WILHELM NAST (1807–1899): FOUNDER OF GERMAN-SPEAKING METHODISM IN AMERICA AND ARCHITECT OF THE METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH MISSION IN EUROPE

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During the time of Methodism’s great early expansion under the leadership of Francis Asbury, Methodist itinerant preachers ranged across the American landscape. Indeed the efforts of Asbury’s preachers not only created a connected church on the frontiers of America, but the piety, the preaching, and the organization of the Methodists as it emerged, also helped to tame the wilderness and shape the American nation. The missionary beginnings of the Methodist movement and the role of Asbury’s band of preaching circuit riders has been the subject of much historiography. But that historiography has often underplayed the role and contribution of the German-speaking immigrants to the Methodist mission in North America and their subsequent impact on the foundations of Methodism on the European continent. In this article, we will narrate the story of Wilhelm Nast, the founder of Methodism among German-speakers in North America and the architect of the German American mission back to the European continent. By examining the life and thought of Nast, fully accessible only through German sources, we will recover a greater appreciation of this “Asbury among the German Peoples.” Moreover, such a study promises to remind us anew how Methodism, even in its earliest development, displayed a stunning ability to translate itself into new linguistic and cultural forms, and thereby function with a global missionary impulse and outreach.

The story of German Methodism and Nast’s role in it begins in the earliest period of American Methodist history. During Asbury’s tireless preaching tours, he encountered many German-speaking immigrants, but at the time there were only a handful of German preachers and translators available to mount a sustained mission among these German speakers.¹ A number of Germans were converted by itinerant Methodist preachers before 1800, and some of these Germans preached to other immigrants in both

¹Karl H. Voigt, in Geschichte der Evangelisch-Methodistischen Kirche, Herausgegeben von K. Steckel und C. E. Sommer (Stuttgart: Christliches Verlagshaus GmbH, 1982), 40; Heinreich (Henry) Böhm and a certain Dr. Romer were counted among Asbury’s translators; other preachers who could address the German immigrants were named in the German language sources as Jacob Gruber, John Swartswelder, William Folks and Simon Müller.
German and English. Jacob Albrecht (Albright), a local Methodist preacher, itinerated among the Germans in 1790, and he would have set up German-speaking Methodist Churches—yet Asbury resisted the idea at the time. Ultimately, Albrecht seceded from the Methodists in 1807 to better serve the German immigrant population in their native tongue, founding his own popular movement that became known as the Evangelical Association. Asbury continued, however, to resist sanctioning separate work among the German immigrants. He hoped in vain that they would simply join the English-speaking Methodists, thereby avoiding the need for separate services and churches. Asbury later in 1808 grudgingly conceded that German-speakers needed ministry in German; he therefore allowed Henry Böhm to translate parts of the Discipline into German and encouraged the German immigrants awakened under Methodist preaching to be served by Albrecht’s Evangelical Association. Yet these events demonstrate how Asbury underestimated the desire of German immigrants to retain their language and culture in worship styles.

Over a decade after Asbury’s death, the Methodist Episcopal Church nevertheless came to see the need to work formally among the continuing stream of German-speaking immigrants. Bishop John Emory put out the first call for German preachers (and French preachers for their respective community) in the 1833 edition of the periodical *Western Christian Advocate*. It was noted at the time how difficult it was to find men as qualified in their spiritual life, as in their knowledge of the German language. Nevertheless, Wilhelm Nast responded in 1835 to one of these calls in the *Western Christian Advocate*, thus starting a remarkable missionary career. Nast was born in Stuttgart, Germany, in 1807 and confirmed in the Lutheran Church at fourteen as was customary. Through a combination of strong family Christian influence and exposure to Lutheran pietistic prayer meetings, Nast felt an early and strong call to missionary service. He even talked seriously about attending a missionary training institute, until his family convinced him of the advantages of a more traditional theological path.

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2Wittke, 35–36.
3Wittke, 35–36; see also Voigt, 40.
4On some of the difficulties encountered by the German immigrants of the early 18th century with Methodist worship styles, it is instructive to note the following: The German immigrants found particularly difficult those parts of Methodism so stamped by American culture, namely the open-air revival meetings, and the preachers incessant itinerant moving on horseback from settlement to settlement. The Germans were on the contrary, used to a highly ordered, stable parish church tended to by one pastor, and were generally opposed to such aimless wandering across the land by travelling preachers or *Reisepredigten*; see Voigt, 40.
5Voigt, 41.
6Voigt, 41.
education and his gifts for pastoral service. He subsequently entered a lower seminary as preparation for his entry to Tübingen University, where he was educated on a government scholarship. After some struggle with his pastoral call, Nast declined to take a pastoral appointment in the state-supported Lutheran Church (thereby having to repay the state for his theological education). Launched on a search for employment, Nast’s desire to become a teacher of classics led him to emigrate to America, where the dearth of available persons to teach classics became Nast’s opportunity. After teaching for a number of years, most notably as German teacher at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, Nast became attracted to the same pietistic elements in Methodism which had also so impressed Wesley in Savannah: the German protest against ecclesiastical formalism, the stress on inner regeneration, and an emphasis on the “priesthood of all believers.” With an outstanding theological education already in hand, Nast was ready to answer Bishop Emory’s call for German-speaking Methodist preachers. Nast, thereby, became the formal founder of the German-speaking Methodist movement in 1835, when he was sent by the Ohio Conference to be a German missionary on probation in Cincinnati.

Nast quickly synthesized in a vigorous way his teenage ambition to be a missionary, along with realizing the promise of his pastoral and theological gifts. Through his long ministry, many German immigrants were gathered around him in Methodist classes, which formed the basis of the German Districts of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Some of his first contacts who met with Nast in these class meetings were K. H. Doering and L. S. Jacoby, who later became District superintendents for the Pittsburgh German District, and the St. Louis German District, respectively. Even more significantly, L. S. Jacoby was later to return to Germany to take up a post as Superintendent of the fledgling Methodist Episcopal Church in Bremen, Germany, a key center from which Methodism spread more widely in Germany.

Nast’s commitment to a theologically grounded group of itinerant German preachers can be seen in his drawing up of an “Authorized Study-plan for the German Travelling and Local Preachers,” which appeared from 1856 in the Church Order (Kircheordnung) of the German Conferences. A further step towards pastoral and theological education for German-speaking Methodism was taken when Nast accepted responsibility for the

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8 Wittke, 5–6.
9 Wittke, 5–6.
10 Wittke, 28.
11 Voigt, 41; 1 September.
12 Voigt, 45, 47.
13 Voigt, 87.
14 Voigt, 51.
training of German preachers at German-Wallace College, beginning with forty students in 1864.\textsuperscript{15}

Apart from the individuals who were influenced by Nast to enter the ministry to German immigrants in America, Nast engaged in other activities which had the effect of consolidating the German districts in their mission in America. His work at the General Conference of 1848, gave the German districts their vision and legal standing to become integrated, but separate Conferences within American Methodism, charged with the task of reaching the 5 million German immigrants that would arrive.\textsuperscript{16} This move demonstrated that for Nast and the other first generation German immigrant Methodists, “connectionalism” was more than a Methodist administrative approach or theological principle. It was a way of life that nourished their lives together as German-speakers and as Christians, and was critical to their survival in America. With this goal of promoting the German-speaking Methodist connection, Nast subsequently provided the first translations of foundational Methodist documents to sustain the German-speaking movement. He was the first translator into German of complete parts of the Methodist Book of Discipline, such as the “Teaching and Church Order,” “Articles of Religion,” and “The General Rules.” In addition, he translated a collection of Wesley’s forty-four standard sermons, as well as a forty-part collection of German hymns (1839), not to mention various other administrative documents which nourished connectionalism among the German districts within the wider American Methodist body.\textsuperscript{17} That such documents were published in portable, pocket formats of 8cm × 13cm, for the convenient use of Methodist preachers itinerating on horseback, indicates the practical seriousness of Nast’s theological vision of Methodism as essentially a mission movement.

Also significant for creating a shared sense of mission and connectionalism, was Nast’s work as editor of regular theological publications. Most importantly, Nast published and edited the influential German language Methodist weekly periodical Der Christliche Apologete, first published in January 1839 and continuing under his editorship until his son took over in 1889.\textsuperscript{18} This weekly periodical, along with Nast’s multiple series of German catechisms, were widely read and influential theological documents for German-speaking Methodists both in America and later in Germany. The tone and theology of Der Apologete was thoroughly missional—with Nast’s primary concern always to “save souls among all German immigrants.”\textsuperscript{19}

\textsuperscript{15}Voigt, 51.
\textsuperscript{16}Voigt, 48; statistic: Methodist Episcopal Church, \textit{Journal of General Conference 1864}, 196, 428.
\textsuperscript{17}Voigt, 46–50; Henry Böhm translated earlier, less complete sections of the Discipline at Asbury’s request.
\textsuperscript{18}Voigt, 50.
\textsuperscript{19}Wittke, 84–86.
That is not to say Nast’s writings were merely devotional or evangelistic propaganda. On the contrary, *Der Apologete* contained many long, well-notated articles by Nast, that reportedly taxed his German readers, who often complained about the length of his articles.\(^{20}\) Nevertheless, through *Der Apologete* his many other publications, Nast nourished and unified the German-speaking Methodist communities with the considerable theological and philosophical education he had received at Tübingen. A remarkable range and depth of learning was shown in Nast’s published works, which was quite singular for Methodism of the period.\(^{21}\)

A significant strand of thought in all of Nast’s publishing was the connection of Methodism to the Reformed Lutheran theology so dominant in the state church in Germany, and thereby influential with his German Methodist readership.\(^{22}\) The German-speaking immigrants of North America received a solid theological education drawing largely on the strengths of the Tübingen school of Lutheranism through Nast’s publications.\(^{23}\) As for the relationship of Methodism to Lutheranism, Nast saw no problem; he often quoted the statement of one Professor Lezius: “Methodism is nothing other than the right understanding of Luther.”\(^{24}\) With regard to Lutheran theology, Nast was clear on his editorial and theological principles when he took on the editorship of *Der Apologete*: “In the issues of *The Apologete*, all those biblical teachings will be represented and defended, which by Martin Luther and his honored co-workers and disciples in the Reformation have been performed and proved as essential to salvation.”\(^{25}\) Here was the principle that Nast and, subsequently other early German missionaries in North America and the continent stressed: commonality on the essentials pertaining to salvation. Such a principle was crucial, for in this way the relation-

\(^{20}\) Wittke, 91.

\(^{21}\) The range and depth of his learning is shown in a selection of Nast’s published titles: including translations of Wesley’s biography, a revision/translation of Christian Keller’s *Kurze Seelenlehre, gegründet auf Schrift und Erfahrung, für Eltern, Prediger und Lehrer* (Brief Instructions for the Soul, Based on Scripture and Experience, for Parents, Preachers and Teachers), *Philosophie des Erlösungsplans* (Philosophy of the Plan of Redemption), *Christologische Betrachtungen nach Dr. van Oosterzees Bild Christi* (Christological Observations according to Dr. van Oosterzee’s Picture of Christ), *Das biblische Christenthum und seine Gegenäsätze* (Biblical Christianity and Its Opposition), *Was ist und will der Methodismus* (What is Methodism and What Does It Want?), and *What is a Spirit?* Perhaps his most penetrating studies were on the New Testament—*The Gospel Records: Their Genuineness, Authenticity, Historic Variety, and Inspiration, with some preliminary Remarks on the Gospel History*, and what Nast considered as his *magnum opus*: his *Commentary on the New Testament*, published in both German and English, officially authorized by the Methodist General Conference in 1852, appearing in the first German edition in 1860, and still unfinished in 1894; see Wittke, 162-171. Interesting also were Nast’s excursions into books on physiology and psychology.

\(^{22}\) Voigt, 51.


\(^{24}\) *Der Christliche Apologete*, 1839: 3, my translation.
ship to the Reformation tradition was treated as a valued strength for the first generation of German Methodists to draw upon. Nast’s publications influenced countless Germans on the North American continent, who hailed from such diverse traditions as Lutheran, Reformed, and Mennonite (even in some cases Catholic). His work convinced many that they could find a home in Methodism without throwing away their valued theological tradition. Even those German speakers who did not join the Methodist Episcopal Church, finding their home instead in churches started by German-speakers under the influence of Wesleyan preaching, found Nast’s publications helpful to reconcile their past with their new Christian reality of living in North America. Many ecumenical links were established among this first generation of German-speakers in Methodism with the “Albright People” who later became the Methodist-influenced Evangelical Association (started by Jacob Albright in the late 18th century) and also with the loosely Methodist Church (founded by Philip William Otterbein and Martin Böhm around 1800). These groups were highly instrumental in the establishment of churches in Germany, which later would reunite and become The United Methodist Church.

Although Nast’s writings were widely influential also with Germans beyond Methodism, his relationship with other Christian traditions could at times be complex. Indeed, he offered biting critiques in Der Apologete of any who published against Methodism or its theological tenets, most often pointing his attacks towards Catholicism. Nast was also not above engaging in heated debate with Germans from the Lutheran or Reformed Churches in North America. In particular, Nast drew heavy criticism on his Methodist theology and leadership from none other than Philip Schaff, the leading Church Historian of the German Reformed Church in North America.²⁷ Nast’s strong self-awareness concerning Methodism’s similarities and differences with Lutheranism, would greatly assist later missionaries to Germany in relations with the state church Lutherans. In particular Nast was at great pains to encourage all the German-speaking Methodist preachers to focus entirely upon the mercy and saving grace of God in Christ.²⁸ Like the Lutherans, Nast affirmed justification by faith and a covenant of grace.

²⁷ For a complete discussion of Schaff’s critique and debate with Nast, see Charles Yrigoyen, Jr., “Mercersburg’s Quarrel with Methodism,” Methodist History 22:16–17, 1983. In summary, Schaff criticized the lack of depth in Methodism, and thought it particularly shameful in German Methodism, because Nast should have known better with his education. To such charges, Nast’s response was fairly mild, namely that Schaff had little first-hand knowledge of Methodism by his own admission. Nast lamented that despite Schaff’s great learning, he was greatly misinformed in his distorted judgements. See William Nast, “Dr. Schaff on Methodism” in The Methodist Quarterly Review, XVII (July 1857), 434–436.
²⁸ Wittke, 158.
through which God stands ready at all times to enact with humanity, and because of which we may receive forgiveness from sins “in and for the merits of the Lord Jesus.” 29 Nast clearly framed his soteriology with expressions drawn directly from his Lutheran background.

Yet if Nast found commonalities with the Lutherans, at the same time he stressed the nurturing contribution that Methodist connectionalism could make within the German community as it sought to be a faithful minority in North America. In Nast’s German-American Methodism, the Lutheran heritage clearly predominated, but it was combined with Methodist structures that promoted piety and community: structures such as the class meeting and the American camp meeting. 30 These positive, group-building aspects of Methodist practice proved highly effective in solidifying the faith of the German minority in America as shown in the rapid rise of German-American Methodism. And for Nast, the Methodists had reclaimed something lost in the German speaking Lutheranism, namely, Wesley’s teaching emphasis on holiness and sanctification. 31 Sanctification formed one of the core themes of Nast’s writings in Der Apologete. Nast held that conversion was the great central experience in a person’s religious life and the key to salvation and life everlasting—but this Lutheran summary did not go far enough for classic Wesleyan theology. Accordingly, Nast emphasized in endless articles that conversion was but the first step to complete sanctification, where the heart was completely victorious over all sinful elements in a person’s character—setting himself apart on this point from the classic Lutheran theology. 32

Nast propounded other distinctive Methodist views that he felt were great improvements upon tendencies within later Lutheran theological development. Most notable of these were Nast’s views on the Bible. He was quite conversant with Lutheran Tübingen’s emerging emphasis on higher criticism—having studied there alongside David Strauss under F. C. Baur. Yet Nast never allowed higher critical views to cloud his convictions that the Bible was the inspired Word of God, never to be questioned, and accepted in all parts. 33 In this regard he felt Methodism should allow theologians to expound sharper meanings of the biblical text (for which he was sometimes criticized as being too liberal), yet Nast forcefully opposed all attempts by German “rationalists” to question the Bible as revelation. In his view that had corrupted Lutheranism on the continent. 34

29 Wittke, 158.
30 Voigt, 52.
31 Voigt, 52.
32 Wittke, 157; for a treatment in German of Nast’s period studying under F. C. Baur and other Tübingen professors, see Voigt, 42.
33 Wittke, 155.
34 Wittke, 155.
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Nast’s clear articulation to his preachers and readers alike of both the similarities and the distinctives of Methodism in relation to continental Protestant theology clearly helped Methodist missionary activity among German-speakers in America. Moreover, his vision ultimately helped to guide the Methodist mission return to Germany. Nast believed that the Methodist structures which so promoted group cohesion and nourished the faith among diverse German speaking communities in North America, would prove equally effective in stimulating the faith in Germany among a free church minority community surrounded by state church Lutheranism. For these reasons, Nast developed concepts of mission, connectionalism, and ecumenism that proved decisive in the development of German and continental Methodism, as we shall see later. Indeed, Nast’s publications stressed the connectional nature of Methodism as a strength for its mission task and without Nast’s efforts the missionizing impulse for German-Americans both for their own community in America, and later abroad on the continent, would have certainly been lost.\(^\text{35}\)

Nast’s pioneer missions to German-Americans prospered so quickly that as early as 1844 the Methodist Episcopal General Conference considered ways to explore mounting a mission back to Germany itself. Thus, Nast and the other German-American Methodists wasted no time organizing a mission to their homeland, although it began informally enough. Letters back home to family and friends had provided for many years the first Methodist preaching in Germany.\(^\text{36}\) Among the leading German-American Methodists who had studied in German theological seminaries, such as Nast, awareness of theological developments on both sides of the Atlantic was easily obtained through contacts with school friends. Through such means, Nast and others perceived parallels between Methodist and Lutheran revival movements in Germany, and many felt the conditions were ripe for a more formal mission attempt.\(^\text{37}\) Towards that end, Nast sought to find avenues for a missionary re-immigration to Germany, in order to found a Methodist Episcopal Church in Germany.\(^\text{38}\) With such a goal in mind, Nast embarked on his tour of Germany in 1844 under commission of the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church. On this tour he sought persons and families with whom he had some prior connections in order to scout the prospects of mounting a sustained Methodist mission in Germany supported by the German-American Conferences.\(^\text{39}\) Nast met with a number

\(^{35}\)Voigt, 49.

\(^{36}\)Voigt, 56.

\(^{37}\)Voigt, 56.

\(^{38}\)The Evangelical Association and the United Brethren also sought to bring their types of revivalist, Methodist influenced churches back to Germany. See Arthur C. Core, 59–84. Due to space limitations we will limit our discussion to the Methodist Episcopal Church mission on the continent.

\(^{39}\)Voigt, 56.
of contacts who were involved with the various awakening and revival movements in Germany, hoping to find common ground there for future Methodist work and with a hope of distributing Methodist literature to those considering emigrating to America.\textsuperscript{40} It became increasingly clear to Nast on this trip, that there were some fundamental differences of culture and historical conditions between these German revival movements and Methodist structures and forms of piety.\textsuperscript{41} Thus, Nast saw no real prospect of channeling Methodist influences through these revival groups, but instead saw the even clearer need for a permanent and formal Methodist mission in Germany. By the end of 1849, only fifteen years after Nast had viewed the beginnings of German-speaking Methodism, such formal mission activities were launched in Germany by the Methodist Episcopal Church in America, supported largely through the personnel and financing of the German-speaking Conferences.\textsuperscript{42}

Of course Methodism had first entered Germany in 1830 through the British Wesleyan Methodist Mission Society work of Christoph Gottlob Müller—a refugee who came to England during the Napoleonic Wars, who was converted to Methodism in Britain and ultimately returned to start Methodist lay classes in his home of Württemberg.\textsuperscript{43} He was a true lay evangelist, gathering many interested farmers to hear the witness of how he had experienced God’s salvation. However, after twenty-five years’ work, Müller died leaving only a loosely organized group without leadership or formal church structures.\textsuperscript{44} The Wesleyan Mission Society continued to send workers, because up to that time no baptisms or even celebrations of communion had taken place in Müller’s society. Yet the Wesleyan Methodist Mission Society would go many years before its first baptism in 1872, with its success largely in forming small groups in Baden, Bayern, Schlesien, Böhmen, and even the first society in Austria.\textsuperscript{45}

In contrast to the difficulties of the Wesleyan Methodist Society from Britain, Nast and his German-speaking American Methodist Episcopal Church followers entered Germany remarkably quickly and with a lasting mission contribution.\textsuperscript{46} Superintendent L. S. Jacoby, early protégé of Nast and the superintendent of the German district in St. Louis, was sent to Bremen in December 1849 at age thirty-six, against his wife’s wishes and armed with only five dollars worth of tracts to found and oversee the work in that city. Due to Bremen’s atmosphere of relative religious freedom, Jacoby was soon able to bring his gifts for organization to the mission and

\textsuperscript{40}Voigt, 56.
\textsuperscript{41}Voigt, 56.
\textsuperscript{42}Voigt, 56.
\textsuperscript{43}Voigt, 85.
\textsuperscript{44}Voigt, 85.
\textsuperscript{45}Voigt, 86–87.
\textsuperscript{46}Voigt, 89.
gather believers into a formal church and this church is known as the first effectively organized Methodist church in Germany. Jacoby’s successful work in Bremen soon spread onward.

Another German-American who had been trained by Nast, Ludwig Nippert, was sent to Berlin in 1858 as the first ordained Methodist pastor in that great capital; there, Nippert served the longest of all the German-American Methodist missionaries, and became the outstanding leader of the German work. The success of the small, but growing band of German-American Methodist missionaries could be traced back to Nast’s leadership training and his mission scouting tour of 1844.

When the Methodist Episcopal Church entered Germany in 1849, directly after the Revolution of 1848–1849, it did so with high hopes. The Methodists as a Protestant Free Church, hoped that with the momentum in the northern German states swinging away from Catholicism to Protestantism, a mission there would be easier. The German-American immigrants were hopeful they could openly bring with them the thoroughly democratic means of administration that had developed in Methodism’s historical spread across America. However, Methodism in Germany would still suffer for many years in the face of considerable opposition from both government and state church opponents. Despite this harsh political climate, German-American Methodist missionaries received occasional support and enhanced prestige due to connections with the new consuls from the United States, who were often Methodists themselves.

The spread of Methodism through Germany, despite obstacles found in a political climate that was not yet fully familiar with the democratic principles within Methodism, occurred relatively quickly. Having only entered Germany in 1848, by 1850 Jacoby had gathered 22 adults into a community along with several hundred children. By 1860 a flourishing publishing house was established in Bremen, and by the 1890s German Methodism had become so vigorous and self-supporting that it mounted further missions into Switzerland, Austro-Hungary, and Russia. In 1891, Germany had 72 German Methodist preachers and 10,580 members, with Switzerland claiming 5,307 members. The Methodist work so flourished throughout the continent, that by 1925, despite the ravages of World War I, a Methodist

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47 Voigt, 87.
48 Voigt, 87; The strategic value of entering Bremen first was clear; there was hardly a city in Germany with more connections to the German-American immigrants than Bremen.
49 Voigt, 87; see also Wittke, 180.
50 The spread of Methodism in Germany, which has been treated in other German and English studies, will not be pursued in further detail here. See Paul F. Douglass, *The Story of German Methodism* (Cincinnati/New York: 1939), and K. H. Voigt, *Warum kamen die Methodisten nach Deutschland?* (Stuttgart: BGEMK Bh 4, 1975) and *Die Anfänge der Evangelisch Methodistischen Kirche in Hessen* (Stuttgart: BGEMK 12, 1982).
51 Voigt, 56–57.
52 Wittke, 184–185.
53 Wittke, 185.
Central Conference was formed by Bishop John Nuelson headquartered in Zürich, which comprised delegates from eight Conferences where German missionaries had labored, including Northern and Southern Germany, Switzerland, Austria, Hungary, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, and Russia.\textsuperscript{54} Nast’s German mission in North America had spread with astounding reach to include most of Europe, even before he died in 1899 at 92 years of age.\textsuperscript{55}

The international reach of the German-American Methodist mission was due to several key factors. Clearly, the German-speaking Conferences in America were committed to the work and sent their best German preachers, in some ways sacrificing the work of the Methodist Episcopal Church in America for the sake of the wider mission in Germany. These missionary preachers also had a cultural and linguistic familiarity with Germany that gave them great advantages. Through their considerable contacts with family and friends, these missionaries did not suffer from the same extreme sense of isolation as other missionaries in the late 19th century missionary movement. Moreover, the German-American Conferences under the leadership of Nast, had not only provided much financial help for the mission, but also deployed to Germany the theological documents developed to missionize Germans in North America. Not only were tracts and copies of \textit{Der Christliche Apologete} regularly sent to the mission efforts in Germany, but all the translations of \textit{The Discipline}, “The Articles of Religion,” the Wesleyan sermons, as well as hymn books, that had effectively reached the Germans in Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, and St. Louis, were ready to be quickly used to form a Methodist church in Bremen, Berlin, Basel, and ultimately Vienna and the wider territories of Hapsburg Austro-Hungary.\textsuperscript{56}

In light of this, the relatively quick spread of Methodism in Germany was clearly due in large part to Nast’s leadership in the North American Methodist mission and his role as a bridge figure between English-speaking Methodism and Continental world-views. He was effective at theologically reconciling Tübingen Lutheranism with Methodism, thus providing a welcome point of contact in Methodism for incoming German immigrants to America. This was essential in effectively building up and unifying the German-American Methodist community from among the various German church traditions. The fact that German-American Methodism hailed from such diverse denominations only made its mission back to Germany, vis-à-vis the German state Lutheran church, more ecumenically sensitive. At the same time, Nast’s exposure to previous continental theologies and his ability to expound to his preachers on points of continuity and discontinuity with Methodism only made this group of German-American missionaries more aware of the real contributions Methodism could make in Germany to “reform the nation with scriptural holiness.”

\textsuperscript{54}Wittke, 185.
\textsuperscript{55}Wittke, 185, 188–189; see also Voigt, 53.
\textsuperscript{56}Voigt, 57–58.
As far as Nast’s own role in the Methodist mission back to Germany, we must not forget the significance of his three visits to Germany to support the work in 1844, 1857, and 1877 (at the age of 70). Yet Nast’s most enduring contributions to German Methodism was his translation of the foundational documents used to sustain the mission movement in Germany along with stirring Germans in America to use their transatlantic networks in order to promote mission in Europe. Nast built these transatlantic connections upon a shared German language and culture, reinforced by Methodist connectionalism and mission theology. This unique form of German connectionalism became decisive in supporting the spread of Methodism into the German-speaking parts of Europe and beyond. It was Nast’s mission vision that guided these transatlantic links in the latter half of the 19th century and continued to bear fruit for mission in other European lands long after his death.

The trajectory of the Methodist Episcopal Church’s mission in continental Europe was most clearly stamped by Wilhelm Nast in the latter half of the 19th century, and his influence continues today. Consequently, Wilhelm Nast is appropriately known by German Methodists today, by the title of “The First German Methodist Missionary,” as well as the founder and organizer of the German branch of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Yet the truly international nature of Nast’s legacy also endures, as Bishop Wunderlich of Germany wrote in a 1963 biography of Nast, “Brückenbauer Gottes” (“Bridge-builder of God”): “It is impossible to completely measure his (Nast’s) influence on this side of the Ocean or on that side (America).” Such an assessment of Nast’s international impact, reminds us again of Methodism’s early and remarkable ability to translate itself with great vitality into a global and connected Christian missionary movement.

57 Voigt, 50.
58 F. Wunderlich, Brückenbauer Gottes (Frankfurt/Main: BGM 7, 1963), 43.
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