

# GERMANICA PACIFICA

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## *Looking after One's Own*

The rise of Nationalism  
and the Politics of the  
Neuendettelsauer Mission  
in Australia, New Guinea  
and Germany (1921-1933)

9

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## Introduction

*Looking after One's Own* is a history of a mission society and its organisation, which spanned national borders. It connects events in Germany with developments in New Guinea, and vice versa. Exploring the impact of political desires, national ambitions and missionary aspirations, I could not simply connect mission histories, which focused on New Guinea, with German local and church histories, but had to write the story by moving forth and back, exploring events in Germany and New Guinea anew. My book is not a mission history, but a political history of a mission society. Some developments, which are at the centre of mission histories written about the Lutheran mission in New Guinea, are thus not mentioned in this story, while political events and political and administrative changes marginal to a more narrowly defined mission enterprise take centre stage.

### **In Germany, Australia and New Guinea—a Transnational net**

I started researching the politics of the German mission society *Gesellschaft für Innere und Äußere Mission im Sinne der Lutherischen Kirche*, better known by the short name *Neuendettelsauer Mission*, in the early 1990s. In keeping with the German focus on National Socialism, my aim was to analyse the involvement of Lutheran foreign missions with National Socialism in Bavaria. When I left Germany and came to Australia the framework for this research, especially its focus on one region within the German nation, turned out to be inadequate. Crossing from one nation and culture to another, I found myself entangled in ongoing connections with both. I became at home in either and neither place. Ideas that had been ‘natural’ in Germany became strange, while assumptions shared among Australians remained astonishing. Returning to my research in 2000, I found the Neuendettelsauer mission entangled in a not dissimilar situation. While the home base of the mission was in Bavaria, it was a transnational organisation connected with other church and government organisations in a network which spanned several nations. Actions that were meant by the society to react to a specific situation in one country influenced relationships in another country in unexpected ways. The framework this study uses to examine the politics of the Neuendettelsauer mission is therefore appropriately transnational.

The Neuendettelsauer society was founded in 1849 by Wilhelm Löhe, then parish pastor of the village of Neuendettelsau in Franconia, Northern Bavaria, with the aim of training Lutheran clergy to accompany

Lutheran emigrants to America and keep them from drifting away from Lutheran communities to other denominations. These clergy would, Löhe envisaged, also try as missionaries to bring the gospel to pagan tribes near the new Lutheran settlements. For Löhe, a foreign mission directed at pagans, and an inner mission directed at Christians at home and abroad, were intrinsically connected. They were, he argued, parts of one task, part of the ‘mission’ to gather all people into one flock, under one shepherd:

For the Mission is nothing but the One church of God in motion, the realisation of one universal, Catholic church.

Denn die Mission ist nichts als die Eine Kirche Gottes in ihrer Bewegung, die Verwirklichung einer allgemeinen, katholischen Kirche.<sup>1</sup>

A society called *Gesellschaft für Innere und Äußere Mission im Sinne der Lutherischen Kirche e.V.* was to act as a substitute for the Bavarian Lutheran church until such time that the church came to take its responsibilities to missionize seriously. The three functions Löhe saw as one—providing pastors to emigrant Lutherans, converting distant pagans, and rejuvenating the church at home—remained central to the Neuendettelsauer tradition.

The majority of seminarians, all of them men, were German Lutherans, who were sent either as pastors to serve German-Lutheran Diaspora congregations in Brazil and Australia, or as missionaries to New Guinea. From 1930 a small number of Ukrainian Lutherans received their theological education at Neuendettelsau.<sup>2</sup> Before the establishment of a seminary in South Australia after World War I, the Lutheran synods that amalgamated in 1921 to form the United Evangelical Lutheran Church of Australia sent most of its future clergy to Neuendettelsau for training, and

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- 1 Wilhelm Löhe, *Drei Bücher von der Kirche. Den Freunden der Lutherischen Kirche zur Überlegung und Besprechung dargeboten*, 1845, in: Löhe, W., *Gesammelte Werke*, hrsg. Im Auftrage der Gesellschaft für Innere und Äußere Mission im Sinne der lutherischen Kirche e.V. von K. Ganzert, Neuendettelsau 1951-1986, Volume 5.1, Neuendettelsau 1954, pp. 85-179. Quote p. 96. All translations are, if not otherwise indicated, by me.
  - 2 See Frank Schumann, ‘LÖHE, Johann Konrad Wilhelm’, BBKL. For a short history see *Missionswerk der Evang-Luth. Kirche in Bayern*, ‘Geschichte des Missionswerkes’, <http://test.rotabene.de/mission/ISY/index.php?get=121>, and *Gesellschaft für Innere und Äußere Mission im Sinne der Lutherischen Kirche e.V.*, <http://www.gesellschaft-fuer-mission.de/gesellschaft/index.htm>. Initially the society founded by Löhe in 1849 was called *Gesellschaft für Innere Mission im Sinne der Lutherischen Kirche*. The reference to foreign missions, *Äussere Mission*, was added later.

it occasionally recruited a Neuendettelsau seminarian. The training of seminarians connected the society to churches and synods throughout the world, mainly in the USA, Australia, Brazil, and the Ukraine. This web of transnational relations expands if one looks also at the membership of leading men of the Neuendettelsauer society in other Lutheran organisations with a transnational outlook, such as the *Martin Luther Bund*.<sup>3</sup> *Looking after One's Own* concentrates on Neuendettelsau's foreign mission activities, and its connections with New Guinea. What set relationships with New Guinea, initially a German colony, apart from all others was that Neuendettelsau's only foreign mission field under its control was located there. Thus the Lutheran mission in New Guinea played a central part in the formation of Neuendettelsau's self-understanding and public profile, and most emotional and financial resources were directed towards it. Moreover, the Neuendettelsauer society had to negotiate with a number of national governments; hence *Looking after One's Own* focuses on the society's relationship with the German government and the Australian government, which administered New Guinea as a C Mandate of the League of Nations from 1921.

I limited the study to the organisational network of Neuendettelsau's foreign mission with regret. By doing so I had eliminated the notion of 'German Diaspora' and 'Lutheran Diaspora', which I initially thought were mainly connected to the Brazilian and Ukrainian Diaspora work. But in the process of my research and writing it turned out that the 'diaspora' was still present even with the focus on foreign missions in the form of Australian Lutherans, and the community of German missionaries in New Guinea.

Relations with American and Australian Lutherans are an intrinsic part of this story, as both had been supporting Neuendettelsau in its mission endeavours in New Guinea from the start, and even took over the 'orphaned' mission field after the outbreak of the First World War. A volume entitled '*The Lutheran Church in Papua New Guinea. The first hundred years: 1886-1986*', is to date the most comprehensive collection reflecting this complex transnational history and contains contributions by New Guinean, German, Australian and American Lutherans.<sup>4</sup>

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3 Until 1932 the Bavarian branch of the Martin Luther Bund, the *Martin-Luther Verein* was named *Lutherischer Gotteskasten in Bayern*. See also the home page of the Martin-Luther-Verein, 'Der Martin-Luther-Verein stellt sich vor', <http://www.martin-luther-verein-bayern.de/ueberuns.htm>.

4 Herwig Wagner and Hermann Reiner (eds.), *The Lutheran Church in Papua New Guinea. The first hundred years: 1886-1986*, Lutheran Publishing House, Adelaide 1986.

## A political history: politics past and present

In 1985 as a young theological student at the Friedrich-Alexander-Universität in Erlangen I was involved in the preparations for celebrating the fortieth anniversary of the *Stuttgarter Schulderklärung*, a declaration German Protestant churches had made in 1945 about their shortcomings during the Third Reich. The declaration was a consensus statement, and far more vague and conservative than the more radical declaration in Darmstadt two years later, which was not endorsed by the German state churches.<sup>5</sup> We students asked to use university facilities for the celebrations and invited all faculty members to participate. To our utter surprise the faculty was split down the middle, and we did not have sufficient support. It was only after long negotiations and some radical changes to the programme that rooms became available. The explanation we were given was that ‘Elert’s widow was still alive’. We had no idea why a celebration of the Stuttgart declaration would upset the widow of the late Professor Werner Elert. So we went into the library to investigate.

Werner Elert, who had taught theology in Erlangen since 1923, was one of the most influential theologians of the *Neuluthertum*. Elert was loosely linked to the Neuendettelsauer Mission through personal and professional links with members of the mission, especially director Friedrich Epplein, who also taught at the University in Erlangen. In 1933, when the National Socialist government introduced laws excluding non-Aryans from the civil service, Protestant churches debated whether the churches should likewise dismiss employees of Jewish descent. Two universities, the University of Marburg and the University of Erlangen, were approached for expert reports on this matter. Erlangen’s ambiguous statement jointly written by Elert and his colleague Paul Althaus on whether to introduce the so-called Aryan clause into the church is an example of the way concepts of *Volkstum* and theories about the legitimacy and role of the state translated into policy advice. The two Erlangen Professors came to the conclusion that it was un-biblical to exclude non-Aryan Christians, as baptism not blood was the relevant issue for a church community. But, as the church was part of the wider structures given by God in the creation, of which the state was one, and had the duty to be

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5 For a history and the text of the *Stuttgarter Schulderklärung* and the *Darmstädter Wort* (Ein Wort des Bruderrates der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland zum politischen Weg unseres Volkes) see Martin Greschat (ed.), *Im Zeichen der Schuld. 40 Jahre Stuttgarter Schuldbekennnis. Eine Dokumentation*, Neukirchener Verlag Neukirchen-Vluyn 1985.

*Volkskirche* for Germans, government politics and pressures from the wider society should not be ignored. Lutherans of Jewish descent should therefore be encouraged not to aspire to leading positions in the church or voluntarily leave such positions.<sup>6</sup>

This incident turned me into an historian, and the period of the Third Reich has remained my main focus ever since. When Theodor Ahrens, Professor for mission history, comparative religion and ecumenical theology at the University of Hamburg, invited me in 1991 to research foreign missions and their political involvement with National Socialism in Bavaria, I was faced with an exciting, but personally difficult task. As I had experienced in Erlangen, remembering or researching the National Socialist past was met with ambivalent reactions by the Neuendettelsauer mission and people associated with it. Director Dr Helmut Becker agreed to open the society's archive for me, but other people castigated me for choosing such a pointless, counterproductive topic. Could I not write about something constructive instead, I was asked by one distant relative. I came as a stranger to the Neuendettelsauer mission and its history, but I had long-standing family connections—Rudolf Ruf, director of Neuendettelsau from 1921 to 1928 was my great-grandfather—and this made some aspects of the research easier, and complicated others.

There are two major debates in regard to relationships between politics and foreign missions, which have polarised scholars. One is the question whether and in what way foreign missions had been agents of colonialism. The other is, how close to National Socialism German foreign missions had been. The latter debate has predominantly been a German one, albeit one of its earliest voices has come from the Netherlands, while one of the most recent contributions has been made by a German mission theologian based in Britain.<sup>7</sup> The following overview attempts to locate the Neuendettelsauer mission within these wider controversies, as well as clarifying pertinent to this debate the focus of this study, and the intellectual influences on me.

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6 The *Erlanger Gutachten* was also printed in Neuendettelsau's mission journal *Freimund*, 1933, pp. 398-400. For more information on the *Erlanger Gutachten* see Tanja Hetzer, *Deutsche Stunde-Volksgemeinschaft und Antisemitismus in der politischen Theologie bei Paul Althaus*, Allitera Verlag München 2009; see also Christine Winter and Tanja Hetzer, 'Werner Elert', Wolfgang Benz (ed.), *Handbuch des Antisemitismus*, K.g. Saur Verlag Muenchen, 2009.

7 Werner Ustorf, *Sailing on the Next Tide. Mission, Missiology and the Third Reich*, Peter Lang Europäischer Verlag der Wissenschaften, Frankfurt a.M., 2000 (Studies in the Intercultural History of Christianity, Vol. 125).