Conviviality in Motion

Reflections on Empirical Findings for a Grounded Ecclesiology[1]

Andrea Bieler

1 Introduction

There exists a thought-provoking contradiction within Christian teachings and practices concerning the question of how a sense of togetherness, interdependence, and connectivity among Christian communities and individuals, that potentially perceive each other as vastly different or even as strangers, can be experienced. From the outset, Jewish-Christian communities had to negotiate conflicts caused by perceptions of social and religious difference and otherness while striving for social forms of togetherness. On the one hand, biblical texts speak to the trope of unity (being one in Christ) within a diverse community (Gal 3:28; Col 3:11; Eph 4:4-7) that operates beyond the confines of gender, ethnic, national, or racial categories (Etzelmüller 2022: 698). In addition, texts such as the Pauline letters reflect the complex dynamics of cultural and religious boundary work in which the Apostle Paul is portrayed as a mediator between different cultural and religious concepts, practices, and perceptions (Kobel 2023: 130–134). A vision of *with-ness* that is not reduced to sameness but respects difference (Bieler in this volume) goes hand in hand with the portrayal of conflicts that leave a mark on communities.

On the other hand, historical developments throughout the centuries reveal that such striving for togetherness in diversity has frequently been overpowered by homogenizing developments in social, political, and confessional terms. These developments often contradicted the socially transgressive forces within Christian communities that sought to decenter or even resist the effects of social and religious stratification.

In this vein, the churches of the Reformation in Europe were entangled in processes of homogenization from which confessional churches (Lutheran, Reformed), territorial churches (Landeskirchen, Kantonalkirchen), and state churches (Church of England; former state church in Sweden) arose (Körtner 2022: 236–237). The connection formed between territorial, national, and religious identity produced an imaginary of collective

1 This chapter emanates from the author's research in the context of the research project *Conviviality in Motion* (SNSF 100015_192445), University of Basel, Faculty of Theology, Department of Practical Theology, head: Prof. Dr. Andrea Bieler.

identity that grew stronger over time. In the 19th and 20th centuries, this imagined identity was radicalized in the German Reich when nationalist, anti-Semitic, and racist views gained power and were sacralized as quasi-religious entities to give shape to the "German Volk".

These multiple processes of homogenization had an impact on the development of churches in various ways. For instance, from the onset of the Reformation, many churches strove towards vernacular, monolingual forms of communication. During the Reformation, the fight for use of the vernacular in religious settings had the intention of empowering the laity in self-determination of religious expression (Martin Luther: *Dem Volk auf's Maul schauen*). During the Romantic Era and the phase of nation-state building, philosophers like Johann Gottfried Herder combined a sacralization of the German language with the idea of the holy "Volk". Monolingualism and nationalist thinking became intertwined in problematic ways by turning both into quasi-religious matters. Privileging German exclusively became the standard in schools, in public life, and also in Protestant churches. The use of a sole language became a crucial factor in imagining a homogenous *Volksgemeinschaft* and thus a nation.

Yet, in countries such as Switzerland a different development took place. Here, quadrilingualism became a marker of national identity and official state policy. This means that each region or canton uses one of four official languages. It also shaped the ritual and the social life of religious communities. On the level of state ideology, the idea of numerous official languages was embraced. However, this choice did not leave the Swiss state and its churches automatically better equipped to deal with new forms of diversity due to migration.

Against this backdrop, the research project *Conviviality in Motion* focused on six diverse multilingual Christian communities in Italy, Switzerland, and Germany that can be understood as the exception to the mainstream.[2] The question of how such communities practice their faith in a convivial manner, and to what extent they develop their own religious expression of being church together was at the center of our research interests. Communities were chosen that had developed a degree of diversity for at least ten years due to various migration movements. They consist intentionally of members of the autochthone community and members with migration backgrounds. To various degrees, they seek (and sometimes fail) to practice togetherness by being attentive to biographical life journeys as well as to issues of privilege as they reflect on the sharing of

2 The project is funded by the Swiss National Research Foundation (Grant 100015_192445). For the concept and the individual projects, see https://theologie.unibas.ch/de/projekt-convivialit y-in-motion/ (accessed May 1, 2023): Tabea Rebekka Eugster-Schaetzle, Unbedingte Konvivialität? Austauschdynamiken in multilingualen Gemeinden in prekären Kontexten; Luca Ghiretti, "Essere Chiesa Insieme": Konviviale Praktiken und Theologien der methodistisch-waldensischen Union in diachroner und synchroner Perspektive; Lisa Ketges, Gelebte Utopie. Beiträge zu einer diversitätssensiblen praktisch-theologischen Ekklesiologie; Claudia Hoffmann, Cross-Sectional Studies on the Interreligious Dimensions of Conviviality; Andrea Bieler, Conviviality in Motion: Cross-Sectional Studies. In addition, Esther Maria Meyer is affiliated with her dissertation project: (Doing) Belonging Together in Diversity. Eine theologisches Programm convivialer, migrationsökumenischer Partnerschaften am Fallbeispiel des interkulturellen Kirchenzentrum Mannheims.

leadership, economic resources, and power. Members find themselves in vastly different situations with regard to their residency status, their economic situations, and their access to educational resources. In addition, different pieties come into play when it comes to religious practices and convictions.

Furthermore, the congregations were selected because they had extensive experience with intercultural conviviality, which does not only refer to diaconal activities, e.g. in supporting refugees. These congregations and communities have gone through crises together and experienced failure, disruption, and transformation. Accordingly, none of them want to be portrayed as a model of best practice. It appears to be more helpful to analyze their struggles as well as their accomplishments.

Most of the communities have experimented with intercultural leadership models for many years, in which the diversity of the leadership teams is a key factor. On a programmatic level, they have a keen interest in exploring being an intercultural community. They understand interculturality as a transversal theme that permeates essential areas of Christian life and theological reflection. It has a significant impact on their own religious self-understanding. In these communities, the significance of transnational networks and relationships come to the fore. Individual actors as well as subgroups within the community are connected worldwide which has an influence on debates locally.

This chapter proceeds in three parts: I begin by offering some hermeneutical reflections on how to engage the correlation between qualitative research in Christian communities, focusing on religious and social matters of conviviality, and the ecclesiological reflection this offers. I thus focus on the relationship of empirical research and ecclesiology. In a second move, I focus on some empirical findings across the sub-projects of how *doing conviviality* is understood and practiced and what kind of convivial dynamics can be reconstructed. Finally, I will conclude with some thoughts on a grounded ecclesiology that considers insights from the dynamics of conviviality in super-diverse Christian communities.

2 Empirical Research and Ecclesiology

Over the last two decades there has been a growing discussion about the relationship between qualitative empirical research on Christian communities and ecclesiology as theological reflection on what constitutes church. A few attempts have been made to trace the dynamic interdisciplinary connection between these two fields of knowledge production (Ward 2012; Scharen 2012; Ward/Tveitereid 2022).[3] These fields follow different epistemological goals, methods, and theoretical backgrounds yet they have significant overlap. It is thus important to work productively with the tension of doing qualitative empirical research in Christian communities and congregations and how to insert the findings critically into the development of an intercultural ecclesiology that is sensitive to issues of *with-ness*, difference, and asymmetry. The goal is to develop building blocks

3 Ward and Scharen coordinate a research network on ecclesiology and ethnography, March 23, 2024 (https://www.ecclesiologyandethnography.net/).

for a grounded ecclesiology that combines theological reasoning with the insights from empirical research based on grounded theory methodology.

The research project strives to make a twofold contribution to a grounded ecclesiology that takes intercultural contexts of super-diversity into account. On the one hand, we seek to highlight the importance of studying the circulating theologies and how these are folded into practices of doing conviviality. We seek to enhance practical theological reflection on processes of community building (Vergemeinschaftung) on the micro and meso levels (Bieler 2023). On the other hand, we seek to expand the work of practical theological church theory that has focused until recently primarily on the church as an institution and an organization.

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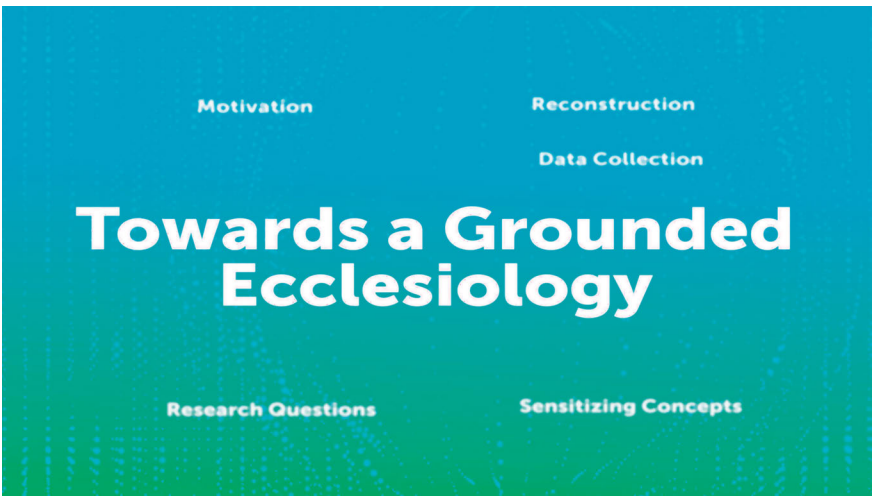

Depicting the Process, © Ralf Bieler/Andrea Bieler.

2.1 Normative Concerns and Empirical Observations

In the following section, I lay out how we proceed in relating empirical research on congregations and communities to ecclesiological reflection. Initially, the project *Conviviality in Motion* began with a twofold concern in which normative and empirical aspects were intertwined. We may call this theological concern a performative self-contradiction. In the introductory remarks, I refer to it by highlighting the tendency of Protestant churches to settle in homogenous milieus, while proclaiming simultaneously a vision of theological heterogeneity or diversity. Accordingly, in many places in Europe Protestant churches develop only weak ties with churches from the Global South or from Eastern Europe (Hoffmann 2021). This is the case although there exist e.g. 2,000-3,000 so-called migrant churches in Germany that belong to the Protestant spectrum with approximately 100,000-300,000 members (Balke 2019: 217–218). Serious attempts, beyond bilateral efforts, to encounter one other on equal footing are the exception to the rule.

This is the case, although many urban neighborhoods can be described as super-diverse (Vertovec 2022; Häneke/Bieler 2017; Burkhardt 2023). Yet many mainline congregations do not reflect the diversity of the social spaces where they are located. Furthermore, so-called intercultural churches (Balke 2022: 629–640), in which persons with migrant background and autochthone members intermingle, are even more rare. By describing this phenomenon, we do not intend to make the normative claim that "migrant churches" and "autochthone churches" must necessarily merge. Yet, the way contact is cultivated, and especially how disinterest is expressed, is frequently troublesome for a church that has an ecumenical vision that reaches beyond homogenous milieus or the identities defined by nation states.[4]

Furthermore, our project grew out of the worries about the highly problematic migration politics in Europe that center insufficiently on the concern of a shared global conviviality with persons who must be on the move for grave reasons (Bieler 2021). The political debates about migration open the door for right-wing, hate-filled discourses; and democratic parties and some churches throughout Europe struggle to position themselves in this context. Against this backdrop, we find it even more necessary to study the convivial interactions and processes of those who meet in super-diverse religious communities and who relate to each other in various forms.

2.2 The Research Process

These normatively driven concerns grew out of empirical observations that provided the initial impulse to develop and refine the research inquiry over time. We began with the question of how and if Protestant communities, that can be characterized as super-diverse in sociological terms (Vertovec 2022), cultivate an affectively and religiously grounded sense of belonging and togetherness while simultaneously negotiating asymmetries and perceived difference on relational, structural, and political levels. In addition, we wanted to reconstruct the religious insights that were driving these practices.

This question is driven by an understanding of *doing conviviality* rather than by an inquiry into what its essence might be (Bieler in this volume). Such a praxeological approach resonates well with a qualitative empirical style, particularly with ethnography that seeks to reconstruct knowledge that circulates in interactive practices within a community. This reconstruction is crucial for a thorough qualitative empirical analysis since we proceed from the assumption that such interactive practices hold implicit knowledge about conviviality (Reckwitz 2016: 72). Such knowledge needs to be made explicit by means of reconstructive analysis. For this purpose, we used classical coding procedures borrowed from grounded theory methodology to enhance our analyses (Breuer/Muckel/Dieris 2019). We oriented ourselves in the field by continuously developing a sensitizing concept that would help to capture the multiple layers of how *doing conviviality* unfolds in the field (Bieler in this volume). This concept has evolved over the course of our research

4 This practical disinterest is also reflected in ecclesiology and church theory that has not been very interested in questions of interculturality and migration. Exceptions are, for instance, the works of Johannes Weth (2021) and Gregor Etzelmüller (2022).

since the fieldwork has brought new insights to the fore which assisted in refining the concept over time. In this way, an iterative research style could be implemented.

2.2.1 Participatory Observation: Capturing Explicit and Implicit Knowledge in Circulating Practices

In order to answer the initial research questions, we chose a qualitative empirical research design with a threefold approach by engaging in participatory observation, episodic interviews, and document analysis. These methods revealed three perspectives on how to study conviviality and its religious significance.

Via participatory observation, formal and informal practices and encounters could be experienced and perceived. This way the ritualized, embodied, and affective ways of doing conviviality in religious contexts came into focus. In order to study aspects of doing conviviality more in-depth an ethnographic approach is indispensable since it helps to uncover the circulation of practices and normativities that reflect negotiations and experiences of what conviviality might mean. Those negotiations, we find, can at times be messy, full of tensions, and contradictory. We immersed ourselves for more than two years into worship services, choirs, youth groups, community gatherings, board meetings, educational events, and bible study gatherings. We also practiced participatory observation at more informal gatherings such as common meals, meetings before and after worship, social or diaconal programs, and week-long vacation camps. Working ethnographically in the field while being identifiable as theologians brought special interactions to the fore. The researchers were at times identified "as one of us" and asked, for instance, to participate in leadership roles in certain ritual practices. On occasion, agreement and common ground was too quickly assumed. Trust developed sometimes more easily, since researchers were usually not experienced as distanced and unengaged academics. This led in many cases to renegotiations in the field in which relationships had to be clarified again.

Not only these clearly defined formal and informal events were of interest to us but also encounters that happened in in-between spaces, at the margins of planned events, and in encounters beyond programmatic frameworks. In all these different spheres of interaction we were attentive not only to verbal discourse but also to embodied practices and to the affectivity that arises between people. We analyzed affective arrangements that reflected atmospheres and embodied interactions in relation to particular spatial configurations (Eugster-Schaetzle et al. 2023). Multiperspectivity was accounted for by engaging in exchanges with different groups and individuals who were situated in different proximity to the communities' leadership. This approach also engaged critics of these communities, especially those who had left.

Ethnographic work that pays attention to affect, embodiment, and space helps to disclose dimensions of conviviality that would otherwise be muted. These dimensions are revealed in attentive participatory observation and uncovered through intense fieldwork over time, during which perceptions are deepened, contrasted, and reflected upon. Participatory observation uncovers over time the silent knowledge of participants and church members that frequently remains unnoticed or is devalued (Meyer 2022: 88–89; Hirschauer 2001: 443). We were interested in the dimension of affectivity that can be researched through ethnographic methods and serves as an important dimension of the

praxeologically grounded order of knowledge that moves in between and beyond verbal discourse (Bieler in this volume).

During the fieldwork phase we tried to work creatively with the tension of being ethnographers of religious practice who wanted to understand empirical phenomena more deeply and being practical theologians bringing the reconstruction of empirical insights into the realm of church theory, such as ecclesiology, in order to enhance theological debates in these fields. In order to work constructively with this tension, it is necessary to be aware of the methodological moves of the researcher. We constantly tried to reflect critically on our assumptions and normative concerns (theological and political) and tried to be as open as possible to what we experienced in the field, in encounters with individuals, and in group dynamics. In that sense we made the effort to constantly bracket our pre-assumptions and be guided by what the people we met in the field brought to us. We disciplined ourselves to step back, to let go of preconceived assumptions, and to take, as much as possible, a non-normative posture in order to enhance our perception.

2.2.2 Episodic Interviews: Reconstructing Interpretations and Narratives

An additional method we used was episodic interviews (Flick 2018: 287–293) in order to capture the multiple interpretations of how conviviality is experienced and interpreted.

This interview method combines general questions and prompts with a focus on a single specific question that invites participants to recount concrete events (in our case: when togetherness was experienced within a group or expressed in practices, but also when it was contradicted or damaged). Interview guidelines included both narrative stimuli (for openness) and important topical domains (for focusing) so that the interviewees were free in their responses and could express their personal insights. By using this method, interviewees were asked to share different kinds of knowledge. They delved into episodic knowledge in which certain events or encounters were remembered and reflected upon. They were also invited to share their religious or political insights or their theological reflections. Since conviviality is a more analytical term that is rather uncommon in English, German, or Italian, we used different concepts in order to circumambulate and uncover practices and theologies of conviviality. These interviews were conducted with employees and volunteers who are engaged in the communities to various degrees as well as with (former) attendees who showed some distance or expressed critique. Focusing on these various groups brought forth a more multifaceted picture. Episodic interviews offered an explicit reflection on doing conviviality and on its failures and successes.

2.2.3 Document Analysis: Identifying Collective Modes of Self-Articulation

The third angle we brought to the research design was engagement with grey and self-published literature in which the researched communities presented their own self-understanding, reflected on their histories, and described their visions. In particular, documents that reflected on historical developments or changes in a community's vision, etc. were of special interest, since they offered a diachronic perspective that cannot be captured through ethnographic work that has a synchronic focus on the eventfulness of a particular moment in time. These documents help to study different modes of self-

articulation which may imply e.g. public confessional stances, political statements, or meditative musings on the religious significance of conviviality.

The entire research process can be described as iterative, it consists of constant revisions of concepts and adjustments of research questions; it implies loops and circular moves. And most important it is in constant conversation with the partners in the field. Observations and the formulation of reconstructed knowledge is brought back to the communities for discussion.

By engaging in this multi-perspectival approach through participatory observation, episodic interviews, and document analysis we sharpened the practice theory of doing conviviality with a focus on analyzing interactive practices as well as more explicit reflections on togetherness in super-diverse church communities. In doing so we were able to tap into implicit and explicit knowledge that is activated in the communities and that could be reconstructed.

2.3 A Praxeological Approach: Grounding Ecclesiological Reflection

We study how normative assumptions about living together circulate in the field and how they are expressed in interviews and written materials that are available to us. We want to know how these normative stances affect competing considerations of what church should be and how processes of community building ought to be developed. We are interested in understanding how ecclesiological assumptions are intertwined with images of the Divine and Christ and with articulations of how the work of the Holy Spirit manifests in these communities. Analyzing the circulation of such articulations enables us to reconstruct the ecclesiological insights that are operating in such communities.

By favoring a praxeological approach, we intend to critique the practice-theory binary, which assumes that valuable ecclesiological knowledge exists prior to and independent of the practices that unfold in Christian communities. As theologians we seek to create a dialogue within the field of ecclesiology, namely in church theory, that begins with reconstructed knowledge from communities. We ask how these insights can enrich ecclesiological reasoning. Qualitative empirical research enables us to insert topics into ecclesiological debates that have not been present before or that have not been sufficiently discussed, such as the meaning of multilingual practices in worship and other settings; the significance of verbal and non-verbal embodied encounters; the entanglement of space, power, and affect; the various layers of food practices in intercultural settings; and the multi-religious contact zones that derive from such super-diverse Christian communities. These reconstructed topics are fertile ground for the development of a grounded intercultural ecclesiology.

This praxeological approach, grounded in qualitative-empirical research methodology, resonates very well with a Protestant approach to ecclesiology that focuses, for theological reasons, on practices that constitute church. It pursues a normative theological understanding that the community convening in the name of Jesus has an *eccentric identity*. The term eccentric means strange or odd by which I mean that communal identity is not based on ideas of sameness found in sharing similar social identity markers, such as nationality, race, or gender. The *eccentric identity* is rather primarily shaped by the relationship to the risen Christ, grounded in the presence of the Spirit, and enlivened by

an eschatological vision. First of all, it is not constituted by something that is attached to individual members. This *eccentric identity* instead leads the theological imagination to transgressive practices that transcend social constraints and to eschatological envisioning of the *basileia* (reign of God).

Simultaneously, the social circumstances that shape the lives of individuals or groups do not just disappear as people gather. This tension between theological imagination and social conditions needs to be considered: on the one hand, there exists the *eccentric* imagination that is expressed when Christian communities gather, on the other hand, the social and political conditions people are subjected to are powerfully at work in these super-diverse communities and beyond. The vision of becoming an intercultural church is often contradicted by lived experiences; the tension between vision and experienced reality must be worked through. The labor of addressing those tensions is of particular interest to us.

Doing conviviality, we claim, is expressed in the gathering of particular people in the here and now. It is embedded in spatio-temporal constellations, thus in physical places where people create space while delving into synchronic eventfulness against the background of diachronic constructions of history (Bieler in this volume). It is about interactive embodied processes in which people are affected, relate to each other, misunderstand each other, and begin socializing anew. In this vein, togetherness is in constant motion, the nuances that are produced are diverse and fluid. For Christian communities these exchange processes have a *coram Deo* horizon as they claim to come to know how communion with God occurs for them through and within such encounters. In this context individual and communal actors draw on their religious and cultural resources and modify them in the process.

Qualitative empirical research can be used to describe how the religious quality of conviviality is understood by actors and how it is situated in certain practices. The practices studied are embedded in social relationships that can be deeply committed and binding, yet also ephemeral and sporadic; they oscillate between informal and formalized interactions and manifest themselves in a range from routinized to improvised performances (Bieler in this volume).

The empirical research on *doing conviviality* fits well into an understanding of Protestant ecclesiology that does not follow an essentialist but a praxeological logic. For instance, the Protestant tradition does not define an understanding of church in soteriological terms. It is one of the major insights of the Reformation that the church is not to be understood as a medium of salvation that intervenes between God and God's people. The emphasis is rather on the immediate intimate relationship between the believer and God. This idea grounds an ecclesiological understanding in freedom of the individual believer. There are no particular church offices, orders, and hierarchies that are necessary for salvation. Reconciliation and salvation reside exclusively in the immediate relationship with Christ. It is rather this immediate relationship of believers with Christ that is primordial.

Instead, what the church is, what it constitutes, is consistently understood praxeologically. E.g. in the Confessio Augustana (Grane 2005), the church exists where the gospel is proclaimed and the sacraments are rightly administered. In the performance of these practices, the church finds its gestalt in the gathering of those who come to-

gether to listen, eat, and drink. At the same time, a central distinction must always be kept in mind: There exists a difference between God's word and human utterances in its proclamation, or between the LORD's Supper as an event and the encounter with the living Christ as pure gift.

All these practices are ephemeral events; they imply a hic-et-nunc structure. This understanding of *eventfulness* does not belong to the symbolic order that attaches the presence of Christ to particular things (e.g. the elements of bread and wine) nor to particularly holy persons such as priests (Bieler/Schottroff 2007). Rather, spirit-filled eventfulness can be found in the intermediate space of ephemeral exchange processes. It is here where Christ's Spirit is at work. This pneumatological grounding offers a theologically charged understanding of *doing conviviality*. It offers a theological attempt to answer the question that drives our research: what constitutes *with-ness*? (Bieler in this volume). Theological insights that derive from the Christian tradition hint at the promise that where two or three gather in the name of Jesus, *with-ness* unfolds as pneumatological communion: communion with Christ in the power of the Spirit. Speaking in the mode of promise, *with-ness* cannot be produced via convivial practices. It is rather a gift that is preserved in these practices. If it is a gift, it cannot be understood as a possession. Thus, the trace of something eccentrically given is embedded in the basic praxeological structure of doing conviviality. In this vein, *with-ness* arises as a figure of the unavailable that permeates convivial practice. It opens up the space between activity and passivity.

By theologizing practices in the described pneumatological way, I have reached a tipping point in reflection on doing conviviality. I have engaged a shift of disciplinary approaches beyond ethnography by speaking about a realm that cannot be captured in empirical terms. By making this claim we proceed from the theological assumption that Christ's Spirit can be at work in such interactions. This sentence is uttered as a sentence of faith, possibility, and hope. At the same time, this approach constantly requires a critical drawing of distinctions between church and Christ which must be repeatedly brought to the fore.

If church is conceived of in terms of the described logic of distinction, the difference between the promised community and the community that actually exists becomes essential. By maintaining this distinction, *with-ness* might become palpable e.g. in the gathering of those who pray together for the coming of the *basileia* in the LORD's prayer in the midst of never-ending wars and catastrophes. In this eschatological prayer practice, a desire is collectively expressed that refers in a radical way to a religiously determined absence. In the present, the community focuses on the coming of the kingdom because something is painfully missing.

The emergence of difference is not an intellectual gimmick but produces friction that often makes social and religious differences visible, at times painfully so. This also applies to the congregations studied. In ecumenical efforts to celebrate worship together, mutual alienation is experienced in many ways. In an effort to bring different liturgical traditions to bear, all participants have to make compromises. In many everyday encounters in which asymmetries become apparent and differing opinions come to light, injuries occur as well.

In this vein the distinction between the Divine and the church is also crucial for critiquing what is going on. These communities are also affected by destructive conditions

because power relations, exclusion, and violence do not cease to exist within them. Thinking about the difference between the empirical and the promised community is therefore a central driving force in the critique of church practice in the present. The practice of differentiation is also a central focus of what people hope for when they pray: "Your kingdom come." In this eschatological orientation of prayer, a mode of religious dispossession is expressed.

By engaging in the work of distinguishing, I strive to make a normative contribution to theological reasoning through a praxeological and deconstructive approach with regard to the notion of Christian community via the concept of *doing conviviality.* In the context of this work, empirical inquiry into doing conviviality is an integral part of the theological project of developing a grounded ecclesiology.

3 Empirical Reconstructions of Doing Conviviality

What follows are cross-sectional reconstructions on *doing conviviality* from our empirical research which concentrate on two major aspects that became relevant in the field. I identified those in our sensitizing concept as circulating normativities and convivial dynamics (Bieler in this volume).

3.1 Circulating Normativities

Let me begin with describing how circulating normativities related to conviviality are articulated in various ways between individuals and groups. In terms of their quality, they range from soft to firm or rigid. In the following section, I present four aspects that are relevant to this description. First, I will elaborate on how the eccentric dimension of doing conviviality is captured in theological self-understanding. Second, I will reflect upon the findings that, in many cases, there is no robust concept of what doing conviviality or being community means or what it is about. It seems to oscillate between idealization and the depiction of experienced fragility. This oscillation is often embedded in rather ephemeral depictions of community. Third, by using the metaphor of the family, I show how normative claims about doing conviviality are transmitted and become powerful. Finally, I highlight the symbolic and normative dimensions of multilingual exchange.

Besides the circulation of normative understandings of conviviality, I will concentrate, in a second move, on the dynamics that drive interactions in super-diverse Christian communities. The doing and undoing of conviviality is discussed as well as the dynamics of boundary work and belonging.

3.1.1 Eccentric Conviviality

In her empirical research, Lisa Ketges found various theological expressions of eccentric conviviality. These are mostly provoked when she asks the question: what connects or carries people in the community. One interviewee reflects on living together in the household of God (Eph 2) that is marked by power struggles and different confessions, yet at the same time:

> [P]eople realize together: So, we, we live here by the grace of God, we have been called into this community. We've all been drawn in (.) […] our vision is actually that in this space, community, i.e. being a Christian community TOGETHER, is negotiated together, and I don't have to tie that to the question of confession. (Interview Lisa Ketges in Hamburg November 19, 2021)

Another person speaks of the things that are given to the community: the gospel that nourishes people, the rich divine blessing, and the love of God as an overarching power:

> What actually connects us with each other? Well (…), I think in the broadest sense actually (7 sec) this, (.) d/ this, this great trust that we as Christians are safe in a large community. That what the gospel proclaims also sustains us, this awareness is there, in all of us – in every form, every spirituality that is lived and may be lived here. (…) That the overarching (…) yes, the rich blessing of God (…) is what really unites us. God is love and whoever remains in love remains in God and God in him, yes. (…) I believe that is really what (…) yes, what is set. (Interview Lisa Ketges in Hamburg June 3, 2021)

It is a common faith in God as the creator and that all are created in the image of God that connects people:

> Ah, I believe, faith in GOD. Faith in God, that we have a Creator who has created us all in his image. This makes it easier for us to accept others as our fellow human beings. I believe that is the basis. Yes? (Interview Lisa Ketges in Hamburg June 11, 2021)

Someone else speaks of the ethical convictions and values which are situated in a shared religious understanding as a connecting force within the community. These shared values can foster a dream:

> And that the dream of community in this Galatian experiment, i.e. neither Jews nor Christians and yet still together, was so focused for Paul as a vision of hope and an image of the church (.), yes. I would say that he failed, but the dream is still there that there is a kind of community based on a religious value orientation that holds us together. And according to my theological conception, this is certainly NOT based on the exclusion criterion of worshipping Jesus as the Son of God. If it did, it would have to have an Abrahamic foundation, but for me it is of course also determined by the Jesus tradition. (Interview Lisa Ketges in Hamburg April 15, 2021)

Eccentric identity hints at religious matters that cannot be fabricated, it refers to what is given, to life itself, and to faith as gift. While interviewees often reflect on the doing of conviviality in terms of programs and practices, this eccentric thread emerges time and again. In its religious underpinnings we find that *doing conviviality* is grounded in the space between activity and passivity. It is framed by notions of faith in the creator, by a house that is given, by being blessed, and by being loved, from which dreams of an inclusive intercultural community arise and daily efforts are inspired. Moral conviction

and habitus emerge from there, like recognizing that the other is created in the image of God or that the Pauline dream is still alive.

3.1.2 Community between Idealization and Fragility

The following deliberations relate to how individuals communicate their understanding of conviviality and community, and how these are experienced. Since conviviality is not a term that we found in the field but that we instead used heuristically for the purpose of analysis, we asked about notions and experiences of community, with a special emphasis on practices, images, and ideas.

For example, the Basel community *Mitenand*, studied by Tabea Eugster-Schaetzle, advertises on its homepage its ecumenical vacation week in Zinal, in the canton of Valais, with a quote from Gregory of Nazianzus: "None of us is in the world for himself alone, he is also there for all others" (Oekumenische Ferienwoche, Website). The quote is followed by a list that indicates: We come from Ethiopia, Burma [sic], Chile, Germany, Eritrea, France, Guatemala, Honduras, Iran, and from 20 other nations. Diversity is interpreted here in terms of national origins. A photo shows people moving in a large circle while holding hands, set against a mountain panorama of Valais wrapped in blue sky. The website advertises that fellowship can be experienced with people from all over the world and between God and humans (ibid).

Vacation Week Zinal © Thawm Mang

The ecumenical vacation week started as a charismatically oriented project in which the participants were invited to a spiritual renewal away from their everyday life. Nowadays, the charismatic understanding has shifted more to the background. A religious understanding is combined with a more social approach which seeks to foster overall well-

being in people's everyday lives. People who would like to participate in the vacation week are supported in finding financial support through social services of the canton or foundations. This makes it possible for people to take advantage of the vacation week in Zinal who would otherwise not have the necessary financial means to participate.[5]

Some participants describe the experience of community at the vacation week as a foretaste of the kingdom of God. This strong religious interpretation is not associated with the diversity of the group as such but rather with moments of emotional closeness, listening to one another, and sharing difficult life experiences. The combination of experiencing nature in the mountains and spiritual offerings is enjoyed by many participants. For instance, Eritrean women might go hiking with a Swiss Jesuit. One evening, participants introduce each other to dances they like; some of these dances are national in character, others are not. The embodied experiences entail that people enter into each other's worlds by learning new step sequences, uncommon rhythms, and ways to move. Sometimes they discover similarities or a sense of familiarity in these ways of dancing together (protocol Andrea Bieler, October 17, 2019). On another night, an atmospheric Taizé service is offered with its circular, multilingual, polyphonic chanting. The service is filled with Christian symbols, such as icons or a cross that is carried around. A Muslim woman talks about how she feels uplifted amidst the atmosphere of this ritual (Hoffmann in this volume).

During the vacation week in Zinal, far from the realities of everyday life where skin color is experienced socially as a marker of difference, an experience of sameness is formed with a view to community. One person says:

> The nice thing is, I think, here we are all under one roof and everyone is the same. To have this feeling that there is no difference here, that is unique. That is unique. […] I, for me personally, we are all the same, we are different in color, black, white, or others, but we are actually the same (someone clears his throat). But what makes us the same is actually that we are all peaceful people. People who are in search of peace, people who are in search of their freedom, we are people who are searching for community, […]. (Focus group conversation conducted by Tabea Eugster-Schaetzle and Claudia Hoffmann with 10 participants in Zinal on October 14, 2022)

Participants in the vacation week are portrayed as seekers, this is what makes them the "same". They seek peace, they seek community. It is about something that they don't possess, or that is only partially available to them, but that they are looking for. Although there is an attempt to articulate sameness, the bond of togetherness is not found in terms of identity. It is expressed as a hope or habitus that is directed towards the future.

The church in Hamburg-Borgfelde (see Ketges in this volume) also offers a variety of occasions where people can encounter each other in intense ways. They also offer an annual vacation week on the island of Sylt in the North Sea. The church provides the opportunity for intercultural worship on a regular basis. One interviewee speaks of the sig-

5 Some of the insights from the vacation weeks in Zinal in 2019 and 2022 have been published in Bieler 2023. They are based on participatory observation protocols by Claudia Hoffmann, Tabea Eugster-Schaetzle, and Andrea Bieler as well as on interviews.

nificance of meaningful community and the emotional bonds it creates that are based on trust, recognition, and even friendship:

> Yes, these, (.) these recurring experiences of (.) successful community, (.) so in the church services or at the camps, (..) certainly also the experience of recognition that you get from outside. So the congratulations or the (.) kindnesses that you encounter, the surprise that others express in the face of connections that don't happen otherwise. (4 sec) The familiarity of working together. (.) So when (.) you can be out and about together and (.) you have the feeling that there really is (.) a sustainable (.) friendship (…) A naturalness of the encounter (…) and perhaps also the – the happiness that you experience when there are conversations in a familiar setting about topics that are otherwise not addressed. (.) When you are included in personal problems or questions (.) like: "How do you do it?" or: "Let me tell you about my son or my daughter and what am I actually doing?" (…) And (…) I think the private aspect is also the most satisfying. (.) (Interview Lisa Ketges in Hamburg April 15, 2021)

Besides the aspects of seeking peace, emotional bonding, and friendship, a person from *Mitenand* notes that people in the community have already found salvation: "that [the participation in the vacation week; TES] really was salvation for him. So you know, for his integration, that was amazing" (Interview Tabea Eugster-Schaetzle in Basel April 20, 2021). In this example, salvation, a heavily loaded religious term, is connected with the social project of integration. The interviewee explains that this man did not get lost in the midst of an extreme life situation due to his contact with the church.

Someone from the charismatically oriented *New Covenant Fellowship* (NCF) in Riehen, Switzerland describes the "costs of discipleship" in following Jesus by pointing out that Christians are persecuted worldwide. In his opinion, communal bonding is not an end in itself. The NCF community seeks to follow in the footsteps of Jesus and to confess Christ; this can also involve persecution. Tabea Eugster-Schaetzle comes to the conclusion that the concept of community is used less in the NCF in Riehen, instead reference to the Pauline metaphor of the church as the body of Christ appears more frequently (protocol Tabea Eugster-Schaetzle, November 11, 2020).

A member of the *New Covenant Fellowship* speaks on the subject of persecuted Christians in a sermon. Tabea Eugster-Schaetzle notes part of that sermon in her field notes:

> He assures us that he is aware of how sensitive it is to speak about the topic of persecution here in this country. We are privileged in Switzerland, he says. Therefore, in the context of persecution, the relevant message for him is to use this freedom, as we would not know how long it would continue. We should invite others. But here, too, discipleship could cost us something, he states, but that there would also be a great reward, because we are part of a large global family. Even if he doesn't suffer himself, he belongs to a body. He refers to Paul describing the church as a body: If the hand suffers, the whole body suffers. Even if he, the preacher, doesn't suffer as a leg, he is affected by the suffering of the hand, since he is connected to the part of the body that is suffering. He invites us then to pray for our brothers

> and sisters in the worldwide church. (Protocol Tabea Eugster-Schaetzle in Riehen, November 11, 2020)

In church services at *Mitenand* in Basel, the experience with the Divine is depicted as the foundation for being church together. This is stated both implicitly and explicitly in many sermons, as for example, in the interpretation of the parable of the banquet. Tabea Eugster-Schaetzle notes after a service:

> Jim speaks of the text as an image, as a parable. He says that Jesus' parables are sometimes very beautiful but also difficult to understand: "This picture here is rather catchy. It's about a feast where everyone comes together. You experience community, not separation. God be in our midst as host". (Protocol Tabea Eugster-Schaetzle in Basel January 24, 2021)

While at *Mitenand* being community becomes an end in itself, in the sense of the confession "we celebrate community," the NCF community stresses that the experience of oneness can be experienced through Jesus. In both communities, the experience of possible healing is described in different ways. One woman describes expressively that Zinal is a healing space for her that helped her to release the pain she carried inside of her:

> (laughs) Of those 28, I must have cried a lot for 20 years. So 20 years, every year. Yes, I have, here was the opportunity to, I don't know, almost like a trauma processing. Because someone gave a topic and this topic moved me or the others too. Yes, and it was always very nice, so I was always happy, not at all at the beginning, because I thought: "So many people? That doesn't work at all!" But from then on, after one year, after one time I was there, I really felt like I was in heaven, I thought: "Oh, what?" I couldn't believe that something like that existed. And, every year I came back and, yes, this community, this, that the woman, man, old, young, different lives come together, none, so, such a peaceful togetherness I would say, of the big picture. Yes, that was so good. And I haven't cried for the last five years (laughs), I think I've cried it out. But today, this lecture moved me to tears again, yes. (Focus group conversation conducted by Tabea Eugster-Schaetzle and Claudia Hoffmann with ten participants in Zinal on October 14, 2022)

Besides these ideal depictions of community as a space of risky discipleship, emotional closeness, and psychological and spiritual healing, the fragility of the communal experience is repeatedly described. This becomes visible in moments when people share dramatic life circumstances that continue to burden them. These conditions are sometimes experienced as haunting, which can also affect the inner self even in moments when one feels connected to the group. A man who translated an Eritrean woman's escape story for the group in Zinal is profoundly shocked by what he has heard in fragmented ways:

> I've learned to swim a bit, but I have respect for water, so I imagined that everything is filled in this little inflatable boat in the water and only when she started to pray (incomp.). (Focus group conversation conducted by Tabea Eugster-Schaetzle and Claudia Hoffmann with 10 participants in Zinal on October 14, 2022)

This fragility is also reflected in the fact that the experiences within the community at Zinal and those of everyday life seem like two worlds that are not necessarily compatible with each other. There is a corresponding difference in the experience of the worship service and life afterwards:

> Yes, when I go to the service, I do feel one with the people, but when I go out I am no longer one with everyone, like that, yes, exactly. (Interview Claudia Hoffmann in Basel, 2021)

As already mentioned, it is noticeable that community is repeatedly described as an emotional experience; dense emotional moments are invoked in which community is felt as connectedness; yet these are described as fleeting, they come and go. The motif of volatility also includes the fact that these two communities see themselves as kind of transit stations. This has partially to do with the way they seek to support those going through asylum procedures and consequently find themselves in a limbo situation. For various reasons, many cannot stay in Basel or Riehen or are not interested in committing themselves to the community for the long term:

> And from those who (.) come on Sunday, that's like passing through anyway. Well, they come two or three times, you have contact with individuals, with individuals for a long time too, or try to put them in touch if they have to go back. (Interview Claudia Hoffmann in Riehen, September 29, 2021)

It can also be difficult for those who belong to the core community, i.e. the people who stay:

> But (.) saying goodbye is sometimes difficult, or I sometimes find it difficult not to say goodbye, yes, in general. The picture helped me once, like from the intensive care unit, serious cases just come in, as soon as things get better they are transferred. (.) (Interview Claudia Hoffmann in Riehen September 29, 2021)

A person in Basel describes that people sometimes come only for a short time because they are severely affected by poverty, or their residency status is extremely precarious. In the interview, she pleads for understanding and describes this as plausible behavior:

> Many come a few times and look for support, then you don't see them anymore. […] But at the same time, I sometimes think, I myself am also from a migrant background, I am, I am – sometimes what makes me sad is, (.) we seek community and help when we are in need. Because when we are well integrated and when we no longer need help, then (.) we turn our backs and no longer look for the community. That's (.) I think it's understandable, it's the same in Europe too. […] But it's also interesting when, if they somehow, at some point, have problems, then they come back. That is a good thing. (Interview Claudia Hoffmann in Basel May 5, 2021)

It is intriguing to realize that the instability of these communities is hardly discussed as a problem. The interviews inspire further reflection on intercultural Christian commu-

nities as transient places, where some stay and others join and leave again or just show up briefly. These places are portrayed as spaces for psychological and spiritual healing, for peace seeking, for emotional bonding and friendship, and for salvation.

Another dimension, in which the fragility of the community experience shows itself, involves dealing with different interests and asymmetries when shaping a future communal trajectory. In these instances, questions of power, dependencies, and structural racism also come up. I will address these issues when I discuss the dynamics of doing and undoing community.

3.1.3 Church as Family

Another characteristic of the community discourse is the family metaphor that is found in the Waldensian Methodist Church in Milan and is vital for describing commitments, social obligations, and affective bonds that are activated in the church. Especially for the English-speaking Methodists in the church in Milan, being a church is closely linked to the concept of family. The family metaphor captures what it means to belong to this church: we are a family, which means we look after one another, we care for one another, we live on equal footing, we are on a first-name basis, we are in community – unlike in society – among equals.

Furthermore, the church as a family has a certain porosity with regard to the biological families. For example, the church in Milan takes for granted the collection of money for some of its members, so that they can afford to travel to Sierra Leone to attend the funeral of a family member and stay there for three weeks. By collecting money for the concrete support of a family that belongs to the congregation, an exchange between the religious and the biological family unfolds. In this case the metaphor of church as family is connected to financial and also to emotional support (Interview Luca Ghiretti in Milan January 5, 2023).

Frederick, another member from the church in Milan who migrated from Ghana to Italy as a boy at the age of twelve, emphasizes the importance of the Ghanaian sub-group within the church in his experiences in Italy while coming of age:

> I said that I come from Ghana, in Africa they say: when you make a child, you make it the (..) the child raises it, the community (..). And so for me the (...) the Ghanaian community is the family, that is (...) in Ghana we don't make a distinction between or, we call everybody dad and uncle, they are all our fathers and they are all our uncles, we don't make a distinction between, or one is the father of the other, no. So if I – like (..) in the Ghanaian community (..) if (..) another parent sees me walking around in Parma, in the center of Parma, and I'm (..) doing all kinds of things, he has the right and the duty to reprimand me as if he was my father (..). They feel this duty, and so there is this thing here that (..) we don't see the difference that one is my father there and the other is not (..). That is, the mentality is if someone, if someone is older than you or is the right age to be your father, automatically (.) he represents the father figure, so he has the right also the duty to make you aware, n/ d/ he doesn't have to be your dad (4) pa/ biologically. (Interview Luca Ghiretti in Milan July 1, 2022)

In this example, a shared national background as well as the appropriate age difference create bonds that are so socially significant that someone can represent a father and his duties in educational terms. Frederick explains further that the support of his Ghanaian peers in the church was tremendously significant as well. His peers helped him with major integration issues, such as acquiring Italian language skills. Through this support he experienced them as true brothers. The experience of social father- and brotherhood creates a sense of family that is attached to the church.

Clara also speaks of family. She however turns the caring relationship around, since she wants to support the church with her service and her attention:

> [T]his is my church family now (.). I feel this is my family (..), so (.) the challenge for me is to protect (.) this church, to love this church (.), and (.) to work in this church (.) as long as I can (.). I'm happy (.) to be here in this church (.), this like my, yes, as I consider as my family, so it's (..) it's good to be (..) in this church (.) as a / (..) to serve, and (..) to stay also, most especially to the Italians, to work with the Italians also […]. (Interview Luca Ghiretti in Milan July 11, 2021)

For Clara the church is her family. She loves it, she works for it, and she offers her service to it. She expresses a strong commitment and a sense of responsibility that grows out of more than thirty years of being a member of this church.

Finally, Marysol uses the metaphor of the *second family* for the church in Milan. She speaks with gratitude about the people who helped her in very dark moments in her life and expresses her deep affection:

> […] there/ I've had some dark moments in my life (.). OK (.). Aah (..). Now I'm coming out, I hope it continues (..) and they've given me so much. They have given me so much (..). So I'm very grateful de qua/ grateful for what they've done for me (.), they've never asked me for anything in return (.), so (.) – so (.). I've really had very, very dark (.) in my life (.). So I always say that I like it that way. People's willingness to help (..) is very important to me (5). That I have relatives here, but they are far away (.), so (.) here in Milan I am alone (6). So for them as sisters, brothers (..), second family let's say.
> I: Are you talking about the Italian side now?
> B: Yes. Italians, no no – in tu/ all Anglophone Italians, because even in the Anglophone (.) there are per/ there are people in which (.) there are people I like very very much. (Interview Luca Ghiretti in Milan March 28, 2021)

In conclusion, we might say that the family metaphor is capacious as it opens up the possibility of describing intense emotions of gratitude, love, and trust. Also, the feeling of not being alone is expressed. Furthermore, the family metaphor captures exchange processes that can be reciprocal as well as unconditional. Marysol expressed the latter: "They have never asked me anything in return." Finally, the family metaphor expresses strong commitments and expectations. Members become representational fathers or siblings when they act as ideal biological fathers should: it is the fatherly duty to also criticize and constrain the actions of the son who goes astray. Brothers in the church show their support and solidarity on the stony road to navigating Italian society.

It comes as a surprise that the *church as family* metaphor always has positive connotations such as being supportive and on equal footing. It could also evoke more negative associations, such as an oppressive father figure, dominating aunts, or jealous siblings. Interestingly, the church as family image does not leave room for such ambiguous expressions.

This does not mean that conflict and negative experiences are not expressed. Yet these are articulated beyond the church as family metaphor. When the term comunità is invoked in the interviews, it is qualified in different ways: the community of beautiful and good people, the community of stubborn people, or the Machiavellian community. Various experiences that people have with each other in the community in Milan are expressed in humorous ways: from openness to good-heartedness to the stubbornness that sometimes comes to light in arguments to the power politics that hardly consider the interests of others.

3.1.4 Polyphonic Community

Tabea Eugster-Schaetzle inquires in her research as to how multilingualism works in international Christian communities (Eugster-Schaetzle in this volume). In the effort to manage the use of various languages she found that the intention to create more cognitive understanding, in the sense of capturing what somebody else is communicating, does not always prevail. Particularly in worship settings it is as important to find a symbolic expression of what the world-wide church sounds like. One interviewee describes the practice of singing songs that are ethnically diverse:

> They have, how do you say? An ethnic diversity there from the songs. That's different. The world is in this church and the church is in the world. (4sec) And THIS church is in the world, (..) that's what I mean. (Interview Tabea Eugster-Schaetzle in Basel May 25, 2022)

Being open to global multilingual realities shapes a church with a *glocal* consciousness. The phrase "The world is in this church, and this church is in the world," captures this awareness in a compelling way.

In the New Covenant Fellowship in Riehen, where the worship participants frequently vary from week to week, an interviewee describes the multilingual experience of worship as at times challenging, since the hardships and the violence that people have experienced cannot even be partially conceived by those who do not share similar experiences. It goes beyond one's horizon of imagination, as one person says.

> And of course it's always great on Sunday mornings when Michelle, the different languages, who's all there and so on, where you can see a bit where these people all come from, which you often can't imagine. From where, what their backgrounds are and so on. Sometimes it goes a bit beyond the "horizon of imagination". No idea what they've experienced, where they come from, or. […]. And then also the backgrounds of these people. But often it's also too much, sometimes you just can't imagine it. You often know they come from somewhere […] but now, you don't always have time or something to study: "Yes, where exactly does this person come from?" Unless you have a longer conversation with them and hear their story a bit.

> And then of course: "Okay, wow." You often hear mega tragic stories. And then that's also something (.) yes, you have to deal with. (Interview Tabea Eugster-Schaetzle in Riehen August 22, 2021)

Often singing in various languages in worship creates an empowering sense of awe that unleashes courage, hope, and a profound sense of joy. Singing a song in one's first language, when it is not German, is interesting. Hearing the community sing a song in one's mother tongue is described as joyful solidarity. One worship participant at the New Covenant Fellowship in Riehen describes the following:

> At the service (.) in this church I like it very, very much when all the people sing during the song, they sing in their own language. This morning there was / were, I think, almost about twenty languages. From Chinese, from tu/, from all over the world. Ten language (in front?) on the tableau or on the picture and the other language, people come forward and sing in their language. I find that very interesting, it gives people the, the courage. (.) First the courage, then the hope, then the happiness, (.) to express themselves, to express themselves. I find that very, very interesting for a new person who comes here and says: "I have to sing in my, my language to all ears?" Yes, I find that interesting. When I was brand new here and then I sang a song in my language (.): "Very interesting, that's – the song is very beautiful. The song has a positive meaning". (Interview Tabea Eugster-Schaetzle in Riehen October 3, 2021)

For an understanding of the church as catholic, or for intercultural worship, monolingualism is not the appropriate expression. It instead appears as a neo-colonial practice of dominance which contradicts the vision and the ethos of these communities. By singing songs in a language one can only partially understand or is not entirely familiar with, participants experience worship through their own constraints. At times, inappropriate pronunciation as well as the desynchronization of rhythm and lyrics create a "poor" performance. These limitations are experienced by some as a loss of control and as dissonance. Not being in the dominant position of communicating through music making is however also interpreted as an important experience of spiritual decolonization. Singing songs in different languages as well as translating simultaneously creates at times a noisy or slightly chaotic atmosphere. Yet the noise and messiness can also imply freedom:

> So it's a it's a very good thing to have a different language and one thing is that (.) the translation goes on here this corner and thas/that corner so it can look a bit messy, like noisy, that's one downside, but also that adds to a more free environment. So it's always for me a very good plus. (Interview Tabea Eugster-Schaetzle in Riehen July 10, 2022)

Another example Eugster-Schaetzle offers from the *Mitenand* community in Basel is the custom of having bilingual elements in worship, e.g. to always preach in both English and German even if it obvious that everybody in the gathered crowd understands German:

> "But it has to remain bilingual!" Jim clarifies. "Why?" a woman asks back. "That's part of Mitenand, this idea of Swiss and migrants together, that's why it has to be bilingual," replies Jim. (Protocol Tabea Eugster-Schaetzle in Basel August 10, 2021. The quotes are recalled from memory)

A third example is the multilingual, simultaneous recitation of the Lord's prayer. This practice does not aim at comprehensibility. It rather strives for the performance of intercultural multivocality within the particular polyphone ritual soundscape that is created by the simultaneous uttering of various languages. Esther Maria Meyer describes the practice of praying the Lord's prayer simultaneously in various languages at an Ecumenical Worship Service at the Christus-Friedenskirche in Mannheim (Germany). The leader of the prayer invites everybody to pray it in their own language:

> She has printed it out and reads it. Her voice correlates with those who also speak the Our Father in English. I assume that's why I hear the voices very clearly. A vowel cloud develops around it, from which I hear words in German, but also from those around me from the Arabic and (Ethiopian) Maranatha community, in Arabic. The end of the prayer is delayed this time, as the English Our Father is the quickest to finish. The German shortly afterwards and then in the other languages. Mrs. Cari stands silently at the microphone. Everyone remains upright. As if holding the prayer posture until every Our Father has been said. Then the bodies begin to move and everyone sits down again. (Protocol Esther Maria Meyer in Mannheim September 22, 2022)

These examples highlight different strategies of ritualization in which multilingual expressions in worship carry different aesthetically and affectively grounded intentions. Privileging multilingual practice in worship over and against the sole use of German creates a distinction in which these communities communicate: we are not a monocultural church. Especially in the seemingly dysfunctional elements evident in "poor" performances and incomprehensibility, connectedness is experienced and solidarity is expressed. We might call this the ritualization of an intercultural paradox through which a sense of belonging is mediated.

A final strategy for creating a sense of belonging within a multilingual religious community is to make efforts to move beyond words, meaning to intermingle language with different modes of nonverbal expression like a theatre performance or music making. There are various ways of moving beyond cognitive understanding that rely solely on verbal communication. One interviewee states it as follows:

> (Incomp.) It's not always just the language or the word (.) that has to be in the foreground. (.) Yes, what a lot of people have also said, a lot of feedback: "Hey, I feel such peace here, such joy. I came back because of this." (Interview Tabea Eugster-Schaetzle in Riehen August 21, 2022)

For the communities in both Basel and Riehen, the importance of music and theater is highlighted for cultivating a deeper understanding. A pantomime, e.g., can communicate a message in an intense way:

> First, first music very good. That's why when people make song and other member only heard that is music in – by ears and sitting by heart. That's why you are melody. […] Not to forget melody. Melody very good (incomp.). Music good. Theater also good, that's why many people come, also big different language. But theater all understood. Only see pantomime. Everyone understood. (..) Actors not language, all understood. Theater also good. […] (Interview Tabea Eugster-Schaetzle in Riehen November 22, 2021)

Similar to the church in Milan, sharing a meal together is very important at the church in Riehen. It is also a mode of communicating beyond words. Some of the people who join the meal are hungry. One person claims that besides being physically fed, there is also a deeper understanding of who God is and how Jesus attends to people when you share in a meal with others. Jesus himself shares in this meal. Sharing in a meal together helps people to remember:

> Yes, and food afterwards. Food, also good in eating. That's why […] that's why, yes, (laughs) no, that's two roles, that's why the food also. Hungry people, a lot sitting, many are hungry, normal to eat. But when people eat, why Bible has story, Jesus gives bread and fish, why? That's because when people eat together, understand the other better. That's why with food.
> I: Understand what? Understand what better?
> B: Better understood (.) Go/God.
> I: God?
> B: Yes.
> I: At dinner?
> B: Mhm. So with food, with bread. Words too. You eat with Jesus. Jesus doesn't just eat, Jesus says something. You take your bread and you heard Jesus, information. (…) yes, that is food. When two, two, three wo/week late/ later, you sit at home and remember. Remember what you think. I – what I do two weeks earlier. I go to church and eat, okay eat. And song, yeah well song. I dundundun, music, guitar and see theater, well see theater. And after four times. Found, yes good. Pray and read Bible well. […]
> I: And you said that eating connects – what you've heard connects with the food and goes (…) deeper, deeper in. Yes, mhm, mhm.
> B: The Bible has a story, Jesus gives us fish and bread. And that's it. But did be/ mean something. Yes, it meant something. That's why when you eat together, don't buy chocolate alone and eat alone, zero. Only, only for belly. But if so eat together, wit/ if you want to talk about it God, this man wants to talk about it God, this man – and four people eat together. That's with food information too. (Interview Tabea Eugster-Schaetzle in Riehen November 22, 2021)

Also, at the Lutheran Church St. Georg in Hamburg-Borgfelde, eating together is an essential convivial practice. This is particularly true in intercultural settings. Here the issue of embodied knowing (see Jahnel in this volume) is mentioned explicitly:

> Eating is basal, intimate, bodily: putting something in your mouth when you don't know it: what if you don't like it? You have to trust the other person, not want to

> harm them, be curious. Eating is a bodily experience: against hunger, for pleasure, for the love of others that is in it. (Interview Lisa Ketges in Hamburg June 6, 2021)

In summary, we might say that the motif of the polyphonic community describes another important aspect of doing conviviality. It implies the normative stance that intercultural Christian communities must be based on a creative approach to multilingual interactions and to ecumenical exchanges beyond words.

This conviction is expressed in a variety of ways. First, it recognizes that a group of people need to be addressed who might not have a language in common, a language they all are able to understand. Strategies of how to foster cognitive understanding in a multilingual setting have to be developed. This mental aspect can lead to an expansion of one's ability to imagine the world. Translation in various languages opens worlds that are often only mediated through social media or on television. Stories of people from Syria, Afghanistan, Nigeria, or the Ukraine push the horizon of the gathered community.

Second, besides this functional approach that facilitates cognitive comprehension, a symbolically grounded approach is just as significant. Different forms of multilingual worship point to a vison of the divine household (Eph 2) and of the transgressive body of Christ that exceeds our socially fabricated boundaries (Gal 3). A *glocal* consciousness arises amidst multilingual exchanges and reveals that the world is in the church and that the church catholic arises from it. Besides the functional and global approaches, the affective dimension of multilingualism is pivotal. Affects such as joy, a sense of awe, solidarity, and empowerment, in the midst of noise and chaos, are articulated. Finally, an ecumenism that goes beyond words, as practiced in music making or food sharing, brings forth an embodied sense of experiencing conviviality.

3.2 Convivial Dynamics

3.2.1 Doing and Undoing of Community

We can observe strong normative claims about conviviality in religious and social terms circulating in the field. Ethical imperatives about living together in diverse Christian communities were expressed in various ways. By proclaiming oneness in Christ, conflicts and hierarchies obviously did not disappear. Instead of feeling that one belongs to the community, sometimes a sense of separateness and loneliness was expressed. It was of particular interest to us how these mismatched experiences were interpreted and dealt with. These frictions can be understood as fertile ground for doing theology. They foster the dynamics of doing and undoing conviviality from which new insights might arise.

Interviewees expressed how ideals did not match shared experiences on a social, spiritual, or emotional level. Imagined equality on religious grounds was often in tension with the realities of social and political inequality. This tension relates to the social positionalities of individuals and groups that are shaped by vast differences in terms of economic and educational access or by experiences of racism. This tension also played out in the ways participants dealt with the claim of togetherness on the basis of imagined equality, while being less heard and having less power (see Ketges in this volume). The unequal access to material resources is time and again an issue:

> And of course also having the feeling that you are not taken as seriously because you have fewer resources. Because – some projects here (..) take longer, yes, than over there. Yes? When it comes to a stereo system, we have a new system and first we have to discuss how much you can contribute and so on. And then you realize, yes, we are a community, aren't we? (Interview Lisa Ketges in Hamburg June 11, 2021)

The undoing of community is also experienced when projects of the African community are ignored and thus devalued. This withdrawal of interest creates frictions in the community that lead to disillusionment. In these circumstances the color line sinks into the language: the distinction between we and they or I and you emerges:

> I remember when we had to renovate the Café Mandela, it wasn't easy (.) because he was like: "We have to do everything." And it was so challenging how to get the money, how to do it for a/ us African. So I got pissed off, I said: "Every time we attend the Kirchengemeinderat, they talk about the development of St. George and nobody cares about the African Center." And it's so discriminatory or it's so like ignoring, you know, if they would be discriminating, yeah, at this point is hard but I was really pissed off because I'm somebody that I say things as straight as it is (...). With that and then I s/ I told them straight, I remember I told Bernd that there is no need for me to be part of the Kirchengemeinderat, because I come and vote and encourage your activities and you ignore our and then there is no collaboration, you, you might go ahead and do whatever you want to (.). (Interview Lisa Ketges in Hamburg April 11, 2022)

Racism is pervasive. It is deeply rooted in perceptions, attitudes, and structural conditions, and this is also true for people who want to be part of a diverse Christian community. Unaddressed racism can be toxic in communities that claim to undo racial boundaries. In this case, the doing and undoing of conviviality is entangled in a complicated way. The attempt to address it can offer a chance for sensitization:

> Sometimes, too, (...) I think that's sh/ (...) – racism is ALWAYS a problem. Even if NOBODY here would say – no, well, or everyone would point far, far away – away from themselves that we have a racist streak in any – that everyone somehow (.) has a racist streak in them. Never. No one. Would say. (.) But racism is a (..) – already VERBAL (..) so deeply anchored in, in many, (.) which you don't even realize yourself. To point it out to people, to make them sensitive to it, (.) to the way we treat each other, to simply look at it and of course a person who has a dark skin color is ALWAYS conspicuous in the broadest sense in a community of people who are WHITE. And that it also makes a difference to someone when they walk in and immediately KNOW that they are perceived as the only black or dark-skinned person there. To sensitize people to that and (...), yes, to pay attention to how you speak, how you meet and, and, and. So these are all learning processes. And (...) that (...) is not a potential for conflict, but a potential for sensitization (...), I would say, yes? (Interview Lisa Ketges in Hamburg June 3, 2021)

3.2.2 Boundary Work and Belonging

In addition, the intertwining of practices of boundary work and belonging is an important phenomenon that drives the doing of conviviality (Bieler in this volume). This dynamic has an internal and an external logic by which internal relationships are reordered and an "outside" is constructed.

The articulation of a "we" is an important form of expression in which doing conviviality takes on a linguistic form e.g. by means of semantic positioning (Nagel in this volume). In the following example someone attempts to describe the inclusivity of a church. The person names various groups and individuals that are included: some have different theological backgrounds, like being evangelical or Pentecostal, others are mentally ill. The interviewee claims that nobody is excluded. This seems to be what church is about:

> And we really do have people who come from a completely different theological background to what I'm used to. So there are some REALLY EVANGELICAL, PENtecostal people with us, including Germans. (...) We also have people who are mentally ill who come to us. (...) But WE ARE CHURCH and I think that's what defines us, that's how we see ourselves. That we don't exclude anyone, no, we want everyone to feel that they are in good hands with us. (Interview Lisa Ketges in Hamburg July 21, 2021)

All of the abovementioned groups are part of the "we" that is constituted through acts of inclusion. Some who belong – those who are neither evangelical or Pentecostal nor mentally ill – include the "others" so that they also belong. By highlighting these groups for the sake of inclusion, distinctions are created and boundaries are drawn.

Lisa Ketges identifies additional usages of "we" in her project (Lisa Ketges, Codesystem December 22, 2023). These are fluid, ambiguous, and full of conflict. For instance, the "we" is used across time. Although community members were not present at the time a community was founded, they use "we" to refer to an imagined, shared past. This transtemporal sense expands the perception of community boundaries over time and fosters a sense of belonging to a story that is larger than one's own biographical story within a particular community. For instance, someone who is connected to the intercultural youth project *Himmelsfels* (Ketges in this volume) connects herself to the "myth of origin" of the community. This way, she makes it her own story by taking on the inherited religious interpretation:

> Every time we tell the story of how it was built. Every time. Whenever. We tell it. We tell this is a mountain of rubbish. God can move mountain and this mountain was moved, this was a built mountain. That is the first thing that we would say. And then we would talk about the (.) Israel has this mosaic of the roads, of the map of Jerusalem – we would probably say about that. (Interview Lisa Ketges at Himmelsfels March 3, 2021)

The "we" also serves as a means of expressing self-chosen belonging. In the sense of belonging together, the experience of emotional togetherness appears to be a driving factor. Belonging to a community is repeatedly expressed as a feeling which can be ephemeral. For instance, Claudia Hoffmann (in this volume) describes the affective sense of belong-

ing for a Muslim participant in a Christian Taizé Service. The feeling of temporary belonging can be strong, however it does not dissolve the boundary between Muslims and Christians in general. An affective sense of belonging can also lead to more lasting commitments. Under the topic of church as family (see 3.1.3) we find various statements that describe a strong sense of affective belonging. These feelings are stirred by other members of the church who pay attention to difficult life situations. In this sense an intimate dimension of church as family is evoked that is not so much interested in who belongs and who does not belong to the family.

Frequently, dynamics of symbolic boundary drawing could be observed in the attempt to create experiences of togetherness. Exactly then, community distinctions were made visible. This can be observed in multilingual exchanges as well as in various practices of sharing food (Eugster-Schaetzle and Ghiretti in this volume).

An interesting phenomenon of invisible boundary blurring for the sake of community cohesion can be observed in the Filipino community in the church of Milan. During his fieldwork, Luca Ghiretti met members of the church who were critical, or even opponents, of the Marcos regime. Simultaneously, he talked to people who support, or at least speaking positively, about Marcos and the regime in the Philippines.

> Then, however, he answers my question about how it is possible that the Marcos family is still active in Philippine politics: "You see, they are powerful in the central part of the country, here they know that the people will be behind them…they will be in favor of what they say or want…it is the same what they want or say, they will be behind them… I said we're a democracy…maybe it's better to say we're an oligarchy … we have important families running the country …". (Protocol Luca Ghiretti in Milan October 24, 2021)

> [She] even says that they support the current president and that his son could become the new president. She doesn't seem shocked, quite the opposite: "They say he was a dictator, but that's not true." […] She emphasizes his intelligence again and adds: "He was good: he built the hospital … the Philippine Institute". (Protocol Luca Ghiretti in Milan January 9, 2022)

The opposing assessments of the political situation in the Philippine are not visible in the Filipino community. Ghiretti never witnessed public controversy about the issue. Also, he did not get a lot of response when trying to speak with individuals about the topic. People avoided addressing this delicate matter. Living in Italy and sharing a diaspora situation as Christians appears to be a challenging situation that creates new bonds beyond political disagreement.

In conclusion, attempts of doing conviviality are situated in the social and symbolic drawing of boundaries. These boundaries are inevitably invoked in the work of distinguishing, but also in the experience of different degrees of closeness and distance. With the articulation of a "we" and of togetherness, the imagination of boundaries is introduced at the same time. This is true even if what or who is beyond the boundary is not made explicit. The boundary drawing dynamics in the field of religion, but also beyond, often conceal the exclusions that are established in even liberal variants of inclusion

rhetoric. Those or that which is excluded, or all those who are not or do not want to be members of the community, remain in the shadows.

In the interviews, however, it is repeatedly mentioned that the community is there to mobilize the experience of being the same. Interestingly, this is partly formulated through the metaphor of searching: we are the same in that we are all searching for peace, i.e. what is missing. Another way of being the same occurs in reference to a shared humanity. By naming this as a common bond, a void is simultaneously called up that challenges further reflection.

4 Conclusion: Towards a Grounded Ecclesiology

In this chapter I explored the resonance between empirical research on intercultural Christian communities and ecclesiological reasoning along three lines. First, following the path of eccentric conviviality served to uncover things that are not self-fabricated. To this end, faith in the creator was articulated as well as what it means to be created in the image of God. People reflected on experiences of being blessed and loved that nurtured dreams of an intercultural church. Entering a house that one does not own, but is instead freely given, hinted at a space between receptivity and creativity that we may call church. Experiences of being wrapped in a divine embrace as well as in human attentiveness touched upon a deep joy of experiencing togetherness and connectivity. These sentiments were often described as fragile and ephemeral. In some cases, the community was described as a transit station in which people pass by, some come and go because they live in precarious conditions that do not offer much stability. Emotional closeness as well as psychological and spiritual healing were reflected upon. In addition, it was mentioned that following Jesus can lead to a risky place of discipleship. Doing conviviality in the context of church was entangled in metaphors, like family, that contain affects of love, gratitude, and trust; family relates to reciprocal and unconditional exchange processes, to commitments, and to expectations.

On the other end of the spectrum reside experiences of disappointment, asymmetry, and violent paternalism. In these cases, expectations cannot be met and visions are contradicted due to unequal access to resources and to power dynamics within the examined community and beyond. This leads to the second thread. The described tensions hint at the theological necessity to constantly work out the distinction between church and Spirit; it seems crucial to not idealize the lived communal experiences. The research brought to light how participants worked through the deconstructive work of doing and undoing conviviality in intercultural church communities.

Focusing on interactive embodied exchange processes and how these were interpreted in a *coram Deo* horizon was the third dimension our research brought forth. These evoked traces of a grounded ecclesiology that takes seriously the convivial attempts to experience *with-ness* beyond difference and to nurture a perception of being connected through the work of the Holy Spirit.

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