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August Hardeland and the »Rheinische« and »Hermannsburger« Missions in Borneo and Southern Africa (1839–1870)

The History of a Paradigm Shift and its Impact on South African Lutheran Churches

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Preface

μηδὲ δίκην δικάσῃς πρὶν ἄν ἀμφοῖν μῦθον ἀκούσῃς
Cicero, ad Att., vii. 18

Without a doubt, one of the most painful periods in the history of Lutheranism in southern Africa is the mid-nineteenth century, i.e. the years immediately following the initial honeymoon phase of the presence of the Hermannsburg Lutherans in southern Africa. In that initial phase, the Hermannsburg Lutherans put into practice what many others only talked about: The Romantic ideal of reviving the communal mission model – and the success – of the early medieval monastic missionaries to mainland Europe, and to Germany in particular. The ideal of Christians, both ordained and lay, traveling to foreign lands as a group, living and working together in mission, dedicating their lives to the proclamation of the Gospel in word and action, and sowing what they saw as the seeds of a new Christian civilization. Such, at any rate, was the ideal. The reality was that after five years of initial concord, conflict broke out – conflict that centered on one man: The new mission superintendent, August Hardeland. August Hardeland came to serve as the catalyst for ongoing conflict in the Hermannsburg Mission Society, leading to painful consequences with which the Lutheran Churches in southern Africa contend to this day.

The best way to deal with painful problems is to bury them. At least, this has been the prevailing sentiment during numerous periods in history marked by conflict and trauma – the idea that silence is the best line of defense, that ignoring painful subjects is easier than dealing with them head-on. It is, in a sense, this sentiment that makes the enterprise of history resemble that of archaeology. Both involve uncovering things buried by accident – or by intention. In either case, uncovering them is profitable. Ever since Roman times, one of the basic tenets of law in Western civilization has been *audiatur et altera pars* ("let the other side also be heard") – the tenet that it is impossible to come to any responsible and reliable conclusions about a matter unless all sides of the story are considered.[1] If only one side is being heard, then it is the task of responsible historical research to uncover and disclose the other(s), even and especially when it comes to painful subjects and traumatic times. The object of such research is not to dwell on pain, but to come to terms with it, precisely by addressing and not burying it. Simply put: If we are to come to any responsible and reliable conclusions about the past, then we must seek to hear all sides; and sometimes, the only way to do that is to uncover buried pain.

In the case of the Hermannsburg Mission Society, there was indeed pain. This pain was caused by conflict on a number of levels.

1 See Franciszek Longchamps de Bérier, "Audiatur et altera pars," in Jan Hallebeek et al., eds., *Inter Cives Necnon Peregrinos* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014), 429–442.

There was conflict between the superintendent and many of the missionaries. This conflict was so severe that it resulted in the loss of the most promising mission stations of the Hermannsburg Mission Society, the stations among the Batswana in present-day Botswana. These stations had recorded the most phenomenal conversion rates and even included members of Tswana royal houses. The missionary personnel were anathematized, their stations lost, and the entire area was essentially abandoned by the Hermannsburg Mission Society for many years.

There was conflict among the Hermannsburg missionaries as a new order was introduced by the superintendent, a ranking system and some resettlement that led in many instances to friction and tension. As a result, a number of missionaries resigned.

There was conflict between the superintendent and the indigenous Africans, conflict which arose when he insisted on treating the Africans as inferiors, disciplining them severely, even brutalizing them, earning him the nickname *uMashayanjalo*, meaning "the one who always beats people."[2] This master-subject approach was also adopted by a number of the other Hermannsburg missionaries, contrary to their initial instructions, which led to further instances of brutalization of Africans.
There was conflict between the superintendent and the "colonists," the laypeople serving the mission as carpenters, shoemakers, wagonmakers etc. Some colonists resigned, and the ensuing tension in the Hermannsburg Mission Society became so great that within a few years, the communal mission model was abandoned, and the colonists, who had dedicated their lives to mission, and who had traveled across half a world to serve in the mission field, now left the mission and became farmers.[3]

There was even conflict between the superintendent and Ludwig "Louis" Harms, founder of the mission – conflict over mission strategy, over the running of the Hermannsburg Mission Society, over the training of the missionaries, over the numbers of missionary personnel, over theological issues, over the mission vision and goals, and, increasingly, personal conflict between the two men as well. After the superintendent resigned, Louis Harms eventually refused to meet with him ever again.

Yes, the superintendency of August Hardeland[4] (1859–1863) was indeed a very painful period for the Hermannsburg Mission Society and for Lutheranism in

2 Prince Bongani Kashelemba Zulu, "From the Lüneburger Heide to Northern Zululand: A History of the Encounter between the Settlers, the Hermannsburg Missionaries, the Amakhosi and their People, with Special Reference to Four Mission Stations in Northern Zululand (1860–1913)" (master's thesis, University of Natal, 2002), 449–450; HMBl 9, no. 4 (1862): 53–54.

3 Heinrich Bammann, *Koinonia in Afrika*, Veröffentlichungen der Freien Hochschule für Mission der Arbeitsgemeinschaft Evangelikaler Missionen. Reihe C: Vorträge und Aufsätze 6 (Bad Liebenzell: Verlag der Liebenzeller Mission, 1990), 84–85.

4 Disambiguation: The August (Friedrich Albert) Hardeland (1814–1891) who is the protagonist of our study should not be mistaken for the younger Lutheran churchman August (Wilhelm) Hardeland (1855–1929), who was a superintendent in Uslar, Germany. Cf. Thomas Stahlberg, *Seelsorge im Übergang zur "modernen Welt": Heinrich Adolf Köstlin und Otto Baumgarten im*

southern Africa. And yet, surprisingly, little was said about it afterward; the leadership of the mission society eventually forbade mention of the superintendent. And thus, in the course of time, the pain was buried. Until recently, subsequent generations learned of the subject only in vague, general terms. However, though the pain of the conflicts was muted, their painful consequences remain(ed), leaving historians puzzled. The most pressing issue remains: Who was this superintendent, what was his story, and why did Louis Harms[5] select him to serve as Hermannsburg Mission Society superintendent in the first place?

The Purpose of the Book in Light of Existing Research[6]

Wolfgang Proske, in his landmark study of the controversial superintendency of A. Hardeland and its impact on the development and history of Botswana, claims that the works covering the history of the Hermannsburg Mission Society (HMS) and of its daughter churches tend to address the painful subject of Hardeland's superintendency in a very carefully formulated, relatively superficial manner. Proske adds that extant research ultimately serves to direct the reader's attention away from the subject or to mythologize it, sometimes even to the point of suppressing it. He concludes: "In this way, Hardeland, who left no descendants in South Africa, has become a 'nonperson;' people cope with the Hardeland conflict by hushing it up."[7] Mignon adds her support to this sentiment.[8]

Proske himself labored to correct this deficiency and to provide a coherent, meaningful contribution to the subject. Since the publication of his work, other authors like Mignon and Hohmann[9] have made substantial contributions toward

Kontext der praktischen Theologie um 1900 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998), 9; D. Sachsse, "Praktische Theologie," in Grützmacher et al., eds., *Die Theologie der Gegenwart* (Leipzig: A. Deichertsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1907), 88.

5 From this point on, Louis Harms will be referred to as "L. Harms," Theodor Harms as "T. Harms," and August Hardeland as "A. Hardeland," except in headings.

6 Spatial limitations prevent the inclusion of a thorough literature review. Interested readers are directed to the review in Karl Böhmer, "Colonist Mission and Community of Property: August Hardeland's Conflict with the Rhenish and Hermannsburg Mission Societies in Borneo and Southern Africa," (doctoral dissertation, Concordia Theological Seminary, Ft. Wayne, USA, 2015), 14–20; 81–106.

7 Wolfgang Proske, *Botswana und die Anfänge der Hermannsburger Mission: Voraussetzungen, Verlauf und Scheitern eines lutherischen Missionsversuches im Spannungsfeld divergierender politischer Interessen*, Europäische Hochschulschriften: Reihe 3, Geschichte und ihre Hilfswissenschaften 391 (Frankfurt a.M.: Verlag Peter Lang, 1989), 227–228.

8 Andrea Mignon, *Dürre und Segen: Die Hermannsburger Mission und die Gesellschaft der Balete im vorkolonialen Botswana*, Beiträge zur Missionswissenschaft und Interkulturellen Theologie 4 (Münster: LIT Verlag, 1994), 79.

9 Christian Hohmann, *Auf getrennten Wegen: Lutherische Missions- und Siedlergemeinden in Südafrika im Spannungsfeld der Rassentrennung (1652–1910)*, Studien zur Außereuropäischen Christentumsgeschichte (Asien, Afrika, Lateinamerika) 16 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2011).

addressing the issue. However, as one of the leading researchers in and publicists on the subject of L. Harms and the history of the HMS, Dr. Hartwig F. Harms, suggests, a significant historiographical need still exists to shed light on the personality and service of A. Hardeland, and especially with regard to comparative studies between his approach and that of L. Harms.[10] This is particularly true from the perspective of Lutheran missiology.

This book is intended to make a contribution in this regard. We will pick up the story by examining A. Hardeland's formative years and his mission service in Borneo. A. Hardeland was a gifted linguist and Bible translator, a man who received two honorary doctorates for his impressive exploits. Imposing credentials! Yet studying this man's story stirs up dust covering even more painful things than those which later took place in the Hermannsburg Mission Society, painful events which people preferred to forget, rather than to discuss. We find traces of radical, seditious politics in A. Hardeland's youth in Germany, whispers of an attempted assassination of German princes. We find evidence of violence in his missionary service in Borneo and in the Cape Colony, aspirations of autocratic rule over local missionary converts, whom A. Hardeland was said to have subjected to anguish, shameful treatment, and even torture – men and women alike. We find mounting conflict between A. Hardeland, his colleagues in Borneo, and the mission leadership in Germany, and eventually a total breakdown of fellowship. Furthermore, niggling questions remain over A. Hardeland's contribution to the subsequent popular uprising in Borneo during which a number of his fellow missionaries were killed. At any rate, the record yielded by the research is indeed a painful one, and so it comes as no surprise that the few people who knew about it preferred to let it gather dust in archives, rather than to make it public.

The same is true for what came to be known as the "Hardeland conflict" in the history of the Hermannsburg Mission Society. It is reasonable to expect that many would prefer it to remain that way. The subject is, after all, a painful one. However, it is my conviction that the other side needs to be heard if we, the heirs and friends of Lutheranism and the Hermannsburg Mission Society in southern Africa, are to begin to come to responsible and reliable conclusions about the Hardeland conflict(s). And these conflicts substantially determined the course of history of Lutheranism in southern Africa. They determined much of the focus, scope, vision, and methodology of the subsequent mission work. They set the stage for later conflicts which arose in the HMS regarding the salaries and trading activities of the missionaries. And they also shed light on the parallel development along racial lines among the Lutheran churches in South Africa as direct or indirect results of the work of the Hermannsburg Mission Society.

It is my hope that this study will contribute toward a greater understanding of our past and present, and enable us to deal with both in a productive and Christlike

10 Hartwig F. Harms, e-mail message to author, April 10, 2010.

manner. It is in this spirit that I decided to write this book in English, in order to make the subject matter available to a wider audience, particularly in Africa. It is my hope that it will help us to hear both sides of the story.

Overview[11]

Although our main aim is to study the early development of the mission work of the HMS in southern Africa and especially the conflicts that unfolded under the supervision of A. Hardeland, two aspects must necessarily occupy our attention before we can turn to this subject. The first will be the development of A. Hardeland as a person and as a missionary[12] and Bible translator in Borneo. As it is, it is difficult to understand why A. Hardeland acted the way he did as superintendent of the HMS. It is impossible to do so without taking into consideration his development within the historical context of Hanover and the German territories, the Rhenish Mission Society (RMS), the south-east Asian island of Borneo, and the Cape Colony. Here lie the seeds that germinated in the HMS during and after A. Hardeland' superintendency. We will begin therefore by tracing A. Hardeland's idiosyncratic development within his particular contexts both as a person and in terms of his career up until 1858, in order to arrive inductively at conclusions about his understanding of mission work, and specifically of his understanding of mission and of the ideal form and function of a mission community. This consideration will be the subject of part one.

11 A note on delimitations is helpful at this point. While many issues suggest themselves as worthy of study, our framework simply does not allow for tangential investigations. Issues not directly investigated in this study include the practice of slavery or bondservice; the use of authority in mission; the relationship between the priesthood of all believers and the office of the ministry; conflict and conflict resolution; the nature of vocation; the role of language in the application of the means of grace; poverty and wealth; the religious beliefs of the Malays, Dayaks, Batswana, or Zulus; polygamy; and a host of others. Although the subject of apartheid and racial discrimination is raised in this treatise, it is only addressed here inasmuch as it bears upon the specific research concern. Certain similarities between the approach of the HMS and the work of other relatively contemporary mission thinkers and societies suggest the need for a comparison and contrast between them and the HMS. Examples include Wilhelm Löhe and his work in Frankenmuth, Frankentrost, Frankenlust, and Frankenhilf in the USA, and the work of the Moravian Brethren or Johannes Evangelista Gossner in southern Africa. However, again, our framework does not allow for analyses of this nature, and they will therefore only be conducted in brief, broad sketches when appropriate.

12 The HMS used the term *Missionar* ("missionary") to refer to ordained men sent out into the mission field to proclaim God's Word and administer the Sacraments. In this research, the term "missionary" will be used in a corresponding fashion. The *Colonisten/Kolonisten* ("colonists") were laymen who were sent into the mission field to carry out their secular vocations as carpenters, rope-makers, etc., and to use those vocations in service to the mission effort. Divine services were always held by the missionaries, not by the colonists. The colonists did not preach or administer the Sacraments. This research project will adopt the word "colonists" to refer to these men and to distinguish them from the missionaries.

The second aspect we need to consider is the development and outlook of L. Harms himself (in brief) and of the HMS as a whole. Many aspects of L. Harms' views and of the whole HMS were unique at the time, and these aspects contributed in no small measure to the unique development of mission work in southern Africa – that is, to the situation which A. Hardeland encountered when he came on the scene as the first HMS superintendent. Specifically, we will trace the influence of the medieval monastic tradition on L. Harms' views, and the manner in which those views were put into practice by the HMS and initially received in Africa. This will be our focus in part two.

These two parts will then set the stage and take us into the third part: The narration and analysis of the "Hardeland conflicts," which so fundamentally altered the course of the HMS and the historical development of the Lutheran churches in southern Africa.

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Karl E. Böhmer,
Pretoria, October 2015

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