

Excerpts from the *Monthly Bulletin of the North German Missionary Society: Report on the Society's Missions in the East Indies and New Zealand (1842)*

Abstract

The North German Missionary Society was among the earliest Protestant missionary organizations in the German lands when it was founded in 1836, though several others did already exist. Therefore, in 1839, when the Society began seriously discussing the location of its first overseas mission—the discussion occurring at the year's General Assembly—one primary consideration was finding a destination that was not already served by a well-established Protestant mission. As these excerpts from the report of the seventh General Assembly (1842) show, finding the right match between the culture of the destination society and the educational level of the prospective missionaries was also an important consideration, along with the climate and political situation of the potential host society and the connections between it and northern Germany. Although the North German Missionary Society would eventually become most noted for its mission stations in West Africa in what is now Togo and Ghana, its first missions were established in South Asia and New Zealand. One advantage of New Zealand was the existence of connections between Bremen and the British colony in the booming Pacific whaling industry. The emergence of global networks is evidenced in various ways in the following excerpts, not least by fact that a young man named Christian Ramajen, from the Brahmin caste in India, had converted to Christianity and been brought back to the Society's educational institution in Hamburg for further instruction and eventual service as a missionary.

Source

[...]

The resolutions of last year's General Assembly included the acceptance into our educational institution of the Brahmin Christian Ramajen, who was baptized by our missionary preacher Knudsen in Tranquebar. We reported this decision to Tranquebar in June of last year, but since an earlier letter failed to reach us, it was not until February 14th of this year that we received news of our new pupil's departure. He arrived here on March 18th via London, following a five-month sea voyage that was at times very difficult.

Communicating with him was hard at first because of all the European languages he speaks only English, and that very imperfectly. We were most fortunate, however, to receive a visit just a few days after his arrival from the missionary Dr. Bernhard Schmid, who worked for many years in the service of the Church Missionary Society in the East Indies and who was able to converse at length with the new arrival in his native language. It seems to do him good to have the opportunity to live in a Christian country where he is treated with love and is subject to neither persecution nor hostility.

Since, however, so much un-Christianity is found and is publicly tolerated in our Christian country, he at first required a good deal of instruction with regard to this obvious contradiction, which he experienced quite vividly on individual occasions since he presumably had a far more positive picture of an entirely Christian country whilst still in his homeland. Now, however, our circumstances are clearer to him, without us having to fear any negative influence upon his mind.

The acceptance of Ramajen into our educational institution increases the number of pupils to ten, so

that all of the space in our mission house is now filled. The pupils are divided into three classes depending on when they were accepted, with a fourth now following Ramajen's entry, since his training requires very special treatment and care, and since joint instruction with the other pupils is not yet possible.

[...]

III.

We now turn to the outcome of our last General Assembly.

a) Establishment of mission stations in New Zealand and the East Indies.

At the General Assembly held in Stade in 1839, the Bremen Committee already made this suggestion in light of the especially favorable conditions concerning a direct connection between this island and Bremen, and given the prospect of the acceptance of a mission pupil trained elsewhere into the service of our Society.^[1] Since, however, this pupil could not be sent out after all, and since the political circumstances in New Zealand became so complicated that it appeared expedient to await their further evolution, the administrative committee felt compelled, in its report on the first mission presented to its next General Assembly in Lauenburg, to advise against founding a station in New Zealand for the time being. Moreover, the kind offer of a friend of the mission in Bremen provided the opportunity for a journey of inspection in New Zealand conducted by ship's chaplain Müller, and it also appeared wise to await its outcome. In its report, the administrative committee therefore stated that the East Indies were splendidly suited to the founding of a mission station, and after the commission that had been formed to scrutinize the recommendations of the administrative committee also emphasized that country in particular, last year's General Assembly passed a preliminary resolution to send the first missionaries of the North German Missionary Society to Hyderabad in the Telugu region via Madras, reserving the right, however, to revise this resolution following the outcome of further inquiries and investigations.^[2]

Such a revision of the resolution occurred at the last General Assembly to the extent that, while the mission to the East Indies was neither given up nor postponed, the establishment of a station in New Zealand was resolved at the same time. The following circumstances provided the impetus.

From the beginning, the Society intended not to separate the two oldest pupils, Wohlers and Riemenschneider, if at all possible, but rather to send them out together. Now, however, because of a long illness early the previous year, one of them was judged by the doctor to be so unsuited for the hot Indian climate that he was likely to succumb within a short time. This circumstance forced us to turn our attention to another area of the heathen world whose climate more closely resembles our own. What is more, not only the news about the East Indian missions from Pastor Knudsen but also our extensive conversations with Dr. Schmid on this subject persuaded us that, for an East Indian mission, it would be particularly desirable if the missionaries who were sent there were actual candidates for the ministry, whose scholarly training would make it easier for them to perfectly learn the difficult languages of the East Indies. To be sure, this consideration alone would probably not have caused us to refrain from sending our two oldest pupils to the East Indies, since the number of men with theological degrees who feel moved to preach the Gospel to the heathen has alas proven very small thus far, and the missionary societies are therefore obliged to send out missionaries with less extensive academic learning even to the more civilized heathen peoples until other possibilities arise.

At the same time, however, we had the unexpected pleasure of being informed by the Stade Committee that the theology graduate Valett of Stade had expressed his willingness to follow a call from the North German Missionary Society to serve in the East Indies. This allowed us to refrain from sending our pupils to the East Indies and to select a different region for them.

Since New Zealand had already been under discussion before, and the same reasons in favor of a mission there still applied, with the misgivings occasioned by the previous political state of the country having been removed in the meantime, and since in March of this year we had also received ship's chaplain Müller's inspection report, which spoke very favorably of a German mission in New Zealand, we felt ourselves drawn to that country, whose climate, especially in the southern part, is very similar to Germany's.

A serious consideration of this plan was bound to lead us to conclude that our pupils were more suited by their personal qualities for a mission in New Zealand, combined with colonization, than for a mission in India, and so with a clear conscience we could recommend to the General Assembly that they be sent out to New Zealand.

The General Assembly agreed to this suggestion and charged us with finding a suitable location on one of the two islands. They will be sent out in the autumn of this year after Wohlers has been ordained a missionary pastor in Hamburg and Riemenschneider in Bremen.

The founding of a mission station in New Zealand also provides us with a suitable occasion to utilize not just the pupil Heine for the purposes of the mission, his poor hearing notwithstanding, but also the valiant former pupil Trost, who left our school a few years ago because his intellectual achievements appeared unlikely to prove sufficient. Trost has worked with exemplary loyalty since then in agriculture at the "Rauhes Haus" rescue institution in [Hamburg-] Horn, to the great satisfaction of the director there, and has consistently wished to devote his energies to founding a station in New Zealand as a companion to our missions. Both are well instructed Christians who will be very useful to our missionaries, especially when it comes to the outward set-up of the station. The General Assembly therefore resolved to send them along to New Zealand as assistants.

As regards the sending of missionaries to the East Indies, which had to be kept in mind with respect to Ramajen, one could ask whether our financial means at the moment are such that we could proceed to do this at the same time.

A closer consideration of our energies suggested that we may undertake this step in God's name. With regard to Ramajen, we consider it necessary, when the time comes for him to be sent out, that he find a station already founded by our Society, which can serve as a point of reference for him, since as a native he can be expected to have to overcome particular difficulties and tribulations.

For that reason, the General Assembly decided to appoint the theological candidate Valett, who not only enjoys the particular recommendation of the Stade Committee but also introduced himself personally at the General Assembly, to serve in the East Indian mission and, as soon as the necessary preparations have been made, to send him out. Valett accepted the Society's appointment and immediately began his service.

During his preparation he will spend time at the mission house in order to become more familiar with the administrative committee, and especially to take over Ramajen's instruction. If at all possible, he will already be sent out next autumn.

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NOTES

[1] See the fourth report, p. 18.

[2] See the sixth report, p. 13.

Source: "Siebenter Bericht der norddeutschen Missions-Gesellschaft," *Monatsblatt der Norddeutschen Missions-Gesellschaft*, vol. 3 (August 1842), pp. 249–57.

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