



Norddeutsche Mission (Ed.)

The charming God

Attractions and Stumbling Blocks in our common Mission

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Preface

„The charming God“

Attractions and Stumbling Blocks in our common Mission

Hannes Menke

General Secretary of Bremen Mission

The member churches of Bremen Mission are grateful to register how many people have become believers in God – the God who liberates, shapes and accompanies our lives. Jesus Christ has arrived in Africa and in Europe, for many years. At the same time, the member churches have also realized with pain, that neither they nor their message play a self-evident and uncontested role in the wider public any longer, be it in Ghana, in Togo, or in Germany. The former Christian self-understanding according to which it were the only legitimate institution that provides meaning in life and orientation, can no longer be presupposed in the contemporary German society that is shaped by a plurality of ideologies and beliefs. Here, faith has increasingly become matter of private patchwork. Similar developments take place in the multi-religious and multi-confessional context of West Africa where the former mission churches are challenged by the loss of members, both young people and successful merchants.

Against this background, the member churches of the *Norddeutsche Mission* have organized a theological consultation from May, 27th to 30th in 2013 in Kpalimé, Togo. We were interested to learn how and why God might become attractive for people of other religions or other worldviews. We are convinced that God as we confess Him, is attractive, since we have come to know God, the Father of Jesus Christ, as our saviour and liberator. To us, God is extraordinarily attractive indeed, or – using colloquial language – He is downright charming!

What is it that might attract people to the God of our fathers and mothers? What is it that might charm them?

And how is God going about to enchant our individual lives as well as our common life? Or, putting the question the other way around: What is it that pulls me to God and that enables others, too, to discover him?

These questions relate to a highly personal domain, i.e. the domain of our own faith and how faith might effect change within us and others.

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

- Are specific languages and cultures of the churches adequate to promote the Good News in various, distinct milieus or contexts?
- How can the Good News of liberation from sin and death, be phrased in our days, considering that our world is hopelessly entangled in sinful structures?
- Which appearance (outward forms), which dances and music (culture) and which language (in preaching and in public relations) should be promoted by the churches for an adequately communication of the Good News?
- What is it that pulls people to believe in Jesus Christ - and how does the church attract people to this faith?
- What degree of transculturation can the Christian faith endure in the process of inculturation? Who describes and approves of the “tolerance of ambiguity”, i.e. the capability of thinking and living in different systems of faith and world-view that might even be contradictory - the trained theologian and preservers of dogmas or in fact each individual believer?
- How can the rationality of enlightenment be conjoined with the spirituality of a faith that reckons with the existence and the agency of supernatural powers, or at least one supernatural power, i.e. God?
- How can the faith be harmonized with a direct personal relationship with God the Creator who is incarnate in Jesus Christ - in a cosmology that is filled with spirits and powers that require sacrifices?

We are obviously dealing here with questions that pertain to the field of the theology of mission. They concern the motivation for conversion and the attempt to understand the attraction of faith as a principle of the communication of the Gospel.

In planning the consultation, the theological commission made sure that personal encounters, direct exchanges of views and mutual learning could become central to the meeting.

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

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The main concern was not the “the faith of the church” but various individual, i.e. contextually diverse approaches. From the very outset of the consultation, these ‘vitae pietatis’ were shared in personal conversation. This formed the basis for a very open and personal atmosphere and reflection at the conference. The discussions, informed at times by quite personal contributions, coined the “spirit of the meeting”, together with the diverse cultural events that the delegates experienced together with the local church congregation.

Bible-sharing - with or without preceding Bible-studies - was a fundamental element of the consultation. Especially the fugitive girl serving Naaman from 2 Kings 5 (cf. the contribution by Rev. Francis Amenu) and the disciples on their way to Emmaus according to Luke 24:13-36 (cf. the contribution by Rev. Franck Agbi-Awume) accompanied us throughout the consultation.

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

Prof. Dr. Werner Kahl has deep insights into inter-cultural perspectives. He is a New Testament scholar, a former lecturer of the University of Ghana and, at present, head of studies at the Mission Academy at the University of Hamburg. He was invited to discuss the inculturation of the Gospel in the process of mission in ever changing contexts and situations. Important questions were: Has the message of Jesus Christ been modified in the process? Or has the Good News shaped and transformed life and society in new contexts?

Dr. Prosper Deh is a specialist in literary studies. He has many years of experience as the manager of church publishing companies. At present he is concerned with the question of the social and political relevance of the churches in Togo. The subject of his contribution is the preparedness of traditional and modern societies in Africa for transformation.

Rev. Fred Amevenku, lecturer for Systematic Theology at Trinity Theological Seminary in Legon, Accra, discusses dogmatic precondition for the transformation of faith in the African context. Being a reformed theologian, he deals with the challenge of translating complex theological concepts such as pneumatology, predestination or eschatology into the African context.

Rev. Macklam Basse of the Evangelical Church in Togo outlines the development of the Christian faith from antiquity to the reformation period. He specifically emphasizes the importance of African theologians in this process.

As a short response to Rev. Basse’s paper, Pastor Renke Brahms, Moderator of the Bremen Evangelical Church, points out implications of turning events in church history for faith and mission.

Dr. Kwaku Atakro, director of the preachers' seminar in Peki, Ghana, has outlined the process of evangelizing amongst the Ewe people. From an African perspective, he considers preconditions that made it possible for the new Christian faith to be accepted in Africa?

Rev. Dr. Madeleine Mbouté from Cameroon participated in the consultation, representing United in Mission (VEM). She prepared a résumé of all the lectures for the leadership of the churches.

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 attraction 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 misbehaviour of church members.

It corresponds to the nature of the consultation - as a space for encounter and reflection - that at the end of the four days of intensive living together, praying, and thinking no formal "declaration" is provided. Instead of that, you will find remarks or aphorisms, additional questions or answers of the participants dispersed throughout the text. They were noted down as contributions to discussions. To summarize the results, four working groups have finally formulated short theses. Rev. Günter Baum who had a major share in planning and managing the consultation has once again summarized these theses from his perspective.

In the appendix, the program and a list of participants have been added.

The preparation and realization of such a consultation is not a small endeavour for an organisation of the size of the Norddeutsche Mission. The success of the consultation is due to the committed discussions and to a good cooperation within our theological council. I wish to personally thank this council and specifically its leader, Pastor Günter Baum. At the same time I am grateful to the lecturers most of whom did not take any fee, and to all the participants for the high quality of their contributions. Special thanks goes to the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in Togo for the perfect organisation of the meeting - especially to its financial director Emmanuel Gameda and to Rev. Dr. Bertille Maditoma-Hetcheli - as well as to the congregations in Kpalimé for the services at the beginning and at the end of the consultation and for the rich cultural program

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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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which included concerts and with the presentation of a historical mission film. All of this contributed to the success of the consultation.¹

¹ Translation of German original: Werner Kahl.

Bible Studies

on 2 Kings 5:1-27

1. Francis Amenu

Moderator Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Ghana

Introduction

The contents of 2 Kings 5 are mixed grill of blessings and curses with the key characters being depicted as servants called to execute various stewardship roles. Their attitudes and character traits are vividly captured over here. Six different categories of servants are mentioned in the chapter, notably. Naaman, military servant of the King of Syria; the young slave girl captured from Israel, a servant to the wife of Naaman; the servants of Naaman who journeyed with him to Israel; King of Syria and the King of Israel, the servant-leaders to their respective nations of Syria and Israel; Elisha, the prophet-servant of God and Gehazi, the servant of Elisha, the prophet. The main character of the story is however, Naaman.

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Children can also be involved in mission.

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As we step into this scene captured in the chapter, we leave the land of Israel, a nation that was to be a light to the Gentiles and a nation of priests. We step into Syria to the north, a heathen (pagan) nation surrounded in darkness, a place of idolatry and heathen blindness.

The description of Naaman (5:1)

Now Naaman, captain of the army of the king of Aram, was a great man with his master, and highly respected, because by him the LORD had given victory to Aram (Syria). The man was also a valiant warrior, but he was a leper. In this we have a picture of the sinner before he comes to God.

The name Naaman comes from the Hebrew verb naem, “be delightful, pleasant, beautiful.” It has the idea of “gracious” or “well formed.” Because of the significance of names in Scripture, this tells us something about the man. His name suggests he had undoubtedly been a handsome man, at least before the leprosy. Further, the implication is that he was also a gracious and delightful man. But his name became a reproach and a striking contrast to his appearance and probably also to his disposition because of the disease which had attacked his body. It provides a striking picture of humankind created physically and spiritually beautiful in God’s

image before sin began to take its toll on both the disposition and physical body of humans.

The way Naaman is first described gives us a picture of him as he was seen by people who tend to look mostly on the outward appearance.

- (1) **His position.** He was “captain of the army of the King of Syria.” This means he was the General of the Syrian or the Aramean Army, second in command to the King. He was a man of great authority and position.
- (2) **His popularity and prestige.** This is noted in the words, “a great man with his master, and highly respected . . .” Here was a popular man. He was a national hero as the general who had been victorious over the enemies of the nation of Syria. Upon his head were the laurels or wreaths of victory and upon his chest, medals of honour and valour. But would you also note the biblical perspective and truth regarding the source of victory and valour; it is the sovereign plan and power of God. He was a man whom God had used as He had Pharaoh and the Kings of Assyria and Babylon. Here again we see how the Lord uses the saved and unsaved alike to carry out His purposes and plans. But being so used does not save a person.
- (3) **His problem.** He was a Leper. This highlights or emphasizes Naaman’s problem. He had the dreaded disease of leprosy.

Leprosy, much like AIDS today, was one of the most feared diseases of the time. Some forms were extremely contagious and, in many cases, incurable. In its worse forms, leprosy led to death. Many lepers were forced out of the cities into quarantined camps. Because Naaman still held his post, he probably had a mild form of the disease, or perhaps it was still in the early stages. In either case, his life would have been tragically shortened by his disease.

But what exactly does leprosy in the Bible teach us about our sin and its effect in our lives? What can we learn from this story about humans’ condition in sin and what God does for people in Jesus Christ to heal them from the leprosy of sin? Leprosy stood as a picture of sin and all its features and effects upon humans and upon humanity’s relationship with God.

Leprosy, like sin, begins within (with what we are) and then erupts on the skin (on the surface). As such, it clearly reminds us of the principle that humans are, by an inherited nature, sinners and that it’s not just what we do that is so bad, but what we are. Because of the nature of the disease, the leper was often considered as dead; it was a kind of living death though physically alive. So humans without Christ are nothing more than the living dead; though walking about they are spiritual zombies (Eph. 2:1).

Regardless of one's position, honour, power, possessions, or wealth, leprosy, like sin, is no respecter of persons. Naaman was a man of position and prestige, but he was also leprous. In Israel, according to the Law, lepers were excluded from society

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In God's mission there is no need for sensational events, but the "ordinary people"

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as a picture of sin and its effects. God used this to remind Israel of His holiness. Cleansing a leper meant being restored back to a normal life. The term "cure" in 2 Kings 5:3 literally meant, "to receive back." This provides us with a fitting picture of our reconciliation to God and to one another (cf. Isa. 59:2 with 2 Cor. 5:18-21).

Finally, the leprosy of sin destroys the pleasantness and beauty God meant for humankind in His creation.

Sin deforms us, but in Christ we are made new creations and can be transformed into His glorious likeness (2 Cor. 5:17; Rom. 12:1-2; Gal. 4:19). In Christ's redemptive ministry our lost human dignity can be wholly restored.

Naaman held a high position, but had a very great problem. We need to understand that God often uses the personal failures, sicknesses, and problems of people as a means so as to bring them to the end of themselves and to knowledge of the Lord and His salvation. (Ps. 119:67, 71, 73). God uses problems in life to force us to face our deeper problem, the problem of sin, and the need of God's forgiveness and salvation in Jesus Christ. This chapter illustrates this. Naaman went from his problem to God's solution which was more than simply the healing of his leprosy. As we will see, Naaman came to know the true God. So, with verses 2 and following we will see how God worked in various ways, through the disease and through people to bring Naaman to the Lord. In these verses we have portraits of how God saves.

The Little Slave Girl in a Foreign Land (5:2-3)

Now the Syrians had gone out in bands, and had taken captive a little girl from the land of Israel; and she waited on Naaman's wife. And she said to her mistress, "I wish that my master were with the prophet who is in Samaria! Then he would cure him of his leprosy."

Here we see how the Lord always has His messengers of the Word. When there is a person whose heart has been prepared, God always has his messengers regardless of the person's status in life. Here, God's messengers begin with a little captive slave girl. In fact, by His matchless grace, God worked through the unrighteous deeds of Naaman's own army to bring this little slave girl into his own home to be the instrument of God's Love.

But what kind of messenger does God use? He uses those who are available--those who know and love the Lord. Here was a small girl, humble, obedient, insignificant to people, living under dire conditions, but with a Romans 8:28 mental attitude; she was a girl using the problems of life as opportunities or as open doors to witness for God.

Though small, weak, and insignificant, this little girl knew the omnipotent and sovereign Lord of the universe with whom there was healing. She was willing to point others to the most significant Being of the universe, YAHWEH OF ISRAEL, who alone could cure Naaman's disease.

Why do you suppose Naaman listened to her? After all what could a slave know? May I suggest that he listened because perhaps her life spoke volumes! Her life had been such a testimony that it gave credibility to her words.

The response of the King of Syria and Israel to Naaman's plight

Naaman, the leprous man of valour, went into the king with the news and to get permission from his king to go to Israel. The king was willing to help, and that's good, but they immediately thought in terms of political and financial clout (vss. 5-6). They thought they could buy the favors of God from the prophet of Yahweh through the king of Israel. So Naaman was sent to the king of Israel rather than to the prophet of God. With him he took a large amount of silver, gold and clothes as payment. This was the typical cultural pattern of that day (and ours as well), but it is not God's pattern.

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The little maid sends the patron to a great prophet. But he discovers the greatness of God in the saving impact of a small act.

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So now with verse 7 we see the response of the king of Israel. First, this was the wrong response for the king. Though he had power, position and wealth, yet unlike the little slave girl, he had no witness. Instead of immediately pointing Naaman to Elisha, the prophet of God, who performed 32 miracles during the course of his ministry, he was paralyzed with fear; he was paranoid. He thought that the king of Syria was seeking some cause to create an incident and reason to attack. Instead of seeing this as an opportunity to demonstrate the power of the Lord, he thought only of himself. What a contrast to the little slave girl who thought of others rather than her own plight. Note that she could have thought, as many would, that he was getting just what he deserved. Or she could have tried to strike a bargain in exchange for her freedom.

Like the king of Israel, how quick we are to read things into situations and expect the worst rather than take life's situations as opportunities to serve the Lord and to see Him work. Why? Because we are blinded and paralyzed by our self-love.

The Invitation of Elisha (5:8)

And it happened when Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his clothes, that he sent word to the king, saying, "Why have you torn your clothes? Now let him come to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel."

This clearly illustrates God's loving concern for the sinner. Again, God indeed has his messengers. Though some will fail in their responsibility and ministry, the Lord watches over the seeking soul and at just the right moment, he sends one of his own with whatever is necessary to take the seeking person another step toward the Lord and salvation (cf. Rom 2:2-8).

Clearly, Naaman represents the seeking soul, one in need of the Lord. We need to recognize that, God was using his leprosy as a means to bring him to a knowledge of the Lord. Elisha on the other hand represents the Lord. And Elisha, as God's representative, said "let him come to me," words which the Lord wants to speak to every unsaved person. For Naaman to come "to know that there was a prophet in Israel" was to come to know that the God of Israel was the only true God, and the only real hope in life (cf. John 7:17; Jer. 29:13; Acts 17:27; Rom. 2:2-8; 1 Pet. 3:9; Matt. 11:28; Rev. 3:20).

The Actions and Command of the Prophet (5:9-12)

So Naaman came with his horses and his chariots, and stood at the doorway of the house of Elisha. And Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, "Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored to you and you shall be clean." But Naaman was furious and went away and said, "Behold, I thought, 'He will surely come out to me, and stand and call on the name of the LORD his God, and wave his hand over the place, and cure the leper.' "Are not Abanah and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean?" So he turned and went away in a rage.

In these verses we have a picture of the simplicity of salvation and of the necessity of humility in finding the Lord.

Naama's going to Elisha presents an imposing picture. Naaman in his chariot with his fine horses, with his gold and silver and fine clothes standing in front of the

prophet's house which was probably very unimposing by Naaman's standards. Naaman was a proud man. He was proud of his accomplishments, talents, power, position, and wealth. He rode up arrogantly and thought, surely this lowly prophet of Israel will come out to me, Naaman the great warrior; and he will waive his hand over the area of my leprosy and I will be cured. We see his pride expressing itself in verses 9, 11 and 12, but especially in his anger at being told to go and wash seven times in the Jordan.

But who was Naaman? He was a sinner and a mere creature of God, who drew his breath from two small slits in his face (Isa. 2:22). Even the power, the victories he had enjoyed, and his accomplishments were given him by the Lord of the universe (so the importance of verse 1). What does the Scripture teach about the pride of man?

- God hates “haughty eyes, or the proud look” (Prov. 6:17).
- “When pride comes, then comes dishonor . . .” (Prov. 11:2).
- “Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before stumbling” (Prov. 16:18).
- “A man's pride will bring him low . . .” (Prov. 29:23).

So, Naaman had to be brought low; he had to be knocked off his high horse! God cannot and will not bless us as long as we are full of pride.

The prophet's reception of Naaman does in this passage seem rude; in fact, he would be severely criticized by many church members today and our politically correct society. His actions would be viewed as unloving, rude, and arrogant. But what Elisha did was really an act of love. It was a means of showing Naaman his pride so he could receive God's grace and begin to count for God himself.

Certainly, Naaman reacted and snorted off. But note that Elisha didn't run after him; it appears he simply turned it over to the sovereignty of God who then worked through the life of another to bring Naaman to his senses. As long as Naaman was proud, he would never obey the Lord in humble belief or faith. Self conceit and the various ego trips of humans are typical of the unregenerate heart and even of the carnal mind of the regenerate. It is so hard to realize just who we are, mere creatures, and to submit to God's plan. We must let God be God!

Lessons in the Reactions of Naaman (5:11-12)

First, let's note what Naaman said as he went away in his fury in verse 11, “Behold I thought.” What verse of Scripture comes to your mind here? “There is a way that seemeth right unto man, but the ways thereof are the ways of death” (Prov. 14:12).

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Salvation is for free.

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Irving Jensen says of this: “This leprous, dying man had actually the presumption to devise in his own mind exactly the plan by which he wanted his cure to be affected.”

But that’s not all. Naaman had contempt for God’s solution and plan. To him it was base and foolish. He was thinking, why should I go wash in the muddy Jordan River in Israel when I have clear streams of water in Damascus? Of all the absurd ideas! Note the human reasoning here. The implication is: If a cure comes through bathing in a stream, then I have better streams in which to bathe myself.

And so we see also Paul’s comments about man’s wisdom and solutions versus God’s wisdom and plan of salvation in the cross of Christ in 1 Corinthians 1:20-31. The world’s standards and ideas of salvation seem so much more logical in comparison to God’s which seems foolish and so simplistic. “Go wash in the Jordan seven times . . . and you shall be clean.” A very simple thing to do, surely, but Naaman objected. And so the Bible teaches, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved” (Acts 16:31). But simple faith is not so simple; men object. Ironically, Naaman “was willing to pay any price, willing to do any great deed of prowess, to make any fatiguing pilgrimage, but he was unwilling to obey a simple command ‘wash and be clean.’” What was the issue here? Was it the washing? No. Would that cure him? No. It was the obedience of faith. It was personal faith in the command of the prophet and not the evidence of his faith, washing, which cured him. It was his simple faith in the word of God, the root. Washing was simply the fruit, the result.

So today, people are saved simply and solely by the obedience of faith, by believing in the Lord Jesus Christ as one’s personal Saviour. The obedience God asks is the obedience of faith in Christ. So Acts 6:7; Romans 1:5 and 16:26; 1 John 3:23 (here “believe” is the root and “love” is the fruit).

Humans are so self-willed. By our ego, our reason, by our own experiences and desires, we want things our own way; we want to be saved our own way; we want to be spiritual our own way; we want the church to operate our own way, and so the list goes. But we must submit humbly to the wise plans of God or there can be no salvation, no real joy and fruitfulness, no deliverance.

Verse 12 shows that in Naaman’s heart a struggle was going on between faith on the one hand and unbelief on the other. His pride was clearly a limiting factor in his decision making. So he turned away in a rage, and it seemed as though Satan had won.

The Persuasion of Naaman’s Servants (5:13)

Then his servants came near and spoke to him and said, “My father, had the prophet told you to do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much more then, when he says to you, ‘Wash, and be clean?’”

This verse gives us an illustration of the value of loving care and of the importance of the right words at the right time to the unsaved (cf. Prov. 15:23, 28-29, 31; 16:21, 23). First, though we need to be praying for the Lord of the harvest to thrust out labourers into the fields, these verses illustrate how God somehow finds agents for His purposes. Perhaps these servants were themselves believers in the Lord of Israel and knew the power of the Lord, but probably not. Other than the fact they were attendants to Naaman, we know nothing about them. Still, they had wise counsel for the general.

Nevertheless, this may also illustrate the importance of wise and timely persuasion needed in personal evangelism. Notice the following points about the wisdom of their answer, an answer of the tongue as a timely word with sweetness of speech, yet honest and courageous evaluation.

- (1) They were courteous. They called Naaman “my father,” showing respect and submission. They chose their words carefully that they might persuade Naaman and help him.
- (2) They spoke from what they knew about Naaman. He was proud and courageous; they knew he was willing to do a great deed.

But, it was precisely this, Naaman’s pride and his personal opinion which was keeping Naaman from being healed. So, the four concerned servants tactfully sought a way to show Naaman that it was not his greatness, by which he would be healed, but by the greatness of the God of Israel. They were able to see from their more humble state and perspective that this was designed to demonstrate the power of the God of Israel. Should he not, then, heed the simple instruction of the prophet.

Finally, this simple command beautifully illustrates the simplicity of the gospel message of salvation in Jesus - that salvation is by faith alone in Christ alone (Eph 2:8-10). The invitation of the gospel is “come, purchase without money and without price . . .” (Isa. 55:1). And how do you do that? By faith. The way of faith is the way of humiliation and repudiation of self worth, human ability, or religious works, which then casts us on the grace of God (Rev. 21:6; 22:1; Rom. 4:1-5; Eph. 2:8-9; Tit. 3:4-5). Faith is the one thing we can do without doing anything. Faith is the recognition of God’s ability and the repudiation of ours.

The Cleansing of Naaman (5:14)

So he went down and dipped himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God; and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean. The immediate cleansing illustrates the complete and instantaneous nature of salvation. We note that he was cleansed “according to the Word.” Salvation is always and only according to the Word and never according to our feelings or emotions or human reason (cf. Rom 16:25-26). He was cleansed

instantly and completely so that his flesh became like that of a little child, but not only his flesh, but his heart also. He became a new creature by faith in the Lord of Elisha the prophet.

The Gratitude and Response of Naaman (5:15-16)

When he returned to the man of God with all his company, and came and stood before him, he said, “Behold now, I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel; so please take a present from your servant now.” 16 But he said, “As the LORD lives, before whom I stand, I will take nothing.” And he urged him to take it, but he refused.

These verses provide us with an illustration of the first fruits of salvation. First, he confessed and acknowledged his faith in the Lord (vs. 15). From a grateful heart he wanted to give a present to Elisha to express his appreciation for what God had done.

However, Elisha, carefully and wisely refuses. Why? He wanted Naaman and all those watching to know he was a servant of Yahweh and not like the greedy heathen priests in the service of Baal. He also wanted them to understand that salvation and all of God’s blessings are free, they cannot be bought nor can they be earned (Rev. 21:6; 22:1; Rom. 4:1-5; Eph. 2:8-9; Tit. 3:4-5). Elisha refused to take anything lest he compromise the name of God and His grace (cf. 1 Thess. 1:5; 2:5; 2 Thess. 3:7-8 with Phil. 4:15-17).

Naaman’s Concern Regarding His Master’s Worship (5:17-19)

This certainly illustrates the kind of concern God’s people should have regarding their worship, their testimony and the appearance of evil. Naaman knew that he would have to return to his old environment and live in the midst of idolatry and evil. He was concerned that he might have a proper means of worship for he could no longer worship in the house of Rimmon. He would not compromise Yahweh. He needed a place and a means for worship, so he asked for permission (note the sudden change in attitude) to take two loads of soil back home. Naaman was reasonably concerned about what God would think about his presence in the house of Rimmon.

Elisha’s only response was, “Go in peace.” This implies Elisha’s assurance that God understands. The issue was his attitude and heart. Perhaps this illustrates the principle of separation versus isolation. Believers are to infiltrate or penetrate the world for the Lord. As the Lord put it, we are to be in the world, but not of it (John 17:15-17). So Naaman knew he would have to go back into the world and face the

evil of that day. It was his responsibility, but he knew he needed fortification through the true worship of the true God if he was to be an effective witness.

The curse visited upon Gehazi

In verses 20-27, it is noted that Gehazi saw a perfect opportunity to get rich quickly by selfishly asking for the reward Elisha had refused. Unfortunately, his plan had three problems: First, he willingly accepted money that had been offered to someone else; second, he wrongly implied that money could be exchanged for God's free gift of healing and mercy; third, he lied and tried to cover up his motives for accepting the money. Although Gehazi had been a helpful servant, personal gain and become more important to him than serving God.

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Faith is a solid foundation even in the struggles of life.

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The passage here does not teach that money is evil or that ministers should not get paid; instead, it is warning against greed and deceit. True service is motivated by love and devotion to God and seeks no personal gain. As we serve God, we need to constantly check our motives; for we cannot serve both God and money.

Key Applications: What are some of the significant lessons we can glean from this story?

In this passage it also clear that the little girl's faith and Naaman's quest contrast with the stubbornness of Israel's King (5:7). A leader in mighty Syria sought the God of Israel; Israel's own King would not. We don't know the little girl's name or much about her, but her brief word to her mistress brought healing and faith in God to a powerful Syrian captain. God had placed her for a purpose, and she was faithful. Where has God put you? No matter how humble or small your position, God can use you to spread his Word. Let us look for opportunities to tell others what God can do. There's no telling who will hear your message or our message.

We also need to note that Naaman, a great military hero, was used to getting respect, so he was outraged when Elisha treated him like an ordinary person. A proud man, he expected royal treatment. To wash in a great river would be one thing, but the Jordan was small and dirty. To wash in the Jordan, Naaman thought, was beneath a man of his position. But Naaman had to humble himself and obey Elisha's commands in order to be healed.

Obedience to God begins with humility. We must believe that his way is better than our own. We may not always understand his ways of working, but by humbly

obeying, we will receive his blessings. We must remember that first, God's ways are best, second, God wants our obedience more than anything else and third, God can use anything to accomplish his purposes.

We note also that Naaman left in a rage because the cure for his disease seemed too simple. He was a hero, and he expected a heroic cure. Full of pride and self-will, Naaman could not accept the simple cure of faith. Sometimes people react to God's offer of forgiveness in the same way. Just to believe in Jesus Christ somehow does not seem significant enough to bring eternal life. To obey God's commands does not seem heroic. What Naaman had to do have his leprosy washed away is similar to what we must do to have our sin washed away - humbly accept God's mercy. We must not let our reaction to the way of faith keep us from the cure we all need the most.

Note also that Elisha refused Naaman's money to show that God's favour cannot be purchased. Money, power and wealth cannot save us, make us spiritual, effective witnesses, or deserving of responsibility or leadership in the body of Jesus Christ. Our money, like Naaman's, is useless when we face death. No matter how much wealth we accumulate in this life, it will evaporate when we stand before God, our Creator. Our faith in Jesus Christ will save us, not our bank accounts or heaped up wealth. Our salvation depends solely on God's grace, his gifts and blessings in Jesus Christ.

It is therefore quite clear in the passage that,

- (1) God is constantly at work to lead people to Himself, no matter how dark their condition.
- (2) God uses any committed believer, no matter how ordinary or insignificant he may be. How? Because of the mighty God who indwells us. This makes us significant as His instruments of light.
- (3) The grace of God cannot be bought with silver and gold or power or position. We must come to God in faith and believe His revelation in the Scripture.
- (4) In fact, power and position, silver and gold, can be a hindrance and an impediment to coming to Christ, as well as to effective service.
- (5) Two of the greatest hindrances to experiencing God's blessing for believers and unbelievers alike are: (a) our pride--Naaman almost lost out because of his pride, and (b) our opinions--Naaman almost lost out because his thinking was contrary to Scripture.

In the passage all appeared to be lost at a stage, it appeared Satan had won and that Naaman would go away without healing and without the saving knowledge of the Lord. But God's intervention came through the unlikely channel of Naaman's own servants and thus bringing into focus another part of the picture of how God saves.

Honesty: The Key to Accountability

There are many ways in which we can give the appearance of accountability while avoiding its reality. What is the purpose of accountability, and why do people generally try to evade it? How many of us perceive genuine accountability as being in our own best interest, regardless of the degree of inconvenience it may at times entail? Here in 2 Kings 5:20-27, we encounter a man who thought he could avoid accountability.

When the prophet, Elisha refused to accept gifts from Naaman for his healing, Gehazi his servant had another plan. Gripped by greed, Elisha's servant Gehazi lied to Naaman the Syrian and misrepresented his master. When Elisha confronted him, he lied once again, foolishly hoping to veil his deed from the spirit of the prophet. Elisha is not trying to trap his servant; he is trying to set him free.

Throughout Scripture, we find God seeking out sinful people and asking them questions like Elisha's. He comes to the Garden of Eden and asks, "Adam, where are you?" (Genesis 3:9). Jesus walks with his disciples while they argue over whom among them greatest. He asks them, "What were you arguing about on the road?" (Mark 9:33). Why does God ask these questions? God is omniscient; he is never at a loss for information. God asks these questions to give us the opportunity to be honest.

Because of his refusal to acknowledge the true nature of his desires to Elisha, Gehazi rationalized his disobedience and failed to consider the possible consequences of his actions. Deception never leads to liberation; it leads to subjugation.

Our ability to deceive ourselves is virtually boundless; that is why accountability is so necessary. Without submitting to the counsel of others, we can rationalize almost anything, especially if what we're doing involves a series of small compromises. Thus, accountability is needed not so much to protect us from others, but to protect us from ourselves.

Those who say that they are accountable only to God fail to realize the spheres of human authority that God has established for our good (Hebrews 13:17). Like the centurion who told Jesus, "For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me" (Matthew 8:9), we must recognize our own need to be under the authority of others.

One of the benefits of accountability is that it is consistent with the human condition that makes us more concerned about what others think than about what God thinks. But we need to remember that accountability is only as good as the

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Faith is a power that expresses itself in many ways.

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information upon which it is based. Accountability without full disclosure is a waste of time.

Concluding Statement

Admittedly, the passage from 2 Kings 5 about the healing of Naaman, the Leper is not just a story of the healing of a man from one of the most dreaded diseases of ancient times, but it is a story of salvation, one which illustrates the spiritual salvation humans find only in Jesus Christ and how humanity come to find that salvation in Christ. In Naaman's healing there are a variety of people who play different parts; some good and vital to the salvation and healing of Naaman and others not so good. All illustrate the various good and evil persuasions of people that either aid or hinder bringing men to Christ.

Indeed in Scripture, leprosy is a portrait of sin and man's true spiritual condition without the saving grace (spiritual healing) of God's salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ. Regardless of how people may see us or we may see ourselves, in God's Holy eyes, we are leprous without the righteousness of Christ imputed to us through faith in the person and work of the Savior. This one word gives us God's perspective of the true condition of this Naaman regardless of how he was seen and thought of by people. Here we see a holy God's perspective of humans without Jesus Christ and the ravages of sin.

The principle we need to see, according to the theologian, J Hampton Keathky III, is that "many today are perishing from the loathsome leprosy of sin. One may be great, successful, wealthy, honorable and mighty, but spiritually lost. To realize one's lost condition before God and to desire to escape from it are the first steps toward salvation. Naaman discovered this."

In the verses of this chapter, there is clearly an anticipation of the gospel that would go out from Israel through Messiah and then out from the church carrying the light of Jesus Christ to the Gentile nations. Naaman's healing was, therefore, an illustration of what God would later do in the ministry of the Lord Jesus and His church. Here, then, is a classic illustration of God's Love, of how He reaches out to a people in utter darkness and uses their afflictions to draw them to Himself if they will only respond to His pre-salvation work of grace wherein God seeks to bring people to repentance (Rom 2:4).

Our expected response as members of the Bremen Mission Family

In this 21st Century, we as the followers of Christ are expected to guide the nations of the world to get to know of God's salvation, healing, and complete deliverance

from sin, poverty, sickness, ignorance, superstition, inordinate fear, and all bodily diseases. Victory will be ours if we are strategically positioned to continually obey God and remain very purposeful in our evangelistic drives. If we do this faithfully, the example of Naaman's eventual success we have studied would have been repeated millions of times in all ages. The church in its programme is expected to carry on the work where Israel as a called out nation failed and it is expected that we should remain steadfast to finish the work that Christ and the early believers began (Matt. 28:20 and Mark16: 15-20). I believe this is the charge all members of the Bremen Mission Family must keep in a very tactical and sustainable way at all times.

2. Franck Agbi-Awume

EEPT, Togo

We propose to approach the text from three directions starting with:

1. the characters or protagonists with their specific roles;
2. the message or the content that should lead us to the purpose of the mission;
3. the process, the course of the mission.

In conclusion we will address the significance of this text - of course with reference to the subject of mission. This final reflection will lead to divided opinions.

1. The Characters

Here we pay attention to the two disciples, the women and Jesus. Starting from these three characters it is very interesting to see who does what and how.

The two disciples

Kleopas is one of them. As for the other, the text does not give his name. It is Kleopas who speaks and explains everything he learnt from Jesus. By his explanations we understand the following:

- The death of Jesus has gone the rounds in Jerusalem. Everyone is informed, therefore his astonishment when he became aware of the fact that Jesus was the only one in Jerusalem who wasn't told; verse 18.
- His idea of Jesus: a man of Nazareth, a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people; verse 19.
- His hope on Jesus, by the way a frustrated hope, can be united into the expression of Israel's redemption (literally: liberation, payment of a ransom). Here we can see how he reduces the mission of Jesus to a certain people. He explained more detailed that he was waiting for three days: but nothing happened. If it was Jesus, and if he should be resurrected, it would have happened the third day. But this is not the case. So this is not the savior that was expected.

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It is God's mission therefore "Go"...

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The women

The fact that shocks me within this text is that the testimonies of the women are not taken seriously. Kleopas goes so far to say that they had a vision, i.e. a mani-

festation. Going back to verses 1 to 12, they have never said they had a vision. On the contrary, what is stressed in these verses is that the statements of the women are considered ridicule. They do not believe them. The disciples did not believe the words of the women, they considered them to be nonsense, women's gossip, at least lies. *The woman is the first missionary. She is the one who carries the good news, at least according to this text, even in the Church.*

Jesus

We have to make clear that it is Jesus himself who sends us on mission. Therefore we all are missionaries sent by Jesus. He repeats to the two disciples his explanations concerning his mission on earth including his passion and glory, i.e. his death and resurrection. This leads us to the content of the mission.

2. The content of the Mission

For Jesus, the content of his mission is clear: he himself is the content, the Holy Scriptures, his suffering, his glory. He came to die for us, to save us. *Did not Christ have to suffer so much to enter into his glory? Verse 27.*

For the disciples it means the salvation of Israel: this has to be done immediately, first of all today. And it gets interesting: Pastors often ask for the ordinary things whereas the African Churches (EEPT) sometimes give priority to the question of daily survival. Are we not often tempted by the immediacy (now and at once) - by the ordinary things?

3. The course of the Mission

The missionary work is a long process. You have to start anew time and again and everywhere. Jesus did not hesitate to repeat to his disciples for three years what he had already told them.

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God's mission evolves in unexpected and uncontrollable ways.

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Conclusion: The scope of this text for mission

The charming God – attractions and obstacles in our common mission

God, in one way or another attracts us, sometimes fascinates us, but we do not know exactly how to deal with it and often we do not even understand. We do not know what he wants from us and what he planned for us.

It seems to me that we do not always have an unanimous opinion on the subject of the mission. This is only a first observation. A second one results directly from the

discussion we had together with the Pastors Hannes MENKE, Klaus SOMMER, Gerson BESSA, Bertille MADITOMA, Franck AGBI-AWUME besides the pastoral 2011 in Bethania.

1. The disciples and Jesus did not have the same perception of the work of Christ. I believe that today it is similar with the North and the South. We have to come to an agreement because the mission is our common concern. But can we speak with one voice regarding important ethical issues? Should we avoid them? In different contexts and cultures the Gospel takes a specific connotation. So the question of the purity of the Gospel arises. Beyond cultures and contexts, the Gospel must keep its purity, i.e. its original message. In Europe people tend to take a rational view of the Gospel and in Africa it is "competing" with the forces of evil, the fetishes.

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We are like the disciples living characters of Christ. The Word of God is Christ; it is only accessible by the testimony of those who believe in him.

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2. The Christian doctrine does no longer predominate as in the past. It is competing with several other models, good ones or bad ones. There are today several possibilities to seek salvation and to find one's fulfillment, i.e. without God. God himself is called into question. Nowadays, it is very easy to lose faith in God who does no longer represent the norm or - to put it in another way - who does no longer represent the norm for many people. Our world is no longer religious, but secularized, i.e. laicist. It changes from being religious to becoming secular. In which way is the Gospel (Good News) a Christian Gospel?

May God himself help us. Amen

3. Jutta Beldermann

United Evangelical Mission

“Bible Sharing”, a way of doing Bible study in groups, was developed in South Africa and has recently spread in Germany. “Bible Sharing” makes it possible for all group members to actively participate on an equal footing - regardless of their educational background. “Bible Sharing” encourages people to connect the biblical text with their lives and gives space to the free work of the Holy Spirit.

The “Bible Sharing” method consists of seven different steps, five of which have liturgical character. In this way all participants may experience that talking about a biblical text includes a spiritual dimension.

First step: Inviting God

Through prayer, a hymn or in any other liturgical way God is invited to be present. This can be prepared by one of the group members.

Second step: Reading the scripture passage

The passage is first read aloud, with the others just listening (no one is to follow the text in their own Bibles); only afterward it is quietly read again by everyone. By now all participants should hold the printed text in their hands.

Third step: Listening to words

From the passage, participants choose words (single words or sentence parts or short sentences) which are important for them. One by one people read these words aloud in a prayerful manner. No explanations and no comments are given. Then the entire passage is read again, either aloud or quietly.

Fourth step: Silence

Participants take about five minutes time to listen to God in quiet and to meditate the text.

Fifth step: Sharing

Participants tell the group why they have chosen certain words or sentences, what they discovered in the text, what they find important, what they wonder about, what they acclaim, what they feel angry about, what associations they have, what thoughts and experiences have come to their minds. Statements should be brief. At this step, there must be no direct responses from others and no discussions. The group leader must be concerned about it.

Sixth step: Conversation

Which aspects of mission are mentioned in the text? How does the text speak to the participants about their church and their mission? How may that be with partners in Germany or Togo? To what kind of engagement concerning mission does the text encourage the participants? It may be useful for the emerging group discussion to be chaired by a leader.

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Everyone should also be able to talk about faith.

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Seventh step: Conclusion

Through a prayer or any other liturgical form the Bible Sharing session is summarized and concluded. Here again, it may be good to choose ways and methods in which all can actively participate.

The inclusive Grace of God in the one diverse world

Werner Kahl

Academy of Mission at Hamburg University

Introduction

We have come together for this theological consultation, not only to talk and to deliberate but also to celebrate service, to sing and to eat together. We not only exchange words but we share our lives during these days in Kpalimé – as Christians from various walks of life and different cultures in Europe and West Africa. As we shall see, this constellation itself has deep theological significance. We, as men and women from Togo, Ghana, Cameroon, Italy and Germany, are united and inspired by that man from Galilee called Jesus of Nazareth. Two thousand years ago he attracted large crowds of people. He did not attempt to draw them to himself but to God. People sensed something special about him. He was different, and he made a difference in the way he approached people. Notoriously he turned towards those who were looked down upon, and he embraced them as beloved children of God. His teachings communicate on the lingual level what his mission was all about, e.g. Mt 5:3: Blessed are those whose spirit is humble, for theirs is the Kingdom of God. Luke 6:20 has this beatitude in a slightly different version: Blessed are the poor, for *yours* (stressed in Greek, meaning: yours and no-body else's; cf. Lk 12:13-34) is the Kingdom of God. Matthew and Luke capture in different words the conviction that God is concerned about the humble in spirit, i.e. those without possessions and security. *They* are the elect of God, and accordingly Jesus turns to those despised by their communities. The Dead Sea Scrolls found at Qumran give ample evidence of a wide-spread expectation among Jews at that time that God elects the poor or humble in spirit, those persecuted and driven out into the wilderness. The Hebrew equivalent of the Matthean enigmatic syntagm *hoi ptôchoi tô pneumati* (Mt 5:3) has been found a few times in the Dead Sea Scrolls as a reference to the group staying at Qumran. Most likely it just meant “the poor who are conjoined with the Spirit (of God)”. In the Greek of Matthew this sounds like an attempt at spiritualizing poverty. According to the Synoptic theory that I favour, Luke had wanted to avoid such a misunderstanding of the message of Jesus, and therefore he dropped here the

qualifier “with the spirit”.¹ It is, interestingly, in line with this Jewish and then Christian tradition, when the Word of God as revealed to Muhammad pronounces: God is with those who are patient in suffering (Sura 13:22; 41:35; 42:43).

Jesus as incarnate Word of God, however, did not only talk wisely, like in his speech at the mountain – his *actions* talked, and *they* convinced people. He associated himself with the neglected and despised ones – in the name of God. These people were made to feel accepted and honored, and they sensed the presence of the grace of God in Jesus. Jesus succeeded in making *transparent* the grace of God by including those who had been excluded by and from their communities. He gave them a deep sense of belonging – to God. Therefore family metaphors abound in the New Testament writings, cf. as one example from a miracle healing narrative Mk 5:34: “Daughter, your faith has saved you! Go in peace (i.e. the Shalom of God!) and be healed from your burden!”

The grace of God shone forth in Jesus’ actions and his teachings came across as divine truth. Therefore many of those who witnessed that man from Galilee concluded: He must be the Son of God, the One sent by God, the incarnate Word of God.

This experience and interpretation of Jesus is clearly communicated in John 1:14-18. In the context of our topic this is a relevant passage and I would like to take a closer look at it:

14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. 15 John testified concerning him. He cried out, saying, “This is the one I spoke about when I said, ‘He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.’” 16 Out of his fullness we all have received grace upon grace. 17 For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. 18 No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.²

The keywords of this passage are seeing, glory, grace, truth and fullness. The passage consists of two moves which are intertwined. The first move serves as precondition to the second move. It describes the eternal, transcendent *logos* of God taking on a particular human existence. As such it dwelled among the people, radiating with glory. By seeing this unique glory, those witnessing it recognized the closeness of God marked by grace and truth. This recognition of the grace of God in

¹ Werner Kahl, *Erhebliche matthäisch-lukanische Übereinstimmungen gegen das Markusevangelium in der Triple-Tradition – ein Beitrag zur Klärung der synoptischen Abhängigkeitsverhältnisse*, in: ZNW 103/1 (2012), 20-46; cf. Michael Goulder, *Luke. A New Paradigm*, Sheffield 1989.

² Based on NIV.

Christ comes to expression in the second move. John however, does not limit this response of faith to an act of confession. There is more involved: The grace of God is overflowing and contagious - "we all", says John, "have received grace upon grace". On the pragmatic level, a third possible move might be at play involving the recipients of this Gospel. As potential partakers in the fullness of divine grace, their grace should overflow. Does it show? Do they dwell among people for them to witness the grace of God shining forth through the believers?

In verse 18 we learn that *Christ* has "brought out" (*exhegeomai*) the meaning of God's *logos*. This Christological exegesis is not to be confused with academic theology or even Biblical exegesis both of which are one-dimensional intellectual endeavors. Christ, according to John, brings out the meaning of God's *logos* in and with his life and death. Christ *lived out* the Word of God to the fullest possible extent. By implication, the believers having been bestowed with overflowing grace, are prepared and expected to serve as living exegetes of the Gospel.

John was, so it seems, in a much more comfortable situation than we are, two thousand years later. For he claims that he still saw Christ (cf. 1John 1:1-4). Witnessing the grace of Christ in a personal encounter, and then being drawn towards Christ and becoming a believer, does not seem to be such a great challenge. However, the Gospel narratives help us understand that becoming a believer was also not an automatism during Jesus' lifetime. The Gospel of John in particular portrays two modes of reaction towards Jesus, especially following miracle healings: belief on the one hand, disbelief and rejection on the other hand. We learn: Doing good and trying to make manifest the will of God does not automatically translate into a desired reaction. And certainly, faith cannot be forced upon anyone.

Miracles, grace and greed

Have we been invested with the grace of God, and how would we make the grace of God transparent? Do we, for example, have to re-enact the miracles of Jesus? All of us here are aware that we are meeting in a region where many people are longing for "their" miracle, in order to make it in life.

I am an academic theologian in the Lutheran-reformed tradition from Germany, but I have also lived a few years in Ghana, and so I have come to reckon with the - divine - possibility of miracles, for I have experienced certain events in my own life that I could not grasp anymore with the analytical terms and critical concepts I grew up with. However, after twenty years of attending and studying neo-pentecostal and charismatic healing services in Ghana and in Germany, my conclusion is: The extraordinary *claims* of a good number of preachers do not meet the *reality* on the ground. After all these years, I have not witnessed in any of these services a single event that stands the criteria of a proper miracle: the *clear* transformation of a

situation of lack which cannot be reversed by human agency, into the situation of fulfilment, brought about by a spiritual power that exceeds human ability. Instead, people were deluded in thinking that a miracle had occurred, when actually on closer inspection nothing extraordinary had happened.

The Biblical evidence

In the Bible of OT and NT, as we also saw with reference to the healing of Naaman in 2Kings 5, the general function of miracle healing stories is the acknowledgment of *God's* involvement, in the context of ancient polytheism. Properly speaking: *God* is the only miracle worker, his prophets serve as humble mediators. Significantly, the story of Naaman's healing is reinterpreted in Luke 4:27 which reads 2Kings 5 as an example of the *divine inclusion* of foreigners who were deemed unclean and unfit, into the people of God. According to this passage in Luke, God shows a special predilection for those who were excluded from Israel. In the NT, Jesus takes on God's miracle healing function. He - and nobody else - is portrayed as *bearer of miracle power*. In the four Gospels of the NT it is not debated if Jesus could perform miracles. This ability is granted even by his opponents. At issue is the provenience of his miracle working ability: Does his miracle working power derive ultimately from God or from Satan? The irony of the negative reactions towards Jesus by those witnessing his miracle performances consists in the fact that they are ultimately attributed to Satan, in spite of the clear evidence that they must be from God due to their quality as healing miracles - they are not destructive. The opponents do not recognize the grace of God at work in these miracles. They are blind to the works of God (cf. Mk 3:22-30 par; John 9). Jesus' miracle healing activity aims fundamentally at the inclusion of those excluded from their communities due to illness and spirit possession. His opponents feel threatened since they realize that Jesus disturbs their traditional ways to keep up order in their societies, i.e. by distinguishing between those inside and those who are (to be pushed) outside because of their alleged impurity.

The apostles of Jesus do not incorporate miracle power. According to Acts, they can pray, and the risen Christ might work miracles through them in particular instances. They function as petitioners and mediators of divine power. Their laying on of hands during a miracle performance signifies their function of a channel of divine power in a particular instance: Christ is at work, not the apostles. The occasional reference to the "name of Jesus" during these performances has the same function; it draws the attention to the miracle worker, i.e. the risen Christ. At the same time, the focus on the apostle is diminished. The "name of Jesus" cannot be used as a magical tool (cf. Acts 19:13-17). It should be noted that according to Acts, the reference to the risen Christ by means of the formula "in the name of Jesus Christ" implies a paradox in itself, in a double sense. This becomes clear in Peter's attempt

to answer the question of his opponents in Acts 4:7 in what power or in whose name he (and John) had healed the lame man of Acts 3. Peter refers to the “name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth whom you have crucified and whom God resurrected from the dead” (Acts 4:10); only in his name it is possible to become “saved” (4:12). The double paradox consists in God’s miraculous resurrection of the crucified one on the one hand and in the fact that the epitome of powerlessness, shame and impurity, i.e. Jesus on the cross, has become the subject of miracle power through whom the powerless and the unclean can be saved.

Disgrace in the contemporary miracle discourse

While in Acts the apostles basically vanish behind the divine miracle worker, I have witnessed in neo-pentecostal and charismatic healing services all too often that the preacher or pastor places himself – almost exclusively men – at center stage. Accordingly, he is referred to as a “powerful man of God”. Typically he would “command” an evil spirit “in the powerful name of Jesus” to leave a person, and he would end the session by saying: “I declare you healed in the name of Jesus.” Interestingly, commanding a spirit in the name of Jesus is only *once* attested in the whole NT (Acts 16:18), and the declaration of health in the name of Jesus by an apostle is not to be found in the NT at all. The apostles are portrayed as humble servants of God or Christ who might work through them (cf. Acts 14:14: “Men, what are you doing? We are also human beings going through life just like you.”). They cannot force God or Christ into a healing miracle. In some of the contemporary churches however, the significance of the pastor is blown out of proportion and many healing services objectively serve the function of elevating the pastor. It can be proven and is obvious that these pastors take home plenty of money offered to them during service, while it is doubtful – to say the least – that real healings take place. We witness in these instances an inflation of the miraculous. Certainly many of these pastors do have “charismatic” personalities but they use their abilities for their own profit. What comes to expression here is greed not grace.

I would like to give a recent example from Ghana that has been well covered by the media: About a week ago a tragedy happened in one of the mega churches in Accra. T.B. Joshua, who is counted among the richest and most famous neo-pentecostal miracle pastors in West Africa, had announced on the internet that he would bless “holy water” at his home base in Nigeria and have it distributed in all the branches of his church. Following the announcement, an estimated 45.000 people from all over Ghana rushed to the church premises on Spintex road. When the church opened its gates on that Saturday morning, four people were trampled to death with dozens left injured. People had come here not for the grace of God but for their miracle. They had hopes to improve their lives, and they met death.

The fallacy of miracle faith

Now, according to the Gospel of John, miracles are ambiguous. They might lead to belief or to disbelief, and the faith gained by witnessing a miracle might be shallow. John is sceptical of a faith that equates Gospel with miracle healing or a faith that rests on miracles (cf. John 4:48: “If you don’t see signs and miracles, you will not believe.”). Therefore, John favours a faith that does not depend on miracles, especially in times when Jesus is not to be witnessed in personal encounter as during his lifetime. Accordingly, Jesus in John 20:29 admonishes Thomas: “Because you have *seen* me, *therefore* you have come to believe in me? Blessed are those who believe, *even though* they have not seen!”

In the Gospel of John miracles are not ridiculed. They are narrated as historical facts. They cannot however – John warns his readers and listeners – serve as a solid basis for faith in Christ, and they point to a truth beyond themselves. The famous and infamous German Lutheran theologian Rudolf Bultmann – certainly the most influential New Testament scholar of the 20th century, and rightly so! – denied the historical value of New Testament miracle healing narratives completely. But after de-mythologizing them, he re-interpreted them Christologically, i.e. he tried to bring out the meaning of Gospel in these narratives. Even though Bultmann has certainly “poured away the child with the bath tub water” in ridding these narratives of their miracle dimension, his approach might still carry value for pastors in West-Africa – while Western European pastors have to learn anew to take serious the miraculous. In a training session for African neo-pentecostal pastors residing in Germany, of the program of the Missionsakademie called ATTiG (African Theological Training in Germany) one Ghanaian pastor reacted to Bultmann in an unexpected manner. He began his comments with “Well, Herr Bultmann also has something to say.” And he elaborated that he as the leader of a pentecostal church felt a heavy pressure by his congregants to perform miracles. Bultmann’s position, to him, was liberative. In fact, an overdue emphasis on miracles will cloud what Gospel is all about, namely the inclusion of the excluded ones as an expression of the undeserved grace of God.

Witnessing the One Word of God in diversity

At the time John composed his Gospel, Jesus’ miracles could no longer be experienced first hand since Jesus was longer present physically. Therefore, John put together memories of Jesus’ miracles in his Gospel. He called them *semeia* – signs, because to his understanding they make transparent the Gospel, or the Grace of God. The miracles signify that God has come close to the world in Christ, not to destroy but to save. John’s Gospel was meant as a testimony to the incarnate *logos*, that the readers and listeners of this Gospel might come to believe that “Jesus is the anointed Son of God, and that you as believers might gain everlasting life in his name” (John 20:31). His is a *written* testimony to the Word of God. In our New

Testament we find three other testimonies of the life of Jesus. All four Gospels give a quasi biographical account of the life and the meaning of Jesus as Good News. And in fact, the whole Biblical Canon is a collection of writings giving witness in one way or another, to the Good News. The Bible gives witness to the Word of God in great variance. Therefore, the Bible is called Holy Scripture. The Bible, however, strictly speaking is not the Word of God. Jesus as Christ is the one and only Word of God.

Compare at this juncture the function of the Quran. Muslims generally consider the written Quran as the ultimate revelation of God. In consequence, it is regarded as a great virtue in Islam to be able to recite the Quran in its canonized form in the Arabic language. Scholars - corresponding to the Christological concept of incarnation - have suggested a theology of *inlibration* for Islam. This could not apply to the Christian Bible. Christians are rather challenged to emulate the example of Jesus *and* to translate the meaning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ into their respective contexts and languages. This however requires an understanding of cultures and languages that transcends their use as pure vehicles of meaning. Encyclopedias are to be appreciated as *resources* to bring out the meaning of Gospel in a particular setting. The project of a *mother-tongue theology* a proposed by the late Kwame Bediako and as developed by our colleague John Ekem of Trinity Theological Seminary, is concerned with the exploration of local languages as resources to understanding and communicating Gospel.

We have the Bible today in the form of a handy book. I can hold it and carry it along. I can put it in my pocket. Some people place it below their pillow to guarantee a save sleep. To have the Bible in our hands and at our disposal might be comforting. But let us not be misled: We do not hold the Gospel in our hands. The Word of God is nothing to be possessed by us. If at all - and this we believe - *the Gospel holds us* and *the Word of God might carry us* through life, not the other way around.

Reading the Bible will give us orientation in grasping what the Gospel is all about, and reading the Bible can in fact comfort us. We cannot, however, fully and objectively comprehend the Word of God. But Jesus according to the Gospel of John, calls us into witnessing the Good News, and he enables us to do so by means of the Spirit of God.

We should be aware, however, that our knowledge is limited, and our testimonies remain fragmentary. If the Grace of God becomes transparent in our humble attempts, then we know that the Spirit of God is at work. We try to give witness, each of us at his or her location, and each of us responding to distinct needs arising out of our various contexts. The variability of worldwide Christianity is a fact, and so is the variability of the NT writings: Just remember the various presentations of Jesus as the Christ in the four Gospel narratives. Basically all NT writings use the terms *kyrios* (lord) and *christos* as attributes for Jesus. But beyond that, there is

great variability: Mark tends to portray Jesus as the most powerful miracle worker; Matthew paints a picture of Jesus as the ultimate teacher of divine justice; John focuses on Jesus the incarnate *logos* of God and can even call Jesus god (John 1:18; cf. 20:28); Luke prefers to depict Jesus as the most important prophet, the “mega prophet” (Luke 7:16). Each one of the Gospel writers had good reasons to decide for a particular presentation. Luke for example, clearly attempted to avoid a typical misunderstanding amongst his audiences with a polytheistic background, i.e. that Jesus was just another god. Therefore he preferred the depiction of Jesus as prophet, implying and in fact clearly stating that God worked many miracles through Jesus (Acts 2:22f.).

As additional evidence for the variability of concepts employed in the NT to express the meaning of Gospel, I would like to draw your attention to the following examples: John prefers the term *agape* (love) and *everlasting life* in order to communicate what Gospel is essentially all about, Paul uses *dikaiosyne theou* (justice of God) while in the Synoptic Gospels we read about the nearness of the *basileia tou theou* (Mk and Lk: Kingdom of God) or *basileia tôn ouranôn* (Mt: Kingdom of Heavens).

It was a wise decision of those behind the canonization process to include a variety of voices witnessing – and *interpreting* – (the meaning of) Christ in written form. From the fact of the NT variability I deduce the following consequences:

- What Gospel might mean in a particular situation, can only be brought to expression contextually and culturally, making use of the existing encyclopedia in its widest sense.
- What Gospel might mean needs to be negotiated, taking into consideration various points of view.
- We as believers are invited and encouraged to become *living testimonies* of the Gospel.

Universal inclusion

The New Testament evidence

The multiplicity and variability of the NT writings have not only prefigured but also effected the *necessary and desirable* variety of world-wide Christianity in church history and in contemporary times.³ In addition, the canonization of diverse – and at times contrary – testimonies as New Testament gives witness to the *unity* of the Church. As such, both the canon and the unity of world-

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Unity in diversity is already in the canon of the New Testament.

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³ Cf. the classic essay by the NT scholar Ernst Käsemann, *Begründet der neutestamentliche Kanon die Einheit der Kirche*, in: *EvTheol* 11 (1951/52), 13-21.

wide Christianity in diversity make transparent an *essential* meaning dimension of the Good News that runs through all NT writings. In Western theology, NT exegetes have uncovered this meaning dimension just within the past two generations. I am sure though, that on the grass-roots level many people all over the world have always sensed what the Gospel is essentially all about: *In Christ God pronounces and effects the inclusion of every human being as his dear child into his people for salvation.*

Now look at the miracle healing tradition of the New Testament from this perspective. It becomes clear that they signify God's election of those who had been selected by their communities as individuals to be stigmatized and excluded – the sick, the demon possessed, the sinners, the foreigners, the impure ones. They were excluded for fear of contamination, not only with sickness but more importantly with sickness and impurity causing unclean spirits.

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We, as the intercultural people of God, may serve as living letters of the Word of God.

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Of course, Ewe Christians for instance, immediately grasp the spiritual dimension of sickness, while Germans including theologians, often have no sense for this dimension which is of fundamental importance for appropriately understanding not only the Biblical miracle healing and deliverance traditions but also the significance of the Good News in Early Christianity. Among Early Christians the belief in sickness causing demons was self-evident since it was presupposed in general as conventional knowledge in antiquity.⁴ We see also in this respect,

that we need one another for a more comprehensive and appropriate understanding of the NT writings.

According to the Synoptic Gospels, *Jesus' grace is more contagious than the impurity of unclean spirits.* They are driven out upon encountering Jesus who embodies a power stronger than theirs, and health, restoration and peace are settling in. But there is more to be said. The former outcasts, the disregarded and disrespected are re-integrated in their communities and/or in the new community of believers.

It is in line with the presentation of Jesus in the Gospels, that Paul interprets the death of Christ. According to 1Cor 1, the cross signifies God's election of those who are – like Christ suffering the shameful death on the cross – low and weak and who do not count for anything in this world.

⁴ Cf. W. Kahl, Heil und Heilung in neutestamentlicher Perspektive, in: W. Kahl and Gabriele Lademann Priemer (ed.), *Lebensstörungen und Heilungen. Traditionelle Verfahren des In-Ordnung-Bringens von Christus bis Mami-Wata (SITMA 1)*, Hamburg 2013, 133-147.

This understanding has been brought out exegetically in works of the *New Perspective on Paul*,⁵ esp. in analysing the meaning and function of the syntagm *dikaio syne theou* (justice of God: the traditional rendering in our English or German Bible translations is problematic, since it tends to spiritualize the justice of God – “justification” or “Rechtfertigung”) in Paul’s writings. The justice of God in Christ, according to Paul, effects the inclusion of the impure, including especially non-Jews into the people of God.

As has been pointed out by Talmudic scholar Daniel Boyarin, the power and significance of the Gospel consists in the project of including others who had been disregarded. They are to be included *as others*.⁶ This means, a Greek did not have to become a Jew in order to be accepted by God and by other believers, but remain a Greek. As such he or she could continue to eat pork meat and he could remain uncircumcised.

This new understanding comes to expression most clearly in Gal 3:28 which I present here in *my* translation together with the immediate context (3:25-29):

25 Since faith has come, *we* are not under the pedagogue (i.e. the Torah) any longer. 26 For *you all* are sons (and daughters) of God through faith, in Christ Jesus. 27 For as such ones you have been baptized into Christ, you have put on Christ 28 *regardless* if as Jew or Greek, as slave or free person, as male or female. For *you all* are *one* in Christ Jesus. 29 But if you belong to Christ, then you are in consequence heirs as seed of Abraham according to the promise.

Being included into God’s people – this is what Gospel is essentially all about. This inclusion has diachronic and synchronic dimensions. West-African traditional concepts of belonging to an extended family and ethnic group can serve as resource for understanding what is involved here. John Pobee and others have pointed out that the West-African understanding of ones own existence is one of communal belonging. In order to capture the difference to the ego-centered self-understanding which is wide-spread in the Western World, Pobee rephrases Decartes’ famous dictum in the following way: I am because I belong, because I am related to a huge family, both in lineage reaching back into history including the ancestors, and in contemporary respects. A similar concept is also presupposed by Paul, but he widens it universally and trans-culturally: Through and in Christ, non-Jewish Greeks have become heirs of Abraham, and together with Jews they have become one people. Paul describes here the new reality of a universal family brought about by Christ. It is the epitome of God’s undeserved mercy, grace and justice. It can be actualized only by the systematic transgression of boundaries set up by social conventions. Paul endeavoured to lay the foundation of trans-cultural

⁵ Cf. K. Stendahl, *The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West*, in: HThR 56 (1963), 199–215; Ch. Gerber, *Blicke auf Paulus. Die New Perspective on Paul in der jüngeren Diskussion*, in: *Verkündigung und Forschung* 55/1 (2010), 45–60.

⁶ D. Boyarin, *A Radical Jew. Paul and the Politics of Identity*, Berkeley 1994, 228-236.

communities in Minor Asia and in Greece, and he was met with stiff resistance – not only by his fellow Jews and by local new-Jewish residents of Minor Asian and Greek towns and cities, but also by Jewish believers in Christ. According to the narrative of Acts, Paul was blamed before city councils and Roman state representatives as one who introduced communal disorder by blurring lines of separation. Even in the newly formed faith communities, misunderstandings abounded. It is actually due to these conflicts amongst the Early Christians, that the letters of Paul were written as attempts to save the project of trans-cultural faith communities.

In mission history, spreading the Gospel all over the world all too often implied an attempt at transforming others in the image of the missionaries. Today we know for example that the love for organ music or a suit and tie are not necessary signs of a good Christian. Or to give another contemporary example: I *can* put on a Batakari and I *can* eat Fufu but I *do not have to* become a Ghanaian or Togolese in order to give witness to the grace of God. I am accepted by God as the one whom I have become in and through the traditions and cultures in which I grew up. In Early Christianity one prominent trans-cultural faith-community was established in Antioch (Acts 11:19-26; 13:1-3). The project was rejected by the Christ believing Jews in Jerusalem (Gal 2:11-21). They did not share Paul's interpretation of Christ according to which God integrated all of humanity into one universal family in diversity. This divinely sanctioned integration is seen as an expression of God's grace. Paul emphatically insists: "I do not set aside the *grace of God*, for if justice could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!" (Gal 2:21).

Inclusion in the churches today

By the grace of God, we have come together as Christians from West-Africa and from Western Europe, and we have grown together as Bremen church family. The Gospel of the Grace of God challenges us to appreciate one another in our distinctness.

As Daniel Boyarin has pointed out from a Jewish perspective, Christian claims at *universalism* can be dangerous when they translate into attempts by the powerful (missionaries) to eradicate the difference of others. Likewise, Boyarin shows that Jewish *particularism* might lead to the exclusion of others. He opts for balancing Christian universalism and Jewish particularism, in avoiding the danger of ethno-centrism and cultural chauvinism.⁷

We are one church. We all believe in Christ in our various ways and we pray to the one and only God. We do so as diverse people deeply rooted in distinct traditions, cultural conventions, languages and socio-economic contexts that shape our

⁷ Boyarin, *Radical Jew*, 232.

perception of Gospel in particular situations. This is a fact that already applied to the writers of the NT faith documents. It needs to be acknowledged and appreciated. At the same time, we can *learn from one another* about new ways of conceiving Gospel and new possibilities of manifesting Gospel.

I would like to give one example, and that pertains to Christian-Muslim relationships: At the recent *Kirchentag* in Hamburg - a huge biannual gathering of Protestant Christians - I experienced for the first time a joint Christian-Muslim service. It took place in the church of St. Georg close to the main train station in the center of town. The church was packed with Christian and Muslim visitors, and two Lutheran pastors and three Muslim imams led through the service. I could sense that the visitors were deeply moved by the experience. The service was a landmark in our society where Christians (about 60% of the population) and Muslims (less than 5%) have not learned to grow together yet. Even granting the permission for the building of mosques has often been met by opposition from city councils and from sections of the general public (esp. by people who do not belong to any religion, about 30% of the population) - in Germany of the 21st century, in a society whose constitution holds religious freedom in high esteem. Where mosques could be erected, Muslims generally refrained from insisting on having the imam call out publically for the prayer. They anticipate more public outcry which they want to avoid.

Now when I came to Ghana first in the middle of the nineties, I was surprised to see many mosques and to hear the public call to prayer. And later, when teaching at Legon University, I was impressed by my Christian and Muslim colleagues: At the departmental meetings in the Department for the Study of Religion, we would open and close the sessions with a word of prayer which was lead alternating by a Muslim and a Christian.

I also learned that in some sub-regions of West Africa it is quite common and acceptable for family members to belong to different religions. In Sierra-Leone for instance, some even call themselves *ChrisMus*, because growing up, children would easily join the services of their friends and family members who belong to a different religion. That God is one and the same seems evident, even though some might address God as Allah, Onyankopon or Mawu. A case in point is our experience when we visited as part of our conference a mosque. We were meeting in a school room. On the blackboard we could see the remnants of the Arabic instruction. And there we could read: "Allahu akhbar - Le Dieu est grand"!

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We do not possess the Gospel but rather the Gospel possesses us.

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Now you might wonder: How strange that in Germany there seems to be hostility or at least a distance between Muslims and Christians. In order to understand, one would have to study history and one would, for example, realize that before the 1960s

there were hardly any Muslims in Germany. Now we have about 4 Million Muslims reside in Germany, many of who are or have become German citizens. The Muslim presence in Germany is a rather recent phenomenon. In West Africa however, Muslims were present in many regions long before the missionary endeavours of the 19th century. And, while Islam in Germany is still considered by many as a religion of foreigners, in West Africa it appears like a religion long established in the population.

We see, the history and contexts of Christian-Muslim relations are very different in our two sub-regions. It is therefore only with caution and with a critical mind that we should turn to the experiences in other sub-regions in order to solve or tackle problems in our respective contexts. We should also be aware of the trap of romanticizing the other. This is most often an expression of our ignorance of the realities on the ground.

This also applies to the organization of church-life. Yesterday evening we, the German delegation, felt overwhelmed by the welcoming service here in Kpalimé - a church filled with friendly, lively and pious people. Can we in Germany not learn from the Togolese, and also from Ghanaian modes of worship? My answer is: We cannot import uncritically elements from one culture into our own tradition. But: We can be inspired by the experiences and by the insights of our sister churches, and look for answers that make sense in our respective own contexts. In our inter-cultural exchange we can also learn to acknowledge and appreciate the distinctiveness of our respective traditions and cultures, while at the same time appreciating the necessarily different traditions and cultures of our brothers and sisters abroad, trusting that they will find appropriate answers to their own problems.

Conclusion

The Gospel encourages us to cross boundaries - not in order to possess but to appreciate others as brothers and sisters. At the same time we have been prepared to create new communities with those with whom we have been bound together through Christ into one family. In so doing, we are followers of Christ and we stand in one line with the Early Christian experience. Growing-together as inter-cultural churches globally and as trans-cultural

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Our ministry is to emulate the Gospel into our present context.

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communities locally, we give witness to the essential meaning of Gospel – the Good News of divine acceptance of difference and of inclusion. This has repercussions for the wider populace and for society.⁸

The most important mode of witnessing Christ whom we consider as the ultimate revelation of God's love, is the Gospel being drawn into life. We are called and empowered to do so by transgressing boundaries and by creating new inclusive communities. Jesus calls us into the search for manifestations of the justice of God, according to Mt 6:33. And in John 17 we are told: When the world sees us as Christians with our various cultures and at times different opinions standing nevertheless united as the church and when the grace of God shines forth, the world might come to believe.

⁸ Cf. Markus Barth, *Jews and Gentiles: The Social character of Justification in Paul*, in: *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 5 (1968), 241–267.

Theses

1. The incarnate Word of God is only to be had in culture. There is no kernel of Gospel to be abstracted. This holds true already for Early Christianity and it is witnessed to by the variance of expressions used to communicate the meaning of the Word of God or Gospel in the writings of the NT, all of which have been composed in Koine-Greek, the *lingua franca* of Mediterranean antiquity.

2. The pluriformity of the NT canon is a consequence of the incarnation of the Word of God which needs to be drawn into life in concrete contextualized forms, by believers as "living letters", giving witness to the Word of God.

3. The NT pluriformity of written witnesses to the Word of God allows for, and it encourages to contemporary contextualizations. The Gospel is both *interpretationsbedürftig* (in need of interpretation, translation, and contextualization) and *interpretationsfähig* (able to be interpreted, translated, and contextualized). The Gospel needs living believers, to be drawn into life in order to become meaningful and relevant in particular contexts.

4. The canon limits the range of valid interpretations: There is more than one valid interpretation of Scripture, and invalid interpretations can be discerned.

5. The Bible is not the Word of God in an immediate sense. Jesus Christ as the Word of God is the ultimate revelation of God.

6. Cultures, contexts, and situations shape our perception of the Word of God. They are both resources and limitations to our understanding of Gospel.

7. We need one another as Christians from different regions of the world:

7.1. to become aware and to experience the beauty of the world-wide family of God;

7.2. to become aware of our limitations and resources.

The partners may serve as mirrors that allow us to recognize our predilections and prejudices, our strengths and weaknesses in understanding and applying Gospel;

they may also serve as windows that might open up new ways of reading and constructing both Gospel and the world. This acknowledges the trans-cultural dimension of human existence in general and of the community of believers in particular.

8. Even though there is no kernel of the Gospel to be subtracted, the NT writings share a common witness to essential parameters of Gospel.

8.1. Transgression of boundaries that separate people (Mt 28:18-20; Eph 2);

8.2. Acceptance of others *as* others in Christ (Gal 3:28);

8.3. Inclusion of the disregarded in society into the community of believers (Mt 5:3ff; 1Cor 1) as the appropriate response to God's justice (*dikaiosyne theou*) forming new inter-cultural and, locally, trans-cultural communities of believers.

8.4. All proclamation of Gospel aims at making the Grace of God transparent. This is also the main function of the NT miracle narratives.

9. Whenever the Grace of God becomes transparent in our humble attempts to communicate the Word of God and when people are being attracted to the Gospel, a *kairos* is established and all praise goes to God.

The charming God Attraction and Stumbling Blocks of our mutual Mission

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Introduction

I would like to begin this presentation by referring to the Israelite slave girl servant of Naaman's house hold in II Kings 5. In verse 3 of the story the girl declared, 'A! If only my master would go to the prophet is Samaria, he would cure him of his skin disease'. This declaration, for me is a testimony to what this girl believes and she is, by this gesture, putting her belief and faith on the table for consideration. I am sure she would, by extension also agree to be challenged, thereby demonstrating her willingness to be flexible. In effect, she was saying, like us today, 'This is what I believe but I am flexible.'

Speaking from the perspective of our common mission in Africa, I suggest that the God of the Bible and of Jesus, in whom we believe, is the creator of the heavens and the earth, who crowned his creation with human beings. His love made him send Jesus his Son to redeem the sinful world from sin, which had sunk deep into sin. His offer of grace, which now saves those he chose and gave to Jesus, is never apart from the task of mission to the unsaved world. In carrying our God's mission, we have constituted ourselves into various institutions and though we are each convinced our faith is based on a solid understanding of Scripture, there are those who do not find us attractive enough to join us. Others completely condemn us, as we struggle to serve God in our individual contexts of Europe and Africa. In Africa, among other things, people have challenged certain aspects of our doctrine, such as salvation, end of the world and gifts and operations of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers. In spite of the setbacks, we wish to affirm the attractiveness of our faith, while at the same time being humble and flexible enough to listen to others.

Mission of God: our mission mandate

Christian mission, simply put is God at work in the world. Since God calls us into this task, our mission as Church is to extend the mission of God to the world. However, we have no mandate to do mission the way we please because God's mission has to be done God's way. Subsequently, we are reminded that we are called to save the world and to do this means to carry out the mission of Jesus the Christ. Jesus, our Lord inaugurated the mission and transferred it to the apostles who also handed it to us, others believers.¹ One can argue further that since, we as members of the Body of Christ have also accepted the challenge to walk in the footsteps of Jesus, we ought to continue the mission (Matt. 28:18-20) at whatever cost, because Jesus was prepared to pay for the mission with his very life.

What do we believe?

As we reflect on mission we are drawn to the history of the Church and we cannot fail to call to remembrance our own struggles in it. Without doubt, the One, Holy,

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Faith is a power which expresses itself in many ways, grounded and controlled by the Bible.

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Catholic and Apostolic Church that Jesus established through his apostles, has experienced major schisms such as the rise of Orthodoxy and Protestantism and today Protestantism is the most schismatic of all these three strands. We, as part of this Protestant family, trace our history back to the Great Reformation of the 16th Century. Incidentally, Protestantism has continued to be divided in dramatic ways, with the most recent of all, perhaps, being the rise of Pentecostalism and its offshoots.

If we trace our tradition back to John Calvin and we agree to belong to the Reformed family, then we ought to accept our baggage. In this baggage, is our doctrine of salvation summed up in the Five Points of Calvinism: Total Depravity, Unconditional Election, Limited Atonement, Irresistible Grace and Perseverance of the Saints (TULIP for short). But what do we mean by all these and how attractive are these to the 21st century German, Togolese or Ghanaian Christian? As people amenable to creeds, we affirm as follows:

Human beings have been polluted by sin and they are entirely under the curse for sin. Thus no one can please God by his or her own efforts (Jer. 17:9-10, Rom. 3:10-18). This is why everyone must be born again (Total depravity).

¹ Gene Taylor, *A Study of Personal Evangelism: Learning to be fishers of Men* (2005), 2-3.

God chose people to be saved through his eternal decree before the foundation of the world and so salvation is from him alone (Eph. 1:4-6). This is unconditional election

The merit of Jesus' death was not indiscriminate for all humankind, but only for His people, who are known to God from eternity. So while his death was sufficient for all humankind, it was efficient only for His people (Matthew 1:21; 20:28; John 10:15, 26; 17:9). This is our view of limited atonement.

Those God has given to Christ as His people and for who Christ died, will be saved through faith, because God accomplished their salvation (John 6:37, 44). By this we speak of irresistible grace.

Those for who Jesus died and who have been called to saving faith in him, in any event cannot be lost again. Once they truly accept God's salvation and are preserved in faith and they will persevere to the end (John 10:27-29; Heb. 10:35-39). This is a reference to perseverance of the saints.

We recall that the Reformation of the 16th century was led by people such as Martin Luther, John Calvin, and John Knox. Reformed Christianity is one of the strands of Protestantism, an evangelical Christianity that emerged from this Reformation. In our profession, we affirm that, we are saved from death and given the free gift of eternal life, only through faith in the Christ Event. This means that for us, salvation cannot be received from any other way but through faith in Christ alone. Human effort, aimed at earning salvation, is therefore futile.

As Reformed churches we are Calvinistic in doctrine and we emphasise the majesty and sovereignty of God.

In any event, this does not mean that we leave preaching and conversion to chance. Indeed, we are deeply conscious of these and some of the best known preachers, who demonstrated genuine hunger for lost souls, were and are Reformed Christians. Calvin himself, George Whitefield, Jonathan Edwards, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, and J. Gresham Machen all longed for the salvation of the lost. More recently, Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, Francis Schaeffer, D. James Kennedy, R.C. Sproul, J.I Packer, John Piper, and John MacArthur have continued the passionate historic preaching and fervent missionary tradition of Reformed faith.²

In any case, we have all not thought or behaved the same way throughout our history as Reformed people, because there those who have preferred to become liberal, as a response to the various circumstances that have confronted them as

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Meeting of different cultures and different cosmologies: linear and circular can complete one another.

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² These names from the tradition of Reformed theology were taken from a paper prepared by Rich Ganz of the Ottawa Reformed Presbyterian Church in 1988 and 2009.

they do mission in their contexts. Some of these liberal churches tend to reject the infallibility and absolute authority of the Bible. Yet, historically, we know that when the doctrine, life and true nature of a Reformed church are lost, it becomes, perhaps 'deformed' and spiritually dead. At the same time, we learn from Scripture that, with the enablement of the Holy Spirit biblical faith of the church can be, and is often discovered and applied, if it is self-examined and open to more listening to the Holy Spirit, provided it is able to return to the conviction that the Bible is true, and it is the sole authority and rule for faith and life. This is what we believe and this is what I believe, yet I am flexible and open to objection to my way of reading the Bible, since I know that the Holy Spirit uses other people too.

In many parts of the world, arguably, the most formidable opposition to Reformed faith is contention over the biblical doctrine of salvation. Reformed faith acknowledges and affirms God as the author and consummator of salvation. (Phil. 1:6). In this regard, salvation does not depend on human decision but it is the work of Christ from start to finish, as has already been outlined. 'We believe that we are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. We believe that we are justified by faith alone in Christ (Romans 5:1). We testify that even our faith is "God's gift, not of ourselves lest we would boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9).³ In this, we rejoice in a gracious and sovereign God, who "...bestows mercy on whom he bestows mercy, and withholds it from those from whom he will withhold it" (Rom. 9:18). John 15:16 makes this clear by recognising that we did not choose Jesus, but he chose us that we may go out for mission and produce fruit. In this regard, God's mission through Jesus through the Church ought to be a mission of fruit-bearing and this is why, speaking about judging pretenders in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus said "Watch out for false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are voracious wolves. You will recognize them by their fruit. Grapes are not gathered from thorns or figs from thistles, are they? In the same way, every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree is not able to bear bad fruit, nor a bad tree to bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire." (Matt. 7:15-19). In pursuance of this call to a mission of fruit bearing, we affirm that, every believer is called to full-time Christian service and witnessing in their respective vocations, just as we observe Naaman's Israelite slave girl do even in captivity. I believe that, in our freedom, contrary to the experience of this girl, we are called to influence arts, politics, business, medicine, education and science and of course religion in our own time and place. In essence, in every honest work found

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Faith as a force of change, of liberation and of new community with values that differ from the values of the world all around.

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³ Rich Ganz, Ottawa Reformed Presbyterian Church, 1988 and 2009.

in the world, we are called to bear fruits of God's mission activity. In essence, this explains why for John, we are in the world, but we are not of the world (John 17:14-16). By being engaged with the world, we are obeying God's command to manage creation as mandated in the book of Genesis.

A major part of our understanding of salvation is the doctrine of predestination, which has never stopped generating mixed feelings and reactions among Christians the world over.

The doctrine of Predestination

That 'Predestination' is taught in Scripture, in our view is not in contention. What is contentious is what Scripture means by 'Predestination'. God's decision to choose some people for salvation even before the world began is known as 'Election' and it is the basis for 'Predestination'. Election may be said to be the starting point of God's saving activity in the yet-to-be expressed life of the individual.⁴ It is legitimate to argue based on biblical evidence that election is simply due to God's sovereign good pleasure. In Acts 13:48, we learn that, as many as were ordained to eternal life believed the preaching of the apostles. In Rom 8:28-30 we read that, those God foreknew, he predestined to be conformed to his Son's image. Those he predestined he called. Those he called, he justified and those he justified, he glorified. Alluding to the Jacob-Esau story of the Pentateuch, Rom 9:11-13 also suggests that, in order that God's purpose of election might continue 'the elder will serve the younger...' Jacob I loved but Esau I hated'. About Israel, Paul said the elect obtained what they sought but the rest were hardened (Rom 11:7; see also Eph. 1:4-6; Eph. 1:12; 1 Thess. 1:4-5).

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We love to proof our mission theologically and critically in terms of pneumatology, eschatology, cosmology and prophecy.

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Speaking about his own missionary activities, Paul claims that, the reason he knew that God had chosen the Thessalonians was that, when he preached to them they believed. In his view, God chose them from the beginning to be saved through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth (2 Thess. 2:13). According to 1 Thess. 5:21, there are also elect angels and in the first epistle of Peter, the author wrote to 'God's elect' (1 Petr 1:1) and later spoke of a chosen generation (1 Petr 1:9). So while there is sufficient evidence to support election, it has to be said that, election is not on merit of the one chosen (2 Tim 1:9; cf. Rev 13:7-8, Rev 17:8).

⁴ Wayne Grundem, *Systematic Theology. An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Nottingham: IVP, 1994), 669.

According to Grundem, predestination ⁵ comforts believers (Rom 8:28-30), encourages the saints to evangelise the world (2 Tim 2:10) and gives reason to praise God (Eph. 1:5-6; 1:12; 1 Thess 2:4; 2 Thess. 2:13). For Paul, election is assurance that some people will come to saving faith throughout his preaching.⁶ Understood this way, the doctrine of election does increase praise given to God for our salvation and seriously diminishes any pride that, we might feel if we thought that our salvation was due to something good in us or something for which we should receive credit.⁷ This lesson is clear in the Naaman healing story, where Naaman literally attempted to ‘purchase’ a miracle of healing from a foreign God whose prophet had been kind to him. After acknowledging that the healing of his skin disease had come from God through Elisha, Naaman strongly urged the prophet to accept a gift offer which Elisha declined (2 Kings 5:15).

The Doctrine of Reprobation

If God decides to choose and save some then he equally decides not to save others, but why not? This is God’s sovereign will and decision not to save some people. It is a decision of God from eternity, even if it is often dreadful. Jude refers to some persons who long ago were designated for condemnation (Jude 4; cf. Rom 9:17-22, Rom 11:7, 1 Pet 2:8) and Jesus thanked God for hiding the knowledge of salvation from some and revealing it to others (Matt 11:25-26). Jesus also alluded to the Naaman story as a response to his rejection in his hometown, to explain how God accepts people regardless of their origin, geographical location, creed or faith. The lesson for us in all of this is that, we must be careful in our attitude towards God, when we fail to understand aspects of his word. The Bible or God’s activity does not always have to ‘make sense’ to us to be complied with because, as Paul observed long ago, the ‘foolishness’ of God is wiser than human wisdom. In I Corinthians 1:18-25, in response to destructive divisions in the church of Corinth that dethrone Christ and resorted to hero worshipping, he writes, ‘For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For, it is written, “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and thwart the cleverness of the intelligent.” Where is the wise person? Where is the expert in the law? Where is the debater of this age? Has God not made the wisdom of the world foolish? For, since in the wisdom of God the world by its wisdom did not know God, God was pleased to save those who believe by the foolishness of preaching. For Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks ask for wisdom, but we preach the crucified Christ, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles. But to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ is the power of God and

⁵ For further details on Wayne Grundem’s discussion of predestination, see his *Systematic Theology*, 673-674.

⁶ Grundem, 674.

⁷ Grundem, 674.

the wisdom of God. For, the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.

Objections to the Doctrine of Election

We acknowledge, however that, against proof there are many, who reject election and for that matter predestination. Opponents of Predestination argue that to affirm this doctrine means that as human beings we have no choice. If we have choices then they are not real and so we are robots or puppets, not real persons. Election, in their opinion is simply unfair, because the Bible teaches that, God will save everyone. Our usual response to these objections has been that, it would be totally fair if God chose not to save anyone at all, just as he did with the sinful angels (cf. 1 Pet 2:4) and that, Scripture does not always give us enough data to probe into certain mysteries and often it is not edifying to delve into some.⁸ While these arguments might sound reasonable, they are not altogether convincing, especially to those ordinary people caught in the crossfire of daily suffering in Africa and other parts of the world. Why should they take blame for their condemnation, for instance, if God took the initiative to save some people and not save others (John 3:18-19; 5:40)? So for them, it may be expedient to suggest that, God is the cause of election but sinners cause reprobation. In their view, therefore, this is mere expediency!

Nevertheless, we ought to remember that, Paul felt exceedingly sorrowful for his people who rejected Christ (Rom 9:1-4). If we came to the position, where we can understand God's or Paul's anguish over the condemnation of a sinner, then we would have deep concern for lost souls, rather than deny that, some are on the verge of damnation. If this fails to happen to us, then we should begin to question our own state of regeneration. For one cannot fail to feel anguish for perishing souls, if one claims to be a genuine Christian and is willing to do mission.

In any event, we do not suggest that, there is no difficulty in all of this, for why, for example, should our mission, though ordered, supported and empowered by God fail to result in the salvation of some? Is this why others reject this doctrine of salvation? Is it not biblical? Why is it not attractive to them? To attempt a response to these pertinent questions, let us first address a subtheme of our discussion by turning to the question, 'What makes a religion attractive?'

What makes a religion attractive?

While we admit that, religion is a concept that defies a simple definition, at least it is possible to identify and agree on some of the key things that people look for in a

⁸ Grundem, 679.

religion, especially in Africa but also in Europe and other parts of the world. All over the world, people struggle with the human predicament in attempting to find a solution to the problem of sin and its devastating consequences. Clearly, one of the ways in which people have done this, with varying degrees of success (we believe), is to turn to a certain transcendent power beyond themselves for assistance. How they do this is what we might refer to as 'religion'. If this is accepted, then we may consider religion to be an attempt by human beings, to answer the human quest and then salvation becomes the pursuit of wholeness located in this quest.

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The good order of God's creation elicits a grateful response.

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In this regard, religion may be said to be a problem solving activity of weak human mortals in collaboration with the all-powerful immortal divine, known in some religions as Ultimate Reality but in our case the God of Jesus. For instance, in many parts of Africa, people believe that, the spiritual universe is occupied by many and various benevolent and malevolent spirits. To ensure one's safety and security would require the location of oneself within the protection of benevolent spirits, whose origin and power is traceable to the Supreme Being. Since the malevolent spirits such as those of magic and sorcery are jealous of successful people, they would do everything within their power to prevent people from living in harmony and total equilibrium with nature and community. Thus, people turn to religion to outwit those forces of negation. Therefore, any religion that is unable to provide answers to the questions being asked is considered impotent and is in effect it is abandoned. Conversely, if a religion is proven potent in its ability to provide the desired answers then it is to be upheld and held in high esteem. This is why for instance, a Moslem educationist would readily lobby not only to head a Christian mission school, but also take steps to get as many Moslem students as possible, to study in this institution, regardless of whatever influence they might experience from the Christian denomination that founded the school. For instance, at the EPC College of Education at Bimbila in the Northern region of Ghana, the Chaplain recently appealed for 400 Bibles for the school, because something unprecedented had happened and Moslem students in the College, all of a sudden become favourably disposed to the Christian worship services the EP Chaplain organises. It is reported that some of these Moslem students were willing to read the Bible text during worship. While some may consider this as potential for compromising one's faith, others like me, believe that, the Holy Spirit could convict many of these Moslem students to prepare their hearts for eventual conversion, which is why I worked very hard to contribute 176 of the Bibles to the project. Did our faith attract the Moslems students or not?

How attractive is our faith?

Since we have given a brief background to what people look for in a religion, let us return to the question of the attractions (or non-attractions) of our faith. Speaking from the context of African Presbyterians, we raise the question again, what does it mean to be 'Calvinist' in the 21st century? Claiming our space as people of TULIP, we are reminded, at this point also of opposition to our doctrines of the end times (Eschatology) and of the Holy Spirit (Pneumatology of Cessation), which are other sources of strong contention to our tradition that this paper will examine briefly.

The doctrine of the end times: Eschatology

One of the struggles for many African Christians in relation of what we believe as Reformed people is connected with the doctrine of the end time. Many Africans, who knew their traditions well before becoming Christians, see a contradiction, when we weigh the African concept of history with Christian theology of history.⁹ It is conventional knowledge among those Africans who knows the traditional religion that hardly makes the Christian faith attractive to African believers who take the Bible seriously.

Most Africans, probably hold a cyclical view of time and history. Such cosmology does not understand time and history as God's purpose moving in a continuum, towards a certain divine climax. Is this view compatible with Bible teaching? According to Christian worldview, History is a working out of God's purpose. In this regard, Redemption has a historical dimension and God's self-revelation is evident in the historical events recorded in the Bible. This is because God is the Lord of history (cf Ps 103:19; Acts 17:26) and history follows a divinely directed goal and yet though God is in control of history, this does not take responsibility away from human beings (cf. Gen 50:20; Acts 4:27-28). If this holds, then everything that happens serves God's purpose, whether it involves nations or individuals (Isa 10:5; 10:12.24-27). In this regard, history has meaning and direction shaped by God's will and purpose. It also means that, Christ is the centre of History. In view of this, Oscar Cullmann has observed that, the Christ Event is the temporal mid-point of the entire historical process and the Parousia is its culmination. As divine plan, thus, history is headed towards the new heavens and the new earth. Associated with this final period, are future events such as the Second Coming of Christ, the general resurrection and the Day of Judgment. Therefore, we believe that, the goal of redemption is nothing short of the renewal of the cosmos because the Fall affected

⁹ We are aware that it is quite controversial to speak of 'the African concept of history' or 'the Christian theology of history'. It is true that disagreements abound when we attempt to define both 'Africa' and 'Christianity' but we use these terms in a general sense for want of a better approach. 'Africa' in this context, would thus be taken to be all those who believe in the general principles of African Traditional Religion. 'Christian' is taken to be biblical religion which also assumes that there is one correct way of interpreting the Bible.

the entire cosmos. We are aware that some theologians, who believe in the total annihilation of the present order of heaven and earth would disagree with this.

The dilemma for the African, who has become a Christian, is that, there is no 'end of the world' or 'new heaven and new earth' or heaven or hell fire in African cosmology. In African cosmology, life leads to death and death leads to life in a cyclical fashion. How should the African conceptualise this? What is there in the biblical end time teaching to attract the African to the belief? As African Christians desirous of being faithful to the Bible what should we do? Should we 'clear the entire forest' and 'plant new trees', to borrow Mojola's concept?¹⁰ Should we do grafting? Since theology is done in context and since we are often reminded of the strong positive correlation between the Gospel and the receptor culture in any successful incarnation of the Christian faith, it seems clear that 'clearing the forest' is out of the question. Thus, in this apparent clash of cosmologies we are left with the difficult task of merging the two without offending the sensibilities of either of them. How do we do this in order to remain attractive to the 'outsider' to the faith? This takes us to the task of formulating Christian Eschatology from African perspective.

Towards an African Christian Eschatology

It seems to me that, the way forward in this task is to get the two cosmologies-biblical and African-two appreciate their mutual diversities, first of all, before attempting a merger. From that point, we could consider mutual edifications, in which case the task would be to focus on similarities to enhance dialogue. Once we can establish from sound Biblical exegesis that kingdom of heaven or kingdom of God is not some abstract geographical location to which believers would be transported someday, to inhabit forever, we have taken the first step towards affirming these two cosmologies in a mutually enhancing way. Using this as a basis, the African can be convinced that God is not planning to 'destroy the earth at the Second Coming of Christ' as if it is not possible to renew the present one by purging it of sin and evil and God himself deciding to tabernacle his presence among human beings in this new kingdom of heaven and earth.

Traditional Reformed Pneumatology

The other issue we mentioned was a certain aspect of Reformed Pneumatology. To argue that Presbyterians are 'people of the spirit' is nothing new. However, it must be noted that Reformed theology in general and Ghanaian Presbyterian theology in

¹⁰ Aloo Osotsi Mojola is a Kenyan Anglican Professor Pastor, former head of the African Region of the United Bible Societies with 30 years' experience in Bible translation. He used the expression in connection with the choice of suitable terms in receptor languages for Bible translation in Ghana in 10th May 2013.

particular has suffered enormous assault from all kinds of quarters. The Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Ghana for instance, has suffered five major schisms in less than 5 decades.¹¹ Each one of these schisms had something to do with the EPC's doctrine of the Holy Spirit among other issues, even if remotely. At least we know that, one instance was precipitated by controversy over a grant that a prominent lay leader failed to properly account for in the 1940s and in another case there was strong contention over a constitutional provision on leadership.

To put the theological 'assault' mentioned earlier in perspective, we refer to a famous Ghanaian Pentecostal/Charismatic leader, who described Trinity Theological Seminary¹², Legon in Accra, as 'a cemetery' and claimed that its beneficiary churches were 'suffering from power failure'. Notice the use of the word 'power'. This is not accidental. Power, especially spiritual power is crucial in African religion. It has to be said that in Ewe, the dominant language used in theologising in the EPC, there is no separation as such between 'power' and 'authority'. Both are rendered 'power' and the difference is seen only in the function of the term. Most Ghanaians go to church to be 'empowered' to confront the world and to be able to fight and become victorious over evil powers. Do the perpetrators of the theological assault not assume that Ghanaian mainline Protestant churches 'lack power to confront evil spirits' because 'there is no Holy Spirit' in their churches? Could they not be exploiting a misunderstanding of a traditional Reformed teaching that some gifts have been withdrawn from the church to advance this criticism?

The question of withdrawal of some gifts

According to typical Reformed/Presbyterian/Dispensational (RPD) theologians (RPDs), some gifts of the Holy Spirit were designed start (Eph 2:20) the Church, to build it up and establish it (1 Cor 14:40). These "sign" gifts were designed to evangelise the unbeliever and stabilise the new believer (1 Cor 14:20-22) until Scripture. Thus, they were temporal and not needed after they accomplished their necessary functions in the early church and so they subsequently disappeared (1 Cor 13:8-10), either when Scripture was completed and canonised, or when Gentiles were included in the Church or with the death of the last of the Twelve Apostles. Accordingly, the withdrawn gifts are listed as prophecy, languages (tongues) and

¹¹ Apostles Revelation Society, the Lord's Pentecostal Church, International, White Cross Mission/Society/Church, Christ Evangelical Mission and Global Evangelical Church, Ghana all came out of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Ghana between 1945 and 1991.

¹² Trinity Theological Seminary, Legon-Accra is an ecumenical Seminary founded by the Presbyterian Church of Ghana, Methodist Church Ghana and the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Ghana in 1942. This joined effort later admitted the Accra Diocese of the Anglican Church of Ghana and the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, Ghana. These churches train their ministers in this Seminary. It must be noted that many other churches, including Pentecostals and Charismatics (neo-Pentecostals) send their pastors and sometimes ministerial candidates to train in Trinity Seminary.

word of knowledge, faith, healing and miracles, and the interpretation of languages/tongues, and the office of apostle (1 Cor 13:8-10). Regarding prophecy in particular the RPDs argue that, at the canonisation of Scripture, prophecy was closed for the Church Age (Rev 22:18-19). In this thinking, Rev 21:14 indicates that there were only twelve apostles, so while it is clear that other people held office that was called 'apostle', it did not mean that they possessed the gift (Gal 1:19) or that their function is reminiscent of those of the twelve who walked with Jesus.

It seems clear from the history of Christianity that Montanism may have been indirectly responsible for the doctrine of the cessation of gifts, even though the idea of the withdrawal of some gifts is based directly on I Cor.13: 8-10. Montanus, the founder of Montanism claimed to be a prophet and he had two female followers also considered to be prophets. Together they laid claim to new revelations from the Holy Spirit, which they equated with Scripture to warrant new doctrines for the Church. Can 21st century Pentecostalism be compared with Montanism or not? Pentecostal and Charismatic theologians disagree with the RPDs over the state of spiritual gifts in the Church today. They seek to re-enact first century pneumatology in an experiential sense. It is important to observe that this emphasis on the experience of the spiritual is popular in Africa especially, because of the nature of the African world. In most cases, the quasi-scientific worldview of Evangelical theology of the global North is completely irrelevant to the non-elite African theologian or Christian.

Continuing the cessation debate, we observe that the main contention is over the interpretation of I Cor. 13: 8-13, a passage which reads, 'Love never ends. But if there are prophecies, they will be set aside; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be set aside. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part, but when what is perfect comes, the partial will be set aside'. Does 'perfect' in this passage refer to the canonisation of Scripture? Does it refer to the inclusion of Gentiles in the church? Does it refer to the death of the last of the twelve apostles or to the Second Coming of Jesus, the Christ? Is the passage suggesting that, spiritual gifts will cease when Jesus returns? This is clearly debatable.

To pick up the objection, the argument is that the conclusion of RPDs is unwarranted on the basis of this passage alone and also that the time for the coming of the 'perfect' is not specified. To provoke further debate, we ask, 'can we even say that, the canon closed'? Probably not! The New Testament canon may have been definitely closed, seeing that, there is hardly any serious dispute over it today. The same cannot be said of the Old Testament. Roman Catholicism and Eastern orthodoxy, arguably two of the largest Christian communions accept and affirm the Apocrypha as 'scripture' and worthy as a rule of faith. We further ask, 'Is the church mature'? And what is prophecy? Is 21st century prophecy equal to scripture? Is it different from revelation'? Grudem argues that, if revelation today is not equal to

scripture then prophecy continues and if prophecy continues then the other gifts have not been withdrawn.¹³ In his opinion, the spiritual gifts are still useful now and will continue to be, until Christ returns but love would continue even after the Christ returns (cf. 1 Cor 1:7). In this thinking, therefore the gifts are “a temporary provision made to equip believers for ministry until the Lord returns.”¹⁴ Indeed, what people call ‘prophecy’ today, has less authority than scripture and so should be seen as human reports of divine prompting. They do not have to contradict scripture, even though to put matters worse, they are often prefixed with the Old Testament phrase, ‘Thus sayeth the Lord’, especially because, even the apostles, who Pentecostals claim to be emulating, pointed people to the supremacy of scriptural authority in a later time of their ministry (cf. Acts 21:4; 10-11; 1 Cor 5:19-21; cf. 2 Petr 1:19-26; 2 Tim 2:15-16; Jude 3; 1 Cor 14:29-38).

In effect, without necessarily suggesting that, anyone is wrong in this debate, we affirm, along with Grundem that, spiritual gifts ought to be subjected to scriptural and mature judgment of the congregation, because in our view their withdrawal per se is not supported by the evidence available. These gifts do not have to compete with scripture and they should not threaten scripture. Contemporary prophecies and revelations are fallible and should be seen as “human reports of something that God has spontaneously brought to mind”.¹⁵ Only prophecy that competes with God’s authority should be prohibited and definitely rejected. In this regard, we have a duty as Reformed people but African theologians in particular, to encourage the exercise of the gifts while working hard to prevent abuse. Nevertheless, we hasten to emphasise that, directive, predictive prophesy (foretelling) would normally be witnessed by one’s spirit to be genuine. Donald Gee¹⁶ presents a helpful position, suggesting that, the extraordinary and exceptional; in short the miraculous should not become the norm (frequent and habitual). We completely agree. Gee, a Reformed theologian also defines ‘illumination’ as Holy Spirit-enabled understanding, recall and application, according to Robert Reymond.¹⁷ Is it ‘revelation’, the spoken report of which is ‘prophecy’? If ‘illumination’ (Reformed/Presbyterian) does not challenge the authority of scripture then perhaps ‘prophecy’ (Pentecostal/Charismatic) does not either. The disclaimer, should however be the avoidance of the ‘Thus sayeth the Lord’ phrase. If it is possible to demonstrate this way that, RPDs and Pentecostals need each other, then the distance between the two strands of faith is unjustifiable. If this is so, then why do people change their faith, especially our members?

¹³ Grundem, 1039.

¹⁴ Grundem, 1035.

¹⁵ Grundem, 1040.

¹⁶ Quoted in Grundem, 1042

¹⁷ Robert Reymond, *What about continuing Revelations and Miracles in the Presbyterian Church Today?* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1977), 28-29.

Changing one's faith or religion

In Africa, people change their faith or religion because there are contradictions in their lives that, they are unable to resolve with the spiritual resources their particular faiths offer. For instance, a member of the EPC or EEPT may decide to drift to one of the Pentecostal churches, because he or she is promised healing from a certain disease that his or her current church has not been able to heal. It really does not matter to this Christian, whether the new, attractive offer is genuine or not. In the first century of 19th century church of Gold Coast/Ghana, believers consulted traditional priests in the night for assistance and then returned to church on Sunday to 'worship God'. Some have described this variously as 'syncretistic' or 'skirt and blouse' religion. Today, there are all kinds and sorts of, so called 'men of God', such as T. B. Joshua with dubious claims to consult with and because of the overwhelming influence of neo-liberal capitalism, promises and offers made to gullible believers are easily attracted to them. The results, needless to say, are often devastating. You certainly remember how stampede over Joshua's 'holy water' left four persons dead and many injured in Accra in May 2013. Is this a replica of the Pentateuchal Joshua, the great leader and problem solver of Israel or is this one 'Joshua the killer'? In an editorial on the issue on 23rd May 2013, the 'Ghanaian Times', the second most popular dailies in the country urged Ghanaian ecumenical leaders, not to remain silent until the situation gets out of hand. So what can be done about this? Is our Reformed faith attractive enough to keep the current believer and win over the potential Christian? How do we respond to the challenge? Do we stabilise the context or stabilise our people to survive in spite of the context?

The Question of Stabilisation: context or person?

In charting a way forward, and to repeat, do we stabilise the context or stabilise persons towards the adversity of their contexts? Is this an 'either or' kind of struggle or can we do a little bit of both? This is a question that defies easy answers. We are both products of our environment and our genetic constitution and so to influence people to cause profound change requires altering both the person and the environment of the person. You recall that, Dr. Dei concluded his lecture with the argument that, faith influences context just as context also influences faith both positively and negatively. For example, historically, we know that early African Christianity disappeared from much or indeed most of North Africa because of undue attachment to and use of Greek, a foreign language for liturgical practice and theologising. At the same time, nevertheless, Egyptian Christianity was resilient because of the use of Coptic, a local language in theologising and liturgical practice. In other words, needless to mention, is the preservation of an enormous amount of theological literature in German that virtually remains inaccessible, even today as I speak to the non-speaker of German. Many of the works originally done in German

have been translated into other languages but a lot more have not and this is not accidental, in my opinion. This, in my view is interplay between stabilising the context and orienting the person towards the context and it offers a strong lesson to churches in the global south in general and Africa in particular.

We need to stabilise the context because there is so much ignorance and exploitation. We can do this by teaching our members to know their faith and its relevance in a world of greed and materialism, so that we can transform Gehazis into Elishas. We recall in II Kings 5 that, while Elisha was simply happy and demonstrably privileged to share God' healing power with a foreigner with no interest in reward, Gahazi, in trying to be 'smart', ended up trading his health (and indeed, sadly those of his family members) for material wealth! But did not Ezekiel 18: 1-3 teach that, it is the soul which sins that would die?

It is true that we have been doing something since the origin of Bremen Mission in our respective environments, but we cannot claim to have done everything or even done enough. We need to intensify the mission mandate to 'go', 'preach', 'baptise' and 'disciple' the unsaved (Matt 28:18ff). We need, like Naaman's slave girl, to testify about God's mission regardless of where we are located, whether at play or work, home or abroad. We have noted as part of our consultation this week that, the mission is God's and ought to be done God's way, even if like Naaman, God's approach contradicts our own expectation. We need to explain Reformed faith and make strong Christians of our members so that they are not blown away by every wind of doctrine. To do this, we need to be flexible in our belief but this does not betray compromise. How then can we be flexible without compromising the sanctity of our faith?

How flexible should we be?

What degree of dynamism should we accept, while trying to be flexible? Should we accommodate all concerns simply because they come from our community? Do we have a community apart from God? As Church, are we not by adoption, members of God's new community of faith? If so, then we are reminded that, the entire community is founded on God's love and mercy, demonstrated through the death and resurrection of Jesus the Christ. To this extent, it is by God's own provisions of gifts that, we have the resources, and indeed, all the resources it takes to extend, expand, heal, teach or transform or grow the community of God's people, God's way. We can only make this community attractive when we are flexible enough to allow God to work through others and by so doing listen to the Holy Spirit regularly for our own good, as we pursue God's mission.

Conclusion

As Reformed Christians of Africa, we desire to make our faith as attractive to our people as possible, so as to ensure that the Gospel of Christ speaks powerfully and relevantly to their individual circumstances. One way of doing this is to tell our story from a sound biblical perspective, whether on salvation, end of the world or the operation of gifts of Holy Spirit in the Church. We cannot pretend not to see what is happening around us, rather, we ought to confront the challenge and surmount it headlong in order to find the appropriate response. It seems clear that contextualizing our theological articulation relevantly, in our mother tongues, is the only way forward to answer the questions that our people are posing. If this happens, we are truly missionaries of God.

How does our faith contribute to our lives – socially, economically, culturally, religiously?

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(PAOET)

Introduction

This article is based around two themes: The theory which accompanies the question of the understanding of our faith within the model of an African tradition (in this case the Ewe culture in Ghana and Togo), and the evolution of this faith under internal (the Ewe sociocultural model) and external (imported sociocultural models) influences.¹

Conceptual approach

Given that the nature of faith can vary between cultures, we have decided to anchor our reflections within the sociocultural context of the Ewe, because this is the context that we know best. We can then examine specific way in which the Ewe people understand faith. The term “Xɔse” is equivalent to faith, and conveys two meanings semantically: It is made up of “Xɔ” which, depending on emphasis, means obtaining or receiving something oneself, a fact or a reality. And “Se” which can mean to listen to an appeal or request.

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God is the only
miracle worker but he
works through us.
”

The precarious context in which the Ewe people existed at the beginning of the colonial period – no transport networks, surrounded by jungle full of dangerous animals, tribal wars, raids by slave traders, and illnesses such as malaria – conditioned their faith, both individually and collectively.

¹ We are indebted to Dr. Isaac Kodjo Sodoké who provided the basic ideas for the lecture for the theological consultation. The lecture itself was longer and more elaborate than this article.

Faith always corresponds to a particular source of inspiration and specific manifestations or witnesses: There are differences between individual, group and community faith. Individuals were looking for personal protection against wild animals or slave traders by using charms such as amulets. People also used geomancy (“fa”) to learn about their destiny, and in order to be able to carry out the necessary rituals to rectify their fate.²

The ancestral throne (“Tɔgbui zikpui”), sharing a ritual meal, distinctive scarring, group pacts sealed by totems or taboos³, and initiation rites were sources of support and cohesion and offered protection from danger. A ritual meal as part of a larger celebration (e.g. ceremonies to bless the New Year or to give thanks at the ancestral throne) were auspicious occasions for members of the community or extended family to reinforce ties amongst themselves and to the gods, and therefore also to the supreme God (Mawu). Within the community there are both vertical and horizontal ties: Vertical ties to the direct family including ancestors⁴, and horizontal ties to people of the same age who underwent initiation rites at the same time. Groups are able to bond and distinguish themselves with pacts sealed by a totem or a taboo.

The community itself seeks protection by the gods (“Trɔ” and “Vodu”), who can plead on their behalf to the supreme god (Mawu or Mawugã) and ask for a blessing before a particular action or event such as the harvest. The alliance within the community is based on ethnic bonds. Therefore, an alliance created around a totem, god or pact involves all members of the community (atabu kaka⁵).

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The context influences our faith. The faith influences our context.

”

² Traditional Ewe society is based on predestination (just like the Fon in Bénin), but people always have a chance to influence their destiny with appropriate ceremonies.

³ Totems and taboos are distinctive elements which define the identity of the group.

⁴ Family groups include dead ancestors. Lineage is a powerful motive and reproduction ensures your ancestors connection to the living world.

⁵ Atabu kaka: This term is used only rarely and with care. Kaka literally means to hit something in order to fix it. Atabu kaka refers to a pact between two communities based on historic event, usually a war. A pact of atabu kaka is an agreement to defend one another if a third party attacks.

Type of faith	Sources of inspiration	Manifestation and witness
Individual	Need for personal protection (from wild animals, enemies, slavery etc.), to deflect a curse or avoid an unpleasant fate	Dzoka, fa
Group	Cohesion in the family and pleas to ancestors who are also able to provide protection Cohesion in the (horizontal) peer group	Tɔgbui zikpui - Sharing meals - Scarring and other visible markings - Group pacts - Initiation rites - Solidarity within the group
Community	From external dangers (other tribes, illnesses, slave traders) Give thanks to or request help from the supreme God (Mawu or Mawugã)	Trɔwo/Voduwo ethnic bonds within community (totem/taboo, atabu kaka)

The above table shows a number of differences between Christianity and traditional animistic African religion. We would like to focus on two essential differences: Firstly, the existence of a hierarchy of faith in animistic models (from amulets through gods to the supreme god), whereas Christianity only has one level of faith. And secondly, the pre-eminence of guilt in the animistic model which includes degrees of guilt, whereas sin in Christianity is saying, and there is no differentiating between more and less serious sins.

Evolution

We have been created and live in a dynamic world, and so our concept of faith and the way we live our faith evolve as the world around us evolves, and also as we ourselves evolve. Therefore, African animists and Christians alike are obliged to adjust to changing circumstances.

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Cultures always live in transition therefore contextuality always means openness to change.

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Internal evolution in a sociocultural model

The modern context within which we live has generated a number of sociocultural constraints on our behaviour. We can distinguish three types of determinants, which are related to coercion, social disapproval or the challenges of daily life.

Factors linked to coercion

As citizens of a sovereign state we are obliged to respect laws and also traditions and attitudes which may be contrary to our faith or convictions. Jehovah's Witnesses, for example, refuse on principle to salute flags and are sometimes convicted in court as a result. Adventists keep the Sabbath on Saturdays and can have problems with their employers if they refuse to work that day.

Factors linked to social disapproval

By belonging to a group (family, community etc.), we are subject to pressure which may also be against our religious beliefs. In traditional communities, Christians are still expected to abide by taboos and show respect to family talismans and tokens.

Factors linked to daily life and changing circumstances

The demands of daily life in a social context may also lead to us doing things that are contrary to our faith. Individuals may, for example, may on occasions feel that they have no choice but to accept certain foods such as meats which have not been prepared in accordance with their religion.

External evolution

Evolution of faith can also be influenced by at least five factors outside our sociocultural model.

Factors linked to our experiences

Our increasingly changing and dynamic lives are making us more and more into people in transition, rather than being rooted in stable customs and beliefs. Personal and professional experiences, journeys and chance meetings can all put our faith to the test. Such experiences lead to an openness of spirit but erode certainties. We begin to relativize beliefs and change the way we live, sometimes without even realising what we are doing.

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There is a tension between the personal faith; our way of seeking harmony within ourselves, with creation and with all the forces that surround us and the challenges of the community to offer a common perspective to the whole society.

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Factors related to the demands of modern life and the way in which Christianity was introduced to Africa

The rules laid out by municipal councils to govern our communities, the imperative of survival and the aspiring to a better life are all factors which affect the way we live our faith. Can an African from a traditional animist background who becomes part of the intellectual elite or enters into an urban environment (which is largely defined by the Christian conquerors⁶) be at ease practising his faith in public? Could an African member of a charismatic church cry and gesture at a hospital bed in a European city the way he would do in Africa?

Factors linked to the diversity of Christian teaching – the market of the religions

Strong competition in Africa between so-called traditional and so-called charismatic churches has a bearing on the clergy and the faithful, in particular in the traditional churches. Reformed, Anglican and Methodist churches are often mocked and accused of not being home to the Holy Spirit. This is something that they cannot ignore, in particular because they see their members deserting them in favour of more charismatic worship. Either through conviction or convenience, their pastors are adopting (or rediscovering?) Evangelical and Pentecostal themes which they had abandoned in favour of a form of materialism.⁷ The traditional churches have, in other words, been pushed by their own faithful to develop charismatic forms of worship.

Factors linked to interreligious discourse, strength in numbers and the relationship between religion and state

African socio-politics reflect, both historically and currently, the quality of the relationships between major religious groups (Christianity and Islam) in a country. The relative size of each religious grouping and the strength of its political power show themselves in the confidence with which the faithful express their faith. For example, expression of religion is very different in a country such Senegal, where there has been a peaceful and friendly relationship between the Moslem majority and Christian minority for many decades, and a

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Cultural diversity cannot be a hindrance to our common faith.

”

⁶ In this context is important to remember two things: Firstly, the gospel is the religion of the colonials who also imposed their administration and their mentality, in particular towards traditional religion which they mistrusted and tried to combat in all its forms. Secondly, African elites have accepted and internalised these judgements – through intellectual laziness.

⁷ We can observe more and more emphasis is being placed on prayer at the manifestations of the Holy Spirit, and the rise of emotion fitting to Africa in a ritual often characterized in the past by emotional dryness inherited from European rationalism.

country such as Nigeria, where there is great mistrust and increasing violence between the two faiths. It should also be noted that the democratic foundations in Senegal and its clear separation between church and state make it easy for Christians to worship. This is in contrast to self-proclaimed Islamic republics such as Mauritania, Algeria, Morocco or Tunisia.

Factors linked to living standards, social status and the prevailing economic model

The way we live our faith also depends on whether we are rich or poor relative to our society. Jesus himself said that “it is harder for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God than for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle” (Mk 10:24-25). And people who have little money are more inclined to believe in God and place their hopes in Him, than those who have no material worries and feel able to rely on themselves.

Besides our current financial status, the economic model in which we live may also condition the way we express our faith. It would be interesting to study the attitudes of Christians who live in ultra-liberal economies (e.g. USA) and those living in Keynesian countries (e.g. Scandinavia). It is certain that USA is as a whole a more selfish society and that solidarity with the poor - both at home and abroad - is relatively scarce.

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Christianity started as a dynamic historical phenomenon, takes place in present time, and opens up future.

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Conclusion

This article has shown that there is an intrinsic relationship between sociocultural context and the way in which we live and express our faith, be it Christian or animist. Yet just as society can influence our faith, so our faith can influence society - if we select the appropriate strategies. We must change paradigms and realise that we are in a dialectical and not a mechanical relationship. We are and shall remain actors, despite determinist factors that tend to limit our freedom of thought and action. We retain the ability to act and provoke change, however small, and however local. It is now up to us to accept this responsibility.

The spread of Christianity from the Early Church to the Reformation

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Part 1: Early Church History A.D. 50-313

1. What is church history?

Are we talking about mission in the Church history or mission in history of Christianity? This question is really the same as, what is the Church? Was the church promised an outward and visible unity? If so, one must take the Catholic view of church history in some form. Is the church, on the other hand, the name for the entire (invisible) society of actual believers, and the individual churches into which they are constituted? This would be the more Protestant view, and as such, one's Church history would tend to be shaded towards that direction. Our view on this issue will directly impact our view of church history. As Protestants, since our view is slanted towards *believers* rather than simply institutions, we will tend to focus more on reformation and less on institutional progress.

Periods of church history Ancient

Ancient

Apostolic 30-100

Ante-Nicene 100-313

Nicene 313-590

Medieval 590-1517

Modern (using Shelley's periods)

Age of Reformation 1517-1648

Age of Reason and Revival 1648-1789

Age of Progress 1789-1914

Age of Ideologies 1914ff

2. Backgrounds - the culture before the church

- a. Very cultural and cosmopolitan
- b. Recently established Empire. One Empire, one law.
- c. Free movement all around the Mediterranean
- d. Roman system of roads
- e. Greek as a universal language (and culture) "The educated man from the second century B.C. spoke Greek and Latin.
- f. Greek philosophy had also weakened the old religions. They were not dead, but they were considered non-exclusive. Many of the major gods were identified with each other so that the number of deities remained fewer than would have otherwise happened in a large empire. Greek philosophy also had a tendency towards monotheism, but this was not consistently followed, and it was not used to displace the lesser gods. The emperor began to be considered a deity very early in the imperial period - basically at the time of Jesus' birth.
- g. New religions, superstitions, magic and astrology were on the increase in the empire.
- h. Jewish residency throughout the Empire helped the Christians in several ways.
- i. The Greek Scriptures became the Bible of the early Christians
- j. Legality of their religion aided the early Christians since they were seen as Jews.
- k. The synagogue system was a ready made model for the early churches.

3. The geographic spread of Christianity

- a. Note that Asia Minor (Turkey) is the focus of almost all the geographic references in the New Testament. Consider the following names: from the book Acts, Galatia, Ephesus, Colossae (Paul's epistles), Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia (1 Peter), Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea (Revelation).

- b. Much of this area was conquered by the Muslims (Turks) around 1000, and despite the Crusades, has never been officially Christian since then.
- c. Philippi, Thessalonica, Corinth and Rome are other spots to note.

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Simon called Niger and Lucion of Cyrene, two African men at the beginning of the mission of Paul and Silas. Acts 13:1-3

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➤ Persecutions of the early church. The martyrs. The main early persecutors: Nero (54-68, fire 64), Domitian (81-96, 95 John sent to Patmos), Trajan (98-117), Marcus Aurelius (161-180). Consequence of the persecution on the spread of the gospel.

➤ Peter & Paul - Nero's reign. Peter was crucified upside down, because he did not think himself worthy to be crucified just like his Lord was; Paul was beheaded rather than crucified because he was a Roman citizen.

4. The "Apostolic Fathers"

The term "apostolic fathers" is applied to the writings of the late 1st and early 2nd century, and might be construed to imply that the so-called "fathers" were men who had actually known the apostles personally, and therefore represented the first generation of post-apostolic leadership in the church. Actually, with some exceptions, there is not much evidence of such personal acquaintance with the apostles. The name "apostolic fathers" was first used in the 6th century.

- Clement of Rome
 - Presbyter (elder) in Rome
 - Makes clear statements of the deity of Christ.
- Ignatius
 - Wrote seven epistles as he travelled to Rome to suffer martyrdom after a persecution in Antioch. Around 110.
 - "Bishop" of Antioch or of Syria.
- Polycarp
 - Wrote one epistle to the Philippian church, around 110. Polycarp was martyred about A.D. 155.
- Papias
 - Said by Irenaeus (late 2nd century) to have known the apostle John personally.
 - Only fragments of his writings remain.

- Was one of the church fathers known to have been a premillennialist?

5. The early heresies and schisms

The word "heresy" comes from a Greek word basically meaning "party" or "faction." You can see this word in the Bible at, for instance, 1 Corinthians 11:19 Or, 2 Peter 2:1.

As the church grew, and apparently there was unity across the empire on the major points of doctrine, it became customary among the orthodox to call themselves the Catholic Church and everyone deviating from that, a "party" or heresy.

- a. The Gnostic heresy
- b. The Marcionite heresy: It is not clear whether Marcion (c. 140) was originally a Gnostic.
- c. "Unitarian" or "Dynamic Monarchian" heresy.
- d. Modalistic Monarchian/Sabellian heresy.
- e. Montanist heresy/schism.
- f. Novatianist schism.

6. The Responses

Obviously many church teachers labored to write the longest, most convincing books against the heresies.

Formation of the Canon of Scripture. The word "canon" in Greek just means "rule" -- the same word that was used for the "rule of faith". This "rule" was the rule by which the authentic books of the Apostles would be known.

7. The 2nd and 3rd century church fathers

- a. Justin Martyr (d. 156). He was the greatest of the Greek apologists.
- b. Other apologists
 Quadratus and Aristides were Athenians who continued the preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles. Aristo of Pella was a Jewish Christian who wrote an apology against the Jews. (Schaff, vol II, pp 708-710).
 Athenagoras, another Athenian, wrote Embassy for the Christians, c. 177. He is probably the most sophisticated of the original apologists.
- c. Irenaeus (d. c. 200)

- d. Tertullian (c. 155-c. 220).
- e. Hippolytus (c. 170-235)
- f. Clement of Alexandria (fl. c. 200)

Clement was the first major scholar in Alexandria to work Christianity and Greek philosophy together in a blend that remained orthodox, yet appealed to the philosophically educated Greek of his day.

- g. Origen (c. 185- c. 254). A great scholar and theologian. Origen shaped the development of theology, but not always in ways that proved to have lasting value. The first in the Christian church to write biblical commentaries.
- h. Cyprian (c. 200-258).
- i. Bishop of Carthage during the difficult time of persecution under the emperor Decius.
- j. Novatian (c. 200- c. 258)
- k. Anthony (c. 251-356). The first major Christian monk, father of Christian monasticism.

8. The late persecutions 250-260 and 302-313

- a. The emperor Decius, in the year 250, commanded all Romans to sacrifice to the gods before a magistrate and to obtain certificates certifying that they had done so.
- b. Under Valerian the persecution intensified in 257-260. He banished ministers and prominent laymen, confiscated their property, and prohibited assemblies. The death penalty was used (Schaff vol 2, p. 62).

9. The last great persecution (303-311)

Part 2: Early Church History A.D. 313-451

1. History of Constantine's conversion (Schaff 3-10 through 3-37) (Bainton I-90ff)

Constantine became embroiled in theological controversy, and he called the Council of Nicaea together in 325 to settle questions about the deity of Christ. He may have even suggested some of the wording for the creed.

He was baptized close to the end of his life (but a lot of people did that then), and died on May 22, 337.

2. Development of the legalization/establishment of Christianity (Schaff 3-10 through 3-71)

Results of the legalization/establishment: The Church has now entered a position which it will hold in the West until the 1500's-1900's. In the East it held its position right up until the rise of Communism in Russia and the Turkish invasions in Turkey and Greece. Historically, it is the majority position that the church should be in some way established by the state. In England, Germany and elsewhere, this is still true in Protestant countries also. Even the Protestant Reformation did not "reform" this state of affairs, other than in its persecuted Anabaptist wing. Constantine deserves credit for turning the Empire from persecution of the faith to defender of the faith. But within the reign of one emperor, the church grew from legality almost to establishment as the state religion. Exemption of clergy from taxation and public service (Schaff, 3-96). Endowments to the church (Schaff, 3-97). Government support of the clergy (Schaff 3-100). Episcopal jurisdiction and intercession (Schaff 3-102). Sunday as a legal holiday (Schaff 3-105). Legal codes (Schaff 3-107). Status of women (Schaff 3-111). Slavery (Schaff 3-115) Slavery was left intact, although subject to the same Christian cautions which are found in the New Testament. Emancipation of slaves was encouraged in some circles, but not many. Gladiatorial Shows (Schaff 3-122). Union of Church & State and Secularization of the Church (Schaff 3-125).

3. The Doctrine of the Trinity

- a. The Council of Nicaea, 325.
- b. By 680 this controversy was fairly well played out. We can be sure that all the possible options had been debated by the early Church. There are only a few ways, really, that this can be worked out. Assuming the validity of the distinction between "nature" and "person" which was developed in the discussions on the doctrine of the Trinity, and assuming Jesus Christ was God in some sense, we have the following major options:

4. Augustine and the Pelagian Controversy

A. Augustine (354-430)

a. Bishop

North Africa. In 391 he was reluctantly made priest; in 396 he took over the job of Bishop of Hippo, a position he held until his death.

b. Theologian

He is known of course for his Confessions, which has been called the first autobiography in European history.

Another prominent feature of Augustine's work was his controversy with the Donatists. The Donatist group dated from the time of the last persecutions in North Africa. They denied the validity of any sacrament performed by unworthy ministers, and had thus separated themselves from what they saw as the corrupt church. Augustine worked hard against them in writings and in public disputations, but ultimately he decided that the authorities had the duty to put down this disorder in the church.

Augustine was prominent in his explanations of the doctrine of the Trinity, and in most other issues of the period. He "is generally recognized as having been the greatest thinker of Christian antiquity" (Britannica). His City of God, a massive explanation of the true interpretation of history from the perspective of the impending fall of Rome, is as much of a classic as his Confessions.

B. Introduction to the Pelagian controversy

The doctrine of God and Christ had taken up the church's attention for many years. More importantly, the chief antagonists of Christianity in the early years were religions and philosophies which placed emphasis on an impersonal fate or determinism that governed men's destinies. Both Greek and Roman religion had this tendency, as well as the more rationalistic philosophies. In addition, the new religion of Manicheanism was very fatalistic. Augustine in his earlier years had to defend the doctrine of human freedom against Manicheanism, and he did it in such a way that partially contradicted his later doctrines which were responses to Pelagius. So, even within the one man Augustine, we can see the growth which the church had to go through to respond to both sides of the freedom/sovereignty issue.

C. Pelagius and his doctrines

Pelagius (c. 354 - after 418) was a monk from Britain (still part of Rome), but not a clergyman. He was a Bible teacher in Rome from about 380-410 -- we would call him a Bible study leader. He ministered to various aristocratic circles, and wrote commentaries on the Bible. He was well respected for his high moral character, even by his opponents.

He took exception to some tendencies he saw in Augustine's writing, especially the saying in the Confessions, "Give what you command, and command what you choose." This sounded like fatalistic teaching to him. He denied that God would

command something that was not in the ability of man to do. He blamed the lax moral climate of the Roman Christians on teachings of grace such as this.

When the Goths attacked Rome in 410, Pelagius, like many others, left the city. He ended up in Africa, in a branch of the church which was heavily influenced by Augustine's leadership.

North African bishops began condemning Pelagius and his views. Around 412 he went to Palestine, where the Eastern clergy were more sympathetic to free will, but also where the Western biblical scholar Jerome lived, who began to stir up trouble for Pelagius in that region.

After some confusion with Popes and councils(1), Pelagius may have left Palestine. He disappeared from history and possibly died in Egypt.

D. Augustine's responses

Augustine spent almost 20 years composing various writings combating the errors of the Pelagians. He was allowed by the end of his life to see the development of the doctrine known as Semi-Pelagianism, and thus was able to write against that compromise version also.

[Original Sin.] Augustine concentrated on the truth of Adam's Fall and its consequences, and the transmission of sin to his descendants. He saw that each human inherits the guilt of sin from his parents, and it all comes from Adam. Not only did Adam act as our representative, but he believed that in some sense we were all in Adam committing the original sin too.

[Total Depravity.] He dwelt at length on the Corruption of man's nature and the consequent lack of freedom of the will to choose God, exercise faith, or generally perform any act that moves towards restoration to God. To be sure, the freedom of the will to act is not in question, and man still makes his choices. However, his choices are all determined now by his corrupt nature, and in himself he has no ability to choose God.

[Unconditional Election and Irresistible Grace.] As a result of the above, the necessity of the doctrine of the free grace of God becomes apparent (not only from the above logic, but from Scripture itself). God must save freely and sovereignly, since we are unable to choose him. God's grace grants everything, so election cannot be based on foreseen future merits. Even faith itself is the gift of God to his elect. Grace and predestination cannot be separated. Grace and predestination have this difference, that predestination is the preparation, and grace the actual application, of God's unmerited favour.

[Perseverance of the Saints.] Augustine held that none of the elect could finally fall away, but that God would bring all his people to himself. However, his dealing with

the problem of "falling away" was different than what we might expect. He taught that there were some who in this life, looked exactly like Christians, and indeed were to all intents and purposes Christians, who actually fell away, and thus proved that they were not elect. This is different from most Calvinistic formulations today, which hold that when a person has once become a Christian, they may attain assurance that they personally will never fall away. In Augustine's system, this assurance was not apparent, and he actually stated that such assurance was unattainable. (See *On the Perseverance of the Saints*.) However, he also stated that the perseverance of God's people was a gift of God, and his people always obtained that gift, and thus always persevered.

Augustine's doctrines were tainted with early Catholic teachings which he never stopped believing: The necessity of baptism for salvation. Consequently, the baptism of infants is not to be denied. This led to some consequences on mission field.

Pope Innocent I excommunicated Pelagius in 417, but Pope Zosimus lifted the ban. He reinstated it in 418. Popes Boniface and Sixtus III rejected appeals from the Pelagians. Pelagius was cleared by a Jerusalem synod, and he was again acquitted at Diospolis (415), both in the East. However, two councils in Africa condemned him in 416 on the basis of his book on Free Will, and a synod of Antioch barred him from Palestine in 424 (NIDCC, p. 761).

Part 3: Early Church History Concluded & Church History In the Middle Ages A.D. 313-1517

1. Overview of the Middle Ages.

a. The Christian Roman Empire.

Remember that Augustine's *City of God*, written 100 years after Constantine's conversion, was directed partly at the pagans of Rome who claimed that Christianity was responsible for the decline of the Empire. Augustine himself was a pagan until midlife. At the same time, the Roman Empire was more and more filled with the barbarians themselves - serving in the army, serving as slaves, and ultimately taking over - who had to be told about Christianity.

Still, the Christian Empire and the works of its great men - Ambrose, Augustine, Gregory, Justinian, etc. - laid the foundation for the ideal of Christendom, the domain of Christ, which in the Middle Ages became the ideal of all society to be a fusion of the Christian Church and the Christian State.

b. Monasticism

During the Middle Ages the monasticism really hits its stride.

Monks begin as a reaction against the worldly living that Christians were practicing, especially after the legalization of Christianity. At first they were hermits living in desolate places, but afterward they often organized into communities.

After the standardization of monastic living advocated by Benedict became the norm, monks became one of the most important of the civilizing influences in European society. (Basil the Great, one of the Cappadocian fathers, had a similar influence in the East to that of Benedict in the West.) Not often did the popes come from the ranks of the monastics, but many of the highest offices were filled by monks. For the first part of the middle ages, monks were responsible for the transmission of learning.

They also served as the missionaries of early Europe. Often the first thing done among a pagan nation would be the founding of monasteries, from which would spread the teachers of the whole society.

c. Division of the Roman Empire

In hindsight, the division of the Roman Empire had a huge impact on the further development of the Church. This is the main reason that we still have the Western (Roman Catholic) church and the Eastern (Orthodox) church divided from each other.

This had happened first under Diocletian, before Constantine, but it was Constantine who created a beautiful new capital in the east, at a city called Byzantium, which he renamed Constantinople.

The bishop of Constantinople rapidly assumed an importance in the Church based upon the standing of his city. At the council of Constantinople of 38, it was declared that the bishop of Constantinople was to be given precedence of honor among all the other bishops, except Rome only, because Constantinople was the new Rome.

d. Fall of the Western Empire

In the meantime, the Western empire and the old Rome were declining. Barbarians, who were sometimes invading armies and sometimes simply huge numbers of immigrants, were increasing. They began to fill the armies of Rome. But new, more violent barbarians were behind them. In 410, the unthinkable happened: the city of Rome itself was conquered and sacked by the Visigoths in 410 and again by the Vandals in 455. In 476 the last Western emperor was deposed by the barbarian general Odoacer, and there were no more.

This had a major impact on the role of the church and of the bishop of Rome. Most of the barbarians respected the church and left it intact. The pope of Rome gained more power by the absence of an emperor.

e. Growth and Decline of the Papacy. Charlemagne

In the absence of the Emperor, the pope became the visible symbol of both the Church and what remained of the glory of Rome. Popes were good and popes were bad, but both kinds of popes never lost sight of the possibilities of such an office.

At times the popes were at the mercy of their secular protectors, whatever king happened to be faithful to them. They played off kingdoms against each other to ensure the survival of what they conceived of as the church's mission.

Ultimately the creation of a Holy Roman Empire was conceived as a way to institutionalize the Christian state envisioned so long ago by Augustine. Charlemagne was crowned Emperor on Christmas day, A.D. 800. The institution of Holy Roman Empire lasted in some form until Napoleon's time, but at best it was simply the kingdom of Franco-Germany.

The growth of nation-states in the High Middle Ages after 1100 spelled ultimate doom for the papacy's universal dominion. Notwithstanding the infamous papal bull *Unam Sanctam* of 1302, the fact remained that popes were always going to be resisted by the temporal power, a fact which came in handy for Luther during the 1500's.

f. The Eastern Empire and Eastern Church

In the meantime, the Eastern Empire never fell until 1453, and a separate Christianity developed with emphases that differed from Rome's.

The Eastern Church always believed that the emperor was a partner in the leadership of the church. Elections of bishops were always under his or her thumb. There was never the kind of conflict that the West went through over respective roles. Constantine's dream was realized more accurately and completely in the East.

By the late part of the millennium relations were quite strained between the leadership of the two branches of the church. In 1054 the leaders of the respective churches excommunicated each other and the schism remains to this day.

g. Society's structure. Feudalism; the beginnings of Nation-States

In feudalism, which developed around the time of Charlemagne, society was organized in a hierarchy in which each leader swore an oath to a greater leader. The oaths were usually centered on the possession of land.

This system began to be superseded by the growth of trade and the middle class. By the High Middle Ages, the role of cash had grown to the point where the feudal structures began to break down, and a more modern world began to take the place of the medieval one.

At the same time, national feeling was beginning. Kings stopped being feudal lords and started being rulers of the whole people. The common person began to think of himself as an Englishman or a Frenchman.

h. Islam & the Crusades

Mohammed heard the call of "God" in 610. By 750 Islamic armies had conquered Spain, all of North Africa, Arabia, Palestine and Mesopotamia, and were spreading eastward as well.

Although they were courteous towards Jews and Christians as "people of the Book," European views of Muslims were of only one kind. The Muslim was the Antichrist and the heretic, and furthermore remained a military threat.

In 1095, Pope Urban II, partly in response to the appeals of the Eastern emperor, preached a Crusade which would liberate Palestine from the heathen and relieve pressure on the East from invading Turks. The First Crusade was the most successful of them all, establishing small kingdoms along the Mediterranean coast of the Holy Land and capturing Jerusalem. But the Christian invaders were more ruthless and inhuman to their enemies than Muslim rulers had ever been. And all crusades after the First were even worse.

The fourth Crusade was so bad that it diverted from fighting Muslims to instead attacking Constantinople itself. They sacked the city and set up a new Latin-based king and church there. The Greeks took back the city years later, but any respect for Western European Christianity pretty much ended at that time.

The crusades had the same effect on Muslims, establishing a hatred of Western Christians that still has repercussions on modern relations with the Middle East.

i. Scholasticism

Around the year 1000, a new learning began to ferment. A new style of study began to replace the old way of simply quoting the earlier masters.

Scholasticism was the name for this new style. There was a new rigor to argumentation, a new desire to return to the sources of learning. There was also a new classical master, who was harnessed to the needs of the Church: Aristotle.

The highest development of this new learning was the theologian Thomas Aquinas and his greatest book, *Summa Theologica*.

New disputants also led the way for new dogmas. Although the doctrine of transubstantiation was not new, it was not formally declared until 1215. This was the result of wrangling between various theologians, especially Raturamus who gave a doctrine approximating that of later Protestants.

Other Scholastics such as Gottschalk explored the doctrine of predestination. Most theologians who came to theories that sounded like later Protestantism were condemned.

j. Medieval Reform

These developments, the final hardening of the Church into an anti-grace stance and the development of all sorts of other abuses, such as the indulgence (an incidental product of the Crusades), led to early calls for reform by such men as Wyclif and Hus. These men were clear forerunners of Protestantism.

1. The Great Schism

Urban VI was elected in 1378, in Rome. But he alienated his base of support by his haughty actions, and this was all the excuse that the French needed. They withdrew and called a new election, in which they elected Clement VII.

From 1378 to 1409 there were two popes at all times. This situation was condemned by Christendom and has always been a great scandal in Catholic history.

The council of Pisa convened in 1409 after many efforts to end the schism. This council marks the first council called under terms which contradicted the medieval theory of the papacy, terms which stipulated that a council could be called independent of the Pope's authority. The Conciliar movement had begun in earnest.

2. Scholasticism / Mysticism / Devotio Moderna

➤ Scholasticism: Britannica: "the philosophical systems and speculative tendencies of various medieval Christian thinkers who, working on a background of fixed religious dogma, sought to solve anew general philosophical problems (as of faith and reason, will and intellect, realism and nominalism, and the provability of the existence of God), initially under the influence of the mystical and intuitional tradition of patristic philosophy and especially Augustinianism and later under that of Aristotle."

- Anselm 1033-1109
- Peter Abelard 1079-1142
- Peter Lombard c. 1100-1160

- Albert the Great (Albertus Magnus) c. 1200-1280, Dominican
- Thomas Aquinas 1224-1274, Dominican
- Bonaventure c. 1217-1274
- John Duns Scotus c. 1266-1308
- **Mysticism:** Mysticism in general from the New International Dictionary: "It concerns the interior life of the spirit, that pilgrimage with the divine which begins outside its awareness and proceeds to the highest stages of personal development possible. . . Christian mysticism has cropped up at many times in history, but certainly the Middle Ages were one of its chief periods."
- **The Devotio Moderna:** The term means "modern devotion." Britannica says the group stressed "meditation and the inner life, attaching little importance to ritual and external works, and downgrading the highly speculative spirituality of the 13th and 14th centuries."

3. John Wycliffe and Jan Hus

- **John Wycliffe** c. 1330-1384. Wycliffe was an Englishman. Comparatively little is known of his life. He was educated at Oxford and taught there. Around 1374 we see him beginning to enter the political arena as a representative of the king (Edward III) at a papal conference. Wycliffe went further. Studying the Bible, he taught a doctrine of predestination and furthermore said that the true church is that of the elect, not the visible organization on earth. But when he attacked the doctrine of transubstantiation, he lost the support of the great and powerful. He also began to teach that the Pope was the Antichrist. By 1380 he was planning Bible translation activities and also began to send out preachers to take the message of the Bible to the people. These "poor preachers" or "Lollards" made a huge impact on the England of that day.
- **Jan Hus** c. 1370-1415. Hus was born of poor parents in Bohemia. He enrolled in the University of Prague in 1390 and took his master's degree in 1394, becoming a professor there. Like all the philosophy professors there, he was reading Wycliffe's philosophical works.

Part 4: The Reformation and Early Protestantism 1517-1750

1. Martin Luther

Luther's early years

Luther was born in 1483 in Eisleben, now part of former East Germany. His father was prosperous enough to send him to school and aim him at the study of law. He

graduated with a BA and MA from the University of Erfurt. But just when he would have entered the study of law, Luther was caught in a thunderstorm and made a vow to St. Anne that he would enter a monastery if his life was saved. He duly entered the order of the Augustinians and their monastery at Erfurt in 1505. He was made Doctor of Theology in 1512 and joined the theological faculty at Wittenberg.

His growing understanding

Two experiences seem to have been important in the development of young Luther. In 1507 he became a priest and said his first Mass, and in the view of the church, he was now able to create the body and blood of Christ. This was one of many experiences which terrorized him in view of the majesty and justice of a holy God.

Secondly, he travelled to Rome in 1510 on monastery business. He was shocked to find Italy a breeding ground of corruption and secularized clergy. This was the time of the Renaissance Popes, and Pope Julius, the current occupant of that chair, was one of the worst of them all.

He also could not understand how, in Romans 1:17, it was said that the "righteousness" of God was revealed in the Gospel. If God's righteousness was revealed, how could it be good news, since God's righteousness could do nothing but condemn man's lawlessness? At last, in a flash of insight (or grace or faith), he understood that the righteousness in the verse was not the righteousness God displayed in judgment, but the righteousness he bestowed on a man through pure grace on account of the righteousness of Jesus Christ. "As it is written, the just shall live BY FAITH."

Now he understood that faith was the key. Faith was not a work. Rather, it was the empty hand receiving the gift of God offered without strings attached. Faith was utterly opposed to works. No works, not even the sacramental acts commanded by the church, could add to the free gift of God. For this reason, Luther added the word ALONE to his later German translation of Romans 3:28.

The Indulgences and 95 Theses

In 1517, Johann Tetzel appeared in Germany selling a special indulgence issued by the Pope. Luther's ruler, Elector Frederick, kept Tetzel out of his dominions, but Luther's parishioners were crossing the border and buying the indulgences anyway. According to Tetzel, the indulgence went further than previous indulgences, procuring not only release from earthly penance and Purgatorial punishment, but also full forgiveness of all sins.

Reactions of Church and State

Initially, the Pope wrote the whole issue off as a quarrel among monks. But local church officials were not so confident. They urged action. Three months after the Theses appeared, Pope Leo directed the Augustinian Order to quiet Luther. In April

1518 Luther was given the opportunity to defend his case at a meeting of the Augustinians.

On August 7, 1518 Luther was given 60 days to appear in Rome to recant his heresies. Luther burns the Pope's bull, and forever breaks with Rome. Dec. 10, 1520.

Repercussions throughout Europe

In 1521 Luther appeared before the Diet of Worms, summoned by the new Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V. Charles needed the support of every part of his splintered empire, and wanted to heal the church for the sheer sake of political unity, if for no other reason.

At the Diet he was commanded once more to recant his teachings. He had expected an opportunity to defend his teachings before the Emperor and all the princes of Germany, but instead he was simply asked to recant. He asked for a day to consider his answer, and appeared the next day to defy the empire and replied, "Unless I am refuted and convicted by testimonies of the Scriptures or by clear arguments (since I believe neither the Pope nor the councils alone; it being evident that they have often erred and contradicted themselves), I am conquered by the Holy Scriptures quoted by me, and my conscience is bound in the word of God: I can not and will not recant any thing, since it is unsafe and dangerous to do any thing against the conscience" (Schaff, vol. 7, p. 304). According to some accounts, he ended by saying "Here I stand. I can do no other. God help me. Amen."

Luther was able to get out of town under the Emperor's safe conduct before Charles could change his mind and seize him.

Luther and the Radicals

"Radical" reformers in his own home town (led by Carlstadt, his former friend), which caused him to return to Wittenberg to calm things down, were the foreshadowing of many such splits among the Protestants. Even though the differences in Wittenberg amounted mostly to (1) going too fast in the right direction, and (2) disagreement over using violent means to overthrow the old traditions, soon there was much more in the larger Germany, and Luther was distressed that the predictions of his enemies might come true in which he became the cause of the dissolution of society.

Luther soothed the radical elements in his own town, and some arranged for some people actually to leave town, but as he got older, Luther became more bitter and violent towards other elements of the Reformation which seemed to go too far. He approved of the suppression of the peasants in the Peasants' War, and his enmity towards Anabaptists, "enthusiasts," and other radicals only increased. He lumped Zwingli in with Carlstadt (who became more and more radical), and was utterly suspicious of any reformation other than the conservative German version.

Luther and the German Reformation

After a while, the various German princes who had adopted Lutheranism began to take steps to systematize and regularize the reforms found within their various dominions. One such effort was the reformation of public worship according to non-Roman principles, via the "Visitations" commissioned by the various German rulers beginning in 1527. These were heavily influenced by the Wittenbergers and began the process of constructing a truly Protestant church system.

Another major undertaking for Luther was the introduction of congregational singing, and the consequent writing of new Protestant hymns. Like many other innovations of the Reformed period, all Christians take congregational singing for granted today (even Roman Catholics), but this was yet another blessing that had been withheld from the people until the Reformation.

2. Ulrich Zwingli and Zurich

Early Life

Ulrich (or Huldrych or Huldreich) Zwingli was born January 1, 1484 in Wildhaus, Switzerland. His father was a free peasant and magistrate. Early scholarly gifts caused him to be sent to school, especially at Basel, and he learned to love the classics. He was invited to become priest at Glarus in 1506. He was learning to be a lover of Scripture, but was not so much of an example.

Beginnings as a Reformer

In Glarus he began to be noticed by many in that part of Switzerland, and in 1518 he was invited to Zurich to become "people's priest" at the Great Minster. He arrived in town with the announcement that he would begin to preach right through the Gospel of Matthew. This was a departure from the fragmentary reading of Scripture that had prevailed in the medieval Church. After Matthew he preached through Acts and then turned his attention to Paul's epistles.

In 1519, a bout with the plague, and the introduction of Luther's writings into Switzerland, brought Zwingli to a clearer understanding of his mission. He became bolder in his denunciation of, not only abuses, but false practices that he felt cut into true Christianity.

3. The Anabaptists

Anabaptists as a movement are probably older than the Reformation, since they embody ways of looking at Christ and the Christian life which were very present in

medieval dissident groups. They are the Protestant version of the medieval sects which were persecuted by Rome, only now they arose in Protestant lands.

The Anabaptists are hard to define because it depends on how you look at them.

The Anabaptists were one of several branches of "Radical" reformers (i.e. reformers that went further than the mainstream Reformers) to arise out of the Renaissance and Reformation. Two other branches were Spirituals or Inspirationists, who believed that they had received direct revelation from the Spirit, and rationalists or anti-Trinitarians, who rebelled against traditional Christian doctrine, like Michael Servetus.

The Anabaptists, as well as the other groups named above, were persecuted cruelly by the Catholics and Protestants alike. Historically, they have taken shape under several "denominational" names:

- Mennonites
- Hutterites
- Brethren
- Amish

What is the heritage of the Anabaptists? We are indebted to the Anabaptists for many things. They were the first large body of believers to proclaim that church and state should be separate. By sticking to their guns, by being willing to die for their faith, and by continuing to do the same for decades and even centuries, they constantly challenged the Protestant church and even the Catholic Church to move towards toleration of all types of Protestants.

The history of mission from the church in antiquity to the reformation – a response

Renke Brahms

Moderator of Bremen Evangelical Church

The contribution of Rev. Basse summarizes the periods of the history of the church and of theology in precise terms. The question, however, is: What does this history mean for the ways mission unfolded and for a theology of mission? I would like to draw our attention to the following aspects.

I distinguish six periods:

1. In biblical times (New Testament) the Gospel spread out over the Mediterranean world by preaching the Gospel and by an attractive community in which different people found their place (slaves and free, man and woman, Greek and Jews etc., cf. Corinthians!). It was an uncontrolled mission.
2. In times of persecution it was an act of decision and confession to become a Christian. Mission was more difficult but still attractive. Christians must bear disadvantages.
3. After Constantine, Christianity became a state religion. The people got benefits by becoming converts to the Christian faith. Mission was easy and it had to investigate if people were only looking for benefits or if they decided for a personal faith.
4. In the Middle Ages all people were Christians and mission was not really necessary. This might be one of the reasons for the crusades (mission in other countries – mission in a violent way).

5. In times of reformation the faith turned from an institutional faith again (back) to a personal faith. The mission again turned to a personal mission - mainly by education and sermons.

6. Today we have different situations at the same time in different countries. We can learn from the history for the presence and the future of mission in various situations.

The mission of Bremen Mission in West Africa until today

McWilson Kwaku Atakro

EP Church, Ghana, Peki Seminary

Introduction

I count myself honoured and privileged to be given this rare opportunity to speak on this important and interesting topic: “The mission of Bremen Mission in West Africa until today”. This is so because Bremen Missionaries came over 160 years ago and their activities are still relevant to the indigenous people till today. There are several reasons given by the missionaries themselves and the recipients why mission work has been extended to Africa in general and Ghana and Togo in particular. The pioneering role played by the Bremen Missionaries by bringing the Word to West Africa cannot be taken for granted. This work of propagating the gospel was later carried on with vigour by the indigenous people who later “owned” the faith and took it as theirs. Theologically, this can be associated with what we find in 1 Corinthians 3:5 saying:

What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed as the Lord assigned to each. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth.

The above quote refers to the theological concept of the work of the missionaries and the indigenous people. This acknowledges the fact that the work was started by the Bremen Missionaries just as it happened in the case of Apollos and Paul. The evangelistic work was initiated by Wolf and others but it was continued by the indigenous people. That is, the Word was proclaimed by the missionaries and accepted by the indigenous people who expanded the field and took it upon themselves to make converts for the Lord among their own people.

Indeed the North German Missionaries brought the gospel message to the West Africa; however, their achievements were limited for a number of reasons. Crucial among them was that the missionaries could not do much to proclaim the gospel due to the language barrier. Though Euro-centric histories emphasized the effort and sacrifices of the missionaries more than the contributions of the indigenous people, a re-examination of the development of Christianity as the faith of the

African church histories, reveal that the contributions of the early African Christians account for a far greater share of the success of the Church in Ghana and Togo than what the Eurocentric view acknowledged. The failure of the missionaries to survive tropical diseases and the dependence of the missionaries on the indigenous people for language skills, cultural understanding as well as physical labour collectively meant that colonial-era Christianity among Ghana and Togo people is far more the history of the indigenous people than formerly acknowledged.

Mr. Chairman, the abilities of the indigenous people and their leaders at the time to

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Based on the church history/
Bremen Mission inputs:
Both, the European and the
African have equal
responsibility in the extension
of the mission of Christ.

”

understand and interact with the language and culture of the people put them ahead of the missionaries in evangelistic work. This means that the indigenous people and their leaders were far more effectively, the source of evangelization of the indigenes. The missionaries deserve much credit for their commitment and sacrifices but it was the indigenous people who actually reached out to their own people and shaped their faith community, which became the indigenous Christian Church. To this we now turn to discuss how the missionaries brought the message.

The Advent of Bremen Mission among the Indigenous People

The Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Ghana and the Eglise Evangelique Presbyterienne du Togo came into existence as a result of the missionary activities of the North German Missionary Society. When the Mission Society began in Hamburg in 1836, it took ‘its stance neither from Wittenberg nor from Geneva nor from Rome, but from Jerusalem on the Mount of Olives’. Werner Ustorf, a lecturer at the Birmingham University in the United Kingdom indicated that “the society recognized the validity of the various confessions of the home country, but wished to be bound only to Matthew 28:18-20 for the spread of the Kingdom of God among the heathen”.¹

The mission of the Missionary Society as indicated by Zahn was that “its main purpose did not consist only in sending emissaries for the gospel into the heathen world-which had hitherto been happening through the dispatch of missionaries from Germany-but also in the task of performing ‘a service for the life of mission at home’.² For Zahn, mission aimed at the Kingdom of God, not the church. That is,

¹ Ustorf, Werner: “Bremen Missionaries in Togo and Ghana: 1847 - 1900” Legon Theological Studies, Ghana (Asempa Publishers, Accra, 2002, p. 22).

² Ustorf, Werner: Op cit p. 102.

mission was to be an independent society not to be controlled by a state or by any denomination. Eugene Grau also stated that the Society had no desire to plant in non-Christian lands the differences in confessions which developed in Europe. Rather it had the intention to give the churches the right under the guiding of the Holy Spirit to preach the Word and to shape themselves into churches which would be a part of their culture.³

With the above, the missionaries under the supervision of the Home Board followed five main policies on the field in Ghana and Togo. These five policies developed by Zahn, the Director of the Bremen Mission at the time were:

- That the congregations must serve as a witnesses
- That the language of the people must be studied
- That there must be concern for the whole of life
- That issues of Civil Authority and Colonial Power be handled with care
- That the congregations must be prepared for self-rule.⁴

Distinguished Moderators, on the field, the Bremen Missionaries followed the above policies, thus they were able to study the language and culture of the people, were able to subject to those in civil authority, preached Christ through interpreters to their workers- in their neighbourhood, market places and in the streets. Schools were started to train workers for the work and the schools were also to serve as a means of evangelism and used for the training of converts in mission work. The educational programs as stated already were to train mission workers in order to help with teaching and the establishment of congregations. Indeed the missionaries saw schools as one of the most potent means of putting the message across and converting people to Christianity. In view of this aim, wherever the missionaries settled, one of the first things they did was to gather young people together and start teaching them the scriptures. These teachings eventually began the formal education among the indigenous people because at each station a school started with the arrival of the missionaries. One of the major aims was to train converts who would help the missionaries to train the local people further, so that they would not only interpret their messages but would

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The commitment of the missionaries to their work can encourage us to give of our best.

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³ Grau, Eugene: “The Evangelical Presbyterian Church (Ghana and Togo): A study in the European Mission Relations affecting the Beginnings of the Indigenous Church 1914-1946” (An Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation) 1964 p. 215 (Rev. Dr. Eugene Grau was a Missionary in Ghana from 1946 to 1975).

⁴ Atakro, M. K.: Indigenous Leadership of the Ewe Church in Ghana and Togo (1847-1945) “The Case of Revds. Andreas Aku, Robert Stephen Kwami and Robert Domingo Baeta” (An unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation) 2008, p. 82. “Baeta” (An unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation) 1964, p. 15.

also help in teaching, and some could even become catechists and eventually ministers.⁵

Missionary Work among the Indigenous People

Mr. Chairman, distinguished participants, mission work among the indigenous people began when missionary Wolf arrived at Peki in November, 1847. Wolf did not move to Peki by himself. When he inquired from the Basel Missionaries where he

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Without the African agents the universal church would not have been established.

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could find a fertile place for his evangelistic work, they suggested he should turn to the East. Fortunately at this time there was a boy called Nyangamagu attending school at the castle who offered to take him to his father who was king of the Pekis. Nyangamagu was the son of Togbe Kwadzo Dei Tutu II King of Peki. Tradition has it that the former was a merchant dealing in arms. This trade brought him into contact with the palace of the Ga Mantse. The amazing thing was how he knew his father would accept them and assist them. Indeed what were the reasons that accounted for the acceptance of the missionaries when the King

of Peki heard from his son that he wanted to bring some missionaries? Several reasons have been adduced, among them are economic, political and religious.⁶

Economic Reasons

It has been established that trading had been taking place when the indigenous people were in Notsie, their ancestral home. It has been noted that during the Sixteenth Century some of them moved from Notsie in the middle of Togo to trade on the coast with the whites. When the people were in Notsie they lived within walls and some of them in order to have free access to the coast and trade, moved out of the wall.

The Rev. Prof. N.K. Dzobo, a former Moderator of the E.P. Church, was one of those who argued that economic reasons must have been the major factor for leaving the wall at Notsie. He explained that the influence of traders along the coast was inviting as it was lucrative for business. Dzobo, emphasized that with the coming of European traders who were on the coast, many indigenous people wanted to become middlemen thus they went to settle on the coast.⁷ Sandra Greene on her part noted that Notsie was an economic and commercial centre from the mid-sixteenth

⁵ Ansre, Gilbert: „Evangelical Presbyterian Church; 150 Years of Evangelization and Development 1847-1997“, E. P. Church Press Ltd. Ho, Ghana, 1997), p. 168.

⁶ Ansre, Gilbert: Op cit. p. 27.

⁷ Dzobo, N. K.: Interview with Rev. Prof. N.K. Dzobo, former Moderator of EPC at Ho. 10th June 1994.

century.⁸ We also noted that John Wright and his father had been trading from Accra to Peki even before the arrival of Wolf. Wright later became one of the interpreters for the missionaries. Probably, the King of Peki might have heard that John Wright had access to some white men and would also want to associate with such people through trade.

Mr. Chairman, slave trading was a lucrative business for many chiefs at the time. The chiefs gained by asking their people to go and raid other villages in order to sell their victims. Akosua Perbi, a lecturer at the University of Ghana, Legon, wrote that “the Ewe states were familiar with the institution of slavery in their original homelands in Nigeria and Dahomey. As the states began to be formed, slavery became an integral part of the state’s political, social and economic organization.⁹ Therefore an alliance with any group of white men in order to start slave trading or boost it was welcome for the king.

Political Reasons

Another important reason is political. By the 17th century the indigenous people had settled at where they are found today including the Pekis. After settling, each state needed to protect itself and fortify its position. Many of those who were settling had to fight the indigenous people for the land. According to Ansre, between 1700 and 1874 the Akwamu nation was one of the strongest in the southern section of present-day Ghana.¹⁰ Ansre said, “as part of Akwamu programme of conquest and expansion, Krepi, of which Peki was the leading state, was conquered by Akwamu during the reign of Akwonno, the warlike king of Akwamu. Though Akwonno invaded Krepi in July, 1707, he spent such a long time on the campaign that by February, 1708, he had still not returned to his base. It is likely that the subjection of Ho and Kpando districts to Akwamu rule can be attributed to this 1707 campaign.

The motives behind Akwamu invasion of Krepi were both political and economic. The kingdom, in its growth, undertook adventures of conquest and expansion in order to sustain its authority and prestige over its neighbours. By the turn of the 18th century, Akwamu had established her political power over the Guan principalities in what is today Akuapem area, over Ga-Dangme areas and even to the east of the Volta”.¹¹ In such a situation, Peki must prepare to meet Akwamu or any other power when it comes to war. Having heard of the powers of the white men the

⁸ Greene, Sandra: „Gender, Ethnicity and social change on the upper slave coast: A History on the Anlo Ewe“, Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1996), p. 14.

⁹ Perbi, Akosua Adomah: „A History of Indigenous Slavery in Ghana from the 15th to the 19th century“ (Sub-Saharan Publishers, Legon, Accra, 2004), p. 22.

¹⁰ Ansre, Gilbert: *Ibid.* p. 3.

¹¹ Ansre, Gilbert: *Ibid.* p. 4-5.

King of Peki readily agreed to invite the missionaries to help the Pekis in times of war.

Religious Reasons

The other reason was religious. At the time of extending the invitation to the missionaries, Peki and its environs were very fertile for evangelistic work. Nyangamagu, who asked his father to invite the missionaries, must have observed that wherever the missionaries appeared, development accompanied them. The prince must have explained this to his father to know the gain they would get. Oral tradition has it that the Pekis like the other indigenous people, believed in a hierarchy of gods. They believed in the Supreme God “Mawuga”, the source of all power, God that has power over life and death. However, this God was not worshipped directly like the lesser deities. Thus when the King of Peki was informed that the missionaries knew this Supreme God and could help them worship Him directly, the King became happy, because he needed the supreme protective power of this God to help him win wars, trade and do other extraordinary things.

Mr. Chairman, these and many others might have accounted for the king to extend invitation to the Bremen Missionaries. King Kwadzo Dei II must have been a good leader of his people. Among the indigenous, a good leader is a person who must be honest, loving, caring, dedicated to duty, wise, loyal, be faithful in his dealings with other people and have the ability and capacity to perform. He must be courageous, be relied upon, be selfless in thought and deed and be ready to serve and bring development. These virtues and characteristics the King must have had, hence his ability to deal with strangers. As a King, he displayed peculiar characteristics such as decency in his dealings, displaying moral uprightness, detesting evil, commanded the respect and confidence of his people. Also among the indigenous people, leaders such as kings are not only political heads but they are also religious leaders, the divine symbol of their people’s health and welfare. Thus King Kwadzo Dei demonstrated the “amenyenye” (humane) leadership indicated above and had proved that he had the ability to lead his people to growth. He did not contact or consult others to decide whether to invite and accept the missionaries or not, but with divine inspiration he did so and the benefit we all enjoy today.

The invitation to the Bremen Missionaries and the final acceptance of their religion can be likened to that of Widukind. Widukind was a pagan Saxon leader and the chief opponent of Charlemagne during the Saxon Wars. He was the leader of Saxon against the Frankish king Charlemagne. In 782, when Charlemagne organized Saxony as a Frankish province and ordered conversions of the pagan Saxons of Widukind to Roman Catholicism, the Saxon resumed warfare against the Franks. In later times, Widukind became a symbol of Saxon independence and a figure of legend.

Numerous legends developed around Widukind's life; he appeared as a saintly figure and the builder of many churches. When he died in 808 his feast day is commemorated on January 6. According to legend, Widukind experienced a vision that led to his conversion. Disguised as a beggar, he was spying on Charlemagne's troop camp during Easter. He witnessed a priest performing a mass and the priest was holding a child during the consecration. To his amazement, people would receive communion and the priest would give the same child to each person. Widukind was dumbfounded by this scenario and went to beg outside, following the end of the mass. One of the emperor's servants recognized him behind the disguise. He was captured, interrogated and confessed to spying on Charlemagne's camp for the purpose of becoming better acquainted with the Christian faith. He later confessed the divine vision he had seen. The emperor concluded that God had given Widukind the grace of witnessing the divine child, Jesus, behind the Sacred Host of the Mass. Widukind then renounced his worship of pagan idols.

Since the 9th century, Widukind had been idolized as a mythical hero. Around the 1100, a tomb for him was made in Enger. In German nationalism, Widukind became a hero for German nationalists in the early 20th century. After the Nazis came to power in 1933 so many plays and other works were written about Widukind.¹²

Through Kwadzo Dei, the King of Peki, today the indigenous people have received the word. Accompanying the gospel is development in education, health, building technology, good sanitation, indeed the social standing of the indigenes has improved. Though the Peki King is not idolized or celebrated as Widukind, it is generally accepted by the indigenous people that through his invitation to the missionaries, the Ewes have seen the light of salvation. He is remembered for doing good and a marvellous thing for the Ewe people. Peki has become the first-born of all congregations of the E.P. Church in Ghana and Togo.

Mr. Walter Blege, the immediate past President of the Evangelical Presbyterian University College and a musicologist composed a song for the Dumedefor (Ambassador Choir) of the E.P. Church in which he praised Kwadzo Dei. The Song is entitled "Miawoe he Nyanuuie ve na mi" (You brought the Good News to us). In the song Blege praised the North German Missionaries for bringing the Good News which eventually carried with it Agbemavor kpor kpor - eternal life, Amenovi lolo fe nya - love for one another, Xose kple dedekpokpo faith in Christ and salvation, Mawuga fe nya-Word of God, Akofafa fe nya, Dzidzeme kpokpo - peaceful and restful issues.

Blege in paying this glowing tribute to Kwadzo Dei, the King of Peki said the King became a big tree that provided comfort and pillar to the gospel. This tree was used by hunters, traditional soldiers and other brave men to climb and see the prey afar in order to hunt with ease. The King's invitation to the missionaries became the

¹² Internet <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Widukind>.

means or medium through which the Good News was used to reach as many villages and as many people as possible. Hunters who in this sense were the evangelists were able to see afar to know where the land was fertile for effective evangelistic work.

Again Blege noted that Kwadzo Dei did “Amenuwowie”, that is, he performed a feat worthy of emulation. He did something noble, wise, righteous, marvellous, courageous, indeed something a person with sound mind and wisdom could perform. The act could therefore be considered as heroic. Today Kwadzo Dei became a household name most especially among the E.P. Church and EEPT families. Through one person, the indigenous people have seen the light that is shining into the darkness. Whenever and wherever the history of the E.P. Church is told, the name of this King would be mentioned. It would be nice if this name is celebrated among the indigenous Christians for the heroic act as that of Widukind.

Training for the indigenous People and their Leaders

As indicated above, for the work to be successful, the missionaries began training the indigenous people to assist them. In 1864 a Seminary was established to train the people some of whom eventually became leaders. Earlier, primary and middle schools were also established. The establishment of the schools was to train workers for the Lord. When the training in Ghana and Togo was proving difficult, 20 boys were sent to Germany between 1884 and 1900 to be trained. Among them were Revds. Andreas Aku, Stephen Robert Kwami and Robert Domongo Baeta, Binder, Mr. Onipayede, who later became the first indigenous leaders of the Ewe Church and very astute workers. The missionaries should be commended highly for choosing these very capable young men on whom they later relied to work. These young men representing all indigenous workers had the comprehension of the European context of the missionaries’ faith that went far deeper than the understanding of most of the indigenes because they studied in Germany. They also had the full understanding of their own indigenous culture which helped them to reach their people with ease. Above all, they were able to build bridges between the gospel and the indigenous culture in ways that were far more effective than were possible for the missionaries. These and many others made the indigenous people very central to the propagation of the gospel in Ghana and Togo, making it possible for the people to receive the faith and to own it.

After the King had received Wolf, it took several years for the people to understand his message about Christ. Wolf was however, much liked and respected by the people. People respected him the more for the considerably success he had in his work as a whole and his healing work in particular. Agbeti recorded that Wolf cured Chief Tim Klu of Peki Wudome (one of the towns of Peki) of a chronic ulcer. This made him celebrated and he remarked “it was now believed that I could perform

miracles and that there was magic in my medicine". As a result he won the confidence of the people of Peki.

Though the people co-operated with Wolf they were not ready to give up their traditional religion. The traditional priests were powerful and were held in high esteem by their people. Even later the priests became very antagonistic to Wolf and the other missionaries.¹³

King Dei Tutu of Peki was even blamed by the traditional priests for accommodating the missionary. When a severe drought came, they blamed it on the presence of the white man and his God.

This kind of attitude was demonstrated at Keta also. When the missionaries crossed the Keta Lagoon to get to Keta, they met resistance from the Paramount Chief who instructed the missionaries to remain on the coast and not proceed to the interior because the great deity of Anlo would want to keep the interior entirely to himself.¹⁴

Reception of Christianity and the Challenges Involved

The reception of Christianity in the various villages followed almost the same trend. The missionaries or itinerant preachers might have brought the gospel, but due to the people's faith in the traditional religious system, such preachers could not make inroads or much impact. The missionaries or the preachers were often mocked at, when they reached the villages or the traditional leaders almost always legislated against the preaching of the gospel.

We have noticed that the earliest converts were mainly slaves who were ransomed. At Keta some of those ransomed and became Christians were Henry, Dina, Onyame etc. for various sums of money.¹⁵ Later others like Rudolf Mallet, Onipayede, Stephen Kwami were all slaves who were ransomed and later converted to Christianity.

However, some of the people became Christians on their own volition having realized the true God themselves. A case in point was reported by Missionary Illg at Adaklu Waya on September 23, 1873. A man who was formerly called Kofi was later baptized and named David. David having had a long intercourse with the missionaries had become 'tired of paganism' and opted to become a Christian. Another young man of 40 years at Waya also converted in 1878 to become a Christian to help him live a quiet life.¹⁶

¹³ Agbeti, John Kofi: „West African Christian Missions and Church Foundations 1482-1919, vol. 1“ (E.J. Bill, Leiden, 1986) p. 85.

¹⁴ Agbeti, John K.: Op. cit. p. 88, 89.

¹⁵ Debrunner, Hans W.: „A Church between colonial Powers; A study of the Church in Togo“ (London Lutterworth Press, 1965) p. 80.

¹⁶ Debrunner, Hans W.: Op. cit. p. 97.

Thus while others became Christians through being ransomed by the missionaries others became Christians on their own volition. Even some of the people who converted had a strong faith in the traditional religion.

A typical example occurred at Wegbe-Kpalime in Ghana. Togbe Klu Adezua Banibensu before his birth was dedicated to the traditional god "Dzoha". Thus when he was given birth, he was named Dzoha Klu. As a farmer he used to set traps for fish in the Dzoha stream. Whenever he inspected the traps he found out that they were destroyed by crocodiles in the river. Dzoha Klu therefore decided to kill the reptile. When he killed one of the crocodiles, his son called Nyangamagu (not the prince mentioned earlier on) fell seriously sick. Klu was advised to consult another deity to know the reason for his son's sickness. At the shrine, he was informed that the Dzoha god was responsible for the child's sickness because he had killed a crocodile.

He was therefore asked to go back and pacify the Dzoha god with a goat, a keg of palm wine and 12 baskets of cowries. He was requested to crawl on his knee when he was about 100 metres from the Dzoha shrine. He did as instructed, yet the boy died the following day. He was to repeat the pacification rite else his second son, Tawiah would also die. This experience shattered his belief in the local god hence his conversion to the Christian faith.

As indicated earlier, itinerant preachers had been going from place to place to preach the word of God. Wegbe-Kpalime was also visited often but no one had offered to convert. However, after the experience of Togbe Klu, when an itinerant preacher in the person of evangelist Gustav Ata Yao came, Togbe Banibensu Klu went to listen to him. Later he accepted Christ and he and his second son Tawiah (who was going to die if the ritual was not repeated) were converted and baptized in 1896. Their conversion attracted others to join the Christian faith and Tawiah became the first pastor from Wegbe-Kpalime.

What happened was that once the convert saw the benefit of becoming a Christian, they went all out to display their faith. Such converts went from their hometowns to the missionary stations to learn the catechumen or to attend church service. In the case of Togbe Banibensu he and his son had to travel to Peki, a distance of about 40 kilometres to learn the catchment for a year before baptism. On Sundays they had to travel to Ho, a distance of about 25 kilometres to attend church service.¹⁷

This was the case in many other places, both in Ghana and Togo. Converts, who on their own volition accepted the Christian faith, seriously took up and lived according to its teachings. They own it and propagate the gospel first by bringing their families on board.

¹⁷ Evangelical Presbyterian Church centenary celebration Programme and Brochure, November, 2012, 26-28.

Hans Debrunner indicated that the fear of death and of the last judgment, a desire for eternal life and paradise, were some of the motives for adults to be baptized, especially in the case of older people. They normally said “I wanted life; that is why I became a Christian”.¹⁸

From the above, the case of Togbe Klu Banibensu, fear of death played a greater role in becoming a Christian.

Another main reason for becoming a Christian is a longing to serve God alone and no longer serve the traditional gods. People expressed the view that they saw that the traditional gods were no longer worth serving, rather they would serve God. Thus Hans Debrunner wrote:

I wanted to serve God
The guardian Spirits (Trowo) are nothing
God is all powerful
I want to be a child of the Creator
I was ill and was cured by prayer to God: that is
why I became a Christian.

The above quotation came from someone at Agu-Nyogbo in Togo who wanted to become a Christian but for the fear of his life and traditional gods, would not want to. The following statement came from someone at Agu-Nyogbo:

My father served the guardian spirit Chevieso. After his death we thought we could give up serving Chevieso, where upon we became enraged, and a large number of our family died. The family met together and discussed what ought to be done. It was decided that I should become Chevieso’s priest in order to propitiate him. There was a further consideration; we regretted the large sum of money which my parents had spent on Chevieso. So I became his priest. Of course God (Mawu) is the only God and greater than Chevieso. Therefore I allowed my children to become Christians. Yet I cannot become one, else Chevieso would kill me.¹⁹

The fear of the traditional gods affected conversions. Many people would have liked to become Christians but the fear that the traditional gods would kill them actually affected their faith in Christianity. Chevieso is a guardian spirit like Dente, but it is very vigorous, very brutal and acts through lightening. Thus people fear and respect it. It forms part of the Yehwe cult. The Yehwe cult rules must be strictly observed

¹⁸ Debrunner, Hans W.: Ibid. p. 249.

¹⁹ Debrunner, Hans W.: Ibid. p. 252.

and special clothing is worn by its members. Failure to observe its rules may lead to death thus people who serve it would not want to go contrary to its rules.

Growth of the Indigenous Church

With the establishment of schools and the consequent training of personnel, the Church began to grow. From its beginning in Peki in 1847, it moved to Keta in 1853, then to Adaklu Waya in 1856, Anyako in 1857, Ho 1859, Mission Tove in 1893 and Lomé in 1895. With the rapid expansion, many indigenous trained people assisted the missionaries in their work. Whenever a station was opened, the missionaries moved on leaving the work in the hands of the indigenous people and leaders to help it grow. The first indigenous pastor, Rudolf Mallet was ordained in 1882. It was not until 1901 that two more indigenous people were ordained. Several factors accounted for this. Grau indicated that though the local people were trained by the missionaries, the missionaries were not prepared to place so much leadership into the hands of the African pastors earlier because the missionaries did not believe the Africans could do it.²⁰ In 1910 two more were ordained and a further one in 1911. The real growth of the indigenous Church was to occur during World War I. To this we now focus our attention.

World War I and its Contributions to the Independence of the Church

There is no gainsaying the fact that the Church's independence was to a large extent brought about by World War I. Indeed this war could be referred to as being the immediate factor in building indigenous leaders and hastening the devolution of autonomy to the indigenous people and the leaders of the Ewe Church. By 1882, the Bremen Mission was thinking that it would take another century before leadership could be devolved into the hands of the indigenous people. However, exactly four decades after such a pronouncement the indigenous workers became the leaders of the Ewe Church. How then did this happen?

The war started on August 2, 1914 and on the second day, the German Governor of Togoland mobilized all German reservists including 7 German missionaries to protect the largest African wireless communication station at Kamina near Atakpame in Togo. When the Kamina station was captured, the missionaries were imprisoned and later sent to Dahomey. From that event many of the missionaries were sent home. When the missionaries realized that many of the stations were left uncared for, they decided to ordain more indigenous workers and gave them more responsibilities. By January 10, 1918, all the missionaries were deported home except Burgi who as a Swiss national. Having lost the missionaries, it was advisable

²⁰ Grau, Eugene: *Ibid.* p. 237.

to ordain more indigenous workers to fill the vacuum created. Therefore more indigenous people were ordained. Between 1847 and 1900, one person was ordained and between 1901 and 1912, 7 indigenous people were ordained. However between 1914 and 1918, within 4 years 10 indigenous people were ordained. Ansre said that the missionaries were beginning to recognize that the indigenous workers were capable of handling the affairs of the Church and were in the process of taking up responsibilities.²¹

Independence for the Ewe Church

Soon after taking over responsibility from the Bremen Missionaries, the indigenous people took a step of organizing a Synod for the Church in Ghana and Togo. The architects of this meeting were pastors Aku, Kwami, Baeta and Quist, all of whom trained in Germany. This Synod meeting was held in Kpalime in Togo. Kpalime was chosen for its centralized position for all the delegates from Keta, Ho, Peki, Lome and Atakpame. The Synod delegates consisted of fourteen (14) indigenous pastors, fourteen (14) catechists, forty-five (45) senior teachers, fifty-eight (58) Church Elders and thirty-five (35) other delegates. In all, there were one hundred and sixty-six (166) delegates. There was no missionary when Rev. Burgi the last of them left the previous year.²²

Indeed after the departure of the missionaries, the indigenous pastors took over the leadership of the congregations. The meeting in Kpalime elected Aku as the leader and head of the Church. Kwami and Baeta were also elected Synod Clerks of the British and the French zones of the Church respectively. With these three men representing all the indigenous leaders, we shall from now concentrate attention on them rather than referring to all the indigenous workers.

Grau mentioned that, humanly speaking, the indigenous Church's successful passing from dependence to independence was due to the African leadership of the Church. On the French side, Burgi had made a wise choice when he divided the church between Andreas Aku and Robert Baeta. He further said Aku had the maturity and respect necessary to lead the other pastors while Baeta had the drive and personality, with the ability to deal with government officials, be they German, British or French.

Grau again wrote that on the British side, Robert Kwami was not only a Clerk, he was a prophet who led with steady and firm hand, yet never seemed to let the power of his office take his eyes off the God who had called him to be His servant. He said he held his office in simplicity and yet made it one of respect, so that for the years following, the Synod Clerk, and not the Moderator, was looked upon as the

²¹ Interview with Rev. Prof. Ansre – 18th May, 2004.

²² Ansre, Gilbert: *Ibid.* p. 26.

executive head of the church. Though he might have made mistakes, the fact remained that he had the respect of the people, teachers, pastors and the missionaries and they followed where he led.²³

Missionary Eugene Grau was emphatic that perhaps the clearest expression of independence was manifest in the awareness of the members that their faith was not something imposed by a foreign culture, but that it was the most vital part of their lives. Through their church they were learning to be more independent and self-reliant, and were thinking for themselves which had been brought about by the indwelling Holy Spirit. The final proof that they were a true church was seen in the life of love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness and self-control which the Christian tried to express, not because it was expected of him by the missionary or written as a rule for church membership, but because this was the expression of the new life of the child of God.²⁴

Most of the above characteristics were demonstrated in the lives of the Ewe Christians and their leaders. Aku, Kwami and Baeta will be used as case studies to prove the above.

Ownership of the Ewe Church by the indigenes displayed

When the Church had been orphaned by the departure of the missionaries in 1918, Aku, Kwami and Baeta who were appointed leaders in 1922, took over and led the other workers and the indigenous people to own the church. The war had grave consequences for the church most especially when the missionaries also participated in it. It was surprising for the people to witness the missionaries who were preaching peace to take guns intending to kill their enemies. This action of the missionaries challenged the indigenous Christians. The main theatre of the war was staged in Togo. The people of Togo wondered how a European dispute could become a war in Togo. The indigenes were recruited to fight and many of the men lost their lives leaving their wives widows. Schools had to close down and teachers' salaries were left unpaid. Aku had to address the people most especially the teachers on how to move forward.

Aku encouraged them and asked each individual to give of his best. The people saw him as a father on whom they could rely. Aku had the courage, will, valour and wisdom to carry his people along. Compounding the difficulties were the non-availability of funds to pay salaries of teachers as indicated above. Aku had to speak to the congregations to increase their giving and they obliged. Moreover the teachers were also willing to take the meager salary that was given them. At times even the meager salary was not there at the close of every month, yet the indigenous people

²³ Grau, Eugene: Ibid. p. 241.

²⁴ Grau, Eugene: Ibid. p. 24.

continued to work with zeal. This showed the extent of commitment of the indigenous workers and the Christian community at the time. The people saw the need to continue the work whether the missionaries were present or not. The people were ready to salvage the fallen image of Christianity no matter the cost. These leaders and the entire indigenous Christian community now saw that Christianity belonged to them and not to the Europeans. The indigenous now owned the faith and were ready to propagate its tenets to all and sundry. A legacy of volunteerism and self-sacrifice became the hallmark of the people for many years. The question we ask today is, are people are ready to volunteer to do God's work?

Willingness of the Indigenous Workers to Carry on the Work

As stated above, Christians now saw that the faith belonged to them and not an imposition from Europe; as such they had to protect and defend it. Indigenization of activities began in the church; for instance the indigenous language was used more in teaching the scriptures. The impact of the use of the vernacular was great as the vernacular developed a deeper appreciation for the entire indigenous culture. The indigenous language became a dynamic cultural resource, reflecting the spirit of the people and illuminating their sense of value.²⁵ The willingness of the indigenous people to work helped membership of the congregations to rise considerably. In Togo, the congregations rose from 7,929 in December, 1914 to 9,366 in December, 1918.²⁶ Indeed Aku's speech brought home the message of sacrifice and dedication of the indigenous worker in spite of the difficulties. People now knew that the faith had become theirs and they were ready to do everything to own it fully. An event which amazed the Germans even more than the indigenous people and which convinced the former that indigenous Christianity had matured occurred in Germany in the 1930s.

Challenge to the Christian Faith in Germany

In the 1930s there arose economic depression most especially in the Gold Coast. The over-dependence on the mono cash crop, cocoa, led to over-production and glut on the world market with its consequent fall in price of the commodity. The financial crisis led to large-scale unemployment and many people became poor. This affected giving (offertory) in the church also. Kwami as the Synod Clerk was therefore invited to Germany to talk about the difficulties confronting the church and possibly solicit financial assistance.²⁷ Kwami reported that the tour was a success taking him through 82 locations. He arranged to deliver 60 lectures but

²⁵ Bediako, Kwami: *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion* (Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 1997), p. 152.

²⁶ Debrunner, Hans W.: *Ibid.* p. 150.

²⁷ Atakro, M. K.: *Ibid.* p. 295.

ended up giving 150 lectures and spending 120 days. He visited many places in Germany but when he was to go to Oldenburg he was asked not to come.

The Real Challenge

The Mayor of the city, Rover, who was once a coffee merchant in Cameroon declared at an election meeting on September, 1932 that the “house of God, the foremost sanctuary, would be desecrated by the visit of Kwami, a member of the most primitive race.”²⁸ He warned that if Kwami should ever set foot in Oldenburg chapel, he would regret it. Though the Church Leadership in Germany wanted to prevent Kwami from going to Oldenburg, Kwami himself said he would go, damn the consequences. It was reported that Kwami went to Oldenburg and mounted the pulpit. Soldiers were sent to the chapel with guns ready to shoot when given the command. Kwami related that he knelt down, recited Psalm 23 and gave his speech. He came down later and was seen off by the German church leaders.

Kwami had the courage to stand against racism even at the backyard of the perpetrators of the racist acts. Not even the intimidation of the gun could prevent him from the truth about God and exhibiting his God-given rights. His courage raised the confidence level of the indigenous Christians while it challenged the faith of the German actors. This event showed that the indigenous people knew the strength and power of God; therefore they could trust and rely on Him all the time. Some Germans who witnessed the event wondered if God had sent Kwami to them to test the Germans to find out if they were perfect Christians.²⁹

Baeta and Church Leadership

Baeta in order to continue with indigenization and devolving more leadership role into the hands of the indigenous workers took some steps. To involve more people into the worship programme, he introduced singing, dancing and clapping of hands to make the worship lively. The indigenous religion and the Christian religion became part of him and these religious practices permeated the lives of many indigenous people from infancy to the grave. They were born into the indigenous religious atmosphere and later through baptism accepted into the Christian religion. The values in both religions enriched their lives and enabled them to lead the Christly lives. The indigenous people and their leaders were able to distinguish between virtue and vice, something they went ahead to teach and practice. The indigenous people had now taken ownership of the faith and used the indigenous language to propagate it. Instructions for baptism were done by the indigenous

²⁸ Nutifafa Nami: Peace be unto you. An Ewe Newspaper published in Lomé in the 1920s and 1930s.

²⁹ Schöck, Eva & Lenz, Dieter (ed): „150 Years of North German Mission 1836 - 1986“ (Bremen, Roder Druck, 1989), p. 13.

leaders in the indigenous language and the people receiving the instructions understood the catechumen better because the instructions were taught in the indigenous languages. In areas where Christianity was built on the past and present values in the indigenous society, it made relevant the word of the Lord in the indigenous cultural setting.

Devolving Leadership into the Hands of Indigenous Workers

Baeta lamented over the long period it took the missionaries to devolve leadership into the hands of the indigenous people, which rather came by accident than by plan. At the time the indigenous leaders took over the administration of the Church from the missionaries, membership began to grow very fast. Statistics revealed that by 1914, membership of the Church was 11,682 while by 1924, this figure rose to 23,980. There was an increment of 105%. From 1924-1935 the total membership of the Church had increased by 202%, bringing the membership of the Church in Ghana to 33,100 and that of Togo stood at 15,400.³⁰

To prove that the message brought by the Bremen Missionaries and accepted by the indigenous people was worthy, the indigenous people actually evangelized for the work to continue when the missionaries left. In Togo, from Lome, other villages such as Bagida, Amutivi, Be, Fiawu, Agoe, Adafienu, Denu were reached. Once a week the leaders went out with school children to spread the gospel. Baeta and some indigenous workers later embarked on vigorous outreach work into the Kabye areas in the north. (The Kabyes are the second largest group of people in Togo who occupy largely the northern area of the country.) For the evangelistic work to reach the northern part of Togo, the Atakpame Seminary was tasked to train some Kabye people and the following Ewes to learn the Kabye language. The people were Anikpi from Akposo and Sowu from Tove. If today the Kabye area is evangelized, schools are established and the language is reduced to writing, the credit must go to these pioneers who worked in the area in the 1930s and 1940s. Indeed by the 1940s the indigenous people now saw that the work became theirs and they were the people to carry it on.³¹

Development of Literary Works

To aid the work of propagation, literary works started by the missionaries were carried on by the indigenous people. These were the constitution, the bible and the hymn book.

The Constitution: The first constitution evolved from the regulations, practices and procedures that were to guide the missionaries. It was called the

³⁰ Ansre, Gilbert: *Ibid.* p. 92

³¹ Atakro, M. K.: *Ibid.* p. 254-255

Zahn Constitution of 1876. Dr. Franz Michael Zahn drew it up in 1876 at the time he was the Inspector of the North German Missionary Society.³² There were some reviews to this original constitution but the actual Constitution was drawn up for the Church in 1931 and known as the 1931 Constitution. This constitution was written by the indigenous people themselves, an indication that they were ready to abide by rules and regulations formulated. Reviews continued by the indigenes till today we have the 1991 Constitution. The work now rests on the shoulders of the indigenous people.

The Bible: Work on the Bible translation began in 1961 after Schlegel had completed writing his first Ewe book, Key to the Ewe Language in 1854. He translated the four Gospels by the end of 1861 and by 1877 the whole New Testament was translated. He was assisted by people like Christian Kwist from Dzelukope. From that time there have been several reviews and today there is a new translation headed by the Rev. Prof. Ansre, formerly of the Bible Society of Ghana. Today the Bible is written in several languages and dialects in Ghana and Togo. The indigenous people have realized that the faith is theirs and are doing everything possible for it to reach many people.

The Church Hymnal: The church hymnal was first published in 1924. In this hymnal there were 481 hymns. The indigenous people helped to translate some of the hymns; Andreas Aku translated 25, Kwami translated 22, Baeta translated 35, Samuel Quist and Adzaklo translated 98. The indigenous people took interest in the translations because they knew the faith was now theirs. Today there is a new hymnal coming out in 2002 with 665 hymns and some additions. The work was solely done by the indigenous people themselves.³³

Contributions of the Indigenous People to the Development of Education among the People

Education formed an integral part of the work of the missionaries as well as the indigenous people. The first secular education was started at Peki in February, 1848 with fourteen (14) boys. The school closed down when the missionaries left Peki in 1852. The second school began in 1855 at Keta. Schools were established whenever a station was opened. By 1872, there were 128 pupils in schools. By 1897 when the Church celebrated its Golden Jubilee, the number of school pupils rose to 900 and by 1913, a year before the war broke out, the number rose to 7,500.³⁴

³² Synod Committee: 1931 Constitution of the E. P. Church

³³ Ewe Hymnal of the EPCG, EEPT.

³⁴ Atakro, M. K.: Ibid. p. 267.

The number of school pupils increased considerably because the number of indigenous workers also increased. By 1910 while there were 19 missionaries, there were as many as 215 indigenous workers. Again by 1935 there were 22 indigenous pastors while there were only 6 missionaries and as many as 400 teachers and evangelists in Togo and Ghana. In Ghana by 1945 school enrolment rose to 325. In the Lome district alone there were 728 school pupils. These high figures were recorded due to the untiring efforts of the indigenous workers, an indication that the people knew the value of education and the mission of the missionaries and were prepared to work for it and own it.

Some Negative Legacies of the Indigenous Christians

In spite of very many good things done by the indigenous people, there were some negative ones that can be said that were not acceptable. The activities of the missionaries as well as the indigenous people disrupted good communal living in some places. It was felt at times that some traditional values were not worth practicing. In places Salems were created for the converts in order not to mix with non-converts. Such behaviours divided the adherents of the traditional religion and Christian converts leading to disruption of the unity of the indigenous people. Christians were also forbidden to participate in some social activities considered by Christians as 'pagan' (people outside the Christian faith). A typical case was that, the people of Leklebi in Ghana were suspended from participating in the Holy Communion because they attended the burial of their chief. Christians forgot that the chief of the village was the embodiment of the area. He was the political and religious leader. The chief till today maintains security, fosters social cohesion, economic development and regarded as the custodian of the rules and regulations of his society. Therefore the people were/are linked to the chief politically, socially, religiously and economically. There was no way the people could detach themselves from an important occasion as the burial of the chief. Such behaviours still continue today since some Christians consider the chief and his people and their activities as 'evil' people who should not mix with Christians and Christian activities.

The use of some terminologies such as 'pagan' and 'fetish' used to describe non-converts were inappropriate. The word 'pagan' came from the Latin word 'paganus' meaning 'rural dweller', that is the worship of many gods as against the worship of one God. The word 'fetish' comes from the Portuguese word meaning 'idol', thus Africans were associated with idols'. These were used by the missionaries and copied by the indigenous people and their leaders. For these converts normally refer to non-converts as (trosubolawo) meaning 'worshippers of idols'. The use of these terms brings tension between Christians in some communities thus creating divisions and disunity.

The Way Forward

Indeed the two Churches in Africa will remain indebted to the Bremen Mission for bringing the word of God. Having accepted and embraced it, we are also carrying the message to others. The two Churches have their own ministries, administering the Word and sacraments; they have their own lay ministry, people consecrated to serve in the congregations and teachers to teach in the schools. Moreover they have their own leadership of General Assembly and Synod. Though the above are being carried on effectively, financially things are still not running as they should. African Governments and some Churches still depend on foreign aids/donations to run their budgets. But the question is, how long will this continue? There must be a way out so that financially the African Churches can be independent. Therefore there must be more collaborative effort to help strengthen the existing relationship.

The Future of the Church

Hans Debrunner in his concluding chapter of his book “A Church between Colonial powers” lamented gravely about the future of the church in Togo. His comments and findings in Togo are not so different from those in Ghana. We shall therefore use his assessment for discussion on this important issue of the future of the church.

The first thing he mentioned to be considered seriously is the possibility that the church might languish. He elaborated on the above point that the most troublesome for the church is its poverty. He said workers’ salaries were and are still low while the churches central funds are often exhausted.

Thus the African Churches depend or lean heavily on their European counterparts financially to service their budgets. A church that finds itself in such a dilemma is unable to attract competent staff. He wrote this in 1965 yet this particular challenge still persists today. This is even affecting the partnership today. Can we actually describe the relationship between the European Churches and the African Churches as partnership or paternalistic in nature.

If the African Churches are to be truly independent then they must do a lot to change things. The question is, is it really true the churches in Togo and Ghana are poor? I can confidently say that these churches are not poor but attitudes of the individual congregations, districts, presbyteries must change. Debrunner indicated that unless trustworthy men of strong spiritual power are in charge at the various levels, things will remain same if not worse. I totally agree with this assessment because some congregations I served in, those in charge of the finances never rendered proper accounts. I served a congregation where the treasurer alone was in charge of counting the tithe envelopes. The monthly income on the average was around one thousand and five hundred Ghana Cedis. Though the constitution of the

church clearly said a treasurer could serve only two terms of three years each, a particular treasurer served twelve years. With difficulty we managed to remove this person. When the person was removed the monthly income from tithes rose to an average of three thousand Ghana Cedis. This scenario is found in many congregations today.

If the church should overcome its financial challenges, then drastic measures must be taken. I leave this to the consultation to deliberate upon. However may I suggest that one of the areas we can improve upon is the tourism industry. If the church is able to develop tourism and attract local and international guests, the church's financial challenges can be easily overcome.

Another important factor that is affecting the growth of the indigenous Church in Togo and Ghana is that the church still “remains content with jealously preserving its tradition and its freedom, shutting itself up and becoming isolated”.³⁵

Today the Church has reached a cross road and getting confused whether to turn to the left or right. In order for the church to guard and preserve its traditions, the older people find it difficult to accept the new wave of spiritual development that has engulfed the Christian church wide-world. Indeed what the elders feared at the beginning eventually occurred in Ghana.

To strongly build upon the spiritual life of the members, Bible Study and Prayer Fellowship was formed. It helped to build the church numerically but eventually got the church in Ghana to divide itself into two in 1991.

Still the church in Ghana is struggling whether it should accept some of the followings fully:

Speaking in tongue, anointing, extempore prayers in church, tithing, praises singing and others. The youth that fraternize with other Charismatic and Pentecostal churches feel all the above musts be embraced and taken on board in church service. One significant thing is the “worship time” during worship. This is a period the youth come together to sing special songs after singing praises. This is done solemnly and to them, they do invoke the Holy Spirit at this time for God to take centre stage before the sermon comes later. This is an aspect that is destroying the church the fastest of late.

While some elders and pastors oppose it vehemently, the youth are also bent on doing it. Thus some congregations are fighting this. In some instances, the youth mainly members of the Evangelical Presbyterian Students Union (EPSU) decide to leave the church. If at this stage we are still losing our intellectuals over such simple matters, then what is the future of the church?

³⁵ Debrunner, Hans W.: Ibid. p. 305-308.

There are many issues relating to spiritual life, if not handled as expected the church will find itself isolated so much so that it can no longer be even part of the wider church in the world.

The issue of spirituality is not affecting only the EPC in Ghana and EEPT in Togo alone but the other orthodox churches such as the Methodist and Presbyterian Churches of Ghana. The latter two churches have been able to manage theirs and the gain is tremendous. They are not only able to maintain and retain membership but are also able to win more souls for Christ. We must be open to some of these things, think over them properly before decisions are reached. I am not however calling for the acceptance of all kinds of teaching that some of our youths are also trying to introduce.

The Bremen Mission and its African Churches have been in partnership relations for some time now. Though the relationship is working, most of the people in Africa and even Europe know very little about it today. Many people in the African Churches can tell very little about the relationship.

Such members can tell only when the church began in Peki, Keta and can talk a bit about Wolf, and how he was received by King Kwadzo Dei II.

Most members of our congregations do not care much about the history let alone to know how the relationship is working. To many congregants, there is a partnership but this remains with the top officials of the churches in Africa and those in Europe.

The Annual General Meeting of the Bremen Mission and its African counterparts are only considered as ritual for these officials to perform yearly. What it entails and its prospects have little meaning to the ordinary people. After deliberations at these meetings, summary of what went on must be put on paper and sent to all congregations for discussions to go on in congregations.

The observance of the Partnership Sunday is considered by many congregations as a burden rather than something to help build the relationship. This is even seen as an imposition from Europe thus many congregations do not attach any importance to it. In many congregations, on this particular day, pastors do not prepare beforehand. They go to the church to read the programme sent to them for long hours thus making the service very boring. For congregations in Africa to be interested, the programme should not be long and pastors must involve as many participants as possible.

We are grateful to the Bremen Mission for involving the Youth of Germany in the annual exchange programme. But in Africa their presence is not being felt as expected. They are either kept in the Head-offices and on Sundays follow some pastors to attend churches.

I think, for their presence to be felt more they can go from congregation to congregation to talk to such congregations about their mission. They can make friends

with members of the congregations, telling the youth and others about Germany etc. In the end I suggest that:

- Relationships should move from the church leaderships to congregations.
- The current exchange of pastors is lauded highly but those who participate in the programme must be made to write about their experiences and share same with other pastors and congregations.
- Volunteer youths from Germany to Africa must be made to visit as many congregations as possible to discuss their mission, what they expect to achieve and whether their expectations have been met.
- The word of God spreads more quickly where women take centre stage. Therefore let us involve women more in the activities of the church.

Conclusion

From the above submissions one can confidently say that the Christian faith brought by the Bremen Missionaries was not an imposition from Europe but was voluntarily accepted by the indigenous people. The king of Peki on his own volition sent his people and even gave his palanquin, something reserved for only kings to ride in, to the missionaries. This gesture shows the affection and love for the missionaries. The general acceptance of the gospel which led to development in many fields and the contributions of the indigenous helpers and later leaders is a testimony that the indigenous people willingly accepted the word and made it theirs. All we can do at this stage is to thank all those who contributed in diverse ways to bring the gospel to us. Indeed the indigenous people provided all kinds of assistance to the missionaries in the form of guiding the missionaries to reach their destinations in safety, acting as guides and guards, helping as artisans, domestic workers etc. Progress was made by the indigenous to take the lead in evangelism, church planting, leadership and scholarship. Though missionary attitudes demonstrated that Europeans had little expectation that the indigenes would be able to wrestle with theological concepts or lead their own people and churches, the end result showed clearly that indigenous people were and are able to overcome the fears of the Europeans. Today, we commend highly measures being put in place by the current leadership of the Bremen Mission led by the Rev. Hannes Menke to bring the activities of all that they are doing to the door steps of the ordinary Ewe people and their congregations. For the first time in the history of the partnership the Annual General Meeting of the Bremen Mission is taking place in Africa. We pray that this will open gates to many other events to make the partnership more meaningful to the general membership of our congregations. We look forward to more changes in the future as the Church today faces many challenges. Financially, the African Churches in the partnership lean heavily on their European counterpart,

a development that does not augur well for any meaningful relationship. In the spiritual domain, the church in Ghana in particular has reached the crossroads; should it take on board the new spiritual wind that is blowing all over the world which some Elders decry, or fail to accept it, and leave the youth to migrate to other denominations. The Bremen Missionaries brought the gospel, it was accepted by the chiefs and many converts were made for Christ just as through Widukind many people received Christ. There was no imposition rather it was received and through teachings was owned by the people.

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Excursions

1. Survey among Baptists

Attractions in their procedures (which make their faith attractive)

1. They learn a lot in the Bible.

* Deepening of Bible studies with great frequency and sections.

* Women, men, confirmands, youth, children.

2. They organize memorization meetings of biblical texts at every day of birth.

3. They organize every Sunday and at three o'clock evangelization meetings (at home, public squares, markets).

4. They place special emphasis on receiving individual donations from their members and training them so that they can be at the whole community's disposal.

5. Necessity of local training of members.

“

It is important for our mission to be in contact with other Christian denominations and other religions.

”

What are we regarded as by the Baptists (who are we to them according to their spiritual point of view?)

1. The Presbyterians do not deepen biblical studies to guide Christians to God (they do, but in a superficial way).

2. No education - only baptism by immersion is essential for them to go to Christ.

3. The Presbyterians refuse the teachings of Luther.

4. Why do you return to the Catholics? (allusion to the weeks of unity with the Catholics). For them you simply return to the flock of the church.

2. Visit to the parish of the Pentecostal Church

Two questions were put to the members of this community:

1. What makes the way to live your faith attractive to you?
2. How do you judge the Reformed churches?

Answers to the first question

- 1) The first very important thing that is attractive in our life is that Jesus is our savior. By his crucifixion, his death and resurrection he frees us from sin. Therefore they say we are no longer frightened by traditional priests who cast the evil curse to bewitch people. In our society they say young people and adults are afraid of evil spirits, but we are free.
- 2) The second grace that draws people to the Pentecostal churches is the cultural expression of their faith. The Pentecostal Christians, especially young people, worship God through intercultural and ethnic dances and songs that put Jesus Christ at the center of culture. From these facts the cultural differences between the ethnic groups develop the treasure in their Pentecostal churches, giving their church a special attraction.
- 3) An elder declares that the Pentecostal people pray a lot. Their Christians also live their brotherly communion. The problems of different members concern the whole church.
- 4) The powerful manifestation of the Holy Spirit makes the Pentecostal faith attractive. With the power of the Holy Spirit, miracles abound in the Pentecostal Church and draw the souls to God because humans crave the release from demons, disease and poverty. Example: An elder testifies that he came to the Pentecostal Church because he was sick. His healing after prayer led him to conversion.

“

“The Holy Spirit uses other people as we as He uses me.”
There is no denying to others that the Spirit is active within them and through them and to trust at the same time that He is also active within me and through me.

”

Answers to the second question

“

Despite our weakness, limitations and fallibility in our mission, Christ is able to transform us to become attractive in our faith persuasions.

”

1) All Pentecostal Christians and their pastor confirmed that Reformed churches have very beautiful songs. They say that the melodies are angelic and the messages are very deep. Therefore they think the Holy Spirit has greatly inspired the composers of these songs which make up the pride of the Reformed Churches.

2) All members and their pastor also felicitated the Reformed churches on their social institutions such as schools, hospitals etc.

3) On the other hand they are indignant at the ethical life of some members of the clergy of the Reformed churches living in immorality. Therefore they think that libertinism is allowed in Protestant communities. They urge them to discipline the fornicators.

4) The Christians of the Pentecostal church we visited deplored the monopoly of prayer and preaching. They wished that the clergy would give to all the faithful the possibility to pray also when they are in the church, because everyone should lay his burden before God. In addition the youth has to be enlisted for preaching for being prepared for taking succession.

3. Report on the excursion to the Darussalam Islamic Institute of Kpalimé

On Tuesday, May 28, 2013, at 16.30 h a meeting for exchange and sharing was held between a delegation of the Bremen Mission and some officials of the Darussalam Institute of Kpalimé in the prefecture of Kloto in Togo. The meeting was held in a classroom at the Institute.

The atmosphere was friendly and the discussions we held were very informative, and enjoyed by all. After the usual greetings and brief introductions, the General Secretary of the Bremen Mission Rev. Menke outlined the purpose of this meeting: namely the appeal of each of our missions. A first series of questions were posed to the Muslim representatives, namely:

1. When did the Muslim faith come to the region?
2. What is the nature of the relationship between Islam and other religions, especially the Christian religion?
3. Why are women often not present at the place of prayer in the mosques?

Speaking one after another, the representatives of the Institute provided the following answers to each of the questions:

1. There were two starting points for the Muslim faith in Togo: the first from Sodoké and Tchamba and the second from Mango. We note that Benin and particularly the Djougou region is the origin of Islam in Togo since the 18th century, in 1708.
2. Concerning the relations with other religions they argue that they are good and even in the event of death, baptisms and other occasions a supporting participation is customary.
3. Regarding the women the answering person said that a woman is a "school". Neither religion nor the husband can compel or prohibit her from praying in the same way as men.

Other contributed explanations allow each other to better understand the domains of the two religions, namely:

1. According to Islam, believers and non-believers are brothers in Adam. All the prophets have to be respected, including Jesus Christ and especially Mohamed. It is also important to differentiate between a good and a bad Muslim. The Islamic faith classifies its faithful in: Muslims, Mu Umin and in Muhsin depending on the degree of consecration of the individual. They tell us that in Togo mainly the Sunnis are present with some related minorities.

2. They were also curious to know the reason for the long journey from Europe to Togo? What is the difference between the Christians of different denominations, including Jehovah's Witnesses? Why is the West so insensitive to the cries of asylum seekers from Africa?

The meeting ended at 18.00 h after a request of the Muslim brothers to continue these discussions in the future. We note that 11 people attended the meeting, 4 of them were Muslims and 7 Christians.¹

¹ Report by Macclam Basse.

Summaries

Summary of report of group work

Günter Baum

Reformed Church, Germany

Deviating from the usual practice, no closing communiqué was elaborated. Instead of that, the contents of the lectures, bible discussions and excursions were laid down in protocols by individual persons, subsequently they were discussed and finalised in group work. A small working group prepared three questions:

- 1) What is for me, for us the basis of the attractiveness of our God?
- 2) In which respect could our words and actions obscure or witness the attractiveness of our Christian faith?
- 3) What is of significance for our mission:
 - the meaning of our cultural and confessional differences?
 - the meaning of our mutual faith?

I wish to highlight some of the notes which are considered important by me. I believe that they need further discussion:

Relating to question No. 1:

- The question is two-sided: on one side, it implies great confidence in God who is the original creator and who continues with His creative work. On the other side, it means that He is near to the small and insignificant people. Both these questions are tied together by the word “empowerment”.

- God is described as a power that is stronger than any other powers who consider themselves as “divine”. He is the Lord who is capable of changing structures and individuals.

- God's almightiness covers the weaknesses of mankind, too. Our mission does not require wizard-like happenings or unusual religious experiences in order to be convincing.

Relating to question No. 2:

- A church that is alive must reflect the actual life of people (considering the composition of the congregation); on the other hand, church has to transform, to change people's lives (by the liberating message of the Gospel). God is the counsellor of the weak.
- The objectives of the mission are promoted by flexible, participatory and manifold activities.
 - In every aspect of our life, we have to ensure that our behaviour corresponds to the love and to the grace of God.
 - Our specific Christian universal task is to protect the creation. The world which God has given into the hands of people, asking them to cultivate and to preserve it, needs justice. Christians commit themselves to this purpose the Christian community serves this purpose, too.
 - It is the duty of our church to praise God.

Relating to question No. 3:

- Autonomy of the different churches is a valuable asset (this applies inside Bremen mission, too). This means that each member bears the mission responsibility within his or her own context.
- Because of our diverseness, we are enriched and we receive new ideas for our mission, each in our own contexts.
- Joint reading of the Bible unites us in our diverseness.
- Our belief in the resurrection of Christ removes all cultural and confessional limitations.
- Because Bremen Mission is structured like a family, we are capable of experiencing unity without uniformity. Mutual enrichment comes to us without rivalry. We challenge each other without feeling superior.

Other things that catch my eye:

Whenever summaries or recapitulations are prepared, it rarely happens that christological topics are explicitly mentioned. (As an example, I name the theology of the cross – the resurrection of Christ is named as the power to exceed limits). In the foreground, one finds the theology of the creation and, from the New Testament, concepts of liberation theology. This fact was already mentioned during the closing session of the consultation. My own opinion as a reformed theologian is: this position results from the fact that many participating theologians have a

reformed background. For them, the grace of God is expressed not only in the New Testament but also in the Old Testament.

The attractiveness of faith, of believing in the God of our Bible, was the central point of our consultation, not the attractiveness of our church and its activities. In my opinion, this is a pleasant difference which distinguishes us from some impulses in our German church landscape.

Summary of the Consultation

Madeleine Mbouté

EEC, Kamerun

The Bremen Mission's theological consultation was a wonderful biblical and pastoral adventure. Contributions were delivered by professors from faculties in Germany, Ghana and Togo, by pastors and church members from all six churches of the Bremen Mission. The consultation ran from Monday to Thursday, May 27 - 30, and each day began with a meditation. There were then Bible studies and a wide range of lectures, followed by workshops and small sharing groups. Here is an overview of the subjects we dealt with and lectures we heard.

Old Testament: Rev. Francis Amenu

The text (2 Kings 5) reveals a number of key elements which illustrate problems of pastoral work which we face today. It demonstrates God's power to heal and His way of using unsuspecting people to spread salvation and be vehicles for His grace.

There are two types of people in this passage. Some are instruments of God's will: the young maid, Elisha, Naaman's servant. Others are obstructing God's will, such as Gehazi whose greed is punished with leprosy for him and his descendants.

En effet, à travers l'inter culturalité entre la petite fille esclave servante de Naaman, le roi de la Syrie, Guéhazi le prophète Elysée et le roi d'Israël, l'orateur relève les responsabilités qui incombent aux membres de qualité inférieure de la communauté et leur apport dans l'harmonie au sein de l'Eglise et de la mission commune. There is therefore no reason why any missionary should be prevented from passing on God's blessing to those interested to him or her.

Mission: Dr. Werner Kahl

Dr. Kahl began by leading us into a very different world and very different context. 2000 years ago Jesus chose very different people to follow him. He embraced those who had been excluded, because the humble are blessed in the eyes of God (Mt 5:3). In so doing, he identified himself with the minority. The passage in John's Gospel (Jn 1:8 & 15-17) is made up of two distinct movements.

- The first movement deals with the transformation of the human being who is the fruit of God's grace and truth.
- In the second movement, those who receive God's grace communicate it to others.

This is not done by theology, but by concrete actions. Those who are touched by this grace form a community to spread the good news throughout the world. There is a particular challenge for those who did not know Jesus personally. Some believe in healing, others reject it. How can they communicate faith? As Christians we believe in miracles, but there are those who do not.

Dr. Kahl talked about his own experiences with miracles in charismatic services in Ghana. Even though he is generally very sceptical about widespread miracle claims, he classified some events in his own life as miracles, but in his native Germany he had never experienced something like this. Dr. Kahl declared that the Holy Spirit really is capable of things that man cannot achieve. In the Old Testament God worked through the prophets. In the New Testament the disciples did not have such powers, but the Holy Spirit enabled them to achieve extraordinary things.

The conclusion of the lecture was that cultural, racial and ethnic differences must not be used to marginalise others, but are a wealth with which we can enrich our common faith.

Gospel: Rev. Dr. Frank Agbi Awume

With reference to Matthew's Gospel (Mt 9:36-38 & 10:5-8), Dr. Awume called on the member churches of the Bremen Mission to break their silence on difficult subjects such as homosexuality, and on certain intercultural problems which the African churches prefer not to discuss. The way to address these problems is the theology of inclusion. Our mission is not for ourselves but to include others. Jesus does not send women (wieso Frauen? Bibelstelle fehlt evtl.?) to mission themselves, but to make the disciples realise that he is really risen from the dead.

Sociology: Dr. Prosper Deh

Dr. Deh's lecture was centred around the theme of a charming God. It dealt with the attractions and pitfalls of our common mission, and asked how much our faith depends on what we experience.

Dr. Deh criticised syncretism and those influenced by cultural elements, or tempted to serve both faith and traditional religion. Christian faith requires us to choose between tradition and the Gospel, while retaining elements of culture which are compatible with faith and can contribute to personal development.

5. Theology: Rev. Fred Mawusi Amevenku

Jesus sent out the first missionaries and has entrusted His mission to us. The Bible remains the sole authority which reveals the true nature and purpose of the church, but our reformed churches have become deformed churches which need to rediscover Scripture. African churches need to rediscover the authority of God through His word, understand that it is a privilege to be chosen by Him, and that this privilege binds us more closely to Christ (Mt 11:25, 1Peter 1:1, 2Th 2:13). People in Africa go to church for a variety of reasons, but the main reason remains the wish to be protected from evil spirits. Witchcraft remains a part of daily life. A religion which does not offer solutions to society's problems will be rejected. True religion must solve social problems.

Mawusi emphasises that the problem of Protestantism is the interpretation of the Holy Spirit ... car que veut dire être calviniste si ceux qui s'opposent entre eux à cause du Saint-Esprit se réclament tous être issus de la Réforme ? The problem of miracles in some churches in Ghana creates divisions with between the churches, because we leave ourselves open to the accusation that we ignore genuine suffering. Pentecostal churches are perceived as having found a solution towards being possessed by demons, while Protestant churches come across as unsympathetic.

Mawusi goes on to compare Christian and African cosmology. African cosmology is a cycle which goes from life to death and from death to life. Christianity offers a linear cosmology with Jesus at its centre. It goes from the new heaven and the return of Jesus to the day of judgement. A linear cosmology makes it easier to understand the Gospel. But how can African Christians differentiate between mission and Western civilisation? Do we have to cut down all the sacred forests as one Kenyan theologian has demanded? Mawusi does not see this as a solution which would bind Africans into Christ. The solution to the problem is in the perception of eschatology. In fact, Christian eschatology does not say that God will destroy the world, but that he will reign over it eternally. Le ciel doit être expérimenté maintenant, ou il le sera dans le futur. Thus we can reorientate African Christianity and help it to include elements which are obstructing social harmony.

As for differing pneumatological perceptions, they lead to division in the church in Ghana caused by lack of understanding of what the Holy Spirit means, financial management and leadership.

Concerning the concepts of pneumatology, this has led to schisms of the Evangelical Church in Ghana for several reasons: Misunderstanding of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, financial mismanagement and leadership problems. The spitted up churches declare that they left the mother church because of the Holy Spirit. They argue that the EPC is a cemetery which is suffering of the lake of power, as theologian affirmed.

This comes because Ghanaians often go to church to obtain power to conquer the world. And as for charismatic Christians, the Holy Spirit no longer exists in their church. It has become powerless, weak and vulnerable. And on the other hand reformed theologians say that times of prophecy are finished.

One of the major themes of this lecture was the desire to challenge African churches to translate the Bible into their own languages. This would enable African believers to feel that the Bible is really for and about them. Mission in Africa has been successful, but poor understanding of the culture continues to be a problem. Translating the gospels into mother tongues would surely bring a spiritual awakening to the heart of the African church.

In conclusion, this lecture had three themes: the different pneumatological interpretations of different churches, the need to review African cosmology in the light of the Bible in order to better understand Christian eschatology, and the necessity to translate and contextualise the gospels for a spiritual awakening of the African churches.

Church history: Dr. Emmanuel Ayedze

Dr. Ayedze's lecture retraced the history of the church from the first communities up until the Reformation. Reprising the methodology of Jacques A. Blocher and Jacques Blandenier, the lecture was a summary of the history of mission from its beginnings up until the 18th century and the present day. This historical approach defines the cultural background of the church. Mission is part of the institution, because the command to spread the word was issued by Jesus himself. And mission may have Greek and Latin linguistic and philosophical roots, but it is nevertheless managed to overcome cultural diversity and reach far out into the world.

Dr. Ayedze criticised the spread of Islam which has taken territory away from Christianity despite the work of Church Fathers such as St. Augustine, a model for patristic teachings. Returning to the history of church and mission in Africa, he affirmed that the Bremen Mission experienced linguistic problems in Togo and Ghana. This language barrier limited the success of the mission, even if the colonial impact was much greater.

The history of the Bremen Mission: Dr. Koku Atakro

This lecture told the story of Bremen Mission in Ghana and Togo from 1843 up until the present day. There were two main spheres of Western activity: the missionaries and slave traders. The Ewe lands were very attractive for slave traders, and so there was no doubt contact between the two groups. A third group was those interested in

conquering territory. But in spite of all these difficulties, missionaries were able to win souls for Christ.

Dr. Atakro mentioned the example of the chief in Peki, who realised that the missionaries could pray directly and without intermediary to the great God in which he and his people believed, and converted to Christianity despite fierce opposition. Another chief converted when the prayers of missionaries cured him from incurable illness. These examples show the power of God at the heart of our mission.

Sharing groups and interreligious exchange

The sharing groups centered on personal faith and how this can attract others to God. Contributions showed how Christian faith is something fundamentally extraordinary and different from the profane. Some felt that God's power is shown by His continuing influence in spite of human weakness or technological development. Others felt that the strength of faith was shown by the fact that, despite material wealth, we continue to turn to God out of fear for our futures. For Christians, total faith in Christ liberates us from fear, because we know that God can shape our destiny and use our weaknesses to transform our lives.

There was consensus that faith and church are attractive when they are able to address real problems, and allow those with weaker faith to be strengthened by others. It is essential to rediscover the elements of our personal faith which give it its unique character and make us living examples for others.

Outing in other faith communities in Kpalimé

On the afternoon of May 28 the participants set off in three groups to different communities in and around Kpalimé. One group went to a mosque to talk to Muslims, others to a Baptist Church and third group to a Pentecostal parish. Each group was given two main questions for their encounter:

1. What makes your faith attractive to others?
2. What is your opinion of the reformed churches in the area?

Answers from the Pentecostal Church

The crucifixion, death and resurrection of Jesus are at the centre of our faith. Belief in Jesus liberates us from fear spread by priests of traditional religions who threaten people with evil. Liberation from this sin frees young people to praise God in song and dance, united between different cultures in a dynamic diversity. This intercultural diversity is part of the richness of our church, and something which makes us attractive.

We also pray much and people like this. People come to our Pentecostal community to find solutions to their problems, and the Holy Spirit is a force which can set the power of God in motion. This is also why reformed Christians come to our church for salvation. One former reformed Christian converted because he found healing in the Pentecostal parish of which he is now a member.

Pentecostal Christians are impressed by the beautiful music played in reformed parishes. We like the way Protestants sing and find their melodies inspiring, a wonderful way of spreading the word. We would also like to congratulate the Protestant church on its vision in creating good works, such as preaching the word of the Lord to sick people in hospitals, schools, universities and through social work. On the other hand we criticise the Protestant clergy, who now without exception live debauched and immoral lives. We guess that Protestant churches must be complacent, because pastors who live sinful lives are never disciplined. We feel that church leaders should punish those who tarnish the image of the church. Pastors should allow the faithful to express themselves through preaching and prayer. Every Christian should have the chance to bear witness, because those who live a problem can entrust it to God better themselves.

We hope that despite its clergy the Holy Spirit manifests itself in the lives of the faithful of the reformed churches. Members of the reformed churches often come to us in their search of miracles because they are lacking in their Protestant parishes. By closing themselves off to the Holy Spirit, pastors are limiting God's power and turning their parishioners into spiritual cripples.

Answers from the Baptist Church

The Baptist Church believes that the power of our faith comes from studying the Bible. The Bible is at the centre of Christianity, and we cannot affirm our faith if we do not meditate on God's word every day. The second part of our faith is mission. We organise meetings every Sunday afternoon for those wishing to get to know God, reach out to the lost souls and try to bring them into the middle of our Christian works. The third part of our faith is our submission to the will of God. Scandals that are found in other churches are not found in the Baptist Church, because we preach by example and see ourselves as living witnesses.

We are impressed by the music in the reformed churches, and by their social work. But we do not like the irresponsibility shown by certain pastors and a good number of the faithful who set bad examples.

Answers from the Muslim community

Islam arrived in Togo from Benin in 1708. Loving our neighbours every day is what makes our faith attractive. We appeal to our European friends to allow Africans to visit Europe without visas. After all it is easy for Europeans to come here. We cannot comment on what distinguishes the reformed church from other Christian churches. These experiences were very helpful in understanding how our church is perceived by other Christians in and around Kpalimé, and probably beyond.

Evaluation

The theological consultation ended with a final evaluation. Each participant was invited to give his or her own personal impression of the meeting. Several participants made suggestions for future meetings. Rev. Hannes Menke, general secretary of the Bremen Mission, said that the meeting went very smoothly and thanked everyone for their active participation. He also thanked those who contributed to the meeting with the lectures, and promised to make texts available to all participants.

Annexe

Programme of consultation

Lectures, plenary discussions, work in small groups and in groups of two persons will alternate during the consultation. The composition of the groups will take account of linguistic abilities. The groups will get together in the morning, during Bible studies, and in the afternoon as well.

Monday, May 27th, 2013

Moderation of the day: Bremen Mission

- 8:00 h Devotion by E.P. Church, Ghana
- 9:00 h Bible-sharing: 2 Kings 5
- 10:00 h Dialogues in groups of two persons:
„I shall tell you why my faith is attractive“
- 11:00 h Small groups
„Which part of our faith is important, to be conveyed to other persons?“
- 16:00 h Lecture in mission studies:
Prof. Dr. Werner Kahl:
„How will the Gospel become flesh? “
- 20:00 h An evening of hymns and songs

Tuesday, May 28th, 2013

Moderation of the day: Kossi Bebefee, EEPT

- 8:00 h Devotion by Franck Agbi Awume, EEPT
(the short morning devotions will follow the a.m. order)
- 9:00 h Bible-sharing on the basis of a text from the Gospel
- 10:00 h Lecture in mission studies:
Dr. Prosper Deh, Togo:
„The way in which we live governs our faith“.
What are preconditions of our mission in various contexts?

- 16:00 h Excursions in small groups to other religious communities (charismatic beliefs, Pentecostal Church, Moslem community):
 „How attractive our faith is ...“ – listening to the testimony of others
- 20:00 h free

Wednesday, May 29th, 2013

Moderation of the day: German churches

- 8:00 h Devotion by the German churches
 (the short morning devotions will follow the a.m. order)
- 9:00 h Bible-sharing: 2 Cor. 5
- 10:00 h Lecture in mission studies:
 Rev. Fred Amevenku, Ghana
 „This is what I believe, but I am flexible!“
 What are the motives of people for changing their faith, their religion,
 to modify them, to develop them, to change over to others?
- 16:00 h Lecture in mission studies:
 Macklam Basse
 The ancient church, up to reformation
 Rev. Dr. McWilson Kwaku Atakro
 The mission of Bremen Mission in West Africa until today
 „Conquest of the hearts or of the world?“
 When, for whom and why did the Christian faith become attractive?
- 20:00 h Cinema show in the congregation

Thursday, May 30th, 2013

Moderation of the day: E.P. Church

- 8:00 h Devotion by a guest
- 9:00 h Bible-sharing : Psalm 104
- 10:00 h small groups:
 „How will the Gospel become flesh? “
(Guiding questions will be prepared)

- 11:00 h Plenary
"How the mission of God goes on among peoples"
- 16:00 h Plenum: introduction and discussion of a final declaration
- 20:00 h Communion service

List of participants

Bremen Evangelical Church

- Pastor Renke Brahms (Moderator)
- Ute Krüger
- Rev. Annette Quade
- Rev. Yves Töllner

Evangelical reformed Church in Germany

- Rev. Günter Baum (Kirchenratsvorsitzender)
- Rev. Christine Oberlin
- Rev. Miriam Richter
- Ursula Wildeboer

Lippe Church

- Heike Albrecht
- Rev. Gerald Busse
- Pfarrer Klaus Sommer

Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Oldenburg

- Rev. Heike Boelmann
- Rev. Beatrix Konukiewitz
- Rev. Detlef Mucks-Büker
- Rev. Gerd Pöppelmeyer

Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Ghana

- Rev. Mrs. Comfort Dela Afele
- Right Rev. Francis Amenu (Moderator of the General Assembly)
- Rev. Fred Amevenku
- Rev. Dr. McWilson Kwaku Atakro (Principal of EPC Peki Seminary)
- Rev. Mrs. Bridget Ben-Naimah
- Jonas Dzodzodzi (Executive Presbyter)
- Rev. Mrs. Mabel Morny
- Samuel A. K. Nibo (Treasurer)
- Rev. Godwin Osiakwa (Clerk of the General Assembly)

Evangelical Presbyterian Church, in Togo

- Rev. Franck Agbi-Awume
- Rev. Imanuel Agbenoxevi Awanyoh (Modérateur)
- Pasteur Frédéric Bebefé (Secrétaire Synodal)
- Emmanuel Gameda (Chef Service Ressources Matérielles et Financières)
- Rev. Dr. Bertille Pialo Hetcheli
- Rev. Macklam Basse
- Dr. Prosper Deh

Guests

- Elizabeth Aduama, Vertreterin EMS/PCG, Ghana
- Victorine Akotsé, Vertreterin CIDA/AIF, Togo
- Francesca Cozzi, Vertreterin Waldenser Kirche, Italy
- Rev. Dr. Madeleine Mbouté, VEM/EEC, Cameroon

Norddeutsche Mission

- Rev. Heike Jakubeit (President NM)
- Prof. Dr. Werner Kahl (Mission Academy in Hamburg)
- Pastor Hannes Menke (General Secretary NM)



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