

African Theological Training in Germany (ATTiG)

A study program of the Academy of Mission for, and with African migrant-church leaders in Northern Germany

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In 2001 a unique program was inaugurated at the Academy of Mission at the University of Hamburg designed to provide theological training for African migrant-church leaders in Northern Germany. The program was the outcome of deliberations between African migrant pastors in Northern Germany and German theologians at the Academy of Mission, held in the second half of the 1990s. It is no coincidence that this development took place in Hamburg since this metropolis has the highest density of migrants originating from West-Africa most of whom are Christians from Ghana and Nigeria. The beginnings of the 1990s saw a sharp rise of West Africans migrating to Germany which was accompanied by the establishment of numerous, mostly neo-pentecostal ministries. Today there are not less than 80 churches in Hamburg with an African membership and leadership (all over Germany about 1000 of these churches were founded within the last two decades). Besides the neo-pentecostal ministries there are relatively few so-called African independent churches (AIC) like Aladura from Nigeria or MDCC from Ghana, traditional pentecostal churches like The Church of Pentecost or The Assemblies of God, and missions by, in West-Africa so-called orthodox churches like The Methodist Church of Ghana or the Presbyterian Church of Ghana. In addition, the Catholic Church provides here and there services for Catholics from Africa, run by African priests.

Interestingly, many of the migrant churches celebrate their services in church buildings belonging to the Evangelical Church of Germany (EKD) making use of the church premises after the service of the locals has ended. Because of cultural and theological differences between the old and the new population there have only occasionally been points of qualified encounters such as joined services. However, it has become obvious – also to the migrants – that most of them have come to stay. As a matter of fact, many have become German citizens due to intermarriage, and the second generation is coming up.

Therefore the need is increasingly felt by pastors of a West-African origin, to deepen their knowledge about church-life and theology in Germany, in order to be able to connect in meaningful ways to the German system, to reach out successfully to Germans, and also to be

accepted as pastors of an equal standing by their German counterparts and by the society at large. Most neo-pentecostal pastors have no formal theological training but they claim to depend on spiritual insight in leading a congregation. This contradicts the positive value attributed by the Evangelical Church of Germany, to a purely academic theological training required of its ministers.

The Academy of Mission attempts, by means of ATTiG, to meet this need and to bridge the gap between African migrant pastors on the one hand, and German theological thinking and church life on the other hand. However this is not meant as a one-way street of theological instruction. ATTiG rather creates an interface in Germany where African migrant pastors learn about German and Lutheran traditions in a critical way and where they exchange theological views with German theologians. However, it is the mission of the Academy of Mission to enable the participants to reflect critically on their faith and experience and to communicate the need of contextually aware theologies.

ATTiG has been sponsored mainly by the Evangelische Missionswerk (EMW: The Association of Protestant Churches and Missions in Germany). Many of the instructors are theology professors of the University of Hamburg of whom it is required that they are open for theological debate. The participants most of whom are neo-pentecostal or charismatic “mainline”-Christians tend to represent their versions of Christianity in rather self-confident ways and they do not shy away from challenging their professors theologically, albeit respectfully.

In the course of the theological debates it becomes clear to everybody involved that we all have our theological predilections and respective, culturally bound hermeneutical keys in reading Scripture. We come to an appreciation of this variability of Biblical interpretation. In such a way it becomes possible to learn from one another, e.g. of dimensions of Biblical passages that have been overlooked in certain traditions, and to become aware of certain blind spots and areas to grow. All this contributes to laying the foundation on which Christians with different cultural and confessional origins may grow-together in church and society.

ATTiG is a two year program during which the participants meet once a month for a weekend. In the middle of 2009 the fourth course will have come to a successful conclusion. Each course so far had about 20 participants, mostly from Hamburg, but also with African church leaders coming from Bremen, Berlin, and Lübeck, i.e. ATTiG covers the Northern parts of Germany. Also in 2001 a similar course was inaugurated by the VEM (United in Mission) in Wuppertal (kikk) catering for educational needs of international migrant pastors in the Ruhr-valley area. A few years ago additional training programs were devised by

protestant church bodies in Frankfurt (KiM) and in the Southern parts of Germany at Neuendettelsau (MiSüNo). The persons in charge of these programs have begun in 2007 to coordinate their activities on a national level (KKMG: Koordination der Kurse für Migrationsgemeinden).

So far the language of communication in ATTiG has been English which of course excludes the minority of African migrant pastors with a Franco-phone background. Deliberations are under way to offer the next ATTiG course in the second half of 2009, in German. This seems to be indicative also against the background that most of the African migrant pastors have decided to stay in Germany and that they are eager to become part and parcel of this society. To use German as the main language of instruction seems to be more realistic nowadays compared to a few years ago, since the competence to communicate fluently in German has increased drastically over the past few years among the church leaders of a African background in Germany.

It should also be noted that former participants of ATTiG increasingly decide to further their theological training by attending theological courses at the University of Hamburg, pursuing the Diploma of the Academy of Mission. ATTiG has also enabled and encouraged many participants to get involved actively in German church life on a local level – not by denying their African and Pentecostal heritage but by regarding it as an asset in forming, informing and transforming church within a rapidly changing society in a global village called Germany.

Curriculum ATTiG IV,1 (2007/2008) **Reflecting Christian Faith: Present and Past**

- Unit 01: Introducing ATTiG
Exploring themes and methods of a continuing theological education program
- Unit 02: Churches in history and context: An overview
- Unit 03: Confessing Christ in different contexts
- Unit 04: Reading the Bible – How does the Old Testament talk about God?
- Unit 05: Reading the Bible – How does the New Testament talk about Christ?
- Unit 06: Communion in Ecumenical Perspective
- Unit 07: Baptism in Ecumenical Perspective
- Unit 08: The Holy Spirit – Source of Power?

Unit 09: The Service of the Church to the World

Unit 10: „And Deliver us from Evil“: Pastoral Care in our Congregations (HIV/AIDS)

Unit 11: Evaluation and Planning for the next year
Closing Worship

Curriculum ATTiG IV,2 (2008/2009)

Suffering, Healing, and Salvation

Unit 1: Introduction to the program and to the general theme
Biblical perspectives on evil and deliverance

Unit 2: The suffering Christ and the broken world – a historical perspective

Unit 3: Sin, suffering, and healing in inter-religious dialogue

Unit 4: One Christ, various confessions

Unit 5: The church as healing community

Unit 6: The `power´ to heal and to transform sin – pastoral identities and Church identity

Unit 7: Suffering, healing and salvation in theological perspective

Unit 8: EKD, EMW, Landeskirchen, and the State: Traditions and structures

Unit 9: Violence and conversion in the history of Christian mission

Unit 10: Church-History: modern times

Unit 11: Evaluation
Closing Service

Structure of a study unit

Example: Reading the Bible – How does the New Testament talk about Christ?

Friday

3:00 p.m. Arrival: Coffee and tea

4:00 p.m. Prayer, praises, welcome

4:15-5:15 p.m. **1. Session:** Reconciled diversity in Early Christianity

5:30-6:30 p.m. **2. Session:** The necessary variability of the Christian confession

6:30 p.m. Supper

7:30-9:00 p.m. **3. Session:** How is the Bible word of God? The text of the NT, its canonisation and its history of transmission

Saturday

8:00-9:00 a.m. Breakfast

9:00 a.m. Morning devotion

9:15-10:45 a.m. **1. Session:** The Miracles and their interpretation in Europe

10:45 a.m. Coffee Break

11:00-12:30 a.m. **2. Session:** Paul – old and new perspectives: On the meanings of Christ

12:30 a.m. Lunch

1:30-3:00 p.m. **3. Session:** Tendencies of interpreting the NT in West-Africa

3:00 p.m. End of program: coffee and tea