

SUMMARY of the CONSULTATION

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.

1. 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.

2. 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 experience with miracles in charismatic services in Ghana. He witnessed miracles himself, but in his native Germany he had never seen such things. After this experience 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.

3. 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.

4. 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.

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.

5. 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 entitled: Summary of the history of mission from its beginnings up until the 18th century and the present day (Prüfen, französisch unklar). 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.

6. 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.

7. 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.

8. OUTING TO OTHER FAITH COMMUNITIES IN KPALIME

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.

9. 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.

Nkongsamba, 15 July 2013
Rev Dr Madeleine Mbouté