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**August Hardeland and the »Rheinische«
and »Hermannsbürger« 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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Table of Contents

Preface	13
The Purpose of the Book in Light of Existing Research	15
Overview.....	17
 South Africa and North America: Observations on the History of Missions	19
Matthew C. Harrison	
 Part One: The Development of August Hardeland Pre-1859	21
 1. Youth and Education of August Hardeland (1814–1839)	23
German Lands and Worldview in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century ...	23
Birth and Childhood.....	27
Adolescence and Early Twenties	28
The Rhenish Mission Society	32
Analysis	34
 2. 1839–1845 August Hardeland’s First Stint in Borneo	37
Borneo.....	37
The Rhenish Mission Society in Borneo	39
Instructions	42
The Journey.....	43
A Controversial Marriage	44
August Hardeland’s Missionary Service in Banjarmasin (January, 1841 – March, 1842)	48
Missionary Service in Gohong, Kahayan (March, 1842 – February, 1843)	50
Missionary Service in Bintang, Pulopetak (February, 1843 – September, 1845)	53
Further Challenges for the Mission to the Dayaks.....	55
An Attempt at a Solution: The Pandeling Project	58
Resistance: August Hardeland Leaves Borneo.....	62
Analysis	65
 3. 1845–1848 August Hardeland’s Service in the Cape Colony	74
The Rhenish Mission Society in the Cape Colony	74

The Printing of Dayak Literature in Cape Town	79
Public Scandal: August Hardeland in the Headlines.....	81
August Hardeland's Brief Missionary Service in the Cape Colony: 1847–1848	85
Analysis	93
4. 1849–1858 August Hardeland's Service in the DBS and Second Stint in Borneo	98
Visit to Europe (1849)	98
August Hardeland settles in Palingkau	102
Conflict with August Beyer	104
Conflict with Ernst Denninger	107
Conflict with Johann Barnstein	108
Conflict with the Deputation: The Pandeling Project	110
Conflict with Ferdinand Rott	117
Suspension of Fellowship and Withdrawal from Active Missionary Service	120
Conflict with Carl van Hoefen and the Bornean Conference as a Whole	121
August Hardeland's Departure and Return to Europe	128
Excursus: The Banjarmasin War (1859–1867)	130
Analysis	132
5. Summary and Conclusions.....	143
 Part Two: Louis Harms	
The Man, His Views, and His Mission	147
 6. The Development of Louis Harms, His Views, and the Hermannsburg Mission Society	149
Louis Harms and the Mission Seminary in Hermannsburg	149
The Consecration of the Twelve	154
The Primary Sources Authored by Louis Harms.....	155
Source 1: Letter to the Administrative Board of the Norddeutsche Mission	156
Source 2: Louis Harms' Letter to the Consistory in Hanover	160
Source 3: "The Mission Seminary in Hermannsburg"	166
Source 4: "Goldene Äpfel in Silbernen Schalen"	168
Summary	173

7. The Training and Deployment of the Missionaries and Colonists.....	176
The Selection Process and the Seminary Curriculum.....	176
The Lay Colonists and Louis Harms' View of Vocation	180
The Expectation Communicated by Louis Harms' Eschatology.....	182
The Constitution of the First Mission Band of the Hermannsburg Mission Society	183
The Commissioning Services and the Candace	186
Summary	189
8. The Implementation of the Vision of Louis Harms in the Mission Field (1854–1859)	192
The Founding of the First Colony in Africa.....	192
Life in New-Hermannsburg During the First Five Years (1854–1859).....	195
Expansion of the Work of the Hermannsburg Mission Society in Southern Africa up until 1859	202
9. Perceptions of the Hermannsburg Mission Society Model by Indigenous Africans	206
Upheavals in Southeastern Africa: The Identity of the Africans	206
Initial Attitudes in the Hermannsburg Mission Society toward the Africans	207
The Hermannsburg Mission Society and the Zulu People	208
The Hermannsburg Mission Society and the Batswana.....	210
Analysis	211
Part Three: The Hardeland Conflicts.....	215
10. Louis Harms selects August Hardeland as the First Superintendent for the HMS in Africa	217
The Need for a Superintendent	217
Louis Harms Appoints August Hardeland	218
A Position of Trust	222
11. Conflict between August Hardeland and the Missionaries in the Tswana Territory	225
The Origin of the Conflict.....	225
The Conflict Progresses.....	232
Excommunication	235

	The Effect of the Conflict.....	239
12.	August Hardeland and the Missionaries of the Hermannsburg Mission Society	244
	No Salary for the Superintendent	244
	Living Arrangements for the Superintendent in New-Hermannsburg	244
	Conflict with Missionaries Friedrich Meyer and August Wiese	246
	Conflict with Missionary Albert Liefeld	248
	Conflicts with Other Missionaries	250
	The Effect of August Hardeland's Censorship	252
13.	Conflict between August Hardeland and the Indigenous African People	255
	<i>uMashayanjalo</i> : He who Always Beats People.....	255
	Growing Racial Segregation in the Hermannsburg Mission Society	257
	Consequences in the Hermannsburg Mission Society	257
14.	Conflict with the Colonists	261
	"They Do Not Earn Their Salt"	261
	Some Colonists Leave: August Hinze's Resignation as a Case Study	263
	Brutality toward the Colonists: The Case of Ludwig Schmidt.....	267
	The Missionaries and the Colonists: Masters and Servants	268
15.	Growing Conflict between Louis Harms and August Hardeland	272
	Mission to the Oromo	272
	Missionary Training.....	272
	Polygamy	273
	The Leipzig Evangelical Lutheran Mission Society	274
	August Hardeland's Resignation and the Leadership of the Hermannsburg Mission Society	275
	August Hardeland's Service in Germany Post-1863	276
16.	The Termination of the Community of Property and Colonization Model	279
	The 1864 Conference of the Hermannsburg Mission Society in Africa	279
	A Call for the Termination of Communism and Colonization	280
	The Founding of the German Speaking Churches in Southern Africa	285
	Other Consequences	287

Conclusion	288
Overview.....	288
Personal Interpretations	288
Implications and Conclusion	292
Der Hardeland-Konflikt	294
Streit um Ideen und Ideale in den Rheinischen und Hermannsburger Missionsgesellschaften in Borneo und im südlichen Afrika (1839–1870) ..	294
Wer war August Hardeland? Sein Werdegang und Einsatz in der Rheinischen Mission.....	295
Louis Harms und die Hermannsburger Mission (HM)	302
Die Wahl August Hardelands zum Superintendenten.....	306
Der Konflikt mit den Tswana-Missionaren.....	308
Die Superintendentur August Hardelands: Weitere Konflikte und Austritte.....	311
Schlussfolgerungen	316
Appendices.....	319
Acknowledgements	321
Abbreviations	322
Chronology	323
Selected Sources (in translation)	324
Rules for the Rhenish Mission Society <i>Pandeling</i> Colonies in Borneo (1851)	324
Excerpts from Carl van Hoefen’s Letter to the RMS Deputation, August 7, 1855	325
Constitution of the First Cohort of Missionaries and Colonists	331
1859 Description of New-Hermannsburg by Carl Hugo Hahn	337
Instructions for the Hermannsburg Mission Society Superintendent August Hardeland	339
Index of Missionaries and Colonists deployed to Africa by the HMS (1853–1867)	341

Bibliography	348
Unpublished Primary Sources	348
Unpublished Secondary Sources	351
Digital Sources	351
Published Sources	352
 Sources of Illustrations.....	 364
 Brief Biographies	 366
 Indices	 372
Index of Names	372
Index of Places	375
Index of Scripture Passages	376
Index of (selected) Subjects.....	377

Preface

μηδὲ δίκην δικάσης πρὶν ἂν ἀμφοῖν μῦθον ἀκούσης
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 Brier, “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 Hardeland⁴ (1859–1863) was indeed a very painful period for the Hermannsburg Mission Society and for Lutheranism in

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- 2 Prince Bongani Kasehlembe 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; HMBI 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 in

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 Harms⁵ select him to serve as Hermannsburg Mission Society superintendent in the first place?

The Purpose of the Book in Light of Existing Research⁶

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 Hohmann⁹ 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. Deichert'sche 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 Hermannsbürger 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 Hermannsbürger Mission und die Gesellschaft der Baale 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.

Overview¹¹

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 missionary¹² 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's 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.

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- 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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Indices

Index of Names

- Adamson, James Constantine 82–84, 96
Althaus, August 275, 284
Andrae-Roman, Alexander 35, 70
Backeberg, Christoph Heinrich 205,
232–234, 239–241, 247, 334
Bading, Johannes 178
Ball, Ernst Friedrich 71
Barnstein, Johann Heinrich 40, 44, 46,
48–50, 53, 62–64, 69f., 102–106,
108–110, 119, 122f., 126f., 131,
133f., 326f.
Baxter, Richard 51, 70
Becker, Johann Friedrich 40, 44, 48f.,
51, 53f., 60f., 64, 69–72, 81, 91, 100,
102–105, 133, 327
Bede, The Venerable 158, 162, 164, 169,
171
Beeger, Carl Heinrich 180, 333
Behrens, Heinrich Wilhelm 240f., 258,
334, 338
Benedict Biscop 164
Benedict of Nursia 145, 167f., 288
Beneke, Johann Friederich 180, 205,
333
Berger, Heinrich Julius 44, 48, 52f., 64
Beyer, August Wilhelm 100, 102–110,
112, 117–119, 122f., 128, 134, 326–
328
Bleek, Wilhelm Heinrich Immanuel 196,
199
Böhmer, Bernd Diedrich Ludwig 263,
283, 335
Boniface (Winfrid) 156–159, 161, 163,
169, 171, 173
Börne, Carl Ludwig 28
Bourne, Thomas Johnstone 79f.
Brockmann, Johann Heinrich 248, 252,
335
Budler, Friedrich 88
Calvin, John 34, 61, 71, 84, 96, 113, 141,
146
Charlemagne 170, 256
Charles Martel 158
Colenso, John William 195
Columba (Columbkil) 154
Columbanus 154
Daniel of Winchester 163
Denninger, Ernst Ludwig 69f., 102, 104,
106–110, 134, 136, 326–328
Diestelhorst, Amalie Friederike 27
Dietrich, Karl 109
Eckhoff, Ernst F. 221
Edwards, William 204
Egbert 162, 171, 173
Fichte, Johann Gottlieb 31
Filter, Johann Heinrich Jacob 229,
250f., 256, 258, 264f., 269, 271,
282f., 334
Fismer, Friedrich Wilhelm 88
Freyer, Heinrich Wilhelm 180, 197, 333
Gathmann, Johan Hinrich 180, 333
Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von 31, 117
Gossner, Johannes Evangelista 17, 154,
200
Graul, Karl 141, 274
Grout, Lewis 195, 244, 258, 337
Gützlauff, Karl Friedrich August 175
Häfele, Christian Friedrich 88
Hahn, Carl Hugo 34, 200, 207, 219, 245,
273, 305, 337
Hansen, Jes Nicolai 235, 248, 335
Harde land
Carl 27
Hermann 27, 29, 32, 141, 220, 296,
306
Johann Hermann 27
Julius 27f., 141, 306
Justine (née Lyßmann) 27, 32
Theodor 227
Harde land (née Hulk), Sarah 44–46
Harms, Theodor 153, 187, 250, 253,
304, 309, 311f., 314
Heine, Heinrich 28, 31, 97

- Herbst
 Johan Heinrich 180, 204, 232, 240, 333
 Wife of J.H. (née Meyerhof) 240
- Hewald
 The Black 169
 The White 169
- Heyer, Philip-Jacob 40
- Himmelmann, Johann Heinrich 40, 42–46, 57
- Hinze, Georg Heinrich August 263–266, 270, 282, 284
- Hofmeister, Ernst 109, 119, 123, 131
- Hohls
 Johann Heinrich 179, 204, 282, 332f.
 Karl 179, 204, 217, 222, 236, 239, 241–243, 245, 247–251, 254, 256, 258, 261, 266, 268f., 281, 284–287, 310, 315, 323, 333
- Hupe, Johann Michael Carl 64
- Hupperts, Johann Gottfried 40, 44, 48, 50, 53f., 60, 64, 69, 102, 131, 135
- Imam of Muscat 192
- Inglis, Walter 204f.
- Jahn, Friedrich Ludwig 26
- Jensen, Thomas 240, 335
- Juffernbruch, Ferdinand 54f., 60, 64, 72, 81
- Kaiser, Heinrich Ludwig 240f., 248, 253
- Karmarsch, Karl 29f., 35
- Khama 235
- Khamanyana 235
- Kind, Friedrich Wilhelm 131
- Kohrs
 Christian 264, 266, 282
 Johann Heinrich Wilhelm 179, 334
- Krapf, Johann Ludwig 172f., 192
- Kriele, Eduard 48, 72
- Kröger, Berthold 266, 284
- Krüsmann, Friedrich Wilhelm 40, 57
- Kück, Johannes Hinrich 248f., 335
- Külpmann, Johann Heinrich 89f., 94
- Landolf 169f., 173, 302
- Leipoldt
 Johann Gottlieb 88
 Wilhelm 47
- Lessing, Gotthold Ephraim 31
- Liefeld, Friedrich Wilhelm Albert 248–252, 259, 267f., 274, 336
- Liudger 167, 169f., 173
- Livingstone, David 155, 204, 210, 242, 370
- Lohann, Carl August 240f., 243, 248, 252–254, 336
- Löhe, Wilhelm 17, 121, 142
- Lückhoff, Daniel 37
- Luther, Martin 61, 71, 84, 141
- MacKenzie, John 233, 239–241
- Mangold, *Mason* 287
- Medhurst, Walter Henry 37, 39, 43, 45
- Meidinger, Heinrich 200
- Meyer
 Johann Jürgen Friedrich Albert 179, 246f., 271, 280, 333
 Jürgen Heinrich 181
- Miller, Ebenezer 82–84, 96f.
- Millies, Henricus Christiaan 98–100
- Moe, Johannes 258, 262
- Moffat, Robert 233, 239
- Mpande, King of the Zulus 193, 207, 209
- Mühlhäuser, Johannes 40
- Müller, Heinrich Wilhelm 179, 258, 267, 279, 281f., 333, 338
- Münchmeyer, August Friedrich Otto 99
- Nägel, Johann Hinrich 172
- Nathusius, Martin von 276f.
- Neumeyer, Elisabeth 65, 248
- Niemeyer, Hermann Agathon 40, 64
- Nies, Tillmann 40
- Nollau, Eduard Ludwig 40
- Oftebro, Ommund 209, 247
- Ondaatje, Adrianus Marinus Elaartst 44, 48–50, 53, 63, 65, 69, 73, 91, 97, 133
- Parisius (née Harde land), Anne Henriette Marie 27
- Parisius, Johann Ludolph 27, 192, 225–227, 340
- Patrick 162f.
- Pestalozzi, Johann Heinrich 26, 31f., 34, 36
- Petersen, Niels 88
- Petri, Ludwig Adolf 99, 141, 151, 166, 184, 192, 306

- Philip, John 37, 85
Pippin II 157f.
Posselt, Wilhelm 192f., 196, 198–200,
202, 368
Pretorius, Martinus (President of the
Transvaal Republic) 203f.
Price, Roger 233, 239
Prigge, Johann Christoph Heinrich 229,
269f., 334
Rabe, J. Heinrich 264, 266, 270, 282,
284
Rebmann, Johannes 192f.
Reinstorf, Heinrich 248, 250, 269, 311,
334
Richter, Heinrich 327
Röhrs, Hans Heinrich 263, 284, 335
Rohden, Ludwig von 72, 104, 134f.
Rott, Ferdinand 110, 115, 117–124, 131,
134, 136, 140, 223, 325f., 328f.
Sander, Immanuel Friedrich 84f.
Schleiermacher, Friedrich Daniel Ernst
155
Schmidt
Georg 87
Ludwig 267f.
Schreuder, Hans Paludan 86, 193f., 202,
209, 247
Schröder
Dorette 226, 240
Hinrich Fritz 180, 198, 205, 334
Johann Georg 88–90
Jürgen Heinrich 179, 204f., 226, 228,
232–234, 239, 333
Schulenburg, Heinrich Christoph 205,
229f., 232–242, 247, 309f., 334
Schütte, Johann Christian 180, 332f.
Schütze, Johann Heinrich Hermann
179, 251, 332, 334
Sechele, Chief of the Bakwena 203f.,
210, 239f., 305, 310
Shaka, King of the Zulus 206, 209
Shepstone, Theophilus 194, 201, 208,
232
Stegmann, Georg Wilhelm 79, 82–85,
96f., 192
Stolte, Johann Heinrich 180, 332f.
Struve, Chr. H. Wilhelm 179, 197, 245,
261, 331, 333, 337f.
Tacitus 56, 169f., 173
Tidman, John 233f., 240
Uhle, 44–46, 68
Ursus 163
Van Hoefen, Carl 54, 57, 60, 64, 81,
102–104, 106–109, 111f., 115–120,
122–124, 126f., 129, 133–137, 325,
328–330
Vollmer, Franz Heinrich 86, 88, 90
Wagner
Christian 250f., 259, 335
Karl 88
Wallmann, Johann Christian 72, 118,
123, 125, 200f.
Weber, Friedrich 335
Weddik, Arnoldus Laurens 62, 65, 73,
101f., 133, 144
Wendlandt, Wilhelm 225, 254, 258
Wentink, Hendrik 43–45
Wichern, Johann Hinrich 149, 277
Wietbert 162
Widukind 169
Wiese, Heinrich August 246f., 334
Wigand, Friedrich Eberhard 131
Willehad 169f.
Willibrord (Wilbrord) 154, 156–159,
161f., 169, 171, 302
Wurmb, Theobald von 37, 89, 95, 144
Zahn, Gustav Adolf 37, 127, 144
Zimmer, Georg 120f., 123–128, 136f.,
140, 329, 330
Zimmermann, Ferdinand Friedrich Alex
205, 217, 227, 232f., 236f., 239–241,
247, 334
Zinje, Gertrud 65
Zinzendorf, Nikolaus Ludwig von 154
Zwingli, Huldrych 71

Index of Places

- Abyssinia 172
 Amandelboom 75, 78
 Amsterdam 43, 98, 100f., 129
 Bad Eilsen 130, 221
 Bad Pyrmont 31
 Banjarmasin 37–41, 44, 46, 48–50, 52f., 62f., 65, 68f., 73, 101–103, 109, 130–133, 135, 138, 140, 142, 219, 325, 328
 Barmen 31–33, 43f., 46, 54, 63, 67, 69, 71f., 79f., 85f., 94, 96, 98–102, 109, 120, 123f., 129, 229, 296, 328f.
 Batavia 39f., 43, 45, 49, 53, 61, 65, 73f., 102
 Benin, West Africa 172
 Bethabara 48, 50, 102f., 108, 111, 124, 324f., 328
 Bethanie 241
 Bintang 53f., 57, 60–63, 70, 73, 102f., 107f.
 Borneo 16f., 37, 39–45, 48f., 50, 54, 56–58, 62–67, 69, 71–73, 79–81, 85f., 91f., 95, 97–100, 101f., 109–112, 115–117, 119, 120, 122–124, 126–133, 135–138, 140, 142, 144f., 217–220, 223, 227, 229, 256, 260, 267f., 277, 291, 294–296, 298–300, 301, 306f., 324
 Botswana 14f., 203, 205, 210, 217, 226, 229–231, 234, 238–240, 242, 295, 305, 308–310
 Brunswick 277
 Cape Colony 16f., 37, 43, 63, 74–78, 81, 85–87, 91, 127, 145, 151
 Cape Town 28, 34, 43, 61, 78–80, 82–85, 87, 100, 192, 225–227, 272
 China 37, 175
 Dusson (Barito) River 48, 50, 107
 Ebenezer 75, 78, 86f., 89f., 95, 140
 eHlanzeni 202, 338
 Elberfeld 32f., 129
 eMlalazi 202f.
 England 23, 80, 88, 169–171, 242
 eNkombela 286
 eNtombe 286
 eNyathi 250, 259
 eNyezane 202
 eThembeni 338
 Flensburg 277
 Genadendal 87f., 95
 Germany 13f., 16, 23–26, 29, 31, 34, 40, 42, 58, 60, 63, 67, 87–89, 92f., 97f., 124, 128f., 132, 141, 154, 156–158, 160f., 165, 169, 171f., 175, 177, 180, 183, 185, 189, 192, 194, 196, 201, 204f., 212, 217f., 227f., 230, 232–235, 239, 243f., 250–254, 259, 263, 265f., 268, 276f., 279–281, 284–286, 289, 291
 Gohong 48, 50–54, 56, 62, 64, 69, 72f., 102, 107
 Göttingen 149
 Greytown 194
 Halle 40, 64, 130
 Hamburg 149
 Hanover
 City of 26–28, 31f., 99, 101, 160, 166, 179, 186, 188, 192, 221, 277
 Kingdom of 17, 23, 27, 29, 149f., 153, 182, 213, 225, 242, 331, 339
 Helmstedt 277
 Hermannsburg, Germany 149f., 152, 154, 156, 160, 162, 166–168, 176f., 180, 187f., 191, 198f., 205, 218, 220, 223, 229, 233, 236, 244, 250, 252, 259, 267, 272–274, 279, 284f., 304–308, 314f., 331
 Hermannsburg, South Africa 194–202, 204f., 207–212, 217, 226–228, 230f., 234–236, 240, 244f., 249, 258, 261, 268f., 271, 274, 279, 283, 285–287, 290f., 304f., 308, 315, 337, 340
 Herrnhut 87
 Ireland 88, 162
 Java 37, 39f., 43–46, 50, 91, 298
 Kahayan 48, 50, 52, 62, 131
 Kolobeng 204
 Komaggas 75, 78
 Lauenburg 150

- Lemgo 220, 306
Linokana (Dinokana) 204f., 240, 241f.
Liteyane (Dithubaruba) 204f., 210,
226f., 239–242
London 77, 233, 234
Lüneburg, Germany 150, 168
Lüneburg, South Africa 285f., 315
Mathebe 205
Matlare 241
Mentangei 54, 107
Müden 202, 337f.
Namaqualand 37, 74f., 78, 85
Namibia 37, 74
Natal Colony 14, 85f., 91, 95, 144, 192–
194, 199–206, 209–211, 217, 221,
225f., 228f., 231f., 236, 243, 253,
255, 258, 261, 269, 281f., 308–311,
337
Neinstedt 276f., 290
Netherlands Indies 37, 40, 43f., 49, 56,
63, 73, 101
New Hanover 202, 285–287, 315
Osnabrück 99
Palingkau 48, 50, 53, 55, 60, 100, 102–
108, 111f., 115, 117–121, 124–129,
136f., 140–142, 324, 328
Pella 75, 78
Pietermaritzburg 194, 197
Port Natal (Durban) 86, 192–194, 226,
234, 272
Potchefstroom 233
Pretoria 240f.
Pulopetak 48, 50–53, 56, 62f., 102,
107f., 118, 126, 328
Pulotelo 54, 107, 118, 121
Richtersveld 75, 78
Sarepta 75
Saron 75, 78, 89–93, 95, 98, 113, 141
Schietfontein 75, 78
Shoshong 205, 234f., 239–241
Sihong/Paty 107, 124, 328
Singapore 61
Steinkopf 75, 78
Stellenbosch 43, 75, 78f., 151, 192
The Netherlands 43, 80f., 101, 196
Transvaal Republic 203, 261, 310
Tulbagh 75, 78, 86, 90, 96, 127
uPhongolo 286
Utrecht 130, 158
Worcester 75, 78, 85f., 91, 94
Wupperthal, South Africa 75, 78, 86–
90, 93–95, 136
Württemberg 172
Zanzibar 192
Zululand 179, 193, 202, 205f., 208–212,
226, 229, 231f., 236, 246, 253,
255f., 261, 265, 267, 269f., 281,
283, 308, 311

Index of Scripture Passages

Old Testament

- Genesis 9:25 207
Numbers 16 236
Psalm 18:49 335
Psalm 23:1 335
Psalm 23:4 333, 335
Psalm 23:6 335
Psalm 27:1 335
Psalm 69:9 61
Psalm 86:11 333
Psalm 119:19 335
Psalm 126:1–2 335
Psalm 126:6 335
Proverbs 22:4 333
Isaiah 41:10 333
Jeremiah 17:7 335
Malachi 128

Apocrypha

- Tobit 4:5 333

New Testament

Matthew 10:28 333
 Matthew 13:31–33 186
 Matthew 18 120, 139, 235, 327
 Matthew 18:15 139
 Matthew 18:15–16 329
 Matthew 18:15–17 120, 138f., 229,
 236f., 275, 326
 Matthew 23:33 61
 Matthew 28:19 200
 Matthew 5:23 108
 Matthew 5:5 335
 Matthew 5:9 335
 Luke 11:13 333
 John 14:6 334
 John 16:33 335
 Acts 26:16–18 186
 Acts 5:29 68
 Acts 8:26–27 186
 Romans 14:23 335
 Romans 8:28 335
 1 Corinthians 12:12–13 321
 1 Corinthians 9:15 188
 2 Corinthians 12:9 336
 2 Corinthians 4:17–18 335
 Galatians 2:20 334

Galatians 3:28 207
 Galatians 6:1 139
 Ephesians 3:17 336
 Ephesians 4:1–6 219
 Philippians 1:21 333–335
 Philippians 3:12 113
 Philippians 4:13 334f.
 Philippians 4:4 336
 Colossians 3:11 335
 1 Timothy 4:16 184, 332
 1 Timothy 5:18 213
 2 Timothy 2:7 335
 2 Timothy 3:2 230
 Hebrews 11:32–40 183
 Hebrews 12:10 125
 Hebrews 13:8 333
 2 Peter 2:13 230
 2 Peter 3 236
 1 John 2:18–27 236
 1 John 4:8 335
 Revelation 2:10 335
 Revelation 4:11 184, 332
 Revelation 7:14 335
 Revelation 12:14–17 183
 Revelation 13 182
 Revelation 22:13 336

Index of (selected) Subjects

1848 revolutions 92, 97
adat 57, 66
 Augsburg Confession 33, 184, 332
 brutality 122, 123, 134, 137f., 140, 223,
 255, 257, 260, 267f., 276, 291, 324f.
 Candace 65, 186, 189, 192, 221, 225–
 227, 232, 252, 268, 285
 celibacy 199, 212, 282, 292f.
 censorship 223, 227, 232, 252–254,
 266
 charges 62–64, 70, 90, 96f., 136f., 141
 colonies
 European colonies 159, 210

mission colonies 88, 156, 159f., 175,
 201, 212, 258, 275, 292
pandeling colonies 58, 72, 80, 98,
 100, 103, 111f., 114, 116, 120,
 129, 139, 144, 300f., 324
 colonization 98, 155, 175, 200f., 244,
 258, 275, 279–281, 283–288, 293
 communism 174, 199f., 214, 244, 271,
 275, 280f., 283–286, 293, 312
 community of property 174, 212f., 222,
 229, 244, 275, 279f., 285–288, 293
 eschatology 182
 excommunication 87, 120, 229, 235–
 238, 240, 253, 290f.

- French Revolution 23f., 149
furlough 42, 189
grid and group 185, 250
hajjis 55, 113
Harcelandism 280
Heidelberg Catechism 33, 71, 96
illness 49, 57, 64, 87, 91, 123, 128, 130, 268, 328, 332
institutes/estates 78, 87–89, 91, 93, 95, 112, 140
Islam/muslim 37f., 55, 58, 131f., 297
Junges Deutschland 28, 295
law of patronage (*ius patronatus*) 186f., 218
Lüneburg Church Constitution 183f., 187, 197, 218, 222, 230, 237f., 290, 331, 339
Luther's (Small?) Catechism 33, 184
Lutheran Confessions 66, 174, 183, 211, 213, 218f., 292
marriage 42, 44–47, 67f., 176f., 198f., 209, 213, 249, 282, 288, 292
martyrs 63, 70, 140, 143, 158, 169f., 183
masters 105, 113, 160, 174, 188, 191, 223, 255, 257f., 268f., 297, 301, 304, 316
mission festivals 58, 92, 97–99, 166–168, 183, 186f., 205, 220, 223, 244f.
moderamen 94, 129
monarchy/monarchical 92, 149, 222, 250, 284, 311
monasticism/monastic 13, 18, 88, 144, 158, 163, 167, 173f., 213, 282, 290, 292f.
Moravians (Brethren) 17, 33, 87f., 170, 204
pandelings 57–61, 65, 71–73, 80, 98, 101, 103f., 110–114, 116–118, 121, 128, 132f., 139–141, 145, 297–301, 324, 328
polygamy 17, 273–275, 279, 289, 314
racism 207, 257, 289
Reformed Confessions 83, 96
revolutionary 25, 29, 92, 231, 246, 249, 251, 288
salary/salaries 16, 98, 100, 174, 190, 199, 211, 229, 244, 258, 280, 285, 287
seminary 32–35, 49–51, 53–55, 59, 71, 92, 98, 101, 149, 151f., 154, 156, 160, 162, 166f., 176–180, 184, 187, 191, 198f., 211, 218, 230f., 250f., 272f., 331f.
superintendency 14f., 17, 94, 217f., 220f., 227–229, 231, 248f., 253, 259, 267, 279, 288
trading/profit 16, 38, 88, 98, 186, 233, 238, 266, 270, 282, 287f.
translation/translator 16f., 54f., 61, 71, 80f., 96, 98–100, 102f., 108, 121, 123, 126, 128–130, 132, 142, 218, 325, 330
two kingdoms 36, 66, 70, 146, 184, 222
vocation 17, 31, 106, 173, 176f., 181, 185, 191, 213, 222, 268, 270, 282, 293
Westminster Confession 84