

Preface

„The charming God“

Attractiveness and Stumbling Blocks in our common Mission

The member churches of Bremen Mission were grateful to notice how many people became faithful in God, the God who liberates, shapes and accompanies our life. Jesus Christ has arrived in Africa and Europe, many years ago. But at the same time, Christians are sad to realize that they are no longer a self-evident part of society, neither in Ghana and Togo nor in Germany. The Christian self-image, the only institution that provides sense and orientation, is lost by the churches within the German environment which is shaped by many ideologies and philosophic outlooks, faith becoming a private patchwork-enterprise. The same thing happens in West Africa where traditional churches are in danger of losing their members – young people and successful merchants – within the multi-religious and multi-confessional context.

In the light of the above, the member churches of the Norddeutsche Mission have organized a theological consultation the 27th to 30th of Mai 2013 in Kpalimé, Togo. We are interested to understand how and why our God is attractive for people of other religions or other worldviews. We are convinced that our God is attractive, we came to know our God, the Father of Jesus Christ, being our savior and liberator – for us, He is most attractive indeed – using colloquial language, He is downright charming!

What is it that attracts people to the God of our fathers, what is it that charms them?

And in what manner is He capable of enchanting our individual life and our living together? Or, asking the other way round: what is the magic that induces me to decide in His favor, that enables other people, too, to discover him?

This question conveys us on one side into a highly personal domain, the domain of our own faith; on the other side it asks how this faith can change us and other people.

In connection with this, a number of theological questions come up:

- Are the own languages and cultures of the churches adequate to promote the Good News in such different milieus or contexts?
- How can the Good News of liberation, liberation from sin and death, be phrased in our days, considering that our world is hopelessly entangled in sinful structures?
- What are the forms (the outward appearance), what are the dances and music (culture), what should be the language (annunciation and external

communication) of the churches in order to generate joy when pronouncing the Good News?

- What is it that induces people to believe in Jesus Christ – and how does the church attract them to this faith?
- So-called “enculturation processes” change the Christian faith – how much change is tolerable?

Who describes and approves of the “tolerance of ambiguity” meaning the capability of thinking and living in different systems of faith and weltanschauung which might even be contradictory? Should this task be shouldered by the theologian and by the preservers of dogmas or de facto by each individual believer?

- Considering the historical “rationality of enlightenment”, the question is how to understand and how to interpret the spirituality of a faith that is connected with supernatural powers - or at least with one of them)?
- A cosmology dealing with spirits and with spiritual powers, a cosmology demanding sacrificial offerings, how can such a cosmology be harmonised with a faith which directly connects the faithful human being to God the Creator, incarnated in Jesus Christ?

We are obviously dealing with a mission-theoretical topic. The motivation for the conversion is in question. An attempt is made to trace the attractiveness of faith as a principle in communicating the Gospel.

Special attention was paid by the theological commission, when planning this consultation, to the encounters, to the direct personal exchange of views and mutual learning. The central theme should be governed not by “the faith of the church” but by the individual access to faith being quite varied in a contextual sense and differing between individuals. From the very beginning of the consultation, these ‘vitae pietatis’ were exchanged in talks between partners. They formed the basis for a very open and personal atmosphere and reflection. In some cases, the discussions were quite personal and they formed the “spirit of the meeting”, together with the cultural events of different nature which the delegates experienced together with the congregation.

Bible talks – with or without preceding bible-studies – were a fundamental element of the consultation. Especially the fugitive girl serving Naaman from 2 Kings 5 (Rev. Francis Amenu, page 9) and the disciples on their way to Emmaus, Luke 24, 13 - 36 (Franck Agbi-Awume, page 24) accompanied us again and again during the consultation.

Apart from the personal question why our own faith is attractive for us and possibly for others, there were other lectures highlighting the range of topics from quite different perspectives.

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To reflect and to share my personal believe with somebody I did not know before.

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Prof. Dr. Werner Kahl disposes of deep insights into inter-cultural perspectives, being a new testimony specialist, a lecturer in Ghana and, at present, one of the directors of studies at the Mission Academy in Hamburg. He was asked how the Gospel became flesh in the mission process in new and unequal cultural surroundings. Was the message of Jesus Christ modified or did the Good News themselves succeed in structuring and modifying life and community of the new contexts (p. 29)?

Dr. Prosper Deh is literature scientist and disposes of many years of experience as manager of church publishing companies. His present sphere of activity is the social and political relevance of the churches in Togo. Under the title: „The way in which we live governs our faith”, he deals with the chances of transforming traditional and modern societies in Africa (p. 63).

Fred Amevenku, pastor in Accra and lecturer for systematic theology at the Trinity Seminary in Legon, Accra, questions the dogmatic preconditions for transforming faith in the African context. Being a reformed theologian, he deals with the problems of translating complex theological traditions such as pneumatology, predestination or eschatology into the African context (p. 46).

Macklam Basse, pastor of the Evangelical Church in Togo, outlined the route taken by the Christian faith during the earliest post-Christian centuries. He specifically emphasized the importance of African theologians in this process (p. 69).

Pastor Renke Brahms, Moderator of the Bremen Evangelical Church, elaborated various stages of the mission, starting from a similar background (p. 91).

Dr. Kwaku Atakro, director of the preachers' seminar in Peki, Ghana, outlined the process of evangelizing his tribe, the Ewe. How and under what preconditions was it possible for the new Christian faith to gain foot in Africa (p. 92)?

Pastor Madeleine Mboute participated in the consultation, representing the United Evangelical Mission. She prepared a résumé for the church management, presenting the highlights of the lectures. **S. X**

Another decisive element of learning was provided by excursions to other denominations. We took interest in the question how Baptists, Pentecostal churches, or the Muslim community comprehend our Christian church, what attractiveness and what weaknesses they attribute to it. These encounters were characterized by mutual honesty. Not only typical Protestant strong points such as richness of hymns and sermons, adequacy of social services were covered, but also weak points were mentioned such as the monopolization of liturgy by the pastors and, sometimes, moral misbehavior of church members (p. 119 - 123).

It corresponds to the nature of the consultation being a space for encounter and reflection that at the end of the four days of intensive living together, praying, and thinking no formal “conclusion” is furnished. Instead of that, you will find

distributed remarks or aphorisms, additional questions or answers of the participants which were noted down as discussion contributions or their interpretations. To summarize the results, four working groups have finally formulated short theses, replying to three questions. Günter Baum who had a major share in planning and administering the consultation has once again summarized these theses from his perspective (p. 124).

In the enclosure, you will find a program summary and a list of participants (p. 131).

The preparation and realization of such a consultation is not a small task for an organisation of the size of Bremen Mission. If the result is as positive as it is, this will be due to the engaged discussions and due to the good cooperation within our theological council. I wish to personally thank this council and specifically its leader, Pastor Günter Baum. At the same time my thanks will go to the lecturers who to a large extent desisted from collecting any fees, and to the other contributors, for the high quality of their contributions. Special thanks to the Evangelical Presbyterian Church for the perfect organisation of the meeting – especially to financial director Emmanuel Gameda and to pastor Bertille Maditoma-Hetcheli – and to the congregations in Kpalimé for the services at the beginning and at the end of the consultation and for the rich cultural framework program with concerts and with the introduction of a historical mission film which gave additional distinction to the consultation.

Hannes Menke, General Secretary of Bremen Mission

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Mission includes all people – the sick, the poor, the outcasts – because Christ includes all in his mission.

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