a level of experience. Here, for example, Biblical drama can help us further. It is possible, even in university institutions, to combine critical science with dance, drama and music, not just so that it is more fun, but also in the service of critical science. We have to learn to use forces beyond reason in the service of critical reason. We should deal with the Bible devoutly, joyfully and honestly. As it deserves.“<sup>310</sup>

The missionary zeal and efforts of Reinhard Bonnke and other Pentecostal preachers pose questions to the churches in Africa that have developed out of European Mission work, what they are doing to contribute to the spreading of the Gospel. And this question can be put to the churches in Europe in just the same way. Is mission more than just a subject for synods and appeals by the church leadership? What is happening in the congregations to make people, who have never heard of the Gospel, aware of it?

It would of course be wrong to see the task of a new missionary involvement only in competition with the Pentecostals, or in order to stabilise the membership of one's own church. Preachers like Reinhard Bonnke can remind us that the proclamation of the Gospel is one of the fundamental reasons for the existence of our congregations. If we understand the Good News as a liberating message then we have to tell others about it. In Germany, mission – at least in the sense of Christian mission work – is viewed with suspicion by many people, even in the churches. But without mission, Christians do not fulfil their responsibility in this world; the statements of the New Testament are absolutely clear in this respect. It is therefore urgently necessary to think again what mission means today and how the churches and their members can take this task seriously.

Here I can only indicate a few further questions among all those raised by this study of Reinhard Bonnke and his evangelism: How can the protestant churches find a new direction in their relations to the Pentecostal churches? What can they learn from the Pentecostal churches? How can we live our piety, our faith in God, today? What form can dialogue between the religions take, so that more people can be included in it, and even more people understand why in our world today there is no alternative to inter-religious dialogue? How can we prevent a position that offers „the surprisingly simple solution for the problems of mankind“<sup>31</sup> gaining more and more interest in a world that is becoming more and more complicated?

It is therefore worthwhile for people to take a closer look at the theological concepts and the evangelistic work of Reinhard Bonnke, especially when their opinions differ from his.

## Notes

1 Cf. Missions-Reportage, Januar 2002, Cf. also idea, 5/6 2001

2 Cf. EMW-„Studienheft Weltmission heute 39“ on the subject „The Pentecostal movement and basic ecclesial communities in Latin America“, Hamburg 2000

3 Cf. Walter Hollenweger: „Halleluja, ich bin gerettet“, in: Deutsches Allgemeines Sonntagsblatt, 21.4.2000

4 Cf. u.a. Elinaza E. Sendoro: Integration of the charismatic movement in the traditional African churches (Integration der charismatischen Bewegung in den traditionellen afrikanischen Kirchen), in: VEM Mitarbeiterbrief, 5/99, p. 13ff.

5 Cf. u.a. Freddy Dutz: Mixed feelings (Gemischte Gefühle), in: Zeit für Mission, Februar/März 1994

6 Cf. u.a. Katharina Hofer: „Erlösung vom Bösen“, Charismatische Kirchen und Politik in Afrika, in: epd Entwicklungspolitik, 9-10/2000, p. 37ff.

7 Quoted from Katharina Hofer, *ibid*, p. 37

8 Cf. Reinhard Hempelmann, *Licht und Schatten des Erweckungschristentums*, Stuttgart 1998, p. 85f.

9 Shanta Bryant: *New religious groups threaten mainline churches*, in: All Africa Press Service, 9.12.1991

10 Quoted from: Colin Whittaker: *Reinhard Bonnke – A Passion for the Gospel*, Eastbourne 1998, p. 30

11 *Ibid* p. 32

12 Reinhard Bonnke: *Mighty Manifestations, The Gifts and Power of the Holy Spirit*, Eastbourne 1995. P.14

13 *Ibid* p. 27

14 *Ibid* p. 16

15 *Ibid* p. 14

16 Reinhard Bonnke later described his early interest in preaching in this way: „A friend and I went into the woods to a place where no-one could see us. There we preached our hearts out to the trees“. Quoted from: Ron Steele: *Die Hölle plündern...* Reinhard Bonnke – *Vom Missionar zum Weltevangelisten*, Erzhausen 1985, p. 14

17 *A Passion for the Gospel*, *loc. cit.*, p. 56ff., cf. also: *Die Hölle plündern*, *loc. cit.*, p. 18ff.

18 *A Passion for the Gospel*, p. 97

19 Cf. *Die Hölle plündern*, *loc. cit.*, p. 41ff.

20 *A Passion for the Gospel*, *loc. cit.*, p. 120

21 *Ibid* p. 120f.

22 *Die Hölle plündern*, *loc. cit.*, p. 51

23 *Ibid*

24 Cf. here also: Paul Gifford, *The Religious Right in Southern Africa*, Harare 1988, p. 41f.

25 *A Passion for the Gospel*, *loc. cit.*, p. 129

26 *Die Hölle plündern*, *loc. cit.*, p. 76

27 Frank Chikane: *Mein Leben gehört nicht mir*, Erlangen 1988, p. 67

28 *Ibid* p. 68

29 *Ibid* p. 69

30 Ron Steele, *... und die Himmel bevölkern*, Erzhausen 1987, p. 140

31 Cf. *ibid*, p. 51ff.

32 Quoted from Peter van den Berg: *Missions-Höhepunkte*, in: *Missions-Reportage S/94 D (1994)*, p. 3

33 Cf. for example, *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 16./17.12.2000

34 Cf. *A Passion for the Gospel*, *loc. cit.*, p. 144

35 *Die Hölle plündern*, *loc. cit.*, p. 151ff.

36 Cf. *Evangelische Information*, 40/87, p. 19

37 Cf. here also the portraits of Pat Robertson in „*Deutsches Allgemeines Sonntagsblatt*“ from 26.6.1992 and 11.2.1994

38 *The Washington Post*, 14.9.2001

39 *Ecumenical News International*, 14.6.1999

40 *Ibid*

41 *Ecumenical News International*, 11.12.2001

42 *Die Hölle plündern*, *loc. cit.*, p. 146

43 Paul Gifford: *Christianity: To Save or to Enslave*, Harare 1990, p. 7

44 Cf. here also: *The Religious Right in Southern Africa*, *loc. cit.*, p. 36ff.

45Evangelische Information, 15/92, p. 17

46Reinhard Bonnke: Evangelism by Fire, Igniting Your Passion for the Lost, 6th Edition, Frankfurt am Main 1999, p. 82

47This was already the case with one of his first major evangelistic campaigns in Botswana. His biographer Whittaker writes that God spoke to him in the night and said to him: „Fly to Gaborone in Botswana.“, Cf. A Passion for the Gospel, loc. cit., p. 114

48Cf. Missions-Reportage, Dezember 2000, p. 2

49Evangelisten-Brief, New Year's greeting 2002, New Year 2002

50Reinhard Bonnke: ... Time Is Running Out, Save the world – before it's too late. Ventura, California 1999, p. 126, cf. here also: A Passion for the Gospel, loc. cit., p. 11f.

51Paul Gifford: Reinhard Bonnke's Mission to Africa, in: Paul Gifford (editor): New Dimensions in African Christianity, Nairobi 1992, p. 173

52In a report on an evangelistic campaign in Kinshasa Reinhard Bonnke writes: „Very carefully questioning ensured the credibility of all those who were allowed to come onto the stage to publicly witness to their healing.“ Missions-Reportage, September 2001

53Cf. here also a short report in the „Frankfurter Rundschau“ on 3.12.2001 under the headline „Deutscher Prediger schürt Unruhe in Nigeria“ (German preacher stirs up trouble in Nigeria) and idea, 5.12.2001

54Cf. here also, Reformierte Nachrichten, Schweiz, 23.4.2001; epd, 23.4.2001

55Cf. Und den Himmel bevölkern, loc. cit., p. 123ff.

56A Passion for the Gospel, loc. cit., p. 160f.

57Cf. Deutsches Allgemeines Sonntagsblatt, 14.7.1989

58Cf. idea, 3.3.1994

59Cf. here Bonnke's Evangelisten Brief from 30.3.1994

60This was for example the case in the Evangelical Church of the Province of Saxony, which warned the congregations against taking part in the campaign, among other reasons because it demanded an agreement to certain principles of faith and because the church was described in a very one-sided way in the brochure „From Minus to Plus“. Cf. Evangelische Information, 15/95, p. 5, cf. also: Martin Keiper: Das Heil per Postwurf, in: Eine Welt, 4/1995

61Cf. idea, 6.3.1995, the alliance was not involved in the preparation of the campaign nor in carrying it out. They questioned the follow-up work and pointed out that the campaign had proved itself to be “ineffective” in Great Britain.

62 Info-Brief Nr. 16 zur Aktion „Vom Minus zum Plus“, 5.10.1995

63Cf. hierzu u.a.: Reinhard Hempelmann, Licht und Schatten des Erweckungschristentums, Stuttgart 1998, p. 76ff.

64 Info-Brief Nr. 19 zur Aktion „Vom Minus zum Plus“, 24.1.1996

65Cf. Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen: Pentecostal Missiology in Ecumenical Perspective, in: International Review of Mission, July 1999, p. 212

66Time Is Running Out, loc. cit., p. 106

67Mighty Manifestations, loc. cit., p. 21

68Evangelisten-Brief, 7/98, 20.10.1998

69Mighty Manifestations, loc. cit., p. 163

70Ibid p.29

71Evangelisten-Brief 3/2000, 22.4.2000

72Missions-Reportage A/92 D (1992)

73Evangelism by Fire, loc. cit., p. 168

- 74Reinhard Bonnke: Now that You are Saved, ohne Ort 1991
- 75Evangelisten-Brief Ibadan 2001, Nr. 2
- 76Missions-Reportage A/93D (1993)
- 77Evangelism by Fire, loc. cit., p.22
- 78Ibid p. 71
- 79Missionsreportage, April 2001
- 80Mighty Manifestations, loc. cit., p. 15
- 81Evangelism by Fire, loc. cit., p. 239-240f
- 82Time Is Running Out, loc. cit., p. 7
- 83Evangelism by Fire, loc. cit., p. 51. In the same book in a different place he writes: „Many churches are very active, but active doing what? To fiddle about with secular issues is one way to look impressively busy and ‚relevant‘. But to bring the Gospel to a dying world is the true relevance.“ Ibid p. 24
- 84Missions-Reportage, 7. April 1997
- 85Missions-Reportage, 23. März 1998
- 86Evangelisten-Brief Seelenernte 2001/2002. 29.5.2001
- 87Evangelism by Fire, loc. cit., p. 21
- 88Ibid p. 127
- 89Ibid p. 23
- 90Missions-Reportage, Januar 1999
- 91„Twenty-five years ago, as a young missionary in Africa, I sometimes preached to five people. My opportunity to see the impact of the glorious Gospel presented in the „proven“ tradition of foreign missions had come. But five people? Beyond our mission there were 450 million souls in Africa, most of whom were ignorant of salvation through Jesus Christ. Yes, they could all be evangelised by the way we were tackling it, but only if they obliged us by staying alive for about 5000 years!“ Evangelism by Fire, loc. cit., p. ix. This calculation only makes sense if the task of evangelism in Africa is seen purely in relation to the work of Reinhard Bonnke and his staff.
- 92Evangelism by Fire, loc. cit., p. x
- 93 Ibid
- 94Missions-Reportage, August 1999
- 95Rudi Forstmeier: „Jesus braucht Dich...“, in: Materialdienst des EZW, 6/2001, p. 190f.
- 96Cf. e.g. Evangelism by Fire, loc. cit., p.7
- 97Time Is Running Out, loc. cit., p. 46
- 98Ibid p. 56
- 99Ibid p. 43
- 100Evangelism by Fire, loc. cit., p. 27
- 101Time Is Running Out, loc. cit., p. 103
- 102Evangelism by Fire, loc. cit., p. xiv
- 103Reinhard Hempelmann: Licht und Schatten des Erweckungschristentums, loc. cit., p. 85f.
- 104Reinhard Bonnke, Now that you are saved, Frankfurt am Main 1999, p. 3
- 105Evangelism by Fire, loc. cit., p. 114 and 116
- 106Evangelisten-Brief, 3/99, 18.5.1999
- 107Time Is Running Out, loc. cit., p. 190
- 108Ibid p. 248
- 109Evangelism by Fire, loc. cit., p. 90
- 110Ibid p. 83
- 111Evangelisten-Brief, 3.7.96
- 112Cf. Evangelism by Fire, loc. cit., p. 36

- 113Time Is Running Out, loc. cit., p. 165
- 114Cf. Ibid p. 242
- 115Missions-Reportage, Januar 1999
- 116Missions-Reportage, September 1999
- 117Missions-Reportage, März 2000
- 118Mighty Manifestations, loc. cit., p. 7
- 119Time Is Running Out, loc. cit., p. 18
- 120Mighty Manifestations, loc. cit., p. 90
- 121Ibid p. 20
- 122Cf. Evangelism by Fire, loc. cit., p. 51
- 123Ibid p. 97
- 124Time Is Running Out, loc. cit., p. 175
- 125Ibid, p. 53
- 126Evangelisten-Brief 1/98, 12.1.1998
- 127The Secret of the Power of the Blood of Jesus, Frankfurt am Main, 1990, p. 10
- 128Ibid P.9
- 129Time Is Running Out, loc. cit., p. 89f.
- 130Mighty Manifestations, loc. cit., p.24
- 131Now that you are Saved, loc. cit., p. 21
- 132Mighty Manifestations, loc. cit., p. 25
- 133Ibid p. 94
- 134Evangelism by Fire, loc. cit., p. 28
- 135Cf. Mighty Manifestations, loc. cit., p. 96
- 136 Now that you are Saved, loc. cit., p. 9
- 137Time Is Running Out, loc. cit., p. 245
- 138Ibid p. 117
- 139Ibid p. 179
- 140Wenn das Feuer fällt, loc. cit., p. 7. Not in the English version.
- 141Evangelism by Fire, loc. cit., p. 106
- 142Cf. her also. Reinhard Hempelmann: Licht und Schatten des Erweckungschristentums, loc. cit., p. 48ff.
- 143Mighty Manifestations, loc. cit., p. 33
- 144Evangelisten-Brief, 7/2001. 21.8.2001
- 145Cf. Mighty Manifestations, loc. cit., p. 168ff.
- 146Cf. Reinhard Hempelmann: Licht und Schatten des Erweckungschristentums, loc. cit., p. 210ff.
- 147Time Is Running Out, loc. cit., p.7
- 148John p. Mbiti: Bibel und Theologie im afrikanischen Christentum, Göttingen 1987, p. 101f.
- 149Evangelisten-Brief, 25.8.1997
- 150Mighty Manifestations, loc. cit., p. 103
- 151Evangelism by Fire, loc. cit., p. 48
- 152Mighty Manifestations, loc. cit., p. 102
- 153A Passion for the Gospel, loc. cit., p.133; cf. here also: Die Hölle plündern, loc. cit., p. 84f.
- 154Evangelism by Fire, loc. cit., p. 7
- 155Time Is Running Out, loc. cit., p. 234
- 156Evangelism by Fire, loc. cit., p. 264
- 157Evangelisten-Brief 2/98, 4.3.1998
- 158Evangelism by Fire, loc. cit., p. 148
- 159Time Is Running Out, loc. cit., p. 189

- 160Ibid p. 27
- 161Evangelism by Fire, loc. cit., p. xvi
- 162Ibid p. 58ff.
- 163Time Is Running Out, loc. cit., p. 84
- 164Evangelisten-Brief 7/2001, 21.8.2001
- 165Time Is Running Out, loc. cit., p. 153
- 166Missions-Reportage, April 2000
- 167Missions-Reportage, 8.4.1992
- 168Time Is Running Out, loc. cit., p. 186
- 169Time Is Running Out, loc. cit., p. 158
- 170Missions-Reportage, September 1999
- 171Mighty Manifestations, loc. cit., p. 105
- 172Evangelism by Fire, loc. cit., p.29f.
- 173Mighty Manifestations, loc. cit., p. 83
- 174Time Is Running Out, loc. cit., p. 137
- 175Ibid p. 23
- 176Ibid p. 175
- 177Cf. ibid, p. 178
- 178Ibid, p. 180f.
- 179Now that you are Saved, loc. cit., p.11-12f.
- 180Missions-Reportage, August 1999
- 181Time Is Running Out, loc. cit., p. 9. A similar description is to be found in the book „Evangelism by Fire“ on Page 55.
- 182Mighty Manifestations, loc. cit., p. 118
- 183Evangelism by Fire, loc. cit., p. 105
- 184Time Is Running Out, loc. cit., p. 95
- 185Cf. u.a. Licht und Schatten des Erweckungschristentums, loc. cit., p. 53f.
- 186 Cf. hierzu: Andreas Kusch: Heilung durch Gebet in historischen Kirchen, in: Heilung in Mission und Ökumene, Studienheft Weltmission heute 41, Hamburg 2001, p. 15
- 187Time Is Running Out, loc. cit., p. 140
- 188Missions-Reportage, März 1999
- 189Rudi Forstmeier: „Jesus braucht Dich...“, loc. cit., p. 191
- 190Missions-Reportage, September 2000
- 191John Mbiti: Bibel und Theologie im afrikanischen Christentum, loc. cit., p. 48
- 192 In No. 2/99 of the periodical „NM“, Michael Hanfstängl from the Northelbian Mission Centre reports on an evangelistic meeting in the centre of Nairobi, where around 300 people had gathered and where it was proclaimed: „Whether it is malaria or even Aids, whether a marriage conflict or loss of your job. Trust in God and hope for a miracle. He heals, He reconciles, He gives you a new future.“
- 193Andreas Kusch: Heilung durch Gebet in historischen Kirchen, loc. cit., p. 17
- 194Mighty Manifestations, loc. cit., p. 120f.
- 195Evangelism by Fire, loc. cit., p. 105
- 196Cf. Mighty Manifestations, loc. cit., p. 97
- 197Evangelism by Fire, loc. cit., p. 172
- 198Mighty Manifestations, loc. cit., p.48
- 199Cf. also, Die Hölle plündern, loc. cit., p. 36f.
- 200Cf. A Passion for the Gospel, loc. cit., p. 106f.
- 201Mighty Manifestations, loc. cit., p. 120
- 202Time Is Running Out, loc. cit., p. 156
- 203Mighty Manifestations, loc. cit., p. 117

204Ibid p. 126  
205Time Is Running Out, loc. cit., p. 99  
206Cf. Andreas Kusch: Heilung durch Gebet in historischen Kirchen, loc. cit., p. 28  
207Dietrich Werner: Die Wiederentdeckung des heilenden Dienstes der Gemeinde, in: Heilung in Mission und Ökumene, loc. cit., p. 64  
208Time Is Running Out, loc. cit., p. 30  
209Ibid p. 47  
210Ibid p. 194  
211Ibid p. 198  
212Cf. ibid, p. 195  
213Evangelism by Fire, loc. cit., p. 47  
214Time Is Running Out, loc. cit., p.83  
215Missions-Reportage, 21.11.1997  
216A Passion for the Gospel, loc. cit., p. 153  
217Time Is Running Out, loc. cit., p. 176  
218Cf. Time Is Running Out, loc. cit., p. 11; A Passion for the Gospel, loc. cit., p. 183; Evangelism by Fire, loc. cit., p. 76  
219Andreas Kusch: Heilung durch Gebet in historischen Kirchen, loc. cit., p. 27; cf. also the booklet No. 39 of the series „Weltmission heute“ published by the EMW on the subject „Pfingstbewegung und Basisgemeinden in Lateinamerika“  
220Evangelisten-Brief, New Years' greeting 2002, New Year 2002  
221Evangelism by Fire, loc. cit., p. 5  
222Ibid p. 95  
223Cf. also Missions-Reportage, 26.8.1993; in one „Missions-Reportage“ in 1993 Bonnke wrote about President Chiluba: „We have become personal friends“, Missions-Reportage B/93 D (1993)  
224 Reinhard Bonnke wrote in an „Evangelisten Brief“ on 8.2.94 about President Arap Moi: „whom I call my friend“.  
225Evangelisten-Brief 2/99, 11.3.1999  
226Missions-Reportage, 7.2.1996  
227A Passion for the Gospel, loc. cit., p. 180f.  
228Cf. Paul Gifford: Reinhard Bonnke's Mission to Africa, loc. cit., p. 168  
229Missions-Reportage, 5.8.1996  
230Time Is Running Out, loc. cit., p. 37  
231Mighty Manifestations, loc. cit., p. 21  
232Evangelism by Fire, loc. cit., p. 11  
233Mighty Manifestations, loc. cit., p. 165  
234Ibid  
235Time Is Running Out, loc. cit., p. 123  
236Mighty Manifestations, loc. cit., p. 35  
237Cf. Time Is Running Out, loc. cit., p. 202  
238Ibid p. 139  
239Evangelisten-Brief 1/2001, 3.1.2001  
240Missions-Reportage, 5.8.1996  
241Mighty Manifestations, loc. cit., p. 134  
242Evangelisten-Brief, 27.5.1992  
243Missions-Reportage, 28.7.1997  
244Cf. also, Evangelism by Fire, p. 32  
245Mighty Manifestations, loc. cit., p. 111  
246Evangelisten-Brief, 18.5.1999  
247Cf. among others, Missions-Reportage December 2001

248Mighty Manifestations, loc. cit., p. 54  
249Cf. Missions-Reportage, 16.2.1995  
250Missions-Reportage, 7.4.1997  
251Evangelisten-Brief, 1.11.1995  
252Missions-Reportage, 8.4.1992  
253A Passion for the Gospel, loc. cit., p. 214  
254Evangelisten-Brief, 6/99, 17.12.1999  
255Mighty Manifestations, loc. cit., p.51  
256Missions-Reportage, Januar 1999  
257Walter J. Hollenweger: Roman Catholics and Pentecostals in Dialogue, in:  
Ecumenical Review, April 1999, p. 147ff.  
258Missions-Reportage, Juli 2000  
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261Evangelisten-Brief, 12.5.1995  
262Evangelism by Fire, loc. cit., p. 144  
263Mighty Manifestations, loc. cit., p. 60  
264Ibid p. 32  
265Cf. Evangelism by Fire, loc. cit., p. 154  
266Time Is Running Out, loc. cit., p. 176  
267Ibid p. 22  
268Ibid p. 40  
269Ibid p. 54  
270Ibid p. 74  
271Ibid p. 59  
272Ibid p. 196  
273Evangelisten-Brief 3/2001, 19.3.2001; cf. also Evangelisten-Brief 7/2001,  
21.8.2001  
274Evangelisten-Brief 8/98, Christmas 1998  
275Mighty Manifestations, loc. cit., p. 100  
276Time Is Running Out, loc. cit., p. 164  
277Evangelisten-Brief 2/2000, 6.4.2000  
278Time Is Running Out, loc. cit., p. 172  
279Ibid p. 188  
280Mighty Manifestations, loc. cit., p. 140  
281Ibid p. 154  
282Ibid p. 21  
283Time Is Running Out, loc. cit., p. 160  
284Cf. A Passion for the Gospel, loc. cit., p. 5  
285Time Is Running Out, loc. cit., p. 12  
286Evangelism by Fire, loc. cit., p. 63  
287Time Is Running Out, loc. cit., p. 240  
288Ibid p. 166  
289Ibid p. 168  
290Ibid p. 244  
291Ibid p. 34  
292Cf. ibid, p. 243  
293Ibid p. 143  
294Cf. Time Is Running Out, loc. cit., p. 246  
295Ibid p. 167  
296Missions-Reportage, 8.11.1996

297Evangelism by Fire, loc. cit., p. 233  
298Cf. Rosalind I. J. Hackett, Radical Christian Revivalism in Nigeria and Ghana. Recent Patterns of Intolerance and Conflict, in: Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im (Ed.), Proselytization and Communal Self-Determination in Africa; Maryknoll 1999, p. 246-267, on Bonnke's role particularly p. 251-253f  
299Cf. for example also, A Passion for the Gospel, loc.cit, p. 184  
300Ibadan 2001, Countdown 3  
301Ibadan 2001, Countdown 2  
302Missions-Reprotage, April 2000  
303Evangelism by Fire, loc. cit., p. 208  
304Evangelisten-Brief 1/2000, 10.3.2000  
305Manifestationen, loc. cit., Photos neben Seite 145  
306Time Is Running Out, loc. cit., p. 66  
307Deutsches Allgemeines Sonntagsblatt, 21.4.2000  
308Hermann Brandt: Wenn Religion – dann Theologie, Religion und Theologie im Spiegel afrikanischer Examensarbeiten, Erlangen 2000  
309Helmut Grimmsmann: Und sie hat doch Recht, Eine engagierte Befürwortung von Aufklärung in Afrika, in: mitteilen, 6/2000, p. 18f.  
310Walter Hollenweger: „Halleluja, ich bin gerettet“, a.a.O.  
311This was the subtitle of a German version of the brochure „From Minus to Plus“ by Reinhard Bonnke, that was published in 1994. In the version distributed to German households the brochure was given the subtitle „The Story of Christ's Cross“.

#### About the Author

Frank Kürschner-Pelkmann (born in 1949) is author and editor and lives in Hamburg. After studying politics, economics and education he first worked as a free-lance journalist before joining the Association of Protestant Churches and Missions in Germany (EMW), where he had particular responsibility for publications (including theological contributions from the "Third World") and later for ecumenical media projects. He visited many countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America on behalf of the EMW during this time. Since 1996 the journalist and author has been editor of the journal „Junge Kirche“ (Young Church) and also works free-lance.

The author is especially concerned with theological topics, the ecumenical movement and church involvement in questions of development. Frank Kürschner-Pelkmann has translated many texts by theologians from the „Third World“ into German and/or has been responsible for editing them for publication.

In the series „Weltmission heute“, he has published among others the booklets „Von Gutenberg bis Internet – Kirchen und soziale Kommunikation“ and „Botschaft der Hoffnung – Theologische Grundlagen für eine menschliche Entwicklung“. mk