

*“In all history there has not been a period when such vast multitudes of people were in the midst of such stupendous changes, economic, social, educational, and religious. Among innumerable multitudes of the inhabitants of the non-Christian world the forces of youth and age, of radicalism and conservatism, of growth and decay are seething and struggling for the mastery. As we survey the unparalleled situation in these lands, the question is forced upon us, What is to be the issue of it all?”<sup>1</sup>*

**Report from the Study Centre in Germany  
on the occasion of celebrating the foundation of IMC 1921**

**Short Introduction:**

The German Society for Missiology (DGMW) and the Missionsakademie at the University of Hamburg (MA) jointly form the German “Study Centre” on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the International Missionary Council (IMC). The DGMW exists since 1918 as an academic association of all German-speaking missiologists. It was the first society for mission studies worldwide, and remained so for more than fifty years. The Missionsakademie traces its roots for missionary education back to 1911 and institutionally as a centre for theological doctoral students and ecumenical conferences it was inaugurated 1957 by Leslie Newbigin, the then moderator of IMC. Both institutions were from the beginning closely connected to the umbrella organisation of the German Mission Societies, the Deutsche Evangelischer Missionsrat (DEMR), which had as its successors in times of the Cold War the “Association of Protestant Missions in the GDR” (AGEM) since 1965, and since 1975 the Association of Missions and Churches in the FRG (EMW) which both were united in 1991 to the “Association of Protestant Churches and Missions in Germany” (EMW). DEMR was a member of IMC and EMW today of CWME. The involved institutions share the commitment for an intercultural understanding of mission and follow closely the global debates on mission, ecumenism und interreligious dialogue of the World Council of Churches (WCC).

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<sup>1</sup> JOHN R. MOTT, *The Decisive Hour of Christian Missions*, London 1911, 12.

In the 1920s the German missions were still attached to a rather paternalistic way of thinking and had little understanding for the attempts by Southern Christianity to overcome the dominance of the missionaries. Being deeply impressed by the “brotherly spirit” of the mission conference in Jerusalem 1928, German missions still criticized the “Anglican dominance” and emphasized the special importance of their understanding of mission for the promotion of “Volkskirchen” (people's churches). To overcome both pietistic individualism and cultural imperialism many referred to “intact orders of creation” and thought to have found a “special way” appropriate to Lutheran theology through an ethnic homogeneous missionary method. In those early years the focus of the relation to the IMC was primarily on practical cooperation for financial and personnel support, which the IMC provided through its *Emergency Fund* and the *Orphed Mission Fund* as well as the mediation of *Inter-Church Aid* programs.

Despite the initial mistrust that had grown out of the defeat at World War I and the following comprehensive social crisis in Germany, a theological reconsideration of mission slowly paved its way through the involvement at the different World Mission Conferences. However generally it can be stated, that after 1918 there was no radical break with the pre-war-Theology of Mission as it happened through Karl Barth or Dietrich Bohnhoeffer in the field of Church Dogmatics.

The IMC-network was appreciated as helping to restore the position of the German missions in their former “mission fields”. But despite all fractions and enmities friendships were made even in times of totalitarianism. It was only after the World War II that a new theology of mission was found in the *Missio Dei* concept developed at the IMC Conference in Willingen 1952 which prepared the integration of IMC and WCC.

We conceive the contribution of IMC in the German context as a learning history in the context of nationalism, racism and colonialism towards a new ecumenical understanding of mission. We ask ourselves how can we strengthen an ecumenically minded mission faced with declining ecumenical commitment in general and dwindling resources in particular? How are practical negotiations for mission and theoretical reflections intertwined in terms of mission theology? In which ways can we understand the entanglements and disentanglements of practice and theology of mission?

This study process wants to understand in what way the IMC made a lasting contribution to the shaping of the newer ecumenical movement in Germany. How were topics such as

racism, criticism of capitalism, secularization, interreligious, interculturality taken up from the early IMC conference history? What was the ecumenically relevant “educational function” of IMC? Such an eye-to-eye view of IMC history will only be possible if the horizon is widened by the research into the non-European, non-Anglo-American Christianity. We are looking forward to the other reports and are grateful to be part of this global study process.

### **Summary of the main findings, insights and new question that emerged out of the studies and discussion**

In its contributions, our study centre reflects on conceptions of mission and efforts to raise awareness towards issues concerning mission as inspired, enabled and fostered by IMC in the German contexts and those connected with Germany. Our study group is analysing the ambiguity of mission policies and theologies in the time from 1921 to 1961 in the context of a contested history.

Two papers focus on outspoken theoretical questions: There is a paper by **Ulrich Dehn** with the title „*Mission theology as mirror of constructions*“ which links general perceptions of the world viewed from Europe before and after world War I to paradigms of mission theology. It states that mission theology mirrors world views as they are constructed over time. Over and over again, IMC and its successor within the WCC, the Commission of World Mission and Evangelism (CWME), provided times for encounter and spaces for reflection which made for timely developments in conceptualising mission.

A second paper, authored by **Moritz Fischer**, promotes an understanding of mission history that goes beyond a notion of mission as a project of individual European mission societies but instead highlights mission as a history of interconnections between globally networked actors, institutions, objects, and bodies of knowledge in times of the rise of national church independent movements in Africa and Asia. The paper, called „**‘Secession in Makolokwe’: Navigating through entanglements and disentanglements of Mission, Colonialism, and African Initiatives of Christianity in Transvaal (1880-1920)**“, identifies eleven factors or discursive events which may be perceived as interacting with each other in qualitative functional relationships of diverse actors in mission history. The whole matrix, though reflecting a general approach to mission history refers to events in Africa in the times of high Imperialism.

A characteristic, yet outstanding example of contextual mission-theology was the German Walter Freytag who developed his theology within the range and by support of IMC. His life and work give witness to the ambivalence in which large parts of the church in Germany lived and struggled with during Nazism. The article **„Promises of the Beyond. Walter Freytag’s Work and theology in the context of Worldwide Mission and the IMC from a Postcolonial Perspective“**, contributed by **Jörg Zehelein**, elaborates on both, his confirmation of concepts on which Nazism drew on, too, such as race, nation, clan, and the resistant role against Nazism which played his eschatological concept of mission. Being himself a high representative of IMC, he came to live out both, his conservative nationalism and his eschatological internationalism. Zehelein employs a postcolonial perspective out of the interest to look for potential perspectives that could be important for a contemporary understanding and practice for mission with postcolonial awareness. Here his interest was caught by the provocative overemphasis of the transcendent and eschatological not-yet of God’s reign as the goal of mission. Can the extreme position that Freytag undoubtedly held in his eschatological focus help to highlight particular weaknesses or shortcomings of the present?

Reflecting on a different kind of awareness building for mission work in Germany at the beginning of the 20th century, another contribution, by **Eckhard Zemmrich**, investigates the efforts of an otherwise unknown informal missionary institution in a paper called **„The German ,Commission for the Mission-study movement’ and its link to IMC.“** This commission was founded in 1911 and dissolved in 1930. It aimed at building interest for the mission movement amongst children and youth and tried to reach people from different educational backgrounds. What can be clearly seen here is not only the operationalisation of certain kinds of mission theology, but also the broadness of target groups which seems to have been inspired by the work of IMC itself, and the relevance of World War I for the development of tendencies towards a nationalisation of missionary efforts in Germany. **Jayabalan Murthy** is **“Remembering First World War and Its Impact on German Christian mission societies in India from the perspective of IMC and NMCI”** as India was the pioneer mission field for German Mission societies since 1706. But the First World War created a trauma on the Germans’ Christian mission societies and their mission work as all German Missionaries were interned and sent back. He wants to find out if the missionaries were in favour of international cooperation, or remained nationalistic. His paper will explore the

contribution of Mott and Oldham to support the German Lutheran mission societies during the time of Great war with the help of National Missionary Council of India. Finally, it will examine the role of National Missionary council in India.

**Michael Biehl** is researching the reasons why the representatives of the *German Missions Ausschuss* did not attend the founding meeting of the IMC at Lake Mohonk in 1921 even though six seats were reserved for them in the newly established council. The preparations for the founding meeting were overshadowed by persisting effects of the First World war and the post war situation in which often enough nationalism, church and mission formed an intricate amalgam. Personal communication between Oldham and members of the German Ausschuss and a meeting in the Netherlands in 1920 explain how the German Ausschuss could not be present in Lake Mohonk but still be recognized as a member council of the IMC.

**Frieder Ludwig** investigates the institutional anchoring and positioning of the **New theological discipline of missiology at the Protestant faculties in the Weimar Republic**. He introduces the argumentation and plausibility structures that enabled the establishment of the discipline of missiology in the 1920s. He shows how the number of missiology chairs tripled in the 1920s after World War I, even though missionaries of German nationality had been expelled from Africa and Asia. The leading representatives of missiology oscillated between nationalism and internationalism. Ludwig also indicates the lines that led to the acceptance of the Nazi rule and works out the connectivity of the German mission to Nazi ideology with all its tensions. But he also points out that the international connections and networks could (sometimes) serve as a corrective: The visit of African pastors to Germany during those years, for instance, made it clear that mission and exclusive nationalism were not compatible. The insight that we need the critical voices to discover the Western cultural heritage in our Christian tradition is important for intercultural theology which is crucial for mission today in the time of globalisation and migration.

**Joachim Wietzke** in his theological history of Mission and Ecumenism in Northern Germany **“Die Weite des Evangeliums”**<sup>2</sup> draws attention to the meeting of the German mission agencies in Halle in March 1921, where the decision was taken not to send any delegates to the crucial meeting in Lake Mohonk. He calls the fact that no German was present when the

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<sup>2</sup> JOACHIM WIETZKE, *Die Weite des Evangeliums*. Eine theologiegeschichtliche Regionalstudie zu Mission und Ökumene in Schleswig-Holstein. Band 2: Die Weimarer Republik, Matthiesen Verlag, Husum (upcoming).

IMC was established in October 1921 “one of the most shameful events” in German Protestant mission history. Wietzke further shows how the Eurocentric view of most mission societies was challenged by the mission conference in Jerusalem 1928, which was the first international conference to give non-European Christianity the attention it deserved. The churches that had emerged from missionary work were officially regarded as entities in their own right and no longer as appendages of Western churches. The Jerusalem Conference no longer thought in terms of “mother churches” and “daughter churches” or sending and receiving churches, but recognized all churches as equal regardless of their denomination or age. It thus laid the foundation for the wider ecumenical movement, in which Protestant churches worked together out of the conviction that they were dependent on each other's enrichment and correction in order to remain or become the church of Jesus Christ.

**Anton Knuth** shows in “**Martin Schlunk between Colonialism and Mission Universalism**” how the long-time chairman of the German mission association devoted himself to educational and public relations work for the mission since the operational work was dispensed with. He wanted to “rebuild the carrier circle of mission” out of the conviction that “only the church remains alive that drives mission.” Schlunk just like his cousin Julius Richter perceived the Peace Treaty of Versailles as a humiliation but kept up the friendly contacts to Oldham and Mott. Schlunk, who also held the British citizenship saw the universal character of Christian mission rooted in the Old Testament but still demarcated the national significance of German mission theology: “The history of missions has in any case proved that every people are amenable to preaching, and the German mission is unanimous in this, that its aim should everywhere be a people's church, that is, not a small select congregation, but a church which in principle seeks to win all the people to its adherents.” After 1945 he embraced an ecumenical understanding of mission, but left it to his successor Walter Freytag to draw the necessary consequences also in a practical manner. It was Freytag who confessed on Nov. 14, 1945, in a DEMR statement, “to the brothers of other missions” the guilt “of our nation, which is also our guilt” and favoured the integration of the IMC into the WCC. Looking at the Declaration of Guilt at Stuttgart 1945, which formed the base for the reintegration of the German Churches into the Ecumenical Movement, it should not be overlooked, that after the war also the friendships made through IMC during the Nazi-Period, made it possible for the German mission and churches to be integrated so fast into the ecumenical movement again.

**Denis Adufuli** explores the “**Nexus between German pietism and the mission, theology, and spirituality of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in Ghana.**” He seeks to address how pietism conflicted with indigenous ideals of spirituality and Christianity thereby leading to syncretism and the spread of Pentecostalism and the pentecostalization of missionary-founded churches. He asks in what way the theological discourse failed to be sensitive to the spirituality and the cultural values as well as the social needs of the evangelized which eventually results into syncretism.

On a similar line **Chibueze Udeani** looks towards “**A historical Analysis of the rivalry missionary Enterprise and Religiomania in present-day Nigeria.**” The role and place of Christianity during colonial era and in the post-colonial Africa was one of the debates that came on the heel of Africa’s political independence, and the end to official colonialism. The article is aiming to show the dynamism portrayed by Christianity since it was brought to Nigeria as an antagonistically splitted nationalised-Eurocentric religion and how it passed through different phases. The aim is to work out some suggestions as to how to deal constructively with this anti-ecumenical development.

**Stanislau Paulau** looks into **Mission cooperation beyond the inner-Protestant ecumenism.** He is interested in the negotiations of Orthodox-Protestant cooperation opportunities in advance of the establishment of the International Mission Council and clarify the ecumenical understanding on which the IMR itself was based. The project would therefore like to take a closer look at the sometimes competing ideas of international mission cooperation that became manifest in the run-up to the establishment of the IMR, and its interdependencies with other contemporary ecumenical initiatives. Of particular interest in this regard are the efforts to open up the formats of missionary cooperation that originally emerged within the framework of inner-Protestant ecumenism to other Christian actors as well. This phenomenon is to be examined on the basis of the negotiation of Orthodox-Protestant cooperation possibilities in the period between the World Mission Conference in Edinburgh in 1910 and the founding of the International Mission Council in 1921.

**Gert Rüppell** explores the **Church’s Travel to Integrated Unity** through the eyes of the missionary experiences gathered in the IMC. He looks into the chance for Ecumenical Learning, the process of growing global integration of Christianity and the consequent interaction could have brought about for Northern Christianity. Thus, he interprets the IMC as early attempt to give Ecumenicity/ Catholicity a platform in Mission, for integral dialogue

between Southern and Northern experiences of Christian witness. Given the existing inter-contextual, inter-cultural pluriformity of Christianity, which has been pointed out by Missiologists such as Hoekendijk, Hermelink, Friedli, Margull and Hollenweger in the 1960<sup>th</sup> (Intercultural Studies / Tertiateranity), it remains a challenging question why in many aspects, the integration of socio-ethical learning in Mission, became only little by little, part of the Northern Churches agenda. What were the intercultural blockages? In other words, Ruppell's aim is to show, that mission inspired learning in the ecumenical context became only part and parcel of the Northern Churches' self-understanding, through the growing integration of Southern Christian Churches into the leadership of the early Ecumenical Movement. The Churches in the Ecumenical Movement at large began bit by bit to recognize their agenda within a globalized world (Geneva 1966 /Uppsala 1968).

The process of learning however remains, as can be seen in the tediousness of the developments in the conversations with non-denominational, Independent, and Pentecostal Christianity. Christianity as interreligious inter pares, is a call that remains from the early days of missionary encounter, remaining still the greatest challenge to mainline Christianity globally. Thus, the IMC/CWME is a still needed platform for dialogue, learning and programmatic inspiration for the Ecumenical Movement of Christianity.

However, it is to note, that the IMC as "influencer" of the Ecumenical Movement, has reflected diversity, either culturally, ethnically, even religiously. Its discourses became central to the identification of the missionary obligation of the churches and the ecclesiastical obligations of Mission. It thus formed a base for learning from the **Catholicity of Christianity** and addressing **Colonial economic exploitation, interreligious awakening, joining young nationalism**. Intercultural, interreligious but also economically exploitative experiences were voiced and by means of mutuality brought to learning from each other, thus, to change. The **differing understanding of salvation** became a theological core issue (Bangkok 1972). The missionary internationalism interpreted world from western civilizing educational perspectives which lead to conflicts among the agencies and with indigenous Christianity's. Thus, the necessity grew to stress the unity of Christianity through Unity in Mission. But this only could be successful, when the dialogue led to common action towards equality in the discourse between missionary experiences and institutional (ecclesial) learning willingness, i.e. identification with the need for healing the wounds of colonial

mission. Thus, learning was demanded not only from the Churches in the North but also within the IMC.

**Bernhard Dinkelaker** reflects in this regard on **Christian G. Baeta's Contribution to Mission in Unity** and relates it to his role as a host to the last IMC Conference in 1957/58 in Achimota, Ghana, and as the last IMC Chairperson who submitted the motion of integration to the WCC Assembly in 1961 in New Delhi. In the context of a paradigm shift in the understanding of "church in mission", Baeta's contribution is significant, also with regard to German missionary organisations: As an ecumenical pioneer deeply rooted in his home country Ghana with a cosmopolitan mind, trained in Ghana, Basel and London, he was very familiar with the European scene of missionary societies. As a self-confident African voice, he could serve as a bridge builder between conflicting interests. With his ecumenical vision, however, he was an early protagonist of a contextual theology taking traditional world views and social realities seriously, of a critical assessment of the colonial legacy in mission, church and society, of the need for establishing constructive interfaith relations, of a theology committed to social justice and human rights. His insights anticipated many developments in the debate on World Christianity and still represent an unfinished agenda, also in the German context.

### **Concluding Comments and Questions**

The World War I trauma of the Germans had not been overcome by the end of the twenties and was later instrumentalised by the Nazi movement. The attempt to instrumentalize the idea of the "Volk" often led theologians to embracing the "Völkische Bewegung" in order to overcome secularization with it. Most Germans welcomed the "National Uprising" in 1933 to overcome the "defeat of Versailles". They did not realize until much later that the NSDAP was actually anti-Christian. As Wietzke shows, the missionaries who pursued the goal of popular Christianization were also influenced by the national Protestant spirit and confirmed with their experiences the "theology of orders" that was widespread in Germany. In an effort to free themselves from the individualism of the pietistic mission on the one hand and from the cultural imperialism on the other they presented themselves as preservers of the customs of the local population and pointed with pride to their missionary successes among the Bataks in North-Sumatra and among the tribal cultures of East-Africa and New Guinea. Well-known German mission theologians saw in the "organs" of tribal and ethnic

communities' God-given orders that were suitable as ideal "points of contact" for the Christianization of entire ethnic groups. In their view, an unbroken relationship with God was preserved in the social community forms, which, although overlaid with pagan ideas, could serve as a basis for missionization. In their opinion, the task of mission was not to detach individual converts from their pagan environment, but to carry the "unadulterated" gospel through Christian instruction into the "pagan world", where, far from the destructive influences of civilization, it was to take the "people-organic" form of a living popular church. How theologically questionable such a linkage to the "natural orders" was became apparent at the latest when the German Christians invoked this mission theology to justify a racially pure "Arteigenes Christentum". Despite the close contact to the IMC there was no major resistance against the "new order" of 1933. Nevertheless, it was invaluable for the nascent Confessing Church to have reliable ecumenical friends abroad.<sup>3</sup>

We therefore ask to what extent the German members of the IMC, after the shattering caesura of 1945 did realize their global (catholic) responsibility and in what way did the churches realize their obligation as *one, holy, catholic, apostolic* community? Was the Northern alienation between Mission and Church overcome through the integration of IMC and WCC in New Delhi 1961? Or was the understanding of "Evangelization" according to western educational standards continued? In what way did the *Partner in Obedience* (Whitby 1947) change their programmatic agenda in Mission? Did they become mutually obedient? Interestingly enough, a significant part of Christianity for dialogue, such as Pentecostal and Independent churches, were largely ignored by the mainline Christianity and its missionary structures.

Yet, many of the socio-ethical findings in Mission remained hurting issues for the Ecumenical Movement. Foremost the **Race Question** addressed by J.H. Oldham / E.C. Blake / P.A. Potter against fierce opposition by Northern Churches despite J.H. Oldham's study (CHRISTIANITY AND THE RACE QUESTION) of 1924. Similarly, the issue of **interreligious dialogue** vividly represented by Southern Churches at the IMC Meeting in Jerusalem 1928 and Tambaram 1938 remained a conflictive issue as for example the V<sup>th</sup> Assembly of the WCC in Nairobi 1975 (Section III) proves. Other unresolved topics were **land grabbing and industrialization** through colonialism (Jerusalem 1928); reorientation of the missionary obligation to **integral witness**

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3 Cf. JOACHIM WIETZKE, op. cit.

*in Unity and Service* (Tambaram 1938). All these subjects needed a growing turn to the world in Ecclesiology. It was to a large extent the merit of the dialogue Southern Christianity led with the West through the IMC /CWME and after the integration by means of a greater presence of Southern Christianity in ecumenical meetings, that socio-ethical concerns became focal to the ecumenical discourse and learning.

It can be stated that its contributions from global Christianity more and more challenged the formerly white Ecumenical Movement. In this context there is the need for Churches to respond to the search for identity of people in a way that responds to the profound changes in socio-economic and political context. The world is fragmented, the marginalized call for justice and recognition. In what way can Gospel values help in reformulating a new meaning of community versus rampant individualism? The statement by Mott quoted at the beginning of this article seems to be permanently relevant and yet any Ecumenical Mission as a learning movement in mutuality would have to ask itself the old programmatic question: "Are we ready to expect, to imagine and to accept as the fruit of mission an ever-new kind of Church in an ever-new kind of fellowship guided by God in God's Healing Mission?"<sup>4</sup>

On the other hand, the ever new question has to be raised: "Who speaks as the 'We', and for the 'We'?" No matter from where theological and prophetic voices are raised, be it from the Global North or from the global South, there is no monophony, but always a polyphony of convictions and concerns of the church that is believed as one in its manifold manifestations. All need to raise their voice and contribute, and listen to the others, and in order to bear credible witness to the unity of the church we need to engage in discussions, likewise serious, informed, critical and benevolent in areas of conflict. Ecumenical fellowship does not absolve us from the struggle for truth; it is the prerequisite for it.

**For the Study Centre:**

Anton Knuth (MA) and Eckhard Zemmrich (DGMW)

Hamburg, 31.1.2022

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4 Cf. MARGULL, H-J., in: WIESER, Th. (ed), Planning for Mission, Working papers on the New Quest for Missionary Communities, WCC 1966.