

# “Holding fast to nationality and to our fathers’ faith”

Colonialism and “Germanness” in German Theological Discourse until 1922

Jürgen Kampmann

## On terminology

What is meant here by “German theological discourse”? If we interpret this term (too) broadly, in the sense of the priesthood of all believers, we could ultimately understand it to mean any statement whatsoever made by any member of a Christian church in Germany (or any German-language region) on the relationship between “colonialism” and “Germanness”. If we interpret it (too) narrowly, we would focus solely on academic theological discourse on this subject. The primary purpose of the Study Process is not to focus on (the often informative details of) trivia, however, but rather to attempt above all to understand phenomena assumed to have a wider effect in some respects. In the following account, we shall therefore give primary consideration to those contemporary sources that attracted notice not only among those with special theological knowledge or an interest in missionary matters characteristic of awakened circles, but also within the greater public realm. Let it be noted from the start that further research is needed into those discussions concerning mission, colonialism, “race” and “Germanness”, for example those in the *Christliche Welt* and the *Allgemeine Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirchenzeitung*, as well as, last but not least, into the relevant commentary by Adolf von Harnack and Ernst Troeltsch.

## Review of the theological survey literature on the subject

If we examine contemporary lexicons published in the Protestant milieu, such as the various editions of the *Realenzyklopädie für die protestantische Theologie* (RE<sup>3</sup>) and *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (RGG), one searches for both terms (“colonialism” and “Germanness”) in vain; the term “colonisation” contains only general references to all instances of colonisation. What is more, as regards German colonisation there is particular emphasis on the expansion of German settlement in central and eastern Europe during the medieval period. But there is no attention to special theological aspects.<sup>1</sup> We also find almost no consideration paid to these matters in ecclesiastical and theological historical accounts published at the same time and afterward, up to the Second World War.<sup>2</sup>

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1 In the RE<sup>3</sup> some aspects are mentioned under the keywords “diaspora, Protestant” and “Gustav Adolf Foundation”.

2 See for example Gustav Fischer, *Leitsätze für den kirchengeschichtlichen Unterricht in Fortbildungsschulen*. Waiblingen 1901, 44–47, 75–83; Karl Heussi, *Kompendium der Kirchengeschichte*, 4, expanded edition., Tübingen 1919, 613f.; Walther von Loewenich, *Die Geschichte der Kirche. Von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart*, Witten 1938, 430–459. See Ernst Buddeberg, *Durch*

The phrase “colonial policy and mission” only appears one time in the relevant volume of the second edition of *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (which was not published for the first time until 1929, and therefore after the end of German colonial rule). This volume contains the following remarks:

“Since numerous questions of colonial policy and mission education converge in the natives problem, the differences between colonial and missionary interests were brought to the fore at all periods of colonial history because of the variety of opinions on this problem. The European colonial powers slowly and gradually found the path to assessing foreign races correctly, whereas the [mission societies] were doing them justice very early on.”<sup>3</sup>

However, here too there is no (theological) argumentation to back this claim – the article merely ends with the succinct observation that

“[r]esearch that summarises the subject of [colonial policy and mission] is lacking; the missiological literature offers material from a missionary point of view, the extensive colonial literature from the perspective of [colonial policy].”<sup>4</sup>

This retrospective analysis is confirmed by contemporary perceptions prior to the outbreak of the First World War.<sup>5</sup> As for the theological and ecclesiastical questions raised in view of what at the time was growing attention to those Germans settling in the German “protectorates”, even in 1911 the only response was the observation that here was a new and unresolved task:

“A new discipline has come knocking at the doors to the faculty of theology. Just as missionising to the heathens claimed its proper scientific place in the fabric of practical theology around twenty years ago, [...] so does *Diasporakunde* [diaspora studies], born of the enormous evolution of Germanness in recent times, now raise the same demand in the more recent theological disciplines.”<sup>6</sup>

This demand was justified on grounds that it was a matter “of nothing less than both Protestant and national portent, of the preservation and strengthening of the Protestant confession and the appreciation of nationalism among the members of our people and our church [...]. [S]cattered in foreign lands because of trade, transit, emigration [and] colon-

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zwei Jahrtausende. Ein Gang durch die Kirchengeschichte für unsre Zeit, Lahr-Dinglingen 1939, 139–147; Theodor Brandt, *Die Kirche im Wandel der Zeit*. 3. new revised edition. Bad Salzuflen 1947, 384–401; Karl Heussi, *Abriss der Kirchengeschichte*. Weimar 1956, 180–197. Only in standard volumes focusing solely on the history of the mission (for example by Gustav Warneck and Julius Richter) can an examination of questions of colonialism and “Germanness” be found.

3 C[arl] Mirbt, *Kolonialpolitik und Mission*, in: *RGG*<sup>2</sup>, 3, 1147f.; cit. 1148.

4 *Ibid.*

5 The question of providing for the diaspora community did not receive much attention from the church as a whole or from the general public until the Prussian General Synod took up this issue and the German Evangelical Church Committee (*Deutsche Evangelische Kirchenausschuss* – DEKA) began its work in 1905. On the DEKA’s work see also articles 1 and 2.

6 From *Deutsch-evangelische Diaspora im Auslande*, in: *Daheim-Kalender für das Deutsche Reich. Auf das Jahr 1911*, Bielefeld/Leipzig n.d. [1910], 78–81, cit. 78.

isation”, there is a threat of “losing both: our fathers’ national character and our fathers’ faith”.<sup>7</sup>

Decades later, in 1992, Gerhard Besier summarised the main points in a survey of the relationship of “mission and colonialism in Wilhelmine Prussia”.<sup>8</sup> He preceded his synopsis with the fundamental insight that it was essential “in order to classify the relationship of mission and colonialism appropriately” to recognise that

“both phenomena were also independent of one another during German colonial history, which lasted a mere thirty years, and that Christian missionary work represented a peculiarity under the conditions of the colonial situation”.<sup>9</sup>

Besier takes this further to say that Christian mission should therefore be investigated “only segmentally from colonialist perspectives”.<sup>10</sup>

### **Proponents and critics of the German cultural and nationalist orientation of Christian involvement in the German colonies**

Friedrich Fabri<sup>11</sup> was the first to emphatically favour the idea that missionary work performed by Germans should have a German nationalist outlook.<sup>12</sup> This idea soon met with massive criticism from his contemporaries, for example from Professor Gustav Warneck in Halle (Saale), the first to hold a chair in missiology.<sup>13</sup> Warneck considered it an “honourable national charge” to promote mission in the German colonial areas, but at the same time he called for the preservation of the international links that had existed for many years in missionary work and that transcended national boundaries.<sup>14</sup>

Theologian Paul Rohrbach, who enjoyed wide appeal as a writer and journalist, developed his own approach at the turn of the twentieth century.<sup>15</sup> Rohrbach’s idea of a “greater Germany” had as its superficial goal the missionary expansion of German influ-

7 Ibid. For more on this issue see article #5 by Hanns Lessing.

8 Gerhard Besier, *Mission und Kolonialismus im Preußen der Wilhelminischen Ära*, KZG 5, 1992, 239–253.

9 Ibid, 240.

10 Ibid.

11 On Fabri’s life and work see the contemporary biographical sketch by Schreiber, “Fabri” in *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie* 48, 1904, 473–476.

12 On this see Klaus [Jürgen] Bade, *Friedrich Fabri und der Imperialismus der Bismarckzeit. Revolution – Depression – Expansion*, Freiburg (Breisgau) 1975, online at [www.imis.uni-osnabrueck.de/BadeFabri.pdf](http://www.imis.uni-osnabrueck.de/BadeFabri.pdf) with a new foreword, Osnabrück 2005, esp. 161–166. On the theological foundation of Fabri’s argumentation see Theo Sundermeier, *Mission, Bekenntnis und Kirche; Missions-theologische Probleme des 19. Jahrhunderts* bei C. H. Hahn, Wuppertal 1962, esp. 58–61. In this volume see in particular article #6 by Jens Ruppenthal.

13 On Warneck’s life and work see Werner Raupp, “Warneck, Gustav” in *BBKL* 13, 1998, 359–371.

14 Gustav Warneck in November 1891 at the second meeting of the Prussian General Synod; see *Verhandlungen der dritten ordentlichen Generalsynode der evangelischen Landeskirche Preußens*, Berlin 1892, 37–41, 319–325. Warneck’s position later changed. In 1903 he believed it a worthwhile goal to put the mission congregations in the colonial areas under the supervision of the settler churches; see Gustav Warneck, *Evangelische Missionslehre*, Abt. 3, *Der Betrieb der Sendung*, 3. *Das Missionsziel*, Gotha 1903, 33f.

15 On his life and work see Josef Anker, Rohrbach, Paul Carl Albert, in: *BBKL* 8, 1994, 592–608. More also in article #6 by Jens Ruppenthal.

ence in the world,<sup>16</sup> but that expansion was to be legitimised both ethically and socially. Rohrbach was guided by the idea of building a “Kingdom of God on Earth”<sup>17</sup> based on Jesus’ vision of people as God meant them to be – Christian and social beings. In a (theologically quixotic) rendering, he saw the global expansion of the Second Imperial German Empire as the “foundation of an empire” in which this fundamental principle of Jesus could be realised.<sup>18</sup> According to Rohrbach, there was thus no real difference between action for the fatherland and for heaven, as long as it was founded on the belief “that we are helping to build God’s Kingdom and working for the completion of the world when we endeavour to make the world as German as we can.”<sup>19</sup>

Rohrbach was thus following in the wake of ideas proposed by Protestant theologian and Orientalist Paul de Lagarde,<sup>20</sup> who in the 1870s developed the theory (without at the time focusing specifically on the phenomena of colonialism)

“that religion is the awareness of the planned and goal-oriented education of the individual person, of peoples and of each generation. Whosoever recognises this *divine guidance* in himself, he who makes an effort toward it, is pious.”<sup>21</sup>

A clear sign that there was an unmistakable awareness in Protestant theology, at least up to the beginning of the 20th century, that German culture and nationalism should not be allowed to overpower the universal duty of mission can be seen in remarks by Berlin University professor Reinhold Seeberg<sup>22</sup> in the conclusion to his large two-volume deluxe

16 On this see the thorough analysis by Paul Rohrbach, *Der deutsche Gedanke in der Welt*, Düsseldorf/Leipzig 1912, 133–160: Rohrbach’s basic position is clearly visible in the following, for example: “Neither among nations or among individuals are beings who create no value considered as having a rightful claim to existence. No false philanthropy or theory of race is able to prove to rational humans that the preservation of some cattle-breeding Kaffir or her hoe-bearing cousin from Lake Kiwu or Lake Victoria is, by any measure of independence, self-sufficiency and lack of culture more important to the future of humanity than the expansion of the great European nations and the white race in general. Should the German nation abstain from becoming larger and more able, from searching for room for its sons and daughters to expand and act freely in the world because 50 or 300 years ago some Negro tribe killed, drove out or enslaved their predecessors and therefore claim the right to a barbarian life on soil where ten thousand German families could thrive and multiply in the vim and vigour of our national character? Only when the natives learn to create value in the service of the higher race, i.e. in the service of themselves and their own progress, have they earned the moral right to self-assertion” (*ibid.*, 143).

17 See Paul Rohrbach, *Im Lande Jahwehs und Jesu. Wanderungen und Wandlungen vom Hermon bis zur Wüste Juda*, Tübingen [and elsewhere] 1901. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Berlin-Schöneberg 1911.

18 For more detail see Walter Mogk, *Paul Rohrbach und das “Größere Deutschland”*. Ethischer Imperialismus im Wilhelminischen Zeitalter. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Kulturprotestantismus. Mit zwei Karten der ehemaligen deutschen Kolonien in Afrika, Munich 1972, 80f. On Rohrbach’s national doctrine of God see *ibid.*, 55f. Rohrbach (*Land*, 307) put it as follows: “He [Jesus] was not thinking of a kingdom in heaven, his kingdom was of this world. He did not call upon man to save himself from the world through heaven [...], but when he spoke of a heavenly kingdom he meant nothing other than a true kingdom on earth in which the power of heaven ruled.”

19 *Mitteilungen des Evangelisch-sozialen Kongresses* May/June 1900, series 9, no. 4/5, 32; printed in Mogk, Rohrbach, 82. For a discussion of this conference see also article #5.

20 On Lagarde’s life and work see Michael Welte, “Lagarde, Paul Anton de” in: *BBKL* 4, 1992, 984.

21 Georg Dost, *Paul de Lagardes nationale Religion*, *Tat-Flugschriften* 4, Jena 1915, 9. See also [Karl] Bornhausen, “Troeltsch, Ernst” in: *RGG*<sup>2</sup>, 5, 1931, 1284–1287, esp. 1287.

22 On Seeberg’s life and work see Traugott Jähnichen, “Seeberg, Reinhold” in: *BBKL* 9, 1995, 1307–

edition *Der Protestantismus in seiner Gesamtgeschichte bis zur Gegenwart in Wort und Bild*:

"The stronger the desire of the great Christian peoples [...] to go toward all corners of the earth, and the clearer the inner need for development on the road to colonisation, the more one understands the meaning of missionary work in broader circles as well. At one time, missionary work was the concern of a small, tranquil circle, 'the work of the Kingdom of God' in the narrowest sense; our understanding of its meaning for the church, even for the nation, grows daily. Of course, there are grave dangers involved in this growth. The mission would lose itself if it ever wanted to serve other aims than spreading the gospel and the dominion of Jesus Christ. Naturally, it is true that this goal can never be achieved without using the manifold means of cultural work, however culture must serve the dominion of Christ and ascribe to the meaning and aspiration of missionary work."<sup>23</sup>

The observations by Marburg missiologist Carl Mirbt<sup>24</sup> reach much the same result, if by a very different approach. At the turn of the century, Mirbt emphasised that Christianity had "proven its ability to encompass all peoples and races, the lower ones such as the Oceanic and the higher ones such as the East Asian, and to fill them with its spirit; in short: to *become a world religion*".<sup>25</sup> To Mirbt, it is a fact that Christianity exercises "an ennobling and humanising influence through its estimation of the individual person",<sup>26</sup> and that it has "not only brought a new recognition of God to those people who have surrendered to its teachings, but at the same time has brought them to a higher moral and social plane". Thus Mirbt saw Christianity not only as "the universal religion to which the future belongs", but he was also convinced that "Protestantism has set foot on the path to the global church".<sup>27</sup> But it was clear to him that the goal of missionary work must be in preparing for the establishment of indigenous national churches:

"The solution to the problem will largely be affected by whether those peoples converting to Christianity have retained their national peculiarities upon their conversion or have been denationalised through Europeanisation and Americanisation. Only in the first case will it also be possible to carry out the essential rebuilding of the whole society upon a Christian-national foundation, without Christianity always remaining the 'foreign' religion."<sup>28</sup>

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23 Reinhold Seeberg, *Der Protestantismus unter Kaiser Wilhelm II. Die Kräfte der Gegenwart und Aufgaben der Zukunft*, in: Carl Werckshagen (ed.), *Der Protestantismus am Ende des XIX. Jahrhunderts*, Berlin 1902, 1193–1206, cit. 1195.

24 On his life and work see Barbara Wolf-Dahm, "Mirbt, Carl" in: *BBKL* 5, 1993, 1569–1573.

25 Carl Mirbt, *Die evangelische Mission unter den nichtchristlichen Völkern am Ende des XIX. Jahrhunderts* in: C[arl] Werckshagen (ed.), *Der Protestantismus in seiner Gesamtgeschichte bis zur Gegenwart in Wort und Bild*, vol. II, illustrations selected by Julius Kurth, finishing by Hans Schulze, second revised edition., Cassel/Reutlingen n.d. [1902], 509–552, cit. 542.

26 *Ibid.*

27 *Ibid.*, 543.

28 *Ibid.*, 545. Mirbt went as far as to prophesise that the Christianised peoples "shall progress to an independent analysis of the Christian doctrine" and that the time will come when the churches that had

These two voices show that in turn of the 20th century for German Protestant theology the “export” of Christianity overseas – in particular to the colonies – was not always and automatically linked with the “export” of “Germanness”.<sup>29</sup> This is in clear contrast to the supposed “flood of racial discourse”<sup>30</sup> otherwise ascribed to the end of the 19th century. It also contradicts political interests of the settlers, who were determined in the main by economic gain against the indigenous population of South West Africa in the period until the First World War.<sup>31</sup> And it is equally in contradiction to the above-mentioned concept developed and put forward by Friedrich Fabri of a comprehensive German expansion into the colonial regions.<sup>32</sup> This was welcomed by the general public and was retrospectively described as follows from the perspective of the early 1920s:

“Before 1870, the German abroad [lived] with the feeling of being lonely and alone, cut off and thrown to the winds of fate; after 1870, he was the citizen of a great empire at home or abroad, a member of a powerful fatherland under whose protection he could also dwell in the diaspora, whose cannons made him respected, whose consulates and embassies stood up for his interests, protected his rights and provided safety and security for his property.”<sup>33</sup>

Because of the growing national involvement in the colonies up until the start of the First World War, alliances could be formed between the state interest in a long-term fortification of “Germanness” in the colonies and the church interest in missionary work.<sup>34</sup> The state expected “the support of the spread of ‘German civilisation’”, which in large parts corresponded with the ecclesiastical and missionary interest in education<sup>35</sup> and the culti-

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emerged as a result of missionary work “will perhaps make room for other organisations”.

29 This is confirmed by various interpretations of missionary duty in very different areas of theological literature, see for example K[arl] H[einrich] Chr[istian] Plath, *Evangelistik*, in: Otto Zöckler (ed.), *Handbuch der theologischen Wissenschaften in encyklopädischer Darstellung mit besonderer Rücksicht auf die Entwicklungsgeschichte der einzelnen Disziplinen*. 3<sup>rd</sup> carefully edited edition, with some new revisions, vol. IV. *Praktische Theologie*, Munich 1890, 39–103, esp. 85–92, 98f; Heinrich Runkel, *Quellenbuch zur Kirchengeschichte für den Unterricht an Lehrer-Bildungsanstalten, I. Teil für Präparandenanstalten zusammengestellt*, issue A, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Leipzig 1910, 178f; A[lbert] Hechtenberg, *Bilder aus der Kirchengeschichte*, 7<sup>th</sup> ed., Gütersloh 1914, 73–75.

30 Martin Eberhardt, *Zwischen Nationalsozialismus und Apartheid. Die deutsche Bevölkerungsgruppe Südwestafrikas 1915–1965*, *Periplus Studien* 10, Berlin 2007, 37; Eberhardt here references Michael Schubert, *Der schwarze Fremde. Das Bild des Schwarzafrikaners in der parlamentarischen und publizistischen Kolonialdiskussion in Deutschland zwischen den 1870er bis in die 1930er Jahre*, Stuttgart 2003.

31 For a more in-depth investigation of this topic see Eberhardt, *Nationalsozialismus*, 40–43.

32 On this see Karl Hammer, *Weltmission und Kolonialismus. Sendungsideen des 19. Jahrhunderts im Konflikt*, Munich 1978, 251f.

33 *Deutsch-evangelische Diaspora*, 80.

34 In accordance with Horst Gründer, *Koloniale Mission und kirchenpolitische Entwicklung im Deutschen Reich*, in: Horst Gründer, *Christliche Heilsbotschaft und weltliche Macht. Studien zum Verhältnis von Mission und Kolonialismus*. Collected essays. Edited by Franz-Joseph Post, Thomas Küster, Clemens Sorgenfrey, Münster 2004 (Europa – Übersee. *Historische Studien* 14), 209–226, esp. 216–219.

35 On the repeatedly mentioned aspect of the education of the native population in the “protectorates” see Horst Gründer, ‘Neger, Kanaken und Christen zu nützlichen Menschen erziehen’ – Ideologie und Praxis des deutschen Kolonialismus in: Horst Gründer, *Christliche Heilsbotschaft und weltliche Macht. Studien zum Verhältnis von Mission und Kolonialismus*. *Gesammelte Aufsätze*. Edited by Franz-Joseph

vation of Christianity.<sup>36</sup> In this area there was not necessarily a fundamental difference between Protestantism and Catholicism<sup>37</sup> although the Pietist–revivalist roots of the mission were quite critical of institutions on the one hand, even if, on the other hand, this was perceived very differently by contemporaries. The impression was that Protestantism was “a manifestation of Christianity that supports national particularities and, unlike Catholicism, is not mostly internationally oriented”.<sup>38</sup>

This perception says the most, however, about the chasm that had opened between Catholicism and Protestantism during the years of the *Kulturkampf*. Protestants in the first decade of the 20th century were even ready to claim that “the *German Protestant character* [is] a *special, divinely ordained manifestation of Christianity*” because “the German national temperament” recognised Christianity “in its innermost, true nature” as a power that permeates all of life. This quickly led to the conclusion that “to stand for the German nature and the preservation of German nationalism is therefore most certainly *a task of the Protestant Church in Germany*.”<sup>39</sup> This linking of “colonialism” and “Germanness” – lacking all theological foundation – took on the form of experience gained and manifest devoutness: “thus we Protestants shall indeed rejoice when German belief, German religion and German services exist in the world. *The inwardness and intimacy of a life of faith is just that: German! Is it not then also proto-Protestant?*”<sup>40</sup> The wish is also expressed that through the work of foreign congregations in particular “German Christianity [...] shall become an ever more potent salt for all peoples! And the German Protestant understanding of religion shall have its future!”<sup>41</sup>

The underlying belief was that

“*Protestant, in particular German Protestant Christianity will fulfil our God-given duty in this world – to bring Christianity into harmony with its initial form and original simplicity and purity in the increasingly modern life of peoples and cultures.*”<sup>42</sup>

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Post, Thomas Küster, Clemens Sorgenfrey, Europa – Übersee. Historische Studien 14, Münster 2004, 227–245, esp. 232.

36 Gründer, Mission, 219–221f.

37 Ibid. 222: “For the Protestants, Christianity and Germanness merged seamlessly into a “German-Christian cultural power” whereby the Catholics were just as quick to assure that the “German virtues [...] are naturally also true Christian virtues”.

38 A[mand] Suin de Boutemard, Die Auslands-Diaspora. Ein neues Arbeitsfeld der Deutschen Evangelischen Kirche. With a foreword by Carl Mirbt, Potsdam, n.d. [1909], 194f. In this vein see also Deutsch-evangelische Diaspora, 80: “Of more value to Germanness in and of itself are without a doubt according to the general estimation of the relevant authorities abroad the Protestant congregations, since they hold much faster to their nationality and tend it more carefully than Catholicism does or desires to do with its internationalism.”

39 Boutemard, Auslands-Diaspora, 195.

40 Ibid., 195f.

41 Ibid., 196.

42 Ibid., 202.

This sense of vocation fit seamlessly with the adage “colonising is missionising”<sup>43</sup> proclaimed before the German Reichstag on March 6, 1913 by Wilhelm Solf, the man who since December 1911 had been secretary of state at the German imperial colonial office.<sup>44</sup>

That this goal in large part had not gone beyond the stage of ideals and visions was at least admitted to a wider public: “This is all still in the process of becoming, is largely still a desire and vision for the future, but that which exists as an idea must one day also become reality.”<sup>45</sup>

### **German colonisation and Christianisation – Nearness and distance**

There had long been questions about the relationship between German efforts to colonise the protectorates and the cultural, missionary, and ecclesiastical work done by Germans. The *Gesellschaft für evangelisch-lutherische Mission in Ostafrika* (Society for Evangelical Lutheran Mission in East Africa), for example, advocated turning converts to Christianity into dutiful German subjects<sup>46</sup> – and in this way conduct comprehensive German “cultural work”.

But there were clear differences among the numerous Protestant mission societies in terms of the orientation of their work regarding their respective perception of their role vis-à-vis the indigenous population in the German “protectorates” on the one hand and the efforts to further national German interests (in particular economic interests) in the colonies on the other. These differences also begged the question of how to further the perception that the purpose of Christian mission was not only to act as an advance guard of European civilisation, but to serve the Kingdom of God. In the case of conflict, were missionaries called to mediate between the interests of the indigenous population and the colonial masters – or to take sides? What should the relationship be between religious authority and protection by the colonial power, even (indirect) participation in worldly power?<sup>47</sup>

Over time, a form of working “hand in hand” developed, supported by the openly purported belief in the great cultural superiority of the colonial masters to the indigenous peoples. It could therefore be said in preparation for the Colonial Mission Days in Dresden in 1911: “Our colonies will only [...] prosper continuously and grow closer to the mother country if colonising activities go hand in hand with the Christianisation of our new regions.”<sup>48</sup>

It is remarkable that even before the beginning of the First World War it was (at least partially) recognised and also publicly proclaimed that the ideal of the colonial regions

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43 Cited in Klaus J[ürgen] Bade, Introduction. “Imperialismus und Kolonialmission. Das kaiserliche Deutschland und sein koloniales Imperium” in: Klaus J[ürgen] Bade, *Imperialismus und Kolonialmission. Kaiserliches Deutschland und koloniales Imperium* with contributions by Klaus J[ürgen] Bade [among others], 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., *Beiträge zur Kolonial- und Überseegeschichte* 22: Stuttgart 1984, 1–29, cit. 15.

44 On Solf’s aims see Gründer, *Neger*, 233.

45 *Deutsch-evangelische Diaspora*, 81.

46 See Horst Gründer, *Christliche Mission und deutscher Imperialismus. Eine politische Geschichte ihrer Beziehungen während der deutschen Kolonialzeit (1814–1919) unter besonderer Berücksichtigung Afrikas und Chinas*, Paderborn 1982, 33–36; esp. 34f.

47 In accordance with Besier, *Mission*, 245.

48 Invitation to the Colonial Mission Days in Dresden 25–28 Jun. 1911; EZA Berlin 7/3650.

growing closer to the German Empire would not be achieved if it was not possible to awaken the will to integration in the indigenous populations living in the colonies.

For example, at the Hanseatic Oldenburg Mission Conference in 1913, Chief Staff Surgeon Otto Dempwolff of Hamburg sharply criticised the idea that the mission societies should "educate the coloured to become workers, tradesmen and devoted subjects."<sup>49</sup> [A]gainst this idea one must repeatedly emphasise that the *missions will never agree to set aside their purpose*,<sup>50</sup> because "the *religious conversion* of the natives and not only their training in individual subjects" was the path by which "the lower races [can] surely and perpetually be brought up to [the level of] culture" – in particular because "*the little-valued coloured man is in his own way deeply religious*".<sup>51</sup> He considered religiosity to be a matter close to the "coloureds'" hearts, "the foundation of their social groupings, their legal life and their healing arts; it constitutes the framework of their ethics and their ideals".<sup>52</sup> But Christianity, abundant with individualism and freedom to activate the powers of reason, was the only religion able to free the individual native "from the Communist bonds of the clan", "from the horrors of cannibalism, of infanticide, of barbarian vendettas", of "wizardry and the fear of ghosts" and thus to make him open to "European medical arts and health care" and allow him to understand "natural global events [...] using reason".<sup>53</sup>

"Not until religious longing receives its rightful tribute, the certainty of the soul's salvation, can reason focus fully on earthly matters and follow European lessons in schools and clearly see what is necessary for one's own livelihood, one's personal progress."<sup>54</sup>

Although the image of man and religion reflected in these lines clearly stems from a late-Enlightenment perspective imbued with optimistic belief, it is just as clear that there were no characteristics attributed to the German national character (or any other) that would bring, or even just pave the way for, salvation, and that therefore it need not be spread as an end in itself. Instead, Christian belief was understood as a crucial aid to learning to participate as fully as possible in German culture, which had long been influenced by Christianity.

"This alone can give the natives new ideals in place of those we whites have unconsciously destroyed and also teach them the meaning of life so that they comprehend what we mean by culture: to become the master of nature, because one is privileged to be a child of God."<sup>55</sup>

It seems to be symptomatic that this theological reasoning does not stem from a scientific theological discourse, but is from the perspective (and the insights) of a layman.

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49 Otto Dempwolff, *Notwendigkeit der christlichen Mission für die Kolonisation*, Flugschriften der Hanseatisch-Oldenburgischen Missions-Konferenz 18, Bremen 1914, 1.

50 *Ibid.*, 1f.

51 *Ibid.*, 2. On the fundamental cultural Protestant discussion of the "infinite value of the human soul" as well as the absolute duty to missionise see in this volume article #8 by Kathrin Roller.

52 Dempwolff, *Notwendigkeit*, 6.

53 *Ibid.*, 13.

54 *Ibid.*

55 *Ibid.*

### Wartime perspectives

The outbreak of the First World War put a new – wartime – perspective on the question of the relationship between “Germanness” and colonial rule. Once the intervention of British and French troops<sup>56</sup> caused contact between Germany and the German colonies – along with German control over the colonies – to be lost almost everywhere shortly after the war began, the Germans working in the colonies under the aegis of the church often experienced severe difficulties as a result.<sup>57</sup> In Germany the events were then interpreted on the one hand in the (unsurprising) context of war propaganda, but were also linked to ideas about the relationship between Christianity and national character – not only in the colonies, but also in Europe, in this case with particular focus on England and Germany.

If one decade earlier Ernst Troeltsch, first professor of Protestant theology in Heidelberg and later a professor of philosophy in Berlin,<sup>58</sup> had criticised German claims to power and been a marked advocate of the creation of a welfare state,<sup>59</sup> under the conditions of war – which he interpreted as a *Kulturkrieg* (war of cultures) forced upon Germany<sup>60</sup> – he developed an idea that received much public attention<sup>61</sup> – that it was Germany’s God-given duty to bring culture to the world, that the idea of God was incorporated in “Germanness”.<sup>62</sup> Troeltsch did not focus only on Germanness, however, but believed “national incarnations of God” existed in other nations as well.<sup>63</sup>

The Berlin pastor and philosopher Georg Lasson,<sup>64</sup> in an essay published in 1918 in the context of the 400th anniversary of the Reformation of 1917, entitled “Die Missionspflicht der deutschen Christenheit gegen unsere Kolonien” (The Missionary Duty of German Christians to Our Colonies), went considerably further:<sup>65</sup> he claimed that all missionary

56 On this see for example the concise overview by Winfried Speitkamp, *Deutsche Kolonialgeschichte*, Stuttgart 2005, 155f.

57 On this see the compilation of examples and reports in I[manuel] Kammerer, *Die deutsche Mission im Weltkrieg*, *Um die Heimat* 6, Stuttgart 1916, esp. 39–49, 69–90.

58 On his life and work see Klaus-Günther Wesseling, “Troeltsch, Ernst” in: *BBKL* 12, 1997, 497–562.

59 See Ernst Troeltsch, *Political Ethics and Christianity*, in: idem. *Religion in History*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, MN 2007 [1904], 177f. See also Peter Hoeres, *Krieg der Philosophen. Die deutsche und die britische Philosophie im Ersten Weltkrieg*, Paderborn [and elsewhere] 2004, 263.

60 On this see Christian Nottmeier, *Adolf von Harnack und die deutsche Politik 1890–1930. Eine biographische Studie zum Verhältnis von Protestantismus, Wissenschaft und Politik*, *Beiträge zur historischen Theologie* 124: Tübingen 2004, 389–392.

61 Hoeres, *Krieg*, 262.

62 *Ibid.*, 266.

63 *Ibid.*, 266. These questions are ignored in Trutz Rendtorff, “Troeltsch, Ernst” in: *TRE* 34, 2002, 130–143. On this see article #8 by Roller in this volume, in which Troeltsch’s ideas are explained about how the “particularity of redemption” also has as a consequence that individuals and peoples are understood as “not chosen” if they do not have the necessary ability to be cultured (*Kulturfähigkeit*) and, as a result, it is considered irrational to missionise these peoples. On Troeltsch’s political activities before and during the First World War see Friedrich Wilhelm Graf, “Troeltsch, Ernst Peter Wilhelm”, in: *RGG*<sup>4</sup>, 8, 2005, 628–632, esp. 630.

64 On Lasson’s work and life see Erika Bosl, “Lasson, Georg” in: *BBKL* 4, 1992, 1212f.

65 See Georg Lasson, *Die Missionspflicht der deutschen Christenheit gegen unsere Kolonien. Ein Beitrag zur Verständigung über das Verhältnis von Christentum und Volkstum*, Berlin 1918. On the relation to the anniversary of the Reformation see *ibid.* 3. In this context (*ibid.*, 5), Lasson claimed that although the German people are not named as God’s only one chosen people, they should nevertheless be seen as a chosen people: “The nation which God chose for the task of the Reformation, the nation that has since

work “in some way bears the stamp of the nation” in that every missionary’s soul is guided by the Christian character he brings from his homeland, which shows him the direction in which he will try to “develop the more primitive way of life of the newly converted”. “In any case, however, the guidelines for Christian practice will be determined by the shape and customs of Christian life in the missionary’s homeland”.<sup>66</sup> In this way, the German missionary societies too “represented Christian belief in its German national form and made the heathens not only into abstract Christians in general, but to Christians who should be taken into the legacy of German cultural work. They brought German work, German knowledge, German discipline to the heathens when they came to them as German Christians.”<sup>67</sup> The English method of mixing national and Christian concerns with one another should act as a warning, however, because when the English persecuted the German missionaries, they did so in the conviction that the missionaries were “agents for Germany, or at least for Germanness”.<sup>68</sup> Conversely, this proved to Lasson that the English were also used to using English missionaries as agents for England.<sup>69</sup> It made missionary duty subordinate to the task of worldly rule, by treating Jesus’ command to make all peoples into disciples as second to the command to make all peoples obedient subjects of England.<sup>70</sup> In Germany, he wrote, this misunderstanding could never become widespread since there had been missionary societies since long before the colonial period began. Because of this historical development, the foundation was laid “for the inner independence of German missionary work from the course of worldly politics”.<sup>71</sup>

Since Lasson’s essay was written at a period when in Germany a victory of the Central Powers still seemed probable (because of the favourable situation on the Eastern Front), Lasson also developed prospects for the future shape of the missionary work to be initiated from Germany (after the end of the war) – at least within the existing and most likely (as Lasson assumed) within a greatly expanded German colonial territory. For this future, his readers were to assume (in light of the experiences during the war) that “our colonial mission [will be] the safe haven of all missionary work” because even after peace returned, German missionaries would scarcely be accepted in the remaining English sphere of influence. What is more, “recognised leaders of the English mission” had already “demanded the total expulsion of all German missionaries from all English territories”. Even if a future peace treaty successfully negotiated safety for German mission stations, “we would be mistrusted, hated, shackled guests”.<sup>72</sup> In a rather ingenious propaganda move, however,

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then served the world as an example of conscientious labour in the service of divine will and of faithful use of its God-given gifts has a global call for all mankind. It may apply to itself our Lord’s Word: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles\*, and kings, and the children of Israel” (Acts 9:15 KJV, \*in German “Heiden” (heathens); trans.). Lasson does at least add the following (ibid.): “We should however not forget, that we must then bow to this Word: I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name’s sake. [...] For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required” (KJV Acts 9:16; Luke 12:48).

66 Ibid., 7.

67 Ibid., 8.

68 Ibid., 11.

69 Ibid.

70 Ibid.

71 Ibid., 12.

72 Ibid., 15.

Lasson linked this (not unrealistic) assessment with an illusorily positive take on the goals of German action and its moral quality, arguing that, compared to England, Germany's position in relation to the people of the earth was of higher moral value:

“Germany’s goal is not the subjection of foreign peoples. She does not arrogantly separate herself and has no intention of letting others work for her while she keeps her education to herself. [...] We must remain that which centuries of work on ourselves has enabled us to become, the teachers of mankind: then our path shall please God and He will also bring our enemies over to our side. Therefore it is of utmost importance that we take our highest national possession, Protestant Christianity, and spread it throughout the world and particularly there where we are welcomed with open arms. From our colonies we can hear the call: come over and help us. We are obliged to prove that German colonial policy is something other than the drive to conquer and the craving for profit. We are responsible for those territories which have fallen under the sovereignty of the German Empire; it is our duty to ensure that they sink not into poverty, but blossom, that the natives not dwindle in number and prosperity, but thrive mightily. As their protectors we must help them move forwards on the path to civilisation, the only way a people can rise and become stronger. But the foundation for such civilised behaviour lies in none other than Christianity; those peoples on a lower cultural plane are least able to find another motor for the civilising power bestowed upon humanity by the belief that transcends all borders in the mercy of our heavenly father through Jesus Christ.”<sup>73</sup>

In light of the “unbelievably enormous sums” spent on the war effort without a second thought, a massive increase in the financial commitment to the duties of mission was “a holy duty of our people”: it was, among other things, a “*duty of thanksgiving* [...] to a God who has made Germany mighty among nations”.<sup>74</sup>

With this Lasson described a course that had been outlined earlier – under other political conditions – at the turn of the century, for example by the secretary of the Saxon Mission Conference, Carl Paul:<sup>75</sup>

“When fifteen years ago [in 1885] our colonial policy had to go through its Sturm and Drang period, the politicians set out to make the mission serve their purposes. They would have liked to have put all missionary enterprises under the control of the colonial administration. They then hoped to win over the natives converted by the missionaries as pliant tools for their selfish plans.”<sup>76</sup>

But the leaders of the mission made it abundantly clear “*that they wanted nothing to do with the mixing of political and missionary interests*”; both politics and mission ought to

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73 Ibid., 18.

74 Ibid., 19f.

75 On Paul's life and work see Thomas Markert, “Paul, Carl” in: Sächsische Biografie, Institut für Sächsische Geschichte und Volkskunde e.V. (ed.), rev. by Martina Schattkowsky, online edition: <http://www.isgv.de/saebi/>, accessed 21 Feb. 2011).

76 Carl Paul, Die Mission in unsern Kolonien, vol 2: Deutsch-Ostafrika, Neue Folge der Dietelschen Missionsstunden: Leipzig 1900, 54.

work towards mutual support.<sup>77</sup> It had to be avoided that the natives not be able to differentiate between the potentates and the missionaries.<sup>78</sup> Paul admitted at the time – in contrast to Lasson in 1917 during the war – that German colonial politicians had been hostile to missionaries of English nationality.<sup>79</sup> Furthermore, there were many Germans in the colonial regions whose behaviour did not exactly make them role models in piety for the native population.<sup>80</sup> Paul did not hesitate to spell this out pointedly: “One would like to give them the following words of wisdom from the Sermon on the Mount: ‘Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted?’”<sup>81</sup>

At any rate, even during the First World War (as it became clear early on that Germany would not be able to hold its colonies militarily) the German missionary sense of vocation was not simply lost: “It is most gratifying to see how our missionaries, in the King’s cloth, find thousands of opportunities to daily tell their comrades and superiors of the mission, of their high, global duties; their heavenly ideals; their vital forces; their lofty cultural duties; and their extraordinary openness to the world.”<sup>82</sup>

Other voices perceived the developments more soberly. Professor Albert Hauck from Leipzig put it directly: “Today one is almost tempted to say that ‘Protestant mission and German Christianity’ would be a fitting epitaph for some gravestone”.<sup>83</sup> He also drew a clear theological line between the nationalist impetus and Christian, missionary duty, the amalgamation of which one so often met with in practice:

“It [Christianity] is not a national religion. All national religions are projections of the respective nations, their gods are the personalised characteristics of the nation. Christianity, by contrast, is the projection of God in this world. [...] Christianity is therefore either a global religion or it is nothing at all.”<sup>84</sup>

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77 Ibid.

78 Ibid., 55.

79 Ibid., 57.

80 Ibid., 62: “The Berlin missionaries in Usambara once were forced to hear, as answer from natives they had called upon to visit their services, that the Germans in Tanga did not go to services either.”

81 Ibid., 63.; Matthew 5:13: KJV.

82 Kammerer, *Mission*, 125. Kammerer (ibid., 128) due to the German-Turkish Alliance, even saw a “new missionary duty”: “This will aid the German mission in the future as well. Pious Mohammedans declare their high esteem for the belief and the piety of the German Kaiser. An Arab saying goes: ‘Peoples trust in the their king’s faith.’ For this reason the trust of the Mohammedan world in the German Kaiser has grown mightily. Is this not a sign that Germany has now been chosen by the will of God to in future take on a great measure of the mission of the Mohammedans? [...] Even the World War can contribute to opening the doors for the victorious march of the Gospel into the world of Islam – in the degree by which German Protestant Christians become aware of this [missionary] duty.” Albert Hauck (*Evangelische Mission und deutsches Christentum, Flugschriften der Deutschen Evangelischen Missions-Hilfe* 4, Gütersloh 1916, 23) also believed that the main task in the future of German Protestant missionary work lay in the Levant.

83 Hauck (ibid., 3f.) wrote, with a realist bent: “In the German colonies [...] if missionary work is suspended, the future of all work is threatened at its core. [...] Not in the least has it already been decided what shall become of the German protectorates in the future.”

84 Ibid., 8.

To this effect, he was able to say of the duty of the German nation only that the nation which best serves humanity should head the world.<sup>85</sup>

Until the last year of the war, the idea remained alive of supporting the relationship between Germans living abroad and at home<sup>86</sup> – because “a nation that has once stepped onto the great street of humanity and tasted global power will not allow itself, as long as it still has any strength, to be pushed back into the limits of its old border posts”.<sup>87</sup> And the proposal was developed that the aim must be, by means of a “*global mission of German piety*” to “*return honour*” to “*our good German name*” that has been “sullied in the world” by disgraceful calumny.<sup>88</sup>

### **Reorientation after the war?**

After the weapons finally fell silent at the end of 1918 – despite conclusively cutting off the overseas protectorates from the German Empire – no immediate fundamental readjustments were made. Siegfried Knak, who was appointed the director of the Berlin Mission in 1921,<sup>89</sup> stressed in 1920 the continued German duty of national mission despite the lost war.<sup>90</sup> He stood decidedly for “consciously spreading the specific German form of our Christianity”.<sup>91</sup> For Knak, the German mission stood out against the English and American mission: “If the English mission is characterised as a whole by the fact that for it, Christianising and anglicising somehow come together, [and] the American mission sees itself called to carry the democratic idea into the wide world, then all our work must clearly indicate the origin of the German Reformation.”<sup>92</sup> Knak saw the goal as creating “a marriage of the natives’ natural gifts and the German Reformation’s basic ideas about God and the world, the state and the church, the Bible and belief”.<sup>93</sup> Over the course of the 1920s and 1930s, in particular “*völkische*” (*ethnic*) and racial elements were added to the concept of “*Völkermissionstheologie*” of the 19th century.<sup>94</sup>

### **Colonialism and Germanness – a theological failure**

The theological approaches outlined above cannot be considered more than an uncertain, vague groping on swaying planks over swampy ground in their attempts to bring together, in a theological context, the commitment to establishing and supporting “Germanness” in the colonies and the work in the field of mission and overseas work with the diaspora.

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85 *Ibid.*, 24.

86 On this see Carl Paul, *Mission und Auslandsdeutschtum*, Flugschriften der Deutschen Evangelischen Missions-Hilfe 9, Gütersloh 1918, 8.

87 *Ibid.*, 19.

88 *Ibid.*, 23.

89 On Knak’s life and work see Karl Rennstich, “Knak, Siegfried” in: *BBKL* 4, 1992, 1092–1097.

90 Siegfried Knak, *Völkermission und Volksmission*, Flugschriften der Deutschen Evangelischen Missions-Hilfe 11, Gütersloh 1920, 8.

91 *Ibid.*, 11.

92 *Ibid.*

93 *Ibid.*, 12.

94 On this point see in particular Bruno Gutmann, *Gemeindeaufbau aus dem Evangelium. Grundsätzliches für Mission und Heimatkirche*, Leipzig 1925; also *idem.*, *Christusleib und Nächstenschaft*, Feuchtwanzen 1931. In southern Africa these ideas were widely taken up by the masterminds of apartheid.

Sound theological arguments combining these three aspects in more than just a superficial, cultural Protestant manner and supporting biblical exegesis – decisive in Protestantism – were obviously lacking. For the same reason the attempt to make the “German” Reformation the legitimate motivation behind these ideas did not really hold, since in the 16th century the ideas of the Reformation were taken up immediately and without ado beyond the borders of the German language and culture. It had theological content, but no (German) national or “ethnic” (German) content.

Thus the only conclusion that can be drawn is that there was no real well-founded theological reflection on these questions.<sup>95</sup> The ideas and linkages presented here are no more than situational attempts at interpretation that have arisen out of their respective circumstances, with rather limited depths of reflection, so there has deliberately been no effort to draw upon the normative elements in Protestantism: the testimony of the Holy Scripture and – with secondary attention – the confessions. The occasional use of biblical quotes is no more than the passing use of *dicta probantia* (proof texts) for an argumentation that at its core is not theological, but missionising with an ethnic/national bent. This argumentation was ubiquitous, found for example in streamlined form in teaching materials for religious instruction in primary schools before the turn of the twentieth century:

“In particular the Kaiser realised [...] the importance of the colonies. [...] They provide foreign trade and shipping routes with the support base they need, [...] those who would like to emigrate find space to settle and still remain under German protection;<sup>96</sup> finally the colonies are a favourable starting point for the work of missionaries, to spread Christianity, education and morals among heathen peoples.”<sup>97</sup>

Later the simple formula was found that both are “inseparably interwoven, mutually engendered: holding fast to nationality and to our fathers’ faith.”<sup>98</sup> But this was not theological argumentation either, only axiomatic positing cloaked in a theological guise.

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95 This claim is backed up by Roller’s detailed description (article #8) of the prevailing theological discourses in Cultural Protestantism and in the predominant History of Religions School. Their concept of culture (and its clearly political consequence: the Germans’ claim to global development and sense of entitlement due to the cultural position of German science, art and religion) not only produced (in terms of the history of its impact and influence) most negative effects as the 20<sup>th</sup> century progressed, but from the beginning was also theologically based on an unbalanced position. The historicity of the past (powerless) revelation of God was interpreted to mean that the historical impact of Christianity had in the course of history already been realised on the cultural level and was to be realised further in the present and future.

96 On the aspect of “empty” space that needed to be filled in the colonies see Alexander Honold, *Raum ohne Volk. Geographie und Kolonialismus*, in: Christof Hamann, *Afrika – Kultur und Gewalt. Hintergründe und Aktualität des Kolonialkriegs in Deutsch-Südwestafrika. Seine Rezeption in Literatur, Wissenschaft und Populärkultur (1904–2004)*, Iserlohn 2005, 39–56, esp. 41f.

97 P[aul] Wischmeyer and Fr[iedrich] Stork, *Geschichtsbilder für evangelische Volksschulen. Mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der Kulturgeschichte und der kaiserl. und minister. Erlasse betreffend den Geschichtsunterricht. Mit Titelbild und Karte*, 3<sup>rd</sup> revised ed. (5.–6. Tausend), Gütersloh 1897, 100.

98 *Deutsch-evangelische Diaspora*, 81.