

A Brief Report upon the German Association for Mission Studies

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1. History

When in 1918 the German Association for Mission Studies was brought into being the founding fathers' intention was to give new impetus to the scientific research concerning mission. The purpose of the association they formulated: "to support the scientific treatment of history and theory of Christian mission" (§ 1). Thus, they intended to counteract the widely held restriction of missiological studies to the horizons and experience of particular mission societies. They felt in competition with activities of Catholics, who had founded the Catholic Institute of Mission Studies in Muenster already 7 years before. The foundation of the German Association for Mission Studies should also help to co-ordinate scattered literary activities, to keep the high standard of linguistic investigation, and to bring up young, scientifically trained authors. The word "German" didn't become part of the Association's name as a sign of national delimitation but as above all to appeal to German speaking missionary circles.

Whereas in the inaugural meeting already 29 persons had participated, in 1919 and 1920 further 84 personal could be admitted to the Association, eleven from them Dutchmen or Scandinavians (besides others Archbishop Nathan Söderblom). In 1926 there were 3 British members, e.g. J.H. Oldham, and the first American, Samuel M. Zwemer. In 1954 D.T. Niles from Sri Lanka, the first representative from an overseas partner church was to be found in the register. In 1960 the Indian Paul D. Devanandan and in 1962 Christian Baeta from Ghana followed. On the occasion of the 75th anniversary in 1993 the history of the German Association for Mission Studies has been presented by Hans-Werner Gensichen under the title "Invitatio ad Fraternitatem".

2. Structure

"The Association consists of Founders, sponsors and elected members" (§ 2). The number of founders and sponsors actually amounts to 11 institutions. One of the founders is the "Evangelisches Missionswerk Hamburg", which together with the Protestant Church in Germany (EKD) contributes the biggest amount to the budget. Other sponsors support the Association with considerable financial contributions. Actually the Association comprises about 270 elected personal members. 55 members come from other European countries, 42 members from another part of the world. From the very beginning women were welcome to the Association, although from a gender oriented point of view their number is anything but impressive until today.

Organs of the Association are the annual general meeting and the administration council with 12 councilors executing the decisions of the general meeting. In particular the council decides on printing assistance and grants and acts as the editor of the books and periodicals published by the Association. Members of the board are at present: Prof. Dr. Dieter Becker (chairman),

Dr. Klaus Schäfer (deputy chairman), Dipl.-Ing. Fritz H. Lamparter (treasurer), and Prof. Dr. Andreas Feldtkeller (secretary).

The new admissions of the recent years have induced a noticeable rejuvenation of the membership. The Association is interested in attracting junior members and giving them a forum. That's one of the reasons for which in the recent years annual meetings and meetings of the Council have been combined with missiological symposia. A membership subscription was introduced in 1999.

The Association wants to clearly and as a matter of priority support the scientific and academic character of IAMS. When new members are to be admitted the call for academic qualifications should not be reduced in favor of some missionary-practical charisma.

3. Research Projects

The Association supports scientific publications by giving regular grants on printing costs and in a similar way grants can be given on research scholarships, visits to archives etc. An important thing about this was to come to a flexible dealing with applications but not to suppress the free play of research mind by a network of rules. In recent years main emphasis was put on the scientific annual meetings which were attended by a great number of members and guests. The missiological symposia have shown the importance of collaborating in common subjects and winning inspiration for one's own work. A "family feeling" has come to mind which may more and more increase.

4. Books and Periodicals

Since 1975 the Association has edited together with the Basel Mission the journal "Zeitschrift für Mission" which was joined by the "Evangelische Missionszeitschrift", founded by Walter Freytag in 1940, and also the Basel "Evangelisches Missions-Magazin", existing since 1816 and rich in tradition. This quarterly also contains the column "information and dates" (personalia, new theses, appointments, conferences, etc.) in order to intensify interchange among the members. The serie "Missionswissenschaftliche Studien" (Studies on Missiology) published by the Association is brought out by the Erlanger Verlag für Mission und Ökumene. Two or three volumes can be published per year. The members may subscribe the series at a 25 % discount.

5. Other responsibilities

Time and again the further establishment of Missiology as a branch of study in theological examinations was on the agenda of the annual meetings. The German Association for Mission Studies has supported the necessity of providing for a sufficient number of lectures on Missiology and History of Religions including ecumenism in the courses of studies. The Association is further intensifying its efforts to draw attention to the importance of Missiology with regard to the social changes in Germany. Due to a decreasing church membership it is a vital matter for churches to regain their missionary and ecumenical dimension.

Dieter Becker