

von Bodelschwingh

As a collector of town name postmarks from South Africa, this postcard with a nice postmark from Izeli is not to be despised (Figure 1). But when I look at the addressee, I think, hey, that tells me something: Pastor von Bodelschwingh in Bethel (Germany).

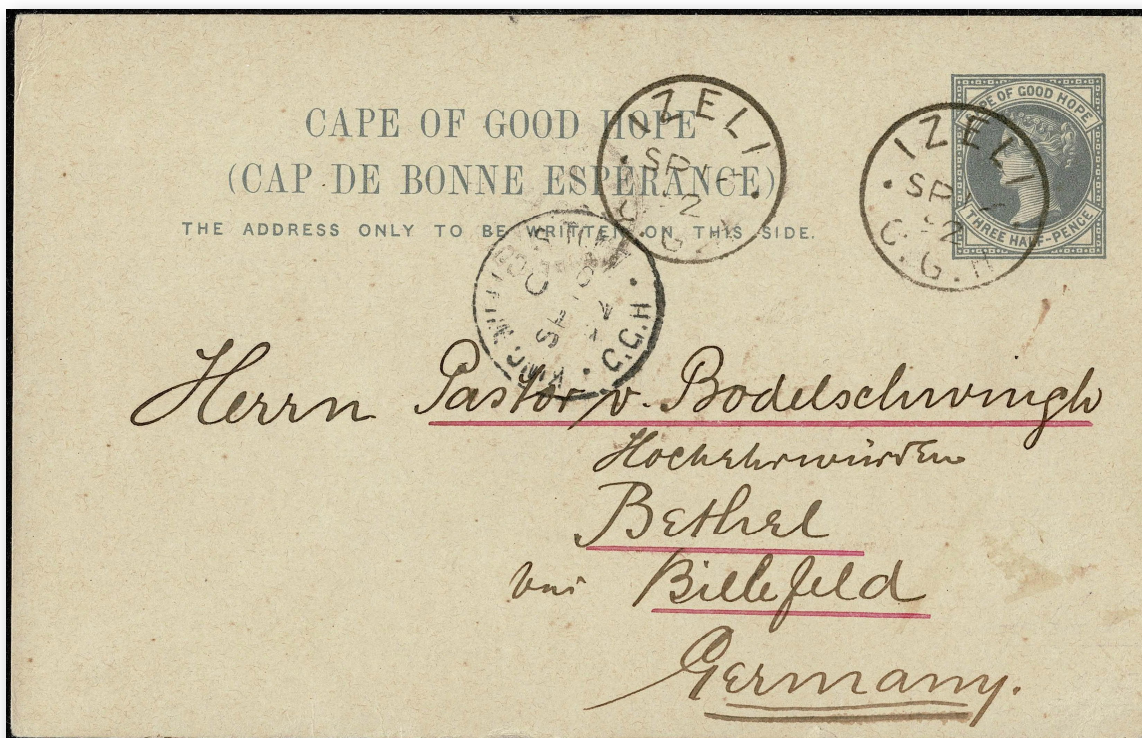


Figure 1



Fig. 2: Stamp BRD 1951, Pastor von Bodelschwingh

Pastor (Friederich Christian Carl) von Bodelschwingh (the Elder) (1831-1910) (Figure 2) came into contact with the misery of the landless in the 1850s. He wanted to go into missions, but his parents persuaded him to study theology first. From 1858, he worked at the Evangelical Mission among the Germans in Paris. For this he collected donations in Germany. In 1864 he returned to Germany. In 1872 he became the director of the Evangelical Sanatorium and Nursing Home for Epileptics near Bielefeld, which was founded in 1867. In 1874, he renamed it Bethel (Hebrew for House of God). Today it is called Von Bodelschwinghsche Stiftungen Bethel. It became the main institution of the Inner Mission.

He founded several institutes to help people in need or with disabilities. Friedrich von Bodelschwingh was very progressive and creative for his time when it came to acquiring donations, helping needy people and finding work. He collected all kinds of goods, which were sorted and eventually repaired and then sold. Among his best-known institutions was the stamp collection center founded in 1906, although it had been around much longer, as evidenced by the commemorative stamp issued in 1988 to mark its centennial (Figure 3).



Fig. 3: Stamp BRD 1988, Stamps for Bethel



Fig. 4: Stamp BRD 1967, 100 years Bethel institution

Pastor Fritz (Friedrich) von Bodelschwingh (the younger) (1877 - 1946) (Figure 4) was the son of Pastor von Bodelschwingh (the elder). After studying theology, he joined the Von Bodelschwingh Foundations Bethel, as did his two older brothers. In 1910 he became their director. He also held several (leading) positions in the Protestant churches. He had a difficult relationship with the National Socialists, had to renounce his church offices and sided with the Confessing Church. Initially he sympathized with eugenic sterilizations..

Starting in 1934, he had about 1,200 disabled residents of Bethel forcibly sterilized. However, when they wanted to proceed to the murder of the sick and disabled, he rejected this out of Christian conviction. From 1940 on, he resisted all kinds of measures imposed on the foundations by the Nazi

regime. He also repeatedly sought dialogue in order to stop the "euthanasia".

The question of guilt of the Second World War did not escape Bodelschwingh, as he proves in a sermon on May 27, 1945: *"Therefore we cannot and do not want to evade responsibility for the guilt and fate of our people. Nor do we want to cover ourselves by pointing out that there is much we did not know about what happened behind the barbed wires of the camps and in Poland and Russia. These crimes are acts of German men and we have to bear their consequences."* Until his death in 1946, he worked for reconciliation between the different currents in the Evangelical Church (Figure 5).

Let us now return to the back of the postcard from South Africa (Figure 6). What did the writer have to say? For us, this is now the difficult to access Sütterlin or Kurrent script, but nowadays we have resources on the Internet (<https://readcoop.eu/de/transkribus/kurrentschrift-uebersetzen/>) and then you get:



Fig. 5: Stamp Germany, Fritz von Bodelschwingh

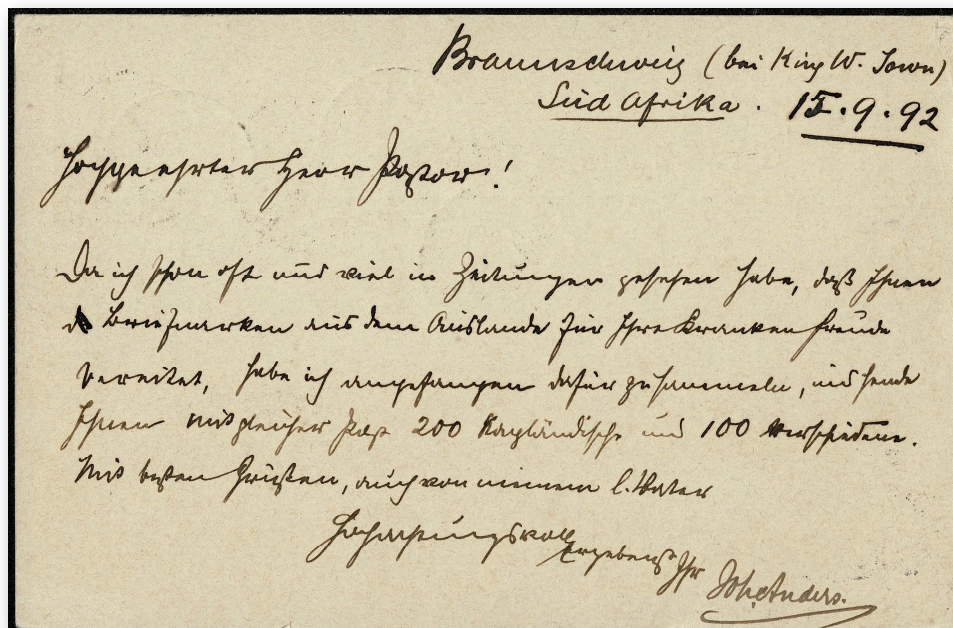


Fig. 6: Postcard backside Rückseite

*Brunswick (near King W. Town)
South Africa 15.9.92
Dear Pastor,
Since I have often seen in newspapers that you enjoy stamps from abroad for your sick people, I have started to collect them, and send you with the same paper (post ?) 200 Cape and 100 miscellaneous.
With best regards, also from my I.(dear) father
Respectfully yours
Sohetuar (?)*



Fig. 7: Stamp Germany 1991, Post office Bethel

Brunswick was a hamlet near King Willem's Town. The area had many immigrants from Germany; Brunswick did not have its own post office, Izeli did, where there was a large monastery.

As early as 1892, people in Brunswick knew that stamps could be used for charity ! Brunswick

The post office in Bethel will have had a lot to do (Figure 7).