

Vowed to Community or Ordained to Mission?

Aspects of separation and integration in the Lutheran
Deaconess Institute Neuendettelsau, Bavaria



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Judith Lena Böttcher: Vowed to Community or Ordained to Mission?

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Chapter 1: Introduction

This study offers an exploration of the Lutheran deaconess community in Neuendettelsau, Bavaria. Its focus is on the period from 1854, when the Deaconess Institute was founded as the first of its kind in Bavaria by the local pastor Wilhelm Löhe, to 1872, the year of the founder's death. Though Löhe repeatedly emphasized its independence, the Institute in Neuendettelsau was part of the nineteenth-century deaconess movement which sought to re-establish the ecclesiastical office of deaconess with reference to the scriptural Phoebe, mentioned in Romans 16:1. This found its first concrete and visible expression when a deaconess institution was established by Theodor and Friederike Fliedner in Kaiserswerth in the Rhineland in 1836. They created something novel within the Protestant churches by combining the option for women to receive a thorough training, and thereafter to pursue a professional career, with a communal form of life for single women as an alternative to marriage and family-life. Concerns that this might possibly further the emancipatory aspirations of women were alleviated by Fliedner's markedly conservative stance and by the patriarchal structures adopted within the mother house. Not least, the deaconesses' social and ecclesiastical acceptance rested on the acknowledged necessity of their work: The "female ministry of love" as it was called in contemporary terminology was regarded as an adequate response on the part of the Protestant churches to the social grievances that accompanied the first signs of industrialization, especially in the fields of health-care and education. All in all, the Kaiserswerth prototype proved highly successful and sparked the founding of many daughter-houses.¹

Neuendettelsau, founded almost twenty years later, was not strictly one of them. Here, the rhetoric of demarcation from Kaiserswerth was strong, especially in the early years. Two arguments were used to differentiate the institution in Bavaria from the one located in the Rhineland. The first was the theological direction of the Neuendettelsau Institute. During the course of his career, Löhe had undergone a theological development from the *Erweckungsbewegung* to Lutheran Neo-confessionalism. Toying with the thought of separation from the Bavarian Landeskirche in 1848/49, Löhe retained an outside position within the broader church throughout the rest of his life. Löhe's difficult relationship with the church authorities, which culminated in his temporary suspension from his office as pastor of Neuendettelsau in 1860, left its mark on the community by its occasional sense of alienation

¹ Ute Gause rates the Kaiserswerth mother house as a "victory model" [*Siegesmodell*], Gause, *Dienst und Demut*, 77. The following mother-houses were directly linked to Kaiserswerth: Dresden (founded in 1844), Bethanien in Berlin (1847), Breslau (1850), Königsberg (1850), Stettin (1851), Stockholm (1851), Utrecht (1844), Pittsburg (1849), cf. Schmidt, *Beruf: Schwester*, 153.

from the broader church and by its wariness of any projects which might swerve from pure Lutheran doctrine. This included Kaiserswerth.

The second argument for demarcation was based on the organisational structure of the Neuendettelsau Institute. It was initially designed to be a purely educational establishment and consciously rejected the conception of a mother house with a communal life as developed in Kaiserswerth. Single women from the local rural countryside were invited to be educated and trained in Neuendettelsau. They could either enrol as deaconess students, if they aspired to become deaconesses, or had the option of attending the courses and returning to their former spheres of life in home and family. Once they had graduated, the ties to the Institute even for the deaconesses were deliberately kept loose. Quickly, however, it transpired that this was not a feasible concept. From 1857, the Institute was restructured, and the changes were officially announced:

As our friends know, at the beginning of the deaconess institution here we were wholly averse to the notion that our pupils should form some kind of enclosed sisterhood or order. However, we have now to confess that in the course of time we have come to hold a different opinion.²

In this official statement, it was argued that the directorate needed to retain a tighter control on the deaconesses:

The pupil who gives up the closer tie to the mother house and her equals always encounters the same affliction; she forgets the mother house, the thoughts which have been instilled into her here, she loses the high view-point of her profession which, as you know, finds so little root in the contemporary congregations, and, in time, she sinks to become a salaried servant and a child of the world.³

This study explores the dynamic process of the emergence of a community, in Löhe's terms "a kind of enclosed sisterhood or order", which was made up of deaconesses who had a "high view-point of her profession" and a sense of distinction from the "child[ren] of the world." The mother house both offered emotional support and a home for those deaconesses working in unfamiliar and potentially threatening situations, and exerted control. It is argued that the process of defining this identity lasted far beyond the year 1857 and that it was double-sided: The institutionally prescribed structures, norms, instructions, and interpretational patterns were adopted and applied, but also partly modified by the sisterhood. Key to the argument is the fact that the women were not merely passive recipients but participated and contributed to the formation of a distinct Neuendettelsau deaconess community. This developed its own dynamics. Löhe himself had to acknowledge at the end of his life:

² 4. Jahresbericht 1857, 26–27.

³ *Ibid.*, 27.

[...] from the beginning, we had not intended to establish a deaconess house where in a modern imitation of the old monastic times a crowd of female workers was to be educated who would then emerge to far-away places to teach how one should conduct works of mercy. [...] We wished to raise our own people for our own immediate needs [...]. It is, of course, now very different according to God's special providence, and what has become we had actually not intended, but something far simpler and more popular [*volksmäßigeres*] [...]. One could say that our own path was not wholly clear to us from the beginning.—We sought for the truth, as I said before, and we would have much preferred to have been able to remain more faithful and closer to our own thought.⁴

This development invites closer exploration.

1.1 Literature survey

The explicit discrepancy between Löhe's original intention and the resulting Deaconess Institute at Neuendettelsau has been pointed out and interpreted by several scholars. Until recently, however, the deaconess community itself has not received much attention. Instead, the Deaconess Institute has been mentioned in the context of an evaluation of Löhe's ecclesiological and diaconal thought. Depending on the theological views of the author, the Institute has been regarded either as an outflow of Löhe's "high church", catholicizing tendencies and proof of his "theology of reprimatation", thus his critics, or as the realization of Löhe's ideal of a church which was, his admirers hastened to add, only intended as a provisional structure and meant to be dissolved once Löhe's vision of a parochially based diakonia had been reinstated in the Lutheran church.

The former view was brought into play by Löhe's first biographer, Johannes Deinzer who, as his *Vikar* [curate] had closely collaborated with Löhe. In the third volume of his biography, published in 1882, Deinzer drew on many original sources to describe in detail the founding of the Deaconess Institute during the last third of Löhe's life, and pointed out that Löhe's conception of the office of deaconess had undergone a development. Although the parochial deaconess remained Löhe's ideal, "one let go of the original dread of an orientation towards the antique form of the communal life [*Genossenschaftsleben*] and came to regard the deaconess of the 19th century 'as a protestant imitation of the Roman Catholic sister of mercy'."⁵ This interpretation was taken up by critics, for example by Martin Kähler in 1898 in his lecture "History of the Protestant dogmatics in the nineteenth century".⁶ In the

4 Löhe, *Etwas aus der Geschichte* (1870), GW4, 171–172.

5 Deinzer, Johannes: *Wilhelm Löhe's Leben. Aus seinem schriftlichen Nachlaß zusammengestellt*, Vol. 3, Gütersloh 1882, 210–211.

6 Kähler, Martin: *Geschichte der protestantischen Dogmatik im 19. Jahrhundert* (1898), ed. by Ernst Kähler, Wuppertal/Zürich 1989. The lecture was published posthumously by his grandson.

context of a critical evaluation of Neo-Lutheran confessionalism, Kähler counted Löhe amongst the “confessional separatists.” According to Kähler, his stance was also reflected in the Deaconess Institute. It “was more oriented towards monasticism, in contrast to the original Kaiserswerth movement.”⁷ This was reiterated by Felix Flückiger in 1975: “The father of the institutions in Neuendettelsau gave rise to a type of diakonia which was strongly influenced by the model of the monastery. All in all, Löhe had a strong leaning towards Catholicism, especially towards the early Catholicism of the early church (which he, however, romanticized).”⁸

Deinzer also began a trend in interpreting the deaconess community as the realization of Löhe’s ideal of the true church.⁹ Following him, Siegfried Hebart, in his hagiographic study “Wilhelm Löhe’s doctrine of the church, its office and government” (1939), argued that Löhe founded the deaconess community as a model for the link Löhe postulated between the visible and the invisible church.¹⁰ Briefly he also remarked that this implicitly resulted in a devaluation of the priesthood of all believers.¹¹ This critique was enhanced by Gerhard Müller, who was the first to explore Löhe’s roots in the *Erweckungsbewegung* and, in a number of essays published between 1971 and 1975, focused on Löhe’s theological development.¹² Löhe’s original intentions to revitalize the congregations through missionary and diaconal initiatives were, according to Müller, redirected in the course of the year 1848/49. From then on Löhe wished to gather an ideal congregation, with the sacramental life as its centre, in retreat from sinful society. In the course of his attempts to revive the diaconal ministry, Löhe, according to Müller, furthered the “professionalization” of diakonia, culminating in what Müller regarded as the ordination of deaconesses.¹³ This, in turn, meant the devaluation or even prevention of voluntary diaconal initiatives in local congregations. With this, a line of critique was taken up that goes back to Bezzel, Löhe’s second successor as *Rektor* of the Institute. Repeatedly emphasizing the provisional nature of the deaconess community, Bezzel returned to Löhe’s original vision, emphasizing that the primary function of the mother house was to serve as an educational institution which should, in the long run, make itself superfluous by spurring the congregations to

7 Ibid., 175.

8 Flückiger, Felix: *Protestantische Theologie des 19. Jahrhunderts*, Göttingen 1975, 69–70.

9 Deinzer, *Löhe’s Leben* (3), 326–328.

10 Hebart, Siegfried: *Wilhelm Löhes Lehre von der Kirche, ihrem Amt und Regiment*, Erlangen (diss) 1939, 195 and 280–281.

11 Ibid, 261; also 68, 71, 163, 173, 232, 276.

12 Müller, Gerhard: “Das neulutherische Amtsverständnis in reformatorischer Sicht”; in: *KuD* (1971), 46–74; Müller, Gerhard: “Wilhelm Löhes missionarisch-diaconisches Denken und Wirken”; in: *Sichtbare Kirche*. FS für H. Laag zum 80. Geburtstag, Gütersloh 1973, 44–53; Müller, Gerhard: “Wilhelm Löhes Theologie zwischen Erweckungsbewegung und Konfessionalismus”; in: *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie*, 1973, 1–37; Müller, Gerhard: “Zeitgemäß im Widerspruch. Erinnerung an Wilhelm Löhe”, in: *LM 11* (1972), 38–39.

13 Müller, *Amtsverständnis*, 50–51.

diaconal work.¹⁴ The vision was taken up by Heinz Miederer, who was *Rektor* of the Institute from 1975 to 1990.¹⁵

The theological critique of mother house diakonia was enhanced by the *Dia-koniewissenschaftler* Paul Philippi. In his doctoral dissertation, he developed the thesis of a “Christocentric diakonia” which was to find expression in the diaconal responsibility of the congregations.¹⁶ Philippi took this as his norm in evaluating all nineteenth-century diaconal undertakings. In a later publication, Philippi therefore interpreted Löhe positively, placing him on a par with Wichern. In the nineteenth century, both had initially attempted to (re-)integrate the diaconal dimension into the church. However, Löhe did not achieve this and therefore established the deaconess office in the form of mother house diakonia as a substitute.¹⁷ Philippi differentiated between the “preceding conception” which the founders of the deaconess houses had developed and “the adapted reality”.¹⁸ For Philippi, therefore, the development in Neuendettelsau was one of decline: Although Löhe had wished to reinstate the “deaconess office of the congregation”,

the deaconesses themselves soon expressed the wish to become organized along the lines of the Kaiserswerth model. In the course of the change, those houses more consciously developed the communal element as communities of women [*entwickelten diese Häuser bewußter das frauengenossenschaftliche Element*] (...), that is, the specific form of a sisterhood as a comprehensive ‘pro-existence [*Proexistenz*]’ for the whole church.¹⁹

Philippi explicitly recommended further research on Neuendettelsau.²⁰ He himself focused his detailed studies on Kaiserswerth. The contemporary agenda of Philippi’s research becomes obvious especially in a work intended for a broader readership, “The so-called office of deacon” (1968).²¹ At a time when “dying mother houses”²² had been detected, Philippi wished to differentiate between diakonia

14 For example the articles “Diakonisse und geistliches Amt”, *CorDiac* 1897, No. 1, 2 and 3; “Alte Diakonissenhäuser”, *CorDiac* 1907, No. 9 and 10.

15 Miederer, Miederer: *Diakonie der Versöhnung. Stand und Auftrag der Gemeinde Jesu Christi*, Neuendettelsau 1979, 11, 27.

16 Philippi, Paul: *Christozentrische Diakonie. Ein theologischer Entwurf*, Stuttgart 1963.

17 Philippi, Paul: *Diaconica. Über die soziale Dimension kirchlicher Verantwortung*, second edition edited by Jürgen Albert, Neukirchen-Vluyn 1989 (originally published 1984), 146; also Philippi, *Christozentrische Diakonie*, 242–247.

18 Cf. Philippi, Paul: *Vorstufen des modernen Diakonissenamtes (1789–1848) als Elemente für dessen Verständnis und Kritik. Eine motivgeschichtliche Untersuchung zum Wesen der Mutterhausdiakonie*, Neukirchen-Vluyn 1966, 5.

19 Philippi, *Diaconica*, 107.

20 Philippi, *Vorstufen*, 5.

21 Philippi, Paul: *Das sogenannte Diakonienamt. Zweieinhalb Beiträge zu einem Gespräch*, Gladbeck 1986.

22 For example Leich, Heinrich: *Sterbende Mutterhaus-Diakonie. Zur gegenwärtigen Lage der Mutterhausdiakonie in Deutschland*, Bielefeld 1955. Leich was at that time director of the Kaiserswerth institutions and pastor in Kaiserswerth. Only a few years later, Thiele called for

as “an element of the right way to build congregations” [*ein Element des rechten Gemeindeaufbaus*]²³ and the form of life which had become intrinsically associated with the deaconess office and which many regarded as obsolete. However, by applying his strictly normative criteria to historical developments, Philippi was blinkered when it came to the contributions of the women who lived and worked within religious communities and who experienced the communal form of life as empowering. For example, Amalie Sieveking’s intention to found a Protestant sisterhood, as an initiative of and for women with only minimal male interference, received a very critical evaluation for what Philippi viewed as its lack of integration into the broader church.²⁴

Anne Stempel-de Fallois, in her research into the development of Löhe’s social thought and diaconal initiatives before the founding of the Deaconess Institute, largely followed Philippi’s line.²⁵ Taking into account a wealth of unpublished sources, Stempel-de Fallois shed new light on the formation of the theological underpinning of Löhe’s diaconal projects from the *Erweckungsbewegung* to Lutheran Neo-confessionalism. She placed a special focus on tracing the influence of women on Löhe’s development and identified Löhe’s image and model of women before he coined his ideal of a deaconess. At the end of her chronological survey, she interprets the founding of the Deaconess Institute in 1854 much in line with previous research: “It was his [Löhe’s] aim to educate [*erziehen*] women to form a unified communion of saints and to construct the pure Lutheran church through diakonia, and to make use of them as multipliers for pure Lutheran doctrine in their different places of work, in the congregation, family, institutions etc.”²⁶ In her subtle and insightful evaluation, Stempel-de Fallois observes that even in those first years of the Institute, before its re-construction into a mother house, there was a discrepancy between the ideal Löhe had reiterated in various publications

an adaption of the mother houses to modern times and criticized the continuous reiteration of the ideal of female submission, cf. Thiele, Friedrich: *Diakonissenhäuser im Umbruch der Zeit. Strukturprobleme im Kaiserswerther Verband deutscher Mutterhäuser als Beitrag zur institutionellen Diakonie*, Stuttgart 1963.

23 Philippi, *Das sogenannte Diakonenamt*, 54–56.

24 Cf. Philippi, *Vorstufen*, 94. To be fair, Philippi did realize that this had to do with Sieveking’s limited options within the hierarchical, male-oriented established church, cf. *ibid.*, 98: “It was not possible for a single woman to revert to the model of the Moravians for the renewal of a female *vocatio* within the congregation [...]. Otherwise, she would have had to reshape the church as such and to give shape to the shapeless congregations—as Oberlin was just able to do, thanks to his charisma, his office and his independence in his small congregation. Amalie Sieveking did not only lack the legitimation through an office. She even lacked the natural precondition to attain such an office: she was not a man.” Writing in 1966, Philippi left it at that and did not reflect further on the necessity of transforming a socially constructed church which, based on a “natural” and therefore, by convention, seemingly unchangeable criterion, prevented half of all church-members from attaining such an office.

25 Stempel-de Fallois, Anne: *Das diakonische Wirken Wilhelm Löhes: von den Anfängen bis zur Gründung des Diakonissenmutterhauses in Neuendettelsau (1826–1854)*, Stuttgart 2001.

26 *Ibid.*, 329.

of parochial diakonia and what was actually realized. By placing the emphasis “on the construction of an ecclesiastically and confessionally formed community”, the spurring of the congregations to diaconal action was secondary: “Therefore, it would be wrong to speak of parochial diakonia, that is diakonia which originates within the congregations, as Bezzel, Meister, Schober, Schoenauer and others have claimed.”²⁷ Although underlining throughout the value Löhe attributed to the education of women, Stempel-de Fallois modified the praise of Löhe’s educational programme by recent scholars: “Löhe did not wish to contribute to a general education which could have contributed to an independent position or to the emancipation of women.”²⁸ She explicitly pointed out the desirability of more thorough research into the transition from a purely educational institution to a deaconess mother house.²⁹ Stempel-de Fallois concluded her survey by highlighting some of the initiatives to retain the original intention of “founding better congregations”³⁰ which were taken after the reconstruction of the Institute into a mother house from 1857. Generally, Stempel-de Fallois viewed the Institute from Löhe’s perspective. Research on the period after Stempel-de Fallois’ timeframe and which takes into account sources that shed light on the perception of the women of the community still remains to be undertaken.

From the literature survey so far we can conclude that scholars who have located the Deaconess Institute and the emergence of the deaconess community within their research on Löhe’s ecclesiological and social thought have come to a critical assessment of the later historical developments. Taking a strictly theological line, the community is either interpreted as an expression of Löhe’s Romanizing tendencies (Kähler, Flückiger) or as a theologically illegitimate professionalization of diakonia which devalued and prevented voluntary diaconal initiatives in the congregations (Bezzel, Miederer, Philippi, Stempel-de Fallois). In both cases, a perspective is presented which takes little account either of the deaconesses’ self-perception, or of women’s limited options within the patriarchal, hierarchically structured nineteenth-century established church.³¹ Within this line of research, hardly any significance is attributed to the community as a form of life for women which provided at least limited space for agency and self-esteem.

In-house publications written with the aim of presenting research on the institutional history of the Deaconess Institute have also all taken the view-point of the male *Rektoren*. This is true even for very recent publications. In 1954, Hermann Dietzfelbinger, *Rektor* from 1953 to 1955, took the occasion of the Institute’s

27 Ibid, 332.

28 Ibid, 329.

29 Ibid, 332.

30 Ibid, 336. She quotes Löhe, *Von der Barmherzigkeit*, GW 4, 522.

31 For an overview of specific research in this area cf. Götz v. Olenhusen, *Feminisierung von Religion und Kirche*.

centenary as an opportunity to present an updated account of its history.³² With the pious wish “that He [God] may revive the sense of serving anew”³³ he dedicated a whole chapter to the “helpmates” [*Gehilfen*] of his predecessor Löhe. This chapter portrays individual deaconesses “who, in addition to natural talents, possessed the greater gift of discipline [*Zucht*] through God’s Spirit.”³⁴ Most of the publication is taken up by a detailed account of the expansion of the deaconesses’ areas of work. More recently, Hermann Schoenauer, *Rektor* since 1990, commissioned two publications which abandoned the theological view-point of his predecessors. Instead, an even more explicitly institutional focus is taken. Harald Jenner, in his “From Neuendettelsau into the whole world” (2004), explores the various fields of work undertaken by the deaconesses, with a special emphasis on their schools, within the contemporary, local social context.³⁵ Guided by this social-historical line of research, Jenner pays tribute to the differentiated, ever-expanding, contextually adapted work which the deaconesses carried out, sustained by their religious motivation. In the most recent publication from 2009, Hans Walter Schmuhl and Ulrike Winkler’s “On the way into the 20th century,”³⁶ also commissioned by the current *Rektor* Herrmann Schoenauer as a chronological sequel to Jenner’s exploration of the Institute under Löhe and his successor Friedrich Meyer, institutional structures and organization again feature prominently: “from the comprehensive context of the social developments in Germany in the era of the emperor Wilhelm,” the authors wish to portray the history of the “institutional complex which is situated under the umbrella Neuendettelsau” and “the development of its various spheres of work” from 1891 to 1918.³⁷ In keeping with this programme, the relation of Löhe’s second successor Bezzel to the deaconess community is presented in language drawn from modern management:

He principally accepted [...] that his directional competence was channelled through rules and operating schedules, he left formal structures untouched, his relation to his subordinates was more factual than personal, and he was able to delegate tasks and decisions, relocate responsibility downwards, and utilise his co-workers’, also the deaconesses’, resources of creativity, imagination and initiative for the institution.³⁸

32 Hermann Dietzfelbinger became well-known in later years when he was bishop of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Bavaria for his decided rejection of women’s ordination. However, he was unable to prevent its introduction in 1974 and, in consequence, resigned as bishop.

33 From the foreword of Dietzfelbinger, *Diakonissenanstalt Neuendettelsau. Ein Gang durch ihre Geschichte und ihre Häuser*, Neuendettelsau 1954.

34 *Ibid.*, 18.

35 Jenner, Harald: *Von Neuendettelsau in alle Welt. Entwicklung und Bedeutung der Diakonissenanstalt Neuendettelsau/Diakonie Neuendettelsau 1854–1891/1900*, Neuendettelsau 2004.

36 Schmuhl, Hans-Walter/Winkler, Ulrike: *Auf dem Weg ins 20. Jahrhundert. Die Diakonissenanstalt Neuendettelsau unter den Direktoren Hermann Bezzel (1891–1909) und Wilhelm Eichhorn (1909–1918)*, Neuendettelsau 2009.

37 *Ibid.*, 21.

38 *Ibid.*, 24.

The perspective is decidedly “from the top downwards” and the deaconesses’ “resources of creativity, imagination and initiative”, although they are named, are left unexplored even in those passages which are explicitly dedicated to the community. This is hardly surprising, given that the authors relied almost entirely on the Institute’s annual reports and Bezzel’s articles published in the deaconesses’ newsletter for their sources.³⁹

From the internal perspective of the deaconesses but largely in hagiographical style, two publications sketch a portrait of Therese Stählin, superior from 1883 to 1921.⁴⁰ Stählin is also one of the few deaconesses to feature prominently in a recently published popular biography of Löhe.⁴¹ This style of writing can perhaps loosely be categorized as the “great women approach”, intended to offer to contemporary women figures for identification.⁴² In the end, however, it serves to strengthen the complementary portrayal of gender-roles: the claim that men and women have “naturally” differing roles which are, however, of equal value. In this case, Stählin’s role is described as “intelligently helping and cooperating” with Löhe who, “naturally” “led and directed.” This, in turn, can function to render latent or even justify the socially postulated submission of women.⁴³ The fact that gender roles are always culturally and socially constructed and strengthened by discursive ascriptions is not considered by this genre of writing.

More recently, the deaconess community has attracted attention from scholars from different fields who deliberately sought to illumine the self-perception of the women. In 2000, the ethnologist Angela Treiber published the results of an oral history project which she had conducted amongst retired deaconesses of Neuendettelsau.⁴⁴ By conducting interviews with the deaconesses themselves, this study shed light on their individual piety and their identification with their profession. This served as a model for similar research in Kaiserswerth.⁴⁵ In addition, three scholars who had worked on other religious communities of women before offered brief explorations of the Neuendettelsau community under Löhe from a historical-theological gender perspective. In 2004, the Roman Catholic theologian Relinde Meiwes published an essay “On the ‘Self-perception of the deaconesses’.

39 Cf. for example the short chapter “Between encapsulation and secularization [Verweltlichung]. The spiritual orientation of the deaconess community under Hermann Bezzel”, 128–132.

40 Cf. Ruckdäschel, Erika: “Therese Stählin 1839–1928. Oberin in Neuendettelsau”, in: K. Leipziger (ed.): *Helfen in Gottes Namen. Lebensbilder aus der Geschichte der bayerischen Diakonie*, München 1986, 107–129; Trautwein, Selma: *Therese Stählin. Zur Erinnerung an unsere Frau Oberin*, Neuendettelsau 1931.

41 Cf. Geiger, Erika: *Wilhelm Löhe. 1808–1872. Leben-Werk-Wirkung*, Neuendettelsau 2003, esp. 255–257.

42 Cf. Habermas, *Geschlechtergeschichte und anthropology of gender*, 489.

43 Cf. Gause, *Kirchengeschichte und Genderforschung*, 44–45.

44 Treiber, Angela: “Diakonie ist kein Handwerk, sondern Dienewerk. — Weiblichkeitsideale und gelebte Frömmigkeit. Zur Identitätsbildung evangelischer Feierabendschwwestern in Lebensgeschichten”, in: *Bayerisches Jahrbuch für Volkskunde*, München 2000, 111–128.

45 Cf. Gause/Lissner (eds), *Kosmos Diakonissenmutterhaus*.

Historical aspects of a current question.⁴⁶ She reflected on the possible methodology of exploring the self-perception of long-dead deaconesses and pointed out the importance of carefully analyzing the fusion of the external normative perception as developed by the male founders and the perception of the women themselves which was influenced by their contemporary options and space for agency. She closed her essay by pointing out that this was a line of research which for the deaconess community in Neuendettelsau had not yet been attempted: “For this a reconstruction of history is necessary which distils the contribution of women to the history of the ‘Neuendettelsau Diakonie’, which allows space for agency, and which documents achievements.”⁴⁷ A beginning was made when, in 2008, Silke Köser and Ute Gause published articles in a volume marking Löhe’s 200th birthday. Köser explored the construction of gender roles in nineteenth-century society and Löhe’s views on women in general while Gause focused on Löhe’s perception of deaconesses.⁴⁸ Both relied on published sources and therefore remained on the level of the founder’s normative prescription, as Gause explicitly acknowledged: “Of course, these ideal-typical constructions do not correspond to the self-image of the deaconesses at that time.”⁴⁹ Both Köser and Gause emphasised the thorough intellectual training and education which the deaconesses in Neuendettelsau received and both regarded this as running counter to Löhe’s otherwise pronounced patriarchal attitude.⁵⁰

In this study, this last line of research from a historical-theological gender perspective is taken further, and applied specifically to the formation and development of the deaconess community in Neuendettelsau. In the course of this, Meiwes’ claim that the deaconesses in Neuendettelsau “did not contribute to the foundational process of founding” the community “in [any] noteworthy form” needs to be qualified.⁵¹ The emphasis of this study is on the emergence of a distinct culture within the deaconess community, and the ways in which this found expression in (boundary) codes, symbols, rites, practices, and formative and normative texts, which were both institutionally prescribed and creatively received, and which gave rise to a “we-identity” that motivated and sustained the women. This approach includes a careful analysis of the way in which Löhe’s

46 Meiwes, Relinde: “‘Vom Selbstverständnis der Diakonissen.’ Historische Aspekte einer aktuellen Frage”, in: H. Schoenauer (ed.): *Tradition und Innovation. Diakonische Entwicklung am Beispiel der Diakonie Neuendettelsau*, Stuttgart 2004, 298–304.

47 Meiwes, *Vom Selbstverständnis der Diakonissen*, 304. Cf. also Meiwes, *Arbeiterinnen des Herrn*.

48 Köser, Silke: “‘Weibliche Einfalt’ und ‘innere Herrlichkeit eines männlich vollendeten Charakters’—Geschlechterrollen und Frauenbild bei Wilhelm Löhe”, 391–409; Gause, Ute: “‘Die Diaconissin, ein Beispiel für Nacheiferung für alle’”. *Das Diaconissenbild Wilhelm Löhes*, 355–371, both in: H. Schoenauer (ed.): *Wilhelm Löhe (1808–1872). Seine Bedeutung für Kirche und Diakonie*, Stuttgart 2008.

49 Gause, *Diakonissenbild Löhes*, 357.

50 Similarly Gause, *Aufbruch der Frauen*, 63–66.

51 Meiwes: *Vom Selbstverständnis der Diakonissen*, 301.

normative, prescriptive perspective, which was largely informed by contemporary bourgeois gender constructions but partly diverged from them, interrelated with the deaconesses' self-perception. The ensuing process of negotiation demonstrates that the deaconesses did not emancipate themselves from their deeply conservative backgrounds. Neither, however, can the normative, prescriptive side simply be reduced to an ideological safeguarding of patriarchal domination.⁵²

1.2 Sources

Until now, scholars who have undertaken research on the deaconess community have mostly relied on published sources, especially on the Institute's annual reports and articles from the *Correspondenzblatt der Diaconissen in Neuendettelsau* [CorDiac], which appeared in handwritten form in 1857 and from 1858 was published in ten to twelve annual issues. Many have also cited at length from the publication "Aspects of the history of the deaconess house in Neuendettelsau" which Löhe wrote retrospectively in 1870.⁵³ Another source which has been consulted frequently are two volumes, published by the sisterhood in 1954 and 1958, containing an extensive selection of the letters written by Therese Stählin to family-members and fellow sisters from the years 1854 to 1925.⁵⁴ However, no one has yet attempted to look beyond the published material to Stählin's unpublished correspondence which in fact reveals some interesting nuances. A collection of letters written by deaconesses who emigrated to the United States between 1857 and 1859, reflecting on their experiences and self-perceptions, originally published in the CorDiac, is now available with scholarly comments and an introduction in both German and English.⁵⁵ Recently, Gause and Köser have attempted to broaden the scope of sources used: Gause by evaluating the published obituaries which Löhe wrote for the deaconesses, and Köser by analysing Löhe's construction of gender

52 Habermas, *Weibliche Religiosität*, analyses the long process of the "negotiation" [*Verhandlung*] (p. 139) of female and male bourgeois identities in the course of the nineteenth century. She interprets the founding of the deaconess institutions as one important element in the emergence of female options for a professional life apart from home and family. The widespread acceptance of this newly developed option for women, however, was bought at the price of committing them to adhere closely to the likewise newly developed bourgeois ideal of femininity as self-sacrifice (p. 138). This gives it a "hybrid-form" as it combines emancipatory aspects with aspects of a prolongation of male dominance. In her conclusion, Habermas explicitly differentiates her position from Karin Hausen's, who claims that the emergence of distinct, polarizing "gender-characteristics" in the nineteenth century was primarily instigated and sustained by the interest to stabilize patterns of male dominance (cf. Hausen, *Polarisierung der Geschlechtercharaktere*).

53 Löhe, *Etwas aus der Geschichte*. Originally published separately in the publishing house of his son, Gottfried Löhe, in Nuremberg in 1870 and listed as the 16th annual report (cf. preliminary remark in the 18th annual report 1871). Nowadays it is cited from the reprint in GW4. We follow this convention here.

54 *Meine Seele erhebet den Herrn* [ThStI], and *Auf daß sie alle eins seien* [ThStII].

55 Liebenberg/Raschzok/Schneider-Ludorff/Honold, *Diakonissen für Amerika*.

roles in his publications “The Evangelical clergyman” (1852)⁵⁶ and “Of female simplicity” (1853).⁵⁷

The focus of almost all previous work, then, has been on published sources, and, in consequence, a wealth of unpublished sources still remains to be analyzed. Some of the sources, relating to the earliest years of the community have been evaluated by Stempel-de Fallois. However, the holdings of the “Central Archive of the Diakonia Neuendettelsau”⁵⁸ [ZADN] are much more extensive, and include both published and unpublished sources. Of the former, in addition to the annual reports and the *CorDiac*, the newsletter of the “Association for Inner Mission in the Sense of the Lutheran Church”⁵⁹ [CorIM], especially the editions between 1854 and 1857, and the community’s liturgical and devotional books are of special relevance to this study. In addition, the archive contains a rich collection of unpublished sources: these include letters written by deaconesses; minutes of chapter meetings; the annals of the community; various versions of the house-rules, personal rules of life, and the “pledge of honesty”; a book containing *curricula vitae* composed by the deaconesses themselves; Löhe’s diaries for the years 1861, 1863, and 1864; and a number of addresses given by Löhe during the deaconesses’ initiation ceremonies. Additional addresses given by Löhe to the deaconesses are held in the “Archive of the Association for Inner and Outer Mission in the Sense of the Lutheran Church,” generally known as the “Löhe-Archiv” [LA], also located in Neuendettelsau, as is the outline of a prayer composed for an initiation ceremony. Finally, the official “Archive of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Bavaria”⁶⁰ [LAELKB] in Nuremberg holds the correspondence between Löhe and the church authorities, including the deanery in Windsbach, the consistory in Ansbach, and the upper consistory in Munich.

Due to its rural location, the archival material stored in Neuendettelsau did not suffer any noteworthy damage during the Second World War.⁶¹ In consequence, the abundant sources could only be evaluated selectively in this study. This selection was guided, on the one hand, by the wish to trace developments. In this respect, unpublished versions of rules were found of especial value as they often turned out to be drafts of the later published versions and thereby indicated historical developments. On the other hand, a focus was placed on evaluating

56 Löhe, *Der evangelische Geistliche* (GW3/2, 7–317) is a compilation of essays by Löhe which were published between 1847 and 1848 in the *Zeitschrift für Protestantismus und Kirche*, edited by the theology faculty in Erlangen.

57 Löhe, *Von der weiblichen Einfalt*. Stempel-de Fallois called this Löhe’s “fundamental writing on the essence of female diakonia” [*Programmschrift zu weiblichen Diakonie*], Stempel-de Fallois, *Diakonisches Wirken*, 292.

58 *Zentralarchiv der Diakonie Neuendettelsau*. The archive in its current form exists since 2002 when the holdings of several separate archives were amalgamated, amongst them that of the mother house [*Mutterhausarchiv*].

59 *Gesellschaft für Innere Mission im Sinne der lutherischen Kirche*.

60 *Landeskirchliches Archiv der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche in Bayern*.

61 Compare, for instance, the state of the archives of the deaconess house in Dresden as described in Renger-Berka, *Weibliche Diakonie im Königreich Sachsen*, 25–27.

the “ego documents” of community members. Werner Schulze provides a helpful definition which we largely wish to adopt:

As ego-documents we can define those texts which jointly adhere to the criterion that in them we find statements or particles of statements which illumine—if only in rudimentary or concealed form—the voluntary or enforced self-perception of a person in his or her family, community, country or social class, or reflect his or her relation to these systems and their transformations. They should justify individual human behaviour, disclose anxieties, reveal stores of knowledge, illumine notions of values, and reflect experiences and expectations of life.⁶²

In the field of church history, special attention should furthermore be given to statements that shed light on the faith of individuals. However, the problem that any historian encounters who works with archival material must be borne in mind: Even a synoptic reading of those sources which can be classified as “ego-documents” does not necessarily offer a representation of all voices within a community. Documents stored for archival purposes are per se a selection, and it must be assumed that those which did not conform to the overall “regime” simply did not find their way into the archives.⁶³ Critical reading and interpretation are therefore always necessary.⁶⁴

1.3 Cultural history

The methodological approach taken in this study lies broadly within a recent line of research which has proved particularly fruitful for church history, generally termed “new cultural history”⁶⁵ or “anthropological history.”⁶⁶ The focus in this

62 Schulze, *Ego-Dokumente, Annäherung an den Menschen in der Geschichte?* 28.

63 For this problem cf. also Mohrmann, *Zwischen den Zeilen und gegen den Strich*.

64 This insight somewhat relativizes the optimistic new turn to ego-documents as a possible “approach of the human in history”, at least where sources from (official) archives are concerned (cf. the subtitle of the publication edited by Winfried Schulze, *Ego-Dokumente. Annäherung an den Menschen in der Geschichte* (Italics JB)). It must be noted that Schulze, of course, was aware of the problem as is attested by the question mark which he added to his introduction to the publication. He cited Vovelle in agreement (24): a historian attempts “with craftiness and cunning” to “wrest from his archives if not the equivalent, at least the substitute for the authentic, immediate testimony” (Schulze cited from Vovelle, *Serielle Geschichte oder “case studies”*, 121).

65 Cf. Hunt, *New Cultural History*. The adjective “new” distinguishes this line of research from the “old” or “classic” cultural history [*Kulturgeschichte*] which had its roots in German scholarship at the end of the eighteenth century and is associated with names such as Jacob Burckhardt and Johan Huizinga. For a critique of their assumptions and how “new” is distinguished from “classic” cultural history cf. Burke, *Unity and Variety in Cultural History*.

66 Burke prefers the term “anthropological history” to “new cultural history” since “novelty is a rapidly diminishing asset” (Burke, *Unity and Variety in Cultural History*, 192). The German equivalent is “Historische Anthropologie” (cf. for example Dülmen, *Historische Anthropologie*). In Britain and the US, however, “historical anthropology” is also in use.

approach is on “popular culture,”⁶⁷ implying that there is always a multiplicity of cultures and a “contemporaneity of the non-contemporary,” with particular attention to “ordinary life” and to the uncovering of the “webs of significance”⁶⁸ spun within distinct social groups, usually composed of the non-elite.⁶⁹ This shift of perspective, with its focus on every-day life⁷⁰ and the experiences of marginalised groups, its predilection for research conducted as “micro-history”⁷¹ and its turn to the individual has spurred much creativity, not least in the field of gender studies.⁷² The emphasis on differentiating between normative conceptions, the social praxis, and the subjective perception and experience⁷³ is linked to an involvement also of the new cultural historians in the “rise of constructivism.”⁷⁴ Nevertheless, in recent years warnings have increasingly been issued about losing sight of the limitations of constructionism, especially if constraints with regard to cultural, social, and/or material factors are ignored.⁷⁵

67 Cf. for example Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*.

68 This is part of a famous quotation taken from Clifford Geertz who is often portrayed as one of the founding figures of cultural history (cf. Bonnell/Hunt, *Introduction*, 2–3). Geertz’ much quoted definition of culture is found in his essay *Thick description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture*, 5: “The concept of culture I espouse, and whose utility below attempt to demonstrate, is essentially a semiotic one. Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning.”

69 Nevertheless, Burke repeatedly argued for retaining an appreciative space for studying the history of high culture within the “new cultural history,” not least in the face of its conspicuous absence in the “cultural studies” which flourish in many educational institutions, cf. Burke, *What is Cultural History?* 101–102.

70 Burke suggests that the “history of the everyday” is a line of research which has gained popularity especially in Germany and the Netherlands, cf. Burke, *What is Cultural History?* 32.

71 The origins of this approach lie in Italy, where, in the 1970s, a small group of scholars, Carlo Ginzburg, Giovanni Levi, and Edoardo Grendi, began to explore the distinctness of local cultures in small communities. The most famous result is Carlo Ginzburg’s “Cheese and Worms” (1976), which encouraged later scholars to take a new angle in their research and to write “history from below.” Another good example of this approach is Hans Medick’s “Weben und Überleben in Laichingen. Lokalgeschichte als Allgemeine Geschichte” (1996). For an overview cf. Ginzburg, *Threads and Traces*, esp. Chapter 14: “Microhistory: Two or three things that I know about it”, 103–214. For a general reflection on the advantages and disadvantages of working with case-studies, cf. Vovelle, *Serielle Geschichte oder “case-studies”*.

72 For an overview cf. Dülmen, *Historische Anthropologie*. More specifically on gender-studies, cf. for example Bynum, *Why all the Fuss about the Body?* 243.

73 Cf. Dülmen, *Historische Anthropologie*, 92.

74 Cf. Burke, *What is Cultural History?* 75.

75 Cf. Burke, *What is Cultural History?* 98. Margaret C. Jacob, *Science Studies after Social Construction*, has highlighted the limitations of this approach with regard to historical studies of science. She warns that adopting micro-historical research methods and the concept that “context gives meaning” can open the door for the “Trojan horse of relativism” (100). In women’s and gender studies, the question of whether gender is (merely) a social construction has long been debated. For an overview of the discussion cf. Gause, *Kirchengeschichte und Genderforschung*, 86–95.

As early as 1988 Peter Burke suggested that

cultural historians might usefully define themselves not in terms of a particular area or field such as art, literature and music, but rather of a distinctive concern for values and symbols, wherever these are to be found, in the everyday life of ordinary people as well as in special performances for elites.⁷⁶

Such a definition leaves space for dialogue with church historians who seek to explore the beliefs, practices and faith of subjects of the past.⁷⁷ Taking as a point of departure the thesis that ecclesiastical history “methodologically belongs wholly to the historical sciences”,⁷⁸ the fruitful interdisciplinary stimulus has shown results, for example in the area of historic-theological gender research. In 2006, Gause offered a survey of the developments.⁷⁹ While inevitably more detailed when covering German research, she widens the focus to include Anglo-American debates, giving an overview of the different angles that have been adopted to analyse the construction of gender over the centuries and of the options for agency in both men and women in their specific contexts.⁸⁰ As a conclusion, Gause calls for a clarification of the scope and purpose of church history. She herself advocates an end to “an a priori definition of the essence of church history”⁸¹ and argues for taking a pragmatic approach by confining church history to a specific area of study, namely the church, comprising both men and women, both within the established and the free churches, both in the centres of power and at the margins, with a whole-hearted embracing of the methods and conceptions developed in the cul-

76 Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*, p. XXIV. The introduction was based on a paper delivered in 1988 (cf. footnote 1). Cf. also Calaresu/Vivo/Rubiés, *Introduction: Peter Burke and the History of Cultural History*.

77 However, it must be pointed out that although research in line with the “new cultural history” has now been conducted by a whole generation of cultural historians, there is still a lack of semantic precision about the terms used so that William Sewell’s dictum of the “cacophony of contemporary discourses about culture” from 1999 still holds true today (Sewell, *The Concept(s) of Culture*, 35). This does not necessarily facilitate dialogue with other disciplines. There is also the problem of methodology. The conflicting voices about methodology in cultural history becomes apparent when, for example, reading Oexles’s essay “Geschichte als historische Kulturwissenschaft” alongside an article by Mandler, *The Problem with Cultural History*. While the former advocates a rediscovery of the cultural theories of E. Durkheim, M. Mauss, G. Simmel, A. Warburg and M. Weber (21), the latter calls for a “re-infusion of discipline” (95) by resuming communication with current debates in the social sciences (116–117). At the same time, this can be interpreted as a sign of the continual vibrancy of this area of study.

78 Leppin, *Einleitung. Kurt Nowak und die Fragestellung “Historiographie und Theologie,”* 12.

79 Gause, *Kirchengeschichte und Genderforschung*.

80 To name only a few, cf. Sherry Ortner/Harriet Whitehead (ed.): *Sexual meanings. The cultural construction of Gender and Sexuality*, New York 1981; Carola Lipp: “Überlegungen zur Methodendiskussion. Kulturanthropologische, sozialwissenschaftliche und historische Ansätze zur Erforschung der Geschlechterbeziehung”, in: *Frauenalltag—Frauenforschung. Beiträge zur 2. Tagung der Kommission Frauenforschung in der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Volkskunde*, Frankfurt/Main 1988.

81 Gause, *Kirchengeschichte und Genderforschung*, 109.