

Pr. in Dresden d. 27/3 [18]43

Revd. Pastor Wermelskirch
in Dresden

Adelaide, August 22nd, 1842

Dear Pastor!

First of all, I must apologize to you for my long silence, or, if I fail to do so, at least ask you to attribute my lack of writing to reasons other than my laziness or perhaps even a lack of love. Frequent changes of residence, preoccupation with mundane matters, and especially the intention to wait and see how things develop in Port Lincoln in the future, have so far delayed my writing.

I have now been in Adelaide for two months, where I was called to assist in the interrogations of three natives from Port Lincoln. I could have returned earlier, if it hadn't been for the government's indecision about whether to abandon the settlement in Port Lincoln or not, which has kept me in uncertainty until now. Moreover, I myself was not sure whether it would be wiser to stay at my post until I could receive news from the company, or to give it up immediately. I would have decided without hesitation for the latter, if I could have found a suitable and permanent sphere of influence in another part of the colony, and means of subsistence for at least a year.

I won't say much about my activities and the notable events in Port Lincoln since my last letter, because the former were almost exclusively limited to learning the language, and the latter are largely described in the attached reports to the protector of the indigenous people. Regarding these, it should be mentioned that an indigenous man named Kungka was shot in an extremely brutal manner by a white man a few months before the tragic murders; however, he survived. He immediately came to me to complain about his suffering, after which the perpetrator was arrested, but since indigenous people are not allowed to testify under English law, he was released again. As there have also been several cases of this kind in Adelaide, I can't help but note that the protection and privileges that the indigenous people are supposed to enjoy from the much-vaunted English subjecthood are actually very precarious. According to this law, they can be legally interrogated and punished as soon as a Christian finds himself willing or unwilling to swear an oath against them; but they can never invoke the protection of the laws for themselves, as they are not allowed to swear an oath, and without such an oath, their statements are not valid.

My dictionary, which I collected during my stay in Port Lincoln and which consists of nearly 2000 words, I handed over to the governor at his request in a transcript, which he sent to the Royal Geographical Society.

Since my salary from the government was sufficient for my needs and I received no other support, I feel compelled to make up for the shortfall through my own work. Last year, I had 2 English acres of excellent wheat, which together yielded 45 bushels. This year, I have only four. During my stay in Adelaide, I hoped to persuade the government to increase my salary to £100, but I received no response. Instead, I see from the cost estimate for 1843 that it is set at £50. Since this sum is by no means sufficient and Port Lincoln seems to me to be a completely unsuitable mission station, it is my intention to terminate my connection with the government after the end of this year or at the latest after receiving a response to this letter, as I have no doubt that the society will grant my request to be transferred to another people as a missionary. Perhaps this request comes as a surprise to you, but I have considered it carefully and believe I can cite reasons that you will consider valid and sufficient.

I firmly believe that the almighty power of the gospel can seize and change even the most ignorant and depraved people, if it is possible to thoroughly and persistently implant it in their hearts. However, the latter is the knot that seems to me indissoluble in relation to the South Australian natives, at least for the forces of the Lutheran Society. The natives are a wandering people, as is well known; going with them to learn their language and then preaching to them might not even be safe in many cases, and considering the small areas they spread out over and how costly such a way of life would be, I do not recommend it at all, at least not as a rule. Where large cities or other sources of food gather the natives, such as Adelaide and in Encounter Bay for several months of whaling, their way of life does change, but it is not much more beneficial for the missions. From morning to evening, every day, Sundays not excluded, they are seen begging at the doors of the whites or carrying salt and water to earn a very meager living, so that the missionary also has only sparse opportunities to teach them the essentials, besides which they learn all sorts of bad habits in speech and behavior, and fall into a terrible disease that usually kills all newborns and many adults. Mangled, partly disfigured and paralyzed.

The only means to save these unfortunate wretches, as I have always believed, is to settle them in their own places, following the model of the Hottentot brotherhoods in South Africa. I am so firmly convinced of this view that I would not even mind a moderate amount of coercion, if the natives were unable to recognize their own salvation. But where are the means for such undertakings? The government does nothing and will do nothing as long as Grey is in charge, the colonists can do even less, as they are usually too busy with their own affairs; the Society (and I wholeheartedly agree) has declared the principle of only donating its resources to the promotion of the Kingdom of God and not engaging in colonization. So who is going to help here? Of course, the government could and should do it, as it has greatly reduced the natives' food sources, but who would motivate them to do so? If success were more likely than can be expected from the events in New South Wales and Port Philip, they might be more willing to take risks. But Governor Grey firmly believes that the natives will disappear within a few decades, which naturally means that he

considers all the costs he spends on them as wasted. From all this, I have come to the conviction that the Society would do well to abolish the entire mission in South Australia as soon as possible. This is certainly a harsh statement that no one likes to hear, and I am reluctant to make it; nevertheless, I consider it my duty to present the state of the mission to them as I see it, so that the Society will not be deceived. The other Bretheren are actually of the same opinion, because even if they do not all vote for abandoning the mission, they view the situation of the natives and the resulting difficulties in the same light as I have just described. Our old friend, Pastor Stow, said just a few days ago that after the cessation of Angas' support, there is no longer any reason for the Dresden Society to maintain Missionaries in the colony.

This field does not seem suitable for our Society, because a Missionary Society should have general objectives and cannot devote all its resources to a particular, not very promising (if we assume the best) issue. They might refer us to the recently established missionary aid society, but you can be assured that it will disappear just as quickly and unnoticed. It will come to an end, just like with many other similarly passionately debated issues in the colony. Moreover, they collect or demand contributions in a way that no one can approve of, and this has led me to decide not to take a single penny from them, unless necessity forces me to do so.

It seems natural to me that when you read this letter, you will ask: if it's about the natives and the mission, what could have prompted you to write about the dispatch of the Brothers Meyer and Klose? I admit that I haven't been able to forgive myself for this mistake yet, but the lack of experience and the vigorous way in which the excellent Governor Gawler dealt with the natives will hopefully excuse it to some extent.

Added to the hopeless prospects of the mission, which depress the mood, are all sorts of other things that are not exactly conducive to a cheerful mood. Here I lead my solitary life in Port Lincoln, and although I'm not currently suffering from a lack of necessary food, I must admit that I've grown tired of cooking. Moreover, a reasonable and inexpensive sense of honor is often violated.

They know that the English, even the believers among them, are a cold-hearted, calculating people who do everything in a businesslike manner. Therefore, they cannot understand the Society's stance that they are only willing to support us if their resources permit. Many people who know our situation, although they don't exactly consider us adventurers, do think we're a bit crazy. It seems to me that the committee's letter to the society stemmed from this or similar views, which I didn't like at all. You'll say that all these things are so insignificant that they shouldn't bother us much, if at all. That may be true, but what else is there to hold onto when our professional work seems to be in vain or can't even be implemented? There's nothing left but a cold feeling of superfluity that haunts me forever, and I'll hardly ever lose my love for South Australia.

Therefore, dear Pastor, I once again earnestly request a transfer to East India or wherever you deem fit, provided that the people to whom you want to send me are settled in one place. In Port Lincoln, you can see for yourself that I cannot stay, because even if the government does not give in to the settlement, it will never do anything for the local natives there.

They might advise us to go to Encounter Bay, but what would we do there? Learn a new language and preach? Brother Meyer could do that almost as well on his own as the two of us. Build houses and farm for the natives, perhaps? To make this the Missionary's task without providing him with the necessary means is to remind him of the fate of that unfortunate man who was supposed to roll a heavy stone up a steep mountain, but could only get it a short distance, only to see it fall back into the abyss.

From the excerpts and letters of the missionaries Threlkeld and Huttfeld, you will see that even with greater resources, they have achieved nothing and can do nothing among the Australian natives. The Wesleyans, it has been reported, intend to abandon their missionaries in Port Philip.

Perhaps the news that the Wesleyans intend to be our successors, should we vacate the field, might reassure Society. Thus, the natives would not be completely abandoned if the Society were to withdraw its support from us.

I just want to add that, even with the bleak prospects of the mission, Society should still support it. And if you don't think it's a good idea to transfer me, it's certainly not an unreasonable wish of mine and the other Bretheren to be given a fixed salary, preferably through accreditation with a bank, so that we don't have to depend on always uncertain shipments from Europe. £125 is, in our opinion, not too much at all! I would rather not see the company spend an annual sum of £500 on South Australia, but if they were to demand that we stay here, I don't see how they could avoid biting the bullet. Your advice to seek to make the mission independent of support from Germany seems to me only feasible if we become farmers ourselves, and if that's the case, then we're certainly not missionaries.

Well, I know, dear Pastor, that what I have written is a matter of no small importance; therefore, my heartfelt prayer is that the Lord may grant you and the other committee members wisdom and grace to come to such convictions and decisions in this matter that are beneficial and healing to the holy work. My greetings to the dear Pastor's wife and family, the Bretheren in the seminary, and all other Bretheren and friends. Commending myself to your intercession, I remain your humble Brother in the Lord.

C. W. Schürmann

Addendum from August 29th.

The governor has finally decided to set £100 as the amount for the Dresden Society for the coming year, on the condition that the Society maintains a Missionary in Port Lincoln. The title of "Sub-Protector" will be abolished, and the Missionary will be under the control of the government's resident. After this decision, some parts of the previous letter will need to be understood, which I can't change anymore because I have to board a ship tonight. Although my external situation in Port Lincoln seems to be improving for the future, I'm still going back there with a heavy heart, convinced that I'll have very few opportunities to practice my profession among the natives. Therefore, I'm not withdrawing my request for a transfer at all, but rather I'm asking that the Society not be encouraged by the government's support of £100 to keep me in my hopeless field of work. What's the use of money if the door remains closed?

C. W. Schürmann