

Brief history of “Women in Mission” at IAMS

Until about ten years ago, neither the issue of women was recognised as a particular concern of an Association for Mission Studies nor was there an increased awareness of the meaning of gender with regard to missionary commitment and missiological scholarship. As at other missiological bodies, also at IAMS little attention was paid to the mission theories and contributions of women though the growth of Christianity around the world in the last two centuries is largely a female phenomenon, stimulated by women reaching each other with the Good News in ways that impact their daily lives.

It was only 1992, at the VIIIth IAMS conference in Kaneohe, Hawaii, when one of the workshops consciously focused on the issue of women’s empowerment. Led by Sr. Mary John Mananzan from the Philippines, that workshop addressed a broad variety of issues, ranging from the impact of Christian missionary activities on women in different cultures and a critique of the role of religion in promoting the exploitation of women to models of empowering action among women (*Mission Studies* Vol. X-1&2, 1993). Furthermore, the need to gather bibliographical data on women missionaries in Europe, Asia, and Africa was stressed, since other than in the case of North American women in mission whose work and lives is fairly well documented there is very little information available.

Four years later, at the IXth conference in Buenos Aires, Argentina, Chae Ok Chun from South Korea organised a workshop exploring the predominantly feminine faces of global poverty as a result of the deep alienation between men and women. Here the main focus was on sharing experiences of women’s suffering as a result of unjust economic systems and on searching for signs of hope which might point to solutions (*Mission Studies* Vol. XIII-1&2, 25&26, 1996).

In 2000, the previous General Secretary of IAMS, Klaus Schäfer, discussed the future of a Women in Mission Study Group with Katja Heidemanns from the Institute of Missiology in Aachen, Germany. He brought her into contact with Annalet van Schalkwyk of the Department of Missiology at the University of South Africa, Pretoria. Katja and Annalet organised a successful workshop on Women’s Gifts in Mission within the 2000 IAMS Congress which was held at Hammanskraal, South Africa. A summary of this workshop’s proceedings is included in *Mission Studies* Vol XVIII-2, 36, 2001.

The conference at Hammanskraal was an important step for the work of the Women in Mission Study Group as it helped to define the task of the Study Group as a truly missiological one which links the sharing of women’s missionary commitment to gender-sensitive theological reflection.

The group sessions on **“How to deal with difference? Creating new paradigms of mission from the perspective of women in a postcolonial world”**, organised by the Women in Mission Study Group at the 2004 IAMS Congress in Kuala Lumpur, will carry forward this approach.

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