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RESPONDING TO THE CALL AND PREPARING FOR MINISTRY: THE FIRST FEMALE MISSIONARIES FROM LATVIA

This paper explores the diverse family and socio-economic backgrounds of the first female missionaries from Latvia (1896–1924), examining how these factors either facilitated or hindered their missionary endeavors. It highlights the more accessible paths for pastors' daughters like Emma Elizabeth Seesemann and Anna Irbe, contrasted with the more challenging journeys of the orphan Auguste Vietnieka and Lilija Otilija Grīviņa, a railway worker's daughter. The author discusses the varying preparation methods of different denominational German mission societies, noting the informal language training for women and the faith-centric approach of the Liebenzell mission. Each missionary's unique experience of responding to God's call and their subsequent success in missions across India, Tanzania, China, and Indonesia is also considered in detail.

Keywords: female missionaries, God's call, missionary preparation, mission, Latvia, German mission societies

Since women from Courland and Livland (Vidzeme) could not take part in foreign mission until the end of the 19th century because of theological obstacles, when they were born, there was no indication that they could receive a mission call and cross borders to go to foreign lands as missionaries. Later, the situation changed, and women from Latvia were among the first to go to foreign mission fields.

This paper examines the different family and socio-economic circumstances of the first female missionaries from the territory of Latvia (1896–1924), the ways how this context contributed or, conversely, almost discouraged them from responding to God's

call and participating in the mission, as well as the approaches of the various mission societies to preparing their female employees for the mission service.

The historically comparative method is applied to ascertain how specific historical circumstances contributed to or hindered the call of the mission. The sources of the study are missionary letters, which are preserved in the archives of the Leipzig Mission (the LMS) in Halle, in the archives of the Barmen/Rhenish Mission (B/RMS) in Wuppertal, in the archives of the Liebenzell Mission (LbM) in Germany, as well as in the archives of the Swedish Church Mission (SCM) and the letters of Anna Irbe published in the journal “Ārmisija” (*Foreign Mission*).

Responding to the call – going on a mission despite or due to circumstances

Each missionary came from a family with specific historical, geographical, and socio-economic circumstances. While they all received the call and responded to these summons, it happened differently. Emma Elisabeth Seesemann (1869–1957) was born in Jelgava, the family of pastor Gustav Seesemann, and later was a missionary in Tanzania.¹ Likewise, Anna Irbe (1890–1973)² was a pastor’s daughter and later served as a missionary in India. As such, they had a more significant advantage to be sent on a mission than a daughter of a railroad worker, as it was in the case of Lilija Otilija Grīviņa (1883–1944) from Rīga (a missionary in China),³ or an orphan Auguste Vietnieka (1873–1952, a missionary in Indonesia)⁴. The Baltic German origin or a confirmation in the German Lutheran congregation gave more support, at least to the first missionaries. However, each took advantage of a chance, or won the opportunity to go on a mission.

The father’s insights significantly impacted his daughter’s ability to go on a mission. Bishop Irbe tried to dissuade Anna, not because he did not believe in the importance

1 Gustav Seesemann, “Jelgavas Sv. Trīsvienības vācu pilsētas 1868.–1874. gada dzimušo un kristīto un mirušo reģistrs”, 1870, LVVA-F235-US2-GV965-0045, Latvijas Nacionālais arhīvs, Latvijas Valsts vēstures arhīvs.

2 More biographical data about Irbe can be read Violeta Stīvena, “Misionāre Anna Irbe – sievietē, kura apsteidza savu laiku”, *Ceļš* 57 (2006): 59–76; Kristīna Ēce, “Anna Irbe un misijas darbs Karunagarapuri”, *Ceļš* 71 (2020): 37–47, <https://doi.org/10.22364/cl.71.03>.

3 More detailed biography of Grīviņa can be found at Kristīna Ēce, “Leipcigas un Lībencellas misijas: Hildegardes Procelas un Lilijas Otilijas Grīviņas kalpošana”, *Ceļš* 73 (2022): 24–42, <https://doi.org/10.22364/cl.73.02>., Kristina Ece, “Pushing against Gender Barriers: A Latvian Woman on Mission in China, 1908–1925”, *International Review of Mission* 112, 1 (May 2023): 125–39, <https://doi.org/10.1111/irom.12456>.

4 More detailed biography of Vietnieka can be found at Kristina Ece, “The Footprints of Three Latvian Female Missionaries in Colonial Contexts”, *Богословські роздуми/Theological Reflections* 21, 1 (August 2023): 57–73, <https://doi.org/10.29357/2789-1577.2023.21.1.3>.

of foreign mission, but because he worried about Anna's little son Cyril and the difficult conditions in India.⁵ At the missionary dedication service, the father said:

*I am not afraid that you might be frightened by the difficult circumstances of Indian life. But what I am afraid of is, that while in your mission work, where you sometimes have to work without visible success, your mental strength will be exhausted, and that you would lack patience.*⁶

Gustav Seesemann, as the reporter of the foreign mission of the Courland Consistory, had a broader view of the ways how the work of the foreign mission developed in different places with the help of the LMS. In a letter to LMS Director Karl von Schwartz, he stated that he had complete confidence in where the LMS would see his daughter's place on the mission.⁷ However, as a father, he, too, was concerned about Seesemann's mental and physical health at work in Africa. He was worried that it would be difficult for Seesemann alone to embark on a women's mission and that another missionary would be needed beside her.⁸ Grīviņa's situation was not as straightforward and supportive. Her father did not want to permit his daughter to go on a mission because it was unusual, and her parents believed an unmarried daughter on a mission was a disgrace. Hence, the permission or obstruction of the father (parents) was also a significant part of starting the mission work. However, mission service also had a spiritual facet – responding to God's call.

Each of them had their way of responding to the call. Prozell nowhere indicated that she had received any special call for mission work, or a dramatic conversion to Christianity. In her autobiography, she wrote that she had always had an interest in mission work, that she invariably had her Christian calling, and that she had strengthened herself in it. Thus, it can be said that she trusted God and continued to grow in Him, therefore, going on a mission was a reasonable progression. This call could be described as a "peaceful flow of faith", which, thanks to the circumstances, allowed Prozell to go on a mission.

Vietnieka experienced a tremendous sense of guilt for her behaviour at a young age until she met Pastor Alber, which allowed her, first of all, to receive a remission of sins and God's peace and spiritual rebirth. After that, for her, the next logical step seemed to

5 Arnolds Grosbachs, "Cimos pie Annas Irbes", *Austrālijas Latvietis*, 21. jūn. 1968.

6 "Misionāres Annas Irbes k. iesvētišana", *Svētdienas Rīts* 17 (1924): 4–5.

7 Gustav Seesemann, "Ein Brief an den Missionsdirektor, #228-229", March 29, 1905, ALMW II/32/537. 228-229, Frankesche Stiftungen zu Halle.

8 Gustav Seesemann, "Ein Brief an den Missionsdirektor, #201-202", May 24, 1905, ALMW II/32/537. 201-202, Frankesche Stiftungen zu Halle.

serve others, to help them. The pastor pointed out the missionary way to her. Therefore, this call could be formulated as “meeting the right person”, which indicated God’s call to the mission.

Meanwhile, Grīviņa lived a relatively peaceful Lutheran life, and her parents, albeit of simple origin, could provide her with a good education. Even so, she experienced a very radical encounter with God, which brought the knowledge of her sins and illuminated the fact that she had lived life for herself. She experienced God’s call on a mission by “reading the right book” about China’s martyrs.

The call of at least two missionaries could be described as “the right person in the right place at the right time”. Seesemann had been thinking about mission work for a long time. Still, it was not until the LMS wanted to start a women’s mission in Africa that she met the missionary Althaus, who was visiting Zaļenieki. He saw that Seesemann might be the one who started the job there. A year later, it would no longer be possible for Seesemann because of her age. Consequently, Seesemann responded directly to the call at the appointed time, place, and situation. This can be seen similarly in the case of Irbe. SCM forged closer ties with the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Latvia (ELCL). In 1923, a missionary, the later Bishop Johannes Sandegren visited Riga and offered to Bishop Irbe for ELCL to begin the work of foreign mission. Anna Irbe heard this offer and was ready to go. Both she and Sandegren were the right people who met at the right place and time.⁹ Hence, Irbe, who had heard and thought about mission work from childhood, had the opportunity to respond to that call.

Considering the situation in Latvia today, when much emphasis is placed on language and nationality, it is interesting to observe that this issue was less relevant a hundred years ago. A great example in this area is Grīviņa’s return to Latvia. Since she had left Europe as a citizen of the Russian Empire, when she returned to Latvia, she needed to prove that she had a connection with Latvia. On the Latvian side, a questionnaire about Grīviņa was completed by her sister and also signed by her mother. This questionnaire is written in Latvian, but it indicates that Lilija Otilija is of German nationality and the language of conversation in the family is German. However, the missionary herself, in her questionnaire from China (the questions there are in Latvian and Russian), which was completed in Russian, indicated that she was Latvian.¹⁰ Therefore, it is possible to conclude that language or nationality was not a single contributing factor or obstacle to going on mission work.

⁹ Kristīna Ēce, “Anna Irbe un misijas darbs Karunagarapuri”.

¹⁰ Administrative Department of the Ministry of the Interior of Latvia, “Entry case: Grīviņš Lilija-Otilija”, 1924, 9–10, f. 3234, apr. 5, 18526, LNA LVVA.

The context of historical circumstances as a possible obstacle to the work of the mission

In addition to the individual family circumstances of each missionary, their work was also influenced by historical circumstances in the territory of Latvia, independent of the missionaries themselves, and by global events. One such event was the revolution of 1905 in Latvia, which had the most significant impact on Hildegard Prozell and Emma Elizabeth Seesemann.

During the revolution of 1905, riots also took place in the churches of Livland and Courland, which expressed disagreement with the rights of the patronage of the nobility. These protests included interrupting services, holding rallies, and sometimes abusing pastors. The members of the Latvian Social Democratic Workers' Party organized these demonstrations, and they were directed mainly against the Lutheran Church. In the spring and summer of 1905, these demonstrations took place in about 40 different congregations. In the summer of 1905, the order of weekly services was suspended in some areas, and in the fall and at the end of the year, many rural churches were closed. Fearing unrest, the pastors, like the nobles, left the congregations and went to the cities to seek refuge. The main protests targeted patronage rights, which restricted congregations from engaging in the selection of pastors, leaving it under the control of German nobles, and against the remuneration system of pastors of evangelical Lutheran congregations, where the parish pastor received compulsory church dues and administered land holdings in the same way as the German landlords in their estate.¹¹

Historical context – the Consistories of Livland and Courland during the events of the 1905 revolution

The pastors met at the 71st Synod in August 1905 in Valka. While the current events of that time had undoubtedly affected the lives of the congregations, the overwhelming excitement surrounding the work of the mission had yet to be noticed. Mission reporter Gotthilf Traugott Hahn reported on the mission's work and recommended how to foster interest in the mission in deaneries and congregations. He offered to plan mission courses for pastors and multi-day mission conferences in different cities.¹² In 1906, though, Hahn had to admit in a report to the Synod that interest in mission work and donations to the mission had waned in some deaneries, and he pointed out that

11 Līga Lapa, "1905. gada revolūcija Latvijā", in *Nacionālā enciklopēdija*, March 21, 2023, <https://enciklopedija.lv/skirklis/20773-1905-gada-revolucija-Latvija>. Accessed July 30, 2024.

12 Gustav Oehr, *Protokoll der 71. Livländischen Provinzial Synode, gehalten in Walk vom 21. bis zum 25. August 1905* (Riga: Livländischen Gouvernements Typographie, 1905), 25.

the revolution was to blame for this damage.¹³ Theophilus Goetgen wrote the most severe description of the situation in the parishes of Livland in his 1907 circular:

*In 1905 – the revolution; in 1906, the reaction; in 1907 – depression. It hangs over people and circumstances like dull, severe fatigue; the government’s firm hand is pushing the nation, and the secret agitators are not giving peace. Pain and joy no longer dare to come to light. The assumed duty has been fulfilled, but there is a lack of real pleasure. No one wants to start something new; the future offers too little security.*¹⁴

Under these circumstances, Prozell, although far away, had to relive what was happening in her homeland. She was more worried about funding from Riga because it was not known how events would unfold.¹⁵ In January 1906, she wrote that she had received only one postcard from Europe and did not know when she would receive news from home, so she felt sad.¹⁶ Prozell experienced emotional distress about the events in her homeland and sadness that mission work suffered due to decreased donations needed to maintain the new school in Mayaveram. However, even in this challenging situation, her faith in God and the belief that everything will be resolved with God’s help was evident.¹⁷ From the analysed information, it can be inferred that for Prozell, this revolution mainly meant concern for the financial situation, which also contributed to emotional difficulties. If the riots in Latvia had continued and donations had continued to decline, this would probably have been the reason for the mission to be terminated. Still, finances were usually not the main reason for discontinuing the mission. For Seesemann, however, the revolution caused such emotional stress that she almost had to give up her mission work.

In 1906, the Mission reporter Gustav Seesemann reported that during the revolutionary period of 1905, the fruits of the faith did very poorly. He also pointed out that due to the revolution, it was only possible to hold mission conferences in Courland in 1903,

13 Th. Gaehtgens, *Protokoll der 72. Livländischen Provinzial Synode, gehalten in Wolmar vom 24. bis zum 29. August 1906* (Riga: Livländischen Gouvernements Typographie, 1906), 20.

14 Theophil Gaehtgens, *Mitteilungen des livländischen Generalsuperintendenten über das Kirchenwesen im Jahre 1907* (Riga: W. F. Häcker, 1908), 34.

15 Hildegard Prozell, “Ein Brief an den Missionsdirektor, #158”, December 12, 1905, ALMW II/31-1/143. 158, Frankesche Stiftungen zu Halle.

16 Hildegard Prozell, “Ein Brief an den Missionsdirektor, #154-157”, January 9, 1906, ALMW II/31-1/143. 154-157, Frankesche Stiftungen zu Halle.

17 Hildegard Prozell, “Ein Brief an den Missionsdirektor, #150-153”, March 6, 1906, ALMW II/31-1/143. 150-153, Frankesche Stiftungen zu Halle.

which affected the amount of donations. Seesemann mentioned that women's mission committees were still operating in Jelgava, Liepaja, Kuldīga, and Salgale, but what had happened to the other six places in Courland, he did not know.¹⁸ Pastor Bernevitz of Kandava called for greetings and blessings to be sent to the Courland missionaries in Africa, Stamberg and Seesemann, at this synod, stating that "in this time of hardship and trials, it is difficult enough to be away from the motherland."¹⁹

The events of 1905 in Zālenieki

To gain a more precise understanding of the circumstances that almost forced Seesemann to leave the work of the mission, it is necessary to understand the context and the historical events of that time that directly influenced it. The publication reported that on April 30, 1905 (according to the old style), the pastor of Zālenieki, Gustav Seesemann, had been attacked.²⁰ However, this event was probably not considered as a very significant occurrence or a development that could systematically continue, since a letter written by Seesemann to the LMS on May 16/29 did not mention such an event. Pastor Seesemann did not refer to anything like this on May 8/25, as he wrote to the LMS director about a possible mission conference in late May or early June, which did not happen.

The most severe attack occurred on Pentecost Sunday, June 5, 1905 (the old style). This event was widely reported by the newspaper *Rigasche Rundschau*, a German-Baltic newspaper, and therefore written from their point of view. During the Latvian service, five suspicious persons had entered the crowded church, and began shouting "Off with Tsar! Off with self-government!" and a red flag was raised in the church. One of the rebels allegedly climbed the pulpit and, threatening with a revolver, ordered Pastor Seesemann to leave the pulpit, which he had refused to do even in the face of death threats. When the pastor received a kick at his feet, he collapsed, and then they pushed him down the pulpit stairs. One of the revolutionaries had continued to threaten him with a revolver, preventing the pastor from leaving.²¹ Elizabeth had not personally experienced these events, since she was already in Germany. She wrote about her concerns to the director of the LMS, as she had learned about the condition of her father and a few other pastors in her homeland. It hurt her heart significantly that her old father had to experience such horrific events, although probably at that moment she did not yet

18 O. Panck, *Protokoll der im Jahre 1906 in Mitau abgehaltenen 71. Kurländischen Provinzial-Synode*, 1906, 21–22.

19 O. Panck, 22–23.

20 "Kirchenschänderische Vorgänge in Kurland und Livland", *Rigasche Rundschau*, 121 (8 June 1905): 2.

21 "Kirchenschänderische Vorgänge in Kurland und Livland".

know all the details of what had happened.²² She later received more information from her father and wrote to the LMS that her father was doing poorly. There was a shooting at the church, and a bullet had just barely missed the pastor, and some Germans had rescued her father. The nerves of her father and sister, who were also at the service, were severely damaged.²³

The father gradually recovered from his experiences, but the unrest continued. Seesemann reported to the LMS that in July one of the landowners had been shot dead at a neighbouring church of Zaļenieki. In Zaļenieki, order had been established and maintained by the Cossacks since the events of Pentecost. Still, the pastor did not return to Zaļenieki until August 9 after a seven-week absence.²⁴ His return, however, did not last long, and in the second half of August, the family, along with other German families, he left Zaļenieki. The church was closed, and the Cossacks assumed the supervision of the congregation. The riots in Zaļenieki continued, as the rebels tried to vandalize the castle and burn down everything they could. Therefore, a state of war was declared in Zaļenieki.²⁵ At the end of August, Elizabeth received news that her father and a German magistrate had been included in the lists of liquidations compiled by the anarchists. Therefore, the father had to leave Jelgava, as well.²⁶

All these events occurred while Elizabeth was still on mission training in Leipzig and Berlin. Her unshakeable decision to leave Latvia and Europe, departing to the unknown ministry in Africa attested to the power of her soul. The following letter in the archives is from Moshi on January 21, 1906 had brought Elizabeth news from her family and Berlin, stating that her father, dressed as a peasant, had fled to Jelgava.²⁷ This material did not yield chronological clarity as to when it happened – whether it was a recent event sometime after August 1905, or was the letter still telling stories about the past events – it has to be taken into account that letters to and from Africa travelled for a long time. Seesemann added that she trembled “for the lives of all the people I love, and I am utterly lacking in joy and strength.”²⁸

22 Emma Elisabeth Seesemann, “Ein Brief an den Missionsdirektor, #197-199”, July 5 1905, ALMW II/32/537. 197–199, Frankesche Stiftungen zu Halle.

23 Emma Elisabeth Seesemann, “Ein Brief an den Missionsdirektor, #188-192”, August 10, 1905, ALMW II/32/537. 188–192, Frankesche Stiftungen zu Halle.

24 Seesemann.

25 Emma Elisabeth Seesemann, “Ein Brief an den Missionsdirektor, #184-187”, August 21, 1905, ALMW II/32/537. 184–187, Frankesche Stiftungen zu Halle.

26 Emma Elisabeth Seesemann, “Ein Brief an den Missionsdirektor, #182-183”, August 28, 1905, ALMW II/32/537. 182–183, Frankesche Stiftungen zu Halle.

27 Emma Elisabeth Seesemann, “Ein Brief an den Missionsdirektor, #131-134”, January 21, 1906, ALMW II/32/537. 131–134, Frankesche Stiftungen zu Halle.

28 Seesemann.

In all these difficulties, however, Seesemann tried to discern the work of God and the meaning of the suffering experienced by her beloved people in her homeland. She pointed out that God had higher goals that were completely beyond human understanding. She sensed that nothing was over yet, and the time for punitive expeditions was approaching her homeland.²⁹

In the aftermath of these events, the church was closed for nine months and reopened solemnly on March 19, 1906 (the old style), as the congregation had requested. The solemn service was led by pastor Gustav Seesemann,³⁰ who had returned from a time of rest and mission study in Leipzig.³¹ It seemed that Elizabeth was finally at peace while on a mission; her father had returned and served in the church, and the unrest in her homeland was over. However, her mission suddenly encountered unexpected obstacles that almost interrupted her service.

Order to Seesemann to leave the mission field to care for the family

At a moment when the difficulties seemed to be relegated to past, her uncle, Dr. Victor Christoph Lieven, a husband of her mother's sister, intruded Seesemann's life and mission ministry. Between June 27 and November 15, 1906, at least 14 letters were written. They are stored in the archives of the LMS, and the authors thereof are Lieven, father Gustav, Elizabeth herself, and the Director of the LMS von Schwartz. From the available sources, it is possible to conclude that there have certainly been further letters that have not survived. Still, the existing material elucidates the impact of the events that took place upon Elizabeth and her loved ones.

Lieven began this process by first writing a letter to Seesemann. He described the events in Latvia in very harsh words, pointing out that Pastor Seesemann had not made a pleasant sacrifice to God by disobeying the revolutionaries, but only played with death and gave the evil killers an additional incentive to continue the atrocities, which in turn contributed to the dehumanization of society. He demanded that Elizabeth return home and fulfil her daughter's duty to her parents.³² A few weeks later, Lieven also wrote to von Schwartz of the LMS, explaining the situation that had arisen – Elizabeth's father would retire, but there would be few funds, and the older brother had a severe lung disease that would require expensive treatment in Switzerland, whilst another sister

29 Emma Elisabeth Seesemann, "Ein Brief an den Missionsdirektor, #129-130", January 30, 1906, ALMW II/32/537. 129–130, Frankesche Stiftungen zu Halle.

30 "Kurland. Neueste Post", *Rigasche Rundschau* 68 (March 23, 1906): 6.

31 Emma Elisabeth Seesemann, "Ein Brief an den Missionsdirektor, #122-124", March 13, 1906, ALMW II/32/537. 122–124, Frankesche Stiftungen zu Halle.

32 Victor Lieven, "Ein Brief", June 27, 1906, ALMW II/32/537. 112–113, Frankesche Stiftungen zu Halle.

had contracted typhus. Consequently, Lieven believed that “in such circumstances, my niece Elizabeth’s duty, however difficult it may be for her, should require her to give up the noble work to which she feels she has been called by God, and to return home, dedicating her work to those closest to her.”³³

Lieven had also written to Seesemann in mid-June about his intentions³⁴, however, Seesemann advised him not to interfere in Elizabeth’s life. Nevertheless, the letter had already been sent to her. At the end of July, Lieven sent another letter to Leipzig, this time expressing regret for interfering in his niece’s life. The financial issue should be resolved through the LMS. He hoped he had not created a lasting emotional conflict for Elizabeth,³⁵ which was exactly what had happened. The father had received a letter written on July 27 from von Schwartz (not preserved), and responded to it on August 3. Seesemann wrote that he had no enmity toward his brother-in-law and that he had immediately written to Elizabeth that he did not share Lieven’s opinion and expressing his wish for Elizabeth to remain in her place where God had placed her. His letter showed complete trust in God, regardless of the difficulties.³⁶ Likewise, the mother had already written in mid-June, explaining the situation and calling upon the daughter to return home, whilst not insisting upon it.³⁷

Elizabeth’s reaction to her uncle’s letter was very emotional, as expected. She pointed out that it was difficult for her to write, her soul hurt, she felt very guilty, and she lacked emotional strength. In her emotions, however, she was able to retain pragmatic and purposeful approach, and she sought advice from Althaus. However, she saw no option but to give up her mission and return home.³⁸ Her theological dilemma was her obedience to God as expressed to respecting and honouring her parents and caring for her family, against her obedience to God which would be fulfilled by staying on a mission in Africa, because God had called her there.³⁹ Throughout the situation, she relied entirely on God’s guidance. She allowed the LMS to make the final decision,

33 Victor Lieven, “Ein Brief an den Missiondirektor, #114-115”, July 19, 1906, ALMW II/32/537. 114–115, Frakesche Stiftungen zu Halle.

34 Gustav Seesemann, “Ein Brief an den Missionsdirektor, #110-111”, August 3, 1906, ALMW II/32/537. 110–111, Frakesche Stiftungen zu Halle.

35 Victor Lieven, “Ein Brief an den Missiondirektor, #116-117”, July 31, 1906, ALMW II/32/537. 116–117, Frakesche Stiftungen zu Halle.

36 Seesemann, “Ein Brief an den Missionsdirektor, #110-111”.

37 Emma Elisabeth Seesemann, “Ein Brief an den Missionsdirektor, #118-119”, August 6, 1906, ALMW II/32/537. 118–119, Frakesche Stiftungen zu Halle.

38 Seesemann.

39 Gustav Seesemann, “Ein Brief an den Missionsdirektor, #105-106”, September 11, 1906, ALMW II/32/537. 105–106, Frakesche Stiftungen zu Halle.

but it was excruciating for her to wait for the mission's decision.⁴⁰ There are no more letters from Elizabeth on this subject; the rest of the course of events must be inferred from the letters of the other correspondents.

Her uncle was still persistent and very impatient, although he knew that Elizabeth was unhappy with the situation and that the LMS could take care of her to some extent. He was willing to repay the finances invested by the LMS in Seesemann's training, – this was stated in the referral letter.⁴¹

The father reacted differently, and there was a firm trust in God, as expected of the pastor. First, he pointed out that his brother-in-law Lieven was far from Christianity and, as a result, did not understand this spiritual dimension; he only saw practical things. He also understood Elizabeth's trust in God, but he sensed that his daughter had too many doubts and had lost her peace of mind. The father worried about his daughter's mental health and offered the idea of giving Elizabeth a vacation.⁴²

The main reason her father did not want Elizabeth to return was that it would break her emotionally. After all, the mission work had been started successfully.⁴³ He believed that the revolution could not go on forever, so Elizabeth could regain her strength and then return to the mission again, but ultimately, the mission should not be abandoned.⁴⁴

LMS director von Schwartz and the mission board decided that granting a vacation after being on a mission for just one year was irrational. There would be the financial loss, which was the least in the collegium's view. They were of the opinion that it would be more detrimental to Elizabeth's moral and emotional state if she did not fulfil the mission. Von Schwartz pointed out that other missionaries from the Baltics had similar experiences, especially when mentioning Prozell. There were further practical considerations – not to make Seesemann switch from a tropical climate to a Russian/Courland winter, which could harm her health.⁴⁵ Consequently, the decision was made: Elizabeth remained on the mission field, and everyone could have a respite.

From the studied materials, it can be inferred that the events of the revolution of 1905 had both a financial and emotional impact on missionaries in the mission field. They affected the pastor's daughter most directly, since the revolution events were

40 Emma Elisabeth Seesemann, "Ein Brief an den Missionsdirektor, #108-109", September 4, 1906, ALMW II/32/537. 108–109, Frankesche Stiftungen zu Halle.

41 Victor Lieven, "Ein Brief an den Missionsdirektor, #107", September 9, 1906, ALMW II/32/537. 107, Frankesche Stiftungen zu Halle.

42 Seesemann, "Ein Brief an den Missionsdirektor, #105-106".

43 Seesemann, "Ein Brief an den Missionsdirektor, #110-111".

44 Seesemann, "Ein Brief an den Missionsdirektor, #105-106".

45 Karl von Schwartz, "Ein Brief, #102-104", September 14, 1906, ALMW II/32/537. 102–104, Frankesche Stiftungen zu Halle.

geared directly against the pastors. However, even in these difficulties, both pastor Seesemann and his daughter continued to place their faith in God and did not lose hope that, in the end, the difficulties would be resolved. Likewise, the synods of Courland and Livland pastors discussed these events and saw that the revolution had reduced donations. It was not possible to hold missions or other conferences.

Missionary education When the first female missionaries entered their ministry through German mission societies, they were still trying to understand the context and develop appropriate training programmes to help them prepare. Male missionaries had relatively clearly defined roles in mission work – there were “professional” missionaries – ordained pastors, as well as helpers, assistants who were laymen.⁴⁶ In Europe, the kind of education needed to obtain ordination was quite clearly defined. Since women were not ordained, according to theological beliefs, they could serve in various auxiliary roles – mainly as teachers, but also as nurses, midwives, and sometimes even in higher education. The next section examines the education of missionaries from Latvia and their preparation for mission work.

Education acquired in Latvia before the mission

The documents published so far by the mission societies themselves have not considered the candidates’ educational requirements. Instead, conclusions can be drawn from biographies and application letters written by the missionaries themselves.

Candidates who had graduated from the gymnasium of the highest order and, as a result, acquired the right to be a homeschool teacher in the Russian Empire, were admitted without any objections. Prozell had studied at the highest girls’ school in Rīga (*Höhere Töchterschule I Ordnung*), and graduated in 1886 with the right to be a homeschool teacher.⁴⁷ A school of a similar class in Jelgava (*Höhere St. Trinitatis-Töchterschule in Mitau*) was graduated by Seesemann in 1886, also passing the homeschooling examination and obtaining the rights of a private teacher. Seesemann’s documents give an insight into the final tests that had to be taken: arithmetic, geography, religion, German, French and Russian, history, and a model lesson in mathematics.⁴⁸ In both

46 Gustav Warneck, *Evangelische Missionslehre: Ein missionstheoretischer Versuch. Band I*, Bearbeitet und neu herausgegeben von Friedemann Knödler (Bonn: Verlag für Kultur und Wissenschaft Culture and Science Publ. Dr. Thomas Schirmacher, 2015), 425–36.

47 Hildegard Prozell, “Lebenslauf, #301”, April 1896, ALMW II/31-1/143. 301, Frankesche Stiftungen zu Halle.

48 Kapustin and A. Heinrichsen, “Zeugnis (Abschrift)”, 31 October 1886, ALMW II/32/537.173, Frankesche Stiftungen zu Halle.

schools, education was conducted in German. Grīviņa graduated from the Lyudmila Tailova Women's Gymnasium in 1902 in Rīga, where the language of instruction was Russian. Grīviņa did not explain why this gymnasium was chosen, as the language of conversation in the family was German, and she also knew Latvian. After graduating from the gymnasium, Grīviņa also had the right to serve as a private teacher. Anna Irbe graduated from Voldemārs Maldonis Gymnasium (*I Ranges V. P. Maldons*) in 1909⁴⁹, where her father was originally a teacher of Christian Foundations and German, later serving as the school's principal from 1909 to 1915.⁵⁰ Irbe, too, acquired the right of a homeschool teacher.⁵¹

Vietnieka, both because of the illness and death of her parents and due to her financial circumstances, had to study at a lower-order school, which was a girls' vocational school (*Mädchen-Gewerbe-Schule*), which was later supplemented by a one-year handicraft school, which she graduated in 1891.⁵² This education provided an opportunity to earn daily bread but did not open up greater perspectives or enable her to go on a mission. Later, already through self-study, she passed the examination of a private tutor in 1894.⁵³ Thus, from the analysed material, it could be concluded that education in the gymnasium was the easiest and fastest way to become a private tutor, which initially enabled these women to earn a living and later facilitated the path to the mission field.

Education requested, provided, or recommended by mission societies for missionaries

When Prozell went on a mission, the LMS had sent missionaries to India for nearly 60 years.⁵⁴ The LMS established its first seminary for missionary training as early as 1845,⁵⁵ and by the time Prozell went on a mission, many men had been trained in seminary. More statistics are available for 1903: 37 trained seminarians and another 23 theologians had gone on the mission.⁵⁶ The seminar taught theological subjects and languages,

49 Ev. Lut. Baznīcas Virsvalde, "Atestāts Nr. 133. Izraksts", May 31, 1909, A2:42, Svenska kyrkans mission, Missionsstyrelsens protokollsbilagor.

50 Ludvigs Adamovičs, "Bīskapa Dr. theol. K. Irbes septiņdesmit mūža gadi", *Jaunatnes Ceļš* 8 (August 1931): 228–32.

51 Violeta Stīvena, "Misionāre Anna Irbe – sieviete, kura apsteidza savu laiku".

52 Auguste Weetneck, "Lebenslauf, #3-9," ap. 1898, RMG 2.087. 3-9, Archiv- und museumsstiftung der VEM Wuppertal.

53 Auguste Weetneck.

54 Paul Fleisch, *Hundert Jahre lutherischer Mission* (Leipzig: Verlag der Evangelisch-lutherischen Mission, 1936), 12.

55 Paul Fleisch, 25.

56 Paul Fleisch, 168–69.

including English, and the basics of the Tamil language. However, there was no seminar for women, and Prozell did not specifically indicate that she had mastered the basics of Tamil, while in Leipzig, it was somewhat understandable. More gratefully, she commented on her being in the mission house, where she could be “so free and open, ask and say what I wanted, and it always felt like I was being understood correctly, and it was so nice!”⁵⁷ Prozell’s referral letter states that, being in India, she must learn Tamil within two years and pass an examination.⁵⁸

LMS missionary Seesemann was in a different situation. She was the first single woman to be sent to German East Africa.⁵⁹ Although it had already become customary at the LMS for missionaries to learn the basics of the language spoken in the land where they were to go, no places of study were available for women at the *Orientalisches Seminar* in Berlin, as Professor Meinhof pointed out.⁶⁰ Consequently, finding a new opportunity to learn the language was necessary. From the surviving letters, it is difficult to ascertain, who was the first to have the idea that Seesemann would learn the language – Althaus as an experienced missionary to the Chaga people, mission director von Schwartz, knowing that the missionaries needed preparation, or Seesemann herself. The professor pointed out that the seminary director allowed classes to be audited. Thus, on the recommendation of the LMS, Seesemann could learn the basics of Swahili already in Berlin.⁶¹

The Barmen/Rhenish Mission also had its mission seminary, established as early as 1827, to train missionaries. The training spanned three years, and included the following subjects: a general review of the Bible, the History of the Kingdom of God, the doctrine of the Christian faith and life, the History of the Christian Church; pastoral theology, mission history; geography; natural history; English and Dutch; pedagogy; speech exercises, etc. Later, the seminary programme was supplemented with ancient Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, to enable the missionaries to translate the scriptures from the original languages, and the duration of the training was extended.⁶² Nevertheless, this seminar was also open only to men. Vietnieka stayed in Barmen for a couple of months,

57 Hildegard Prozell, “Ein Brief an den Missionsdirektor, #296-297”, September 28, 1896, 296, ALMW II/31-1/143. 296–297, Frankesche Stiftungen zu Halle.

58 Kollegium der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Mission, “Vocation der Lehrerin Fräulein Hildegard Prozell”, 13 September 1896, ALMW II/31-1/143. 290–295, Frankesche Stiftungen zu Halle.

59 Paul Fleisch, 297.

60 Carl Meinhof, “Ein Brief an den Missionsdirektor”, April 15, 1905, ALMW II/32/537. 221-222, Frankesche Stiftungen zu Halle.

61 Carl Meinhof.

62 Gustav Menzel, *Die Rheinische Mission: aus 150 Jahren Missionsgeschichte* (Wuppertal: Verlag der Vereinigten Evangelischen Mission, 1978), 27.

getting to know mission and its director, August Wilhelm Schreiber, and acquired a basic medical knowledge at the hospital for a few months.⁶³ In her case, this claim for education was partially confirmed since she did not have an elite gymnasium education, only a vocational school. However, she subsequently studied independently and passed the homeschool teacher examination, therefore her education was accepted.

Therefore, it is possible to conclude that when the first female missionaries from Latvia were sent on a mission, denominational mission societies such as the LMS and B/RMB expected women to have acquired a good education before entering the mission service, but they did not offer any formal education, except for short language courses.

Because the Liebenzell Mission was a so-called “mission of faith”, the rules were different from those of denominational missions. For faith missions, the greatest emphasis was not placed on a good education but on a personal experience of faith. This opened the door for women with relatively lower levels of education.⁶⁴ That had no bearing on Grīviņa’s involvement in the LbM, as she had a sufficiently good education. The determining factor in selecting Grīviņa was her personal experience of faith.⁶⁵

The LbM assigned great significance to missionary preparation.⁶⁶ The main difference was that in this seminary, men and women were educated together, and the mission seminar resembled a large family.⁶⁷ The seminar taught a variety of biblical subjects, as well as English,⁶⁸ and extensive efforts were invested into character building. Consequently, it is possible to conclude that the LbM did not require a high level of education for its missionaries, both men and women upon their entry into the mission, but provided specific training over several years.

The Swedish Church Mission (*Svenska kyrkans mission, SCM*) operated to some extent in a similar way to the denominational Lutheran missions in Germany. The SCM also took over part of the LMS’s mission fields in India in the 1920s. Anna Irbe had heard

63 “Die aktiven Missionare aus unserer Heimat”, 1907, 6–12.

64 Kristin Norseth, “*La os bryte over capture med vor stumhet!*” *Quinners vei til myndighet if de kristelige organisasjonene 1842–1912* (Oslo: Det teologiske Meningshøyskolen, 2007), 369–70.

65 Lily Griwing, “Bericht über die Abordnungsfeier. Abendversammlung”, *Chinas Millionen* 9 (November 1913): 248–49.

66 Thomas Eisinger, *Theologische Ausbildung und Persönlichkeitsentwicklung: Eine exemplarische Konzeptentwicklung am Beispiel des Theologischen Seminars der Liebenzeller Mission* (Bonn: Verlag für Kultur und Wissenschaft, 2009), 107–8.

67 Karl Kalmbach, *Mit Gott von Mensch zu Mensch. Aus der Geschichte der Liebenzeller Mission* (Bad Liebenzell: Verl. der Liebenzeller Mission, 1999), 52.

68 Eisinger, *Theologische Ausbildung und Persönlichkeitsentwicklung: Eine exemplarische Konzeptentwicklung am Beispiel des Theologischen Seminars der Liebenzeller Mission*, 107.

about the foreign mission as a child, growing up in the pastor's family and had thought about it herself. She wrote: "for my own peace, I have to think about other people and do something for them. When I work only for myself, everything seems difficult to me, I am tormented by internal anxiety, the image of Jesus Christ darkens in my soul and the slippery life loses its value."⁶⁹ Thinking about charity work, she went to Switzerland, where she studied for eight months at the *Le Bon Secours* nursing school: the outpatient department, the infant home, and the department of internal diseases and obstetrics, – two months each.⁷⁰

On May 24, 1923, the SCM decided that it would be desirable for mission candidates from Latvia to come to Sweden to learn the language and establish contacts with the SCM,⁷¹ hence, Irbe spent six weeks in Sweden in the summer of 1923.⁷² These six weeks were very productive, as Irbe wrote his missionary application form in Swedish at the SCM in December 1923. Likewise, Irbe wrote home, informing that the SCM required all missionaries, before going to India, to stop in England to listen to lectures on mission and theological subjects, as well as on tropical diseases, and to spend 3 to 6 months improving or learning English, and getting to know English society. Irbe did so between late April and December 5, 1924.⁷³

Consequently, the SCM placed great emphasis on language learning, but firstly, all missionaries had to be proficient in Swedish.

Conclusion

For the first female missionaries from Latvia at the end of the 19th century, the family situation played a significant role in responding to God's call for mission work. It was relatively more straightforward for a pastor's daughter to be sent to the foreign mission field than for an orphan to gain such an opportunity; for a Baltic German, this calling was relatively more accessible than for a Latvian, even though the native language did not play a significant role in the mission field.

The missionaries received their call in several ways: through a peaceful flow of faith, meeting the right person, reading the right book, or being the right person in the right

69 Anna Irbe, "Pieteikums misijai", December 1923, A2:42, Svenska kyrkans mission, Missionsstyrelsens protokollsbilagor.

70 Anna Irbe.

71 Svenska kyrkans mission, "Missionsstyrelsens protokoll 1874–1999, §11", 1923, A1:7, Svenska kyrkans mission, Missionsstyrelsens protokoll.

72 Kārlis Irbe, "Vēstule G. Brundinam", December 1923, A2:42, Svenska kyrkans mission, Missionsstyrelsens protokollsbilagor.

73 Anna Irbe, "No Liverpoolas līdz Port-Saidam", *Svētdienas Rīts* 2 (Jan. 6, 1925): 11–13.

place at the right time. Each one of them received the call differently, but they were willing to pursue it.

By the end of the 19th century, German mission societies had developed extensive training programmes for their male missionaries, as their roles were more clearly defined. On the other hand, most denominational mission societies lacked equally specific training programmes for female missionaries. It could be seen that higher-order gymnasium education was an advantage in being selected for mission work, since this kind of education usually came with a homeschooling teacher's rights, which was what most female missionaries did in the mission field. Most mission societies offered very little preparation for the female candidates. Still, the expectation was that during two years on the field, they would learn the local languages to communicate the Gospel and do the teaching job. Liebenzell Mission had a different approach to training their missionaries, as it was a "faith mission". The main emphasis was placed upon building the missionaries' character, regardless of their gender, and only then came the theological subjects and languages.

Judging from their ministry records, all researched missionaries were successful in their work, even though they had different ways of calling, preparation, and circumstances that sometimes encouraged them to go to the mission, whereas on other occasions almost became a hindrance.

KOPSAVILKUMS

Atsaukšanās aicinājumam un sagatavošanās kalpošanai: pirmās misionāres no Latvijas

Šajā rakstā aplūkoti pirmo sieviešu misionāru no Latvijas teritorijas (1896–1924) atšķirīgie ģimenes un sociālekonomiskie apstākļi, kā tie veicināja vai, gluži otrādi, gandrīz atturēja viņas no atsaukšanās Dieva aicinājumam un dalības misijā. Tāpat tiek pētīts, kā dažādas misijas biedrības sagatavoja savas kandidātes misijas darbam.

Mācītāju meitām Emmai Elizabetei Zēzemanai un Annai Irbei bija vieglāk atrast ceļu uz misijas lauku nekā bārenei Augustei Vietniekai. Dzelzceļa strādnieka meitai Lilijai Otilijai Grīviņai arī pašai nācās izcīnīt ceļu, gan ar grūtībām iegūstot atļauju no vecākiem, kā arī dodoties caur netradicionālo Lībencellas misiju.

Vācu luterāņu Leipcigas un Bārmenas/Reinas misijas biedrībām bija izstrādāta apmācību programma vīriešiem, bet laikā, kad devās misionāres no Latvijas, sievietēm bija tikai neformāla valodas apmācība pāris mēnešu garumā. Lībencellas misija bija "ticības misija", un tā pievērsa lielu uzmanību savu misijas kandidātu – gan vīriešu, gan sieviešu – apmācībai, jo galvenais bija ticības piedzīvojums, teoloģijas studijas bija tikai pēc tam.

Katra no misionārēm saņēma Dieva aicinājumu atšķirīgos veidos – vienkārši pieaugot ticībā, satiekot "pareizo" cilvēku, izlasot "pareizo" grāmatu vai pašām esot "īstajam

cilvēkam īstajā vietā, īstajā laikā”. Viņas visas uzdrīkstējās atsaukties šim aicinājumam un bija pietiekoši veiksmīgas savā misijas darbā Indijā, Tanzānijā, Ķīnā un Indonēzijā.



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