

From Bethel to East Africa in Service to Jesus (1927)

Abstract

These excerpts from the 1927 documentary film *In Jesu Dienst von Bethel nach Ostafrika* [From Bethel to East Africa in Service to Jesus] documented the resumption of German missionary work in Tanganyika, which had comprised the vast majority of Germany's East African colony from 1885 and until the British took control in 1919, under provisions of the Versailles Treaty. The British immediately expelled the 1145 German missionaries working there, but eight years later German doctors, missionaries, and deacons started returning to this region to reestablish their colonial-era network of churches, schools, hospitals, and even brass bands. The Bethel Mission sponsored these missionaries and produced this film as a means of raising awareness of its activities and soliciting financial support. The documentary contained extensive footage of the entire journey, which began in Bethel, just outside of Bielefeld (a city midway between Essen and Hanover), a renowned site of physical, psychological, and spiritual healing since the 1870s. Spectacular and exotic scenes of the subsequent voyage from Genoa to Port Said and then to Tanga, on the Tanganyikan coast (contemporary Tanzania), appealed to German viewers' curiosity and virtual *Wanderlust*. From there, the missionaries traveled inland to their mission stations in the Usambara Mountains, some of which bore German names in this film—such as Hohenfriedberg and Neu-Bethel—but whose official names the newly ensconced British administrators had subsequently changed. Frequent Bible quotations appear as intertitles to remind viewers of the broader Christianizing mission, and a series of scenes portrayed Protestant services, church construction and repair, vocational education, caring for the sick, and even the mending of musical instruments.

The film framed the missionaries' return to their work in 1927 as a reestablishment of the ostensibly close bonds between German and East African peoples that the postwar settlement and British colonial rule had severed. The film's intertitles referred to the British only as "the enemy," and then only in the context of vindictive acts, such as the destruction of a German church. The careful depiction of local African deacons, ministers, and teachers eagerly working alongside their German counterparts, meanwhile, suggested that Germany's influence over its former colony continued in spirit, if not in legal fact. Moreover, the film's opening scenes of the missionaries' procession from Bethel to the train station at the start of their journey—accompanied by a band, local dignitaries, and hundreds of well-wishers—suggested the patriotic as well as spiritual significance that many in the area had attached to this moment. Finally, the film reminds us of the central role that religious institutions continued to play in the Weimar Republic, even as they faced the same forces of social change that buffeted German society as a whole.

Source

Intertitles:

The world war drove 1145 German missionaries from their ministries. All longed to return. But it was a long wait...

...now the path is clear again. Bethel, the city of the wretched and the sick, is once again sending its messengers to East Africa.

On the way to their deployment.

Missionary, physician, and deacon. Each packs for their work.

Cheerfully go forth to the holy war, through the night and through horror victory shines. Whether the weather rages, don't be frightened, always look up; with Jesus there is light!

The congregation awaits the arrival of their missionaries.

This is where the mission church stood; it was destroyed by the enemy.

The European must not walk long distances in the hot African sun. He helps himself with a unicycle cart.

The preaching of the Gospel.

"For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee." Isaiah 60, 2.

Old Kupa, the first Christian convert in Kilulu.

"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord." 1 Corinthians 15, 58.

End of part I.

[...]

Part III

Onwards to Usambara!

[map showing route]

A black pastor in a white robe (Lukas Sefu)

"Let the little children come to me."

Sunday school

Onward and onward from station to station!

Duty is calling already!

Even in this hot continent there is rheumatism.

[footage of patients waiting to see the mission's doctor]

The cultural work of the mission.

The deacon at work.

[deacon is shown repairing brass instruments]

A desperate case.

Like new again!

The sweat muss run hotly from one's brow...

The trade school

[footage of students learning carpentry, printing, and bookbinding]

The drum announces the beginning of school

The teacher, Thoma, at work.

The teacher Emmanuel at Balangai.

The girls' school.

"Praise the Lord with the sounding of the trumpet."

"O praise the Lord, all ye nations: praise him, all ye people. For his merciful kindness is great toward us: and the truth of the Lord endureth for ever. Praise ye the Lord." Psalm 117

"

King Jesus, fight, win,

so that all

that lives and moves in this world may soon be subject to you.

Look upon your messengers of peace;

blow your breath of life

through the whole wide field of the dead!

Hear our pleas

and let it be soon!

Amen. Amen.

So we praise and rejoice in You

with a hallelujah forever and ever."

Source: *In Jesu Dienst von Bethel nach Ostafrika*, prod. Bodenschwingsche Anstalten, 1927. Bundesarchiv Filmarchiv Filmwerk ID: 1337

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