

Noltze, Karl F. (1903–1992) and Clärle (Zimmermann) (1903–1973)

CHIGEMEJI NNADOZIE WOGU

Chigemezi Nnadozie Wogu, MTS, is a Ph.D. student at the Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam, the Netherlands and a research associate at the Institute of Adventist Studies in Friedensau Adventist University, Germany. At Friedensau, he manages the *Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventist research* project for some parts of Europe. Wogu is a junior member of the Netherlands School for Advanced Studies in Theology and Religion. He is co-editor to *Contours of European Adventism: Issues in the History of the Denomination in the Old Continent* (Möckern: Institute of Adventist Studies, Friedensau Adventist University, 2020).

Karl F. and Clärle Noltze were German Adventist missionaries in Liberia and Chile.

Early Years

Karl F. Noltze was born September 14, 1903, in Tübingen, Germany, to August and Berta Noltze. He had six siblings. His father, August, was a literature evangelist. By 1917 he had already completed his high school education. As a young adult he studied horticulture and business operation in Stuttgart from 1918 to 1922. At the same time, he began serving as a literature evangelist in 1921 in Stuttgart. In 1923 he began training as a minister, first at Bad Aibling Seminary and later at the Marienhöhe Seminary in Darmstadt.

Mission Field: Grand Bassa, Liberia



Karl F. Noltze

Photo courtesy of Archives in Friedensau.

After his studies at Marienhöhe, he served in his local church in Stuttgart for a few months² until he went to the Liberia West Africa mission field in December 1927.³ There, he joined Ernst Flammer and Rudolf Helbig.⁴ In Liberia he began work among the Bassa people in the territories of Grand Bassa while living at the Palmberg mission station.⁵ The mission station included about ten acres of land. Surprisingly, the government gave the mission another 100 acres of land to work on. This land was about one and a half hours away from the mission station. Noltze started thinking of building a small station there to watch over the land.⁶

The Bassa tribe was one of the largest ethnic groups in Liberia. They were mostly rice farmers and had no written language. Mission work had not yet been carried out to the north of Grand Bassa (Mpesse, Bios, and Ma). Noltze noted that while the enthusiasm for the gospel grew in Grand Bassa, the people were entrenched in heavy tobacco smoking and alcohol drinking. However, God was working among the Bassa people in helping them turn to a godly life, especially in the areas of avoiding alcohol and tobacco.⁷

Marriage

While on furlough, Noltze married a young nurse, Clärle Zimmermann (born October 10, 1903) to whom he had been engaged before he left in 1927. They were married on August 15, 1929. In his book which contains stories about their ministry in Liberia, *Jenseits von Gestern*, Ronald Noltze reports that Karl was most eagerly awaited by Clärle. She also had a passion for mission, so during his absence she studied the diagnosis and treatment of tropical diseases, so she would be prepared to complement Karl in the mission field.⁸ The day after the marriage ceremony, the young couple went to Berlin to study the various languages of Liberia under Prof. Diedrich Westermann at the Institute for Language Research in Berlin. Their study focused particularly on Kpelle, the most widely used native language, as well as Bussi, Mano, Giu, and Dyula.⁹

On February 20, 1930, the Noltzes sailed to Liberia.¹⁰ On arrival at the mission station in Bassa, Clärle began attending to the medical needs of the people. Although there was no school or hospital at the Palmberg mission station, the couple received new visitors to the worship services each Sabbath. The congregation began growing so that soon there were no benches left for sitting.¹¹

Mission Field: Kpeleland and Konola, Liberia

In 1931 Clärle and Karl Noltze moved to the Liiwa mission station in Kpeleland.¹² It was a journey of two and a half weeks from Monrovia in the northeast of Liberia.¹³ At Liiwa station, the Noltze's built a house, a school, and a worship facility. Among the early converts in Kpeleland was Henry Hallowenger, who later became an ordained pastor of the church and was instrumental in attracting many members to the denomination.¹⁴

The mission work at Liiwa was conducted in a rather conventional manner. The Noltzes shared the gospel and worked to sustain the lives of the people. They aided several thousand people with their medical ministry¹⁵

translated songs and stories of Jesus, and founded a Sabbath School that had an average of 70 to 90 visitors.¹⁶ A more unusual detail was that in July 1931 a huge drum was consecrated for announcing worship, which indicates that the Noltze family was aware of the necessity of thoughtful inculturation.¹⁷ It was at this mission station, in 1934, that Noltze was ordained as a Seventh-day Adventist pastor. From Liiwa, the Noltzes proceeded to Konola. The Konola mission station was established in 1936. At this third mission station, a boarding school for boys started in 1939.

During their time in Liberia, Karl Noltze made significant progress in mastering the Kpelle language. He eventually wrote a primer for this language.¹⁸ In addition, Karl and Clärle Noltze regularly reported on their activities, the nature of the Adventist mission in Liberia, and their host country. While ministering to people abroad, they also shared with their own people the work they were doing. In a series of articles in *Adventbote*, Karl wrote about how Liberia, “the Land of Freedom,” was first colonized. This included historical and geographical data on Monrovia. The information helped the Adventist world (especially the German church) to understand the mission and the need of people in that mission field.

World War II

By 1940 Noltze had worked in various positions in Liberia. Among others, he was president of the region spanning Liberia and Sierra Leone. During this time his son Ronald was born.¹⁹ When World War II broke out, the family abruptly returned to Germany to escape detention. The flight back to Germany led them through several countries.²⁰ This ended the Noltzes’ 14 years of missionary work in Liberia.

In 1941 he went to Berlin where he worked as a research assistant for Prof. Westermann of the Institute for Language Research at the University of Berlin.²¹ There he did linguistic research and participated in publications on the Kpelle, Mano, and Dyula languages. Soon after he was conscripted into the army where he worked as a chaplain and interpreter.²² When the war ended in 1945, he returned to the gospel ministry.

Mission Field: Chile

From 1945 to 1951, he served as a pastor in Stuttgart until he received a call to another overseas field. This time he went to work among the German-speaking Chileans in South America.²³ While in Chile, Noltze was called to the Adventist school in Chillán,²⁴ which also served as a theology seminary and college. In 1954 Karl Noltze worked there as a Bible and English teacher, but in 1955 he was asked to serve as the president of the Central Conference in Argentina. He occupied this position for three years.

Back to Germany, Later Life

In 1958, after eight years in South America, the Noltzes were forced to return to Germany due to Clärle's poor health. She could no longer live in that climate.²⁵ Upon return, Karl began working as a department director at the South German Union Conference. Then from 1960-1969, he served as president of the South German Union.²⁶ As president, one of his significant achievements was to promote major evangelistic programs.²⁷ After he had worked for the church for 45 years as missionary, pastor, and administrator, he retired on January 1, 1970.

On August 27, 1973, Clärle died of cancer.²⁸ He found support in his grief through a widow, Helene Eisenhardt, whom he married on November 28, 1974, in Leonberg.²⁹ They were married for nearly 18 years. Karl F. Noltze died of a heart attack at the age of 88 on February 22, 1992.³⁰

Attitude towards the People in the Mission Field

On the one hand, Karl Noltze was open to learning and understanding the mission field where he was stationed. He made it a duty to survey, study, and document the elements present in each mission station and region where he was located. While in Liberia he wrote an article that provided a detailed description of the Bassa area, its population, the landscape and geography of the region, and the temperature, seasons, and dangers one could encounter while traveling. He also documented those areas not yet entered by Adventists.³¹

On the other hand, while in Liberia Noltze at times mirrored stereotypical attitudes of the colonial era. He was a child of his time who was caught in the ubiquitous narrative of the missions at the time that saw people as heathen, primitive, backward, and in need of civilization.³²

Yet he had a genuine concern for the freedom of the Liberians from sin. Although Liberia was widely purported as the land of freedom, Noltze noted that freedom from slavery was only outward. Deep in their spirituality, they were slaves to sin. Tobacco smoking, alcohol drinking, and immorality, combined with superstitious practices, were deeply entrenched among the people. Hence, he saw the need for the gospel to spread throughout the regions of Liberia. To him, the Adventist work, which combined medical and biblical mission, was contributing to the freedom really needed in Liberia.³³

Contribution

By working in Liberia as a pioneer missionary and church administrator, Karl Noltze helped to establish and strengthen the mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in that West African country. His 14 years of service saw the building of three mission stations, as well as schools for the emancipation of the new converts. His wife Clärle was at the forefront of the medical mission activities and contributed to a sustainable livelihood of the people to whom he preached the gospel. Noltze was also a driving force for evangelistic activities in Chile and in his native country, Germany.

Noltze was an ardent writer. His reports contributed to expanding the knowledge of what was known about Liberia. Moreover, his literary contribution included the translation work he did in Liberia (especially the translation of songs and stories into Kpelle). With his knowledge of the Kpelle language, he also supported Prof. Diedrich Westermann of Berlin, who later published a practical orthography of African languages and a monumental work on the languages of West Africa,³⁴ thus he was one of the few early Adventist Africanists.³⁵

SOURCES

"35 Years in Liberia: Historical Sketch of the Liberian Mission of Seventh-day Adventists." *West African Advent Messenger*, April 1963.

"Nach treuem Dienst." *Adventbote*, February 15, 1970.

Fearing, Andrew. "Seven Months in Germany." *The Ministry*, October 1969.

General Conference Committee Minutes, General Conference Archives. Accessed June 6, 2018.

<http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Minutes/GCC/GCC1958-12.pdf>.

Noltze, Clärle and Karl. "Von unsrer neuen Station unter den Kpelle in Liberia." *Der Adventbote*, December 31, 1931.

Noltze, Karl F. "Die Liberia Mission." *Der Adventbote*, December 15, 1929.

_____. "Ein Kampf um Heimatrecht." *Der Adventbote*, October 1, 1937.

_____. "Ein Kampf um Heimatrecht." *Der Adventbote*, October 15, 1937.

_____. Ein Kampf um Heimatrecht." *Der Adventbote*, September, 15, 1937.

_____. "Haben andere Menschen dir etwas zu verdanken?" *Der Adventbote*, November 1, 1960.

_____. "Lebenslauf." Compiled by Ronald K. Noltze. TMs, n.d.

_____. "Wenn Friedensboten auf Kriegspfaden ziehen." *Der Adventbote*, January 1, 1929.

_____. "...und wieder ruft uns die Ferne." *Der Adventbote*, February 1, 1952.

Noltze, Ronald. K. *Jenseits von Gestern*. Vienna: Top Life Wegweiser, 2016.

Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook. Takoma Park, Washington, D. C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1927.

South German Union. "Prediger Karl Friedrich Noltze." *Adventecho*, May 1992.

Westermann, Diedrich. *The Languages of West Africa*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952.

NOTES

1. This article has benefited from the translation summaries of primary sources by Tobias Osenau, a former student assistant for the ESDA project at Friedensau Adventist University, Germany.
2. With a missionary license under the then Wurtemberg Conference. See *Year Book of the Seventh-day Adventist Denomination: The official Directories, 1927* (Takoma Park, MD, 1927), 109.
3. According to Ronald Noltze, Karl Noltze had a short conversation with Otto Schubert the then leader of the seminary in Marienhöhe. Schubert had asked Noltze to think about serving as a missionary in Liberia. Noltze who had been waiting for such an opportunity gave an immediate response on the spot. See Ronald K. Noltze, *Jenseits von Gestern* (Vienna: Top Liger Wegweisser, 2016), 28-30.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Karl Noltze, "Die Liberia Mission," *Der Adventbote*, December 15, 1929, 383.
7. Karl Noltze, "Wenn Friedensboten auf Kriegspfaden ziehen," *Der Adventbote*, January 1, 1929, 14-15.
8. R. Noltze thinks of Clärle in the following manner. "As a nurse and midwife she was the perfect complement to Karl's mission in the tropics." Noltze, *Jenseits von Gestern*, 78.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. Noltze, "Wenn Friedensboten auf Kriegspfaden ziehen," 14-15.
12. As reported in the *West African Advent Messenger*, "it was decided that other mission stations should be established in different sections of Liberia. As a result of this decision, Evangelist Noltze was sent to Liiwa, a place located about one hour's walk from the town of Wansu in the Gharnga District." See "35 Years in Liberia: Historical Sketch of the Liberian Mission of Seventh-day Adventists," *West African Advent Messenger*, April 1963, 2.
13. Clärle and Karl Noltze, "Von unsrer neuen Station unter den Kpelle in Liberia," *Der Adventbote*, December 31, 1931, 373.
14. Ibid., 376.
15. Ibid., 375.
16. Ibid., 374.

17. Ibid., 376. Cf. Noltze, *Jenseits von Gestern*, 99. The drum had a reach of about 25 kilometers.
18. See E. E: Dick, "The West Coast of Africa—No. 1," ARH, August 3, 1933, 14.
19. Ronald later became the doctor of the Adventist Hospital Waldfriede in Berlin. C.f. South German Union, "Prediger Karl Friedrich Noltze," *Adventecho*, May 1992, 28.
20. After they had been advised to leave Liberia in order to escape internment, they began their escape on November 23, 1940. They walked from Konola all the way through Liiwa in Liberia until they crossed the border and got to Gbamou, Guinea, where a truck took them to Bamako, Mali. From Bamako, they flew to Algiers, Algeria; then to Melilla and Malaga where they caught a train that arrived at Stuttgart on January 12, 1941. See back page map illustration of the escape route in R. Noltze, *Jenseits von Gestern*.
21. Institut für Lautforschung der Universität Berlin, now Humboldt University
22. South German Union, "Prediger Karl Friedrich Noltze," 28.
23. He left from Genua on December 12, 1951. See Karl Noltze, "...und wieder ruft uns die Ferne," *Der Adventbote*, February 1, 1952, 46.
24. Noltze, Karl, "Haben andere Menschen dir etwas zu verdanken?," *Der Adventbote*, November 1, 1960, 328.
25. As a result, the South American Division recommended to the General Conference the permanent return of the Noltzes to Germany. See General Conference Committee Minutes, December 18, 1958, 187, <http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Minutes/GCC/GCC1958-12.pdf>.
26. See "Nach Treuem Dienst" *Adventbote*, February 15, 1970, 62.
27. In 1969 the Union voted 250,000 German Marks (\$62,500 of the period) to be used for a comprehensive evangelistic program. This budget was considered the largest amount of money ever allocated for an evangelistic program in Germany. It made possible the purchase of 10,000 Bibles for the Gift Bible Plan, the printing of 22,000 Bible Speaks Series, and the printing of a penetration tract (the first of its kind in Germany) for public evangelism and all other evangelistic endeavors. See also the full report by Andrew Fearing, "Seven Months in Germany," *The Ministry*, October 1969, 28-30.
28. Ibid.
29. Ibid., Karl Noltze, "Lebenslauf," as complied by Ronald K. Noltze, ND.
30. South German Union, "Prediger Karl Friedrich Noltze," 28. Throughout his life, Psalm 32:8 was his motto: "I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my loving eye on you." For him, this motto made clear "how real God must have been for the dormant time of his life. For him, God was not an incomprehensible, greatness, but a loving Father who had promised to lead and guide his servant." ("Nach Treuem Dienst" *Adventbote*, 62). Noltze was impressed by the profound trust he showed in the divine guidance. According to

this short obituary, this motto was the secret of his quiet, joyous, and exuberant nature, which would remain a living memory for all those who came in contact with him.

31. See Noltze, Karl, "Die Liberia Mission," *Der Adventbote*, December 15, 1929, 381-383. He also wrote a bit about Chile especially after the earthquake of May 21, 1960. In his report he detailed how Adventists reacted to the event: the Adventist relief agency helped to rebuild Chile after these events. See "Haben andere Menschen dir etwas zu verdanken?" 330.
32. This attitude is represented in his reports in the German Adventist paper *Adventbote*; see, for example, Karl Noltze, "Die Liberia Mission," *Der Adventbote*, December 15, 1929, where he compares the Bassa with neighboring ethnic groups and concludes that those others "have a much more well-ordered way of life and a more active ability of thinking than the Bassa." Cf. Karl Noltze, "Wenn Friedensboten auf Kriegspfaden ziehen," *Der Adventbote*, January 1, 1929, 14, talks of "primitive, uncultivated Negroes," and "slyness, malice, and dishonesty are deeply burned into the being of these people."
33. Karl, Noltze, "Ein Kampf um Heimatrecht," *Der Adventbote*, October 15, 1937, 318.
34. See for example Diedrich Westermann, *The Languages of West Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952).
35. Others were Ernst Kotz and Rudolf Reider.

encyclopedia.adventist.org is an official website of the [Seventh-day Adventist World Church](#)

© 2020 General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists 12501 Old Columbia Pike Silver Spring , MD 20904 USA 301-680-6000