

# Concordia Theological Monthly

Continuing

LEHRE UND WEHRE  
MAGAZIN FUER EV.-LUTH. HOMILETIK  
THEOLOGICAL QUARTERLY-THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY

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Vol. XVIII

November, 1947

No. 11

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Ein Prediger muss nicht allein *wet-*  
*den*, also dass er die Schafe unter-  
weise, wie sie rechte Christen sollen  
sein, sondern auch daneben den Woel-  
fen *wehren*, dass sie die Schafe nicht  
angreifen und mit falscher Lehre ver-  
fuehren und Irrtum einfuehren.

Luther

Es ist kein Ding, das die Leute  
mehr bei der Kirche behaelt denn  
die gute Predigt. — *Apologie, Art. 24*

If the trumpet give an uncertain  
sound, who shall prepare himself to  
the battle? — 1 Cor. 14:8

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Published by the

Ev. Luth. Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States  
CONCORDIA PUBLISHING HOUSE, St. Louis 18, Mo.

PRINTED IN U. S. A.



ARCHIVES

10. Theodosius Harnack, *Luthers Theologie*, Muenchen, 1927, Vol. II, Ch. 4.
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12. Symbolical Books, *op. cit.*, p. 691.
13. Augsburg Confession, Article IV.
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15. For a detailed discussion of Luther's doctrine on the means of grace see P. Tschackert, *Entstehung der lutherischen und reformierten Kirchenlehre*, Goettingen, 1910, pp. 162—179; J. T. Mueller, *Christian Dogmatics*, St. Louis, 1934, pp. 441 ff.



## Memorandum Concerning the Church Situation in Germany

By MARTIN KIUNKE

Since the collapse of 1945 the church situation in Germany is horribly confused, for the political chaos seriously affected the church conditions. But even before the political collapse a number of trends developed in the Protestant churches which brought havoc to the churches. This disorder was accentuated by the political collapse to such a degree that conditions never were so confused in German church history as at present.

Two years have passed since the political collapse; years of honest searching, tireless activity, and extreme suffering. What has been accomplished? The confusion has not been dissolved; on the contrary, the points of emphasis are beginning to stand in bold relief. The alembic is functioning. New concepts are in the process of formation. Naturally, these are intimately related to the old church forms, but at the same time they bear the stamp of the new day. One senses that the history of Christ's Church is progressing as though it were equipped with seven-league boots. Whither? To new heights? Hardly. For apparently the Church must go through new dark valleys which, though differing somewhat from the former depths, are no less dangerous. The Church is confronted with dangers such as the Church since the Reformation has not experienced.

No matter what will happen to the Church in Germany, the fate of the German Church cannot be restricted to Ger-

many or even to Europe. The globe has become too constricted for that. This is true particularly of the Lutheran Church as the Church of the pure Gospel. The decisions made in German Lutheranism today will sooner or later spread for good or for evil, like radioactivity, in all directions. No Lutheran Church in the world will remain untouched by what will happen in the Lutheran Church of Germany.

There are particularly three groups which are emerging from the present chaos: (1) The Evangelical Church in Germany (Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland — EKID), (2) The United Evangelical Lutheran Church in Germany (Vereinigte Evangel.-Luth. Kirche Deutschlands — VELKD), (3) The Evangelical Lutheran Free Church.

## I

### THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN GERMANY (EKID)

The EKID is in the main the continuation of the Confessing Church (Bekennende Kirche — BK). The BK came into existence as a resistance movement against the nationalistic socialistic State. The labors, the struggles, and the sacrifices of the BK brought forth their fruit after the collapse of Hitlerism. The loosely organized BK took on more and more the form of a Church. After the collapse of 1945 the underground movements of the BK asserted themselves and assumed the leadership in the reorganization of the German Evangelical Church. The leaders in the BK took a decided stand against the politically sponsored church organization of 1933, the *Deutsche Evangelische Kirche* (DEK). Bishop Dr. Wurm of the Wuerttemberg State Church (nominally Lutheran), a leading spokesman of the BK, gave expression to this thought at the first gathering of churchmen after the collapse, when he said at Treysa in 1945: "It is self-evident that we cannot think of the restoration of an ecclesiastical organism which showed itself so helpless in 1933 against the attacks of a clever and powerful enemy." But it soon became apparent that one cannot rid himself so quickly of the results of the past. As early as March, 1946, the official organ of the EKID published the brief but significant statement: "The Evangelical Church in Germany (EKID) is the continuation of the German Evangelical Church (DEK) of 1933." Though the picture of the EKID is still somewhat hazy, one can nevertheless discern,

among other things, a national-church concept. The fact that the German empire is destroyed makes this observation all the more significant. Some entertain the hope that a Pan-German Evangelical Church will serve as a substitute for the departed political unity. "In our nation, which is divided into occupational zones, yes, which is actually split into an eastern and a western section, only the Church can serve as a spiritual bond of the unity of all German-speaking members of our people." Yes, one even hears expressions such as these: The Prussia which has ceased to exist must continue in the Church of the old Prussian Union, though in a new form. Such ideas must lead to confusion and stymie all attempts to build the Church as a Church.

We ask: What does the EKiD actually wish to be? The "tentative order," adopted at Treysa in 1945, gives the answer: "In its attack upon the errors of our day and in its struggles against a State Church totalitarianism the EKiD has been led to an inner unity (*kirchlich begruendete innere Einheit*) which goes beyond that of the German Evangelical Church Federation<sup>1</sup> of 1922. This unity was first expressed at the confessional synods of Barmen, Dahlen, and Augsburg."

It is evident that the EKiD hopes to be more than a church federation for co-operation in externals, such as eleemosynary and other social activities. If, as the resolution of 1945 indicates, a real inner spiritual unity exists in the EKiD, then there must follow co-operation in *internis*, more specifically, co-operation in the most important phase of church work: a joint confession of the Gospel before the world. And that is exactly what was done in the various confessional synods since 1934, when Lutherans, Evangelicals, and Reformed churches in the "unity of the spirit" gave joint confessions.<sup>2</sup> To cap the

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<sup>1</sup> Der Deutsche Evangelische Kirchenbund of 1850 was re-organized in 1922 as the organ of national German Protestantism. The Deutsche Evangelische Kirche (DEK) came into being in 1933, when the various provincial churches yielded to the widespread clamor for unification of all forces of German life. The constitution proposed to create a United German Evangelical Church, capable of supporting the Nazis in their efforts "to undertake the political and moral purification of public life" by setting up a *Reichsbischof*, in accordance with the leadership principle, a Spiritual Council, and a National Synod. When it shortly became evident that the DEK was Nazi-controlled, an organized opposition came into being, known as the "*Bekennende Kirche*" (BK).

ED. NOTE

<sup>2</sup> It is, of course, possible that church bodies not in doctrinal fellowship may under certain conditions issue a joint statement con-

climax, the 1945 Treysa resolution states expressly that the unity of the EKID transcends the unity of the church federation of 1922—1933. Here we have it in unmistakable terms that the unity of the EKID transcends that of the former Evangelischer Kirchenbund.

It is difficult to square, on the one hand, the claim that the EKID is only a federation of confessionally independent churches and, on the other, the recent developments and especially the proclamation of Treysa. We regret particularly that the Lutheran provincial churches have taken an impossible position. On the one hand, they declare that in their opinion the EKID is only a federation and that they insist upon its remaining such. But, on the other hand, they fail to profess that the Treysa resolution concerning the inner unity is untenable and therefore not binding. But in the constitution of the recently organized United Evang. Luth. Church (VELKD) we read: "The VELKD cultivates (pflegt) the fellowship with the Evangelical Reformed and the Evangelical United churches of Germany which it has gained in its struggle for the confession and which has been confirmed in the proclamation of Treysa and therefore joins the others in the common tasks" (Article V, Section 8). Thereby the Lutheran provincial churches have officially sanctioned the Treysa resolution, with its claim that there is an inner fellowship of all three denominations. Nevertheless the by-laws of the VELKD's constitution define the EKID merely as a federation, not as a Church. It is apparent that the use of the term "federation" (*Kirchenbund*) is misleading.

It is of great significance for the future of the Lutheran churches that they accepted the Treysa declaration. This is quite evident as one studies the plans for the further development of the Evangelical Church in Germany. We read: "He . . . recognizes in this hour God's call for a union of the Evangelical churches in Germany as the Evangelical Church in Germany on the basis of a truly Biblical unity and with the goal of true church fellowship. . . . The tentative order

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cerning some anti-Christian movement without becoming guilty of unionism. We feel that the mistake of the Barmen Theses was not that the various German confessional groups united in a joint declaration against the neopaganism of Hitlerism, but that the leaders of the EKID believe that this joint confession is sufficient for a union of all churches, and that all doctrinal divergences were studiously ignored.

ED. NOTE

of the EKID, according to Treysa, is a fruit of the twelve-year church struggle of the BK, especially the fruit of the three confessional synods of Barmen, Dahlem, and Augsburg. . . . We know that it is difficult to solve the confessional problem of the EKID. But we believe today, as twelve years ago, that there is such a strong unifying power in obedience to the Lord of the Church that we shall be able, in spite of the differences of our respective Reformation Confessions, to achieve a unity of spirit and action. We believe that on the basis of Scripture and the Reformation Confessions the EKID will find a true confessional foundation. This will be effected when the Lutheran and the Reformed and the Evangelical Churches each seriously considers its confessional foundation. They will thus receive a new understanding of the truth of the Lord Jesus (as it is present) in His congregation according to His promise: 'The creation of a true congregation and its presentation in the confessing word!' . . . We believe that the joint Communion services of Lutherans, Reformed, and Evangelicals are not contrary to the Scriptural administration of the Lord's Supper. . . . The problem of paramount importance is not the confessional status. It is an either-or: for or against Christ. Because we deeply feel our obligation to the confession of the fathers, we are not interested to act as representatives of the Lutheran Church in Germany, but of the Evangelical Church in Germany." This, in brief, is the plan of a number of EKID leaders. The deep-seated unionism in Germany and the close tie-up with the ecumenical movement will abet this plan. We have our serious doubts whether the Lutheran provincial churches are capable of stemming the tide begun at Treysa. After the catastrophe of 1945 the Lutheran Church should have observed the rule: *principiis obsta*. This they failed to do, and now they find it impossible to free themselves from the chains which they themselves forged.

All the Lutheran *Landeskirchen* of Germany are involved in the EKID. For this reason it is imperative that we examine a number of essential characteristics of the EKID.

First of all, we want to call attention to a very gratifying phenomenon. The EKID was organized without any encouragement or support from political powers. The same is true of the VELKD. Whether the EKID will remain free from all political influences, remains to be seen. Nevertheless, it is a

noteworthy fact that for the first time in the long history of the Protestant churches of Germany a Church comprising all Germany was organized without political influence. The *Corpus Evangelicorum*, the federation of Lutherans and Reformed after the Thirty Years' War, was organized by church powers. The Prussian Union Church of 1830 would never have come into existence without the power of the State. We all vividly remember how powerfully the pressure of the nationalistic State stood behind the organization of the DEK in 1933. We are happy therefore that a complete change took place when in 1945 churchmen organized the EKID as a Church of the Christians and for the Christians. It would be unjust and unhistorical if one ignored this praiseworthy progress.

But history repeats itself. Wherever the Lord permits the Church to take a step forward at one place, there the Tempter breaks in at another place and leads her backward. On the credit side we must report the independent and free action of the Church in the formation of the EKID, but on the debit side we must register a saddening indifference toward the divine truth committed to the Church. True, the gross errors of the German Christians are unanimously and vigorously rejected. But there is an almost unbelievable indifference toward the numerous fine and yet very dangerous errors which come in Christian garb; for example, under the guise of "true Biblical unity." Not only the tentative constitution, but particularly the further plans of the EKID show that the EKID is unionistic. In fact, the adoption of a unionistic confession is advocated. In the light of the whole historical development the EKID is in reality a unionistic Church on a much larger scale than the former Prussian Union, a union which will comprise all of Germany, will enjoy legal status, and will become a permanent institution comprising practically all Protestant church bodies, including the Lutheran Churches.

The importance of the church condition in Germany will be understood in its full meaning when one considers this development as the result of a long historical process. We think of the large number of union attempts and union struggles since the days of Marburg, 1529. For two centuries the Lutheran churches manfully resisted the attempts of the Reformed churches to suppress Lutheranism in one way or another. We call attention to the heroic efforts to thwart the

efforts of the Elector Sigismund of Brandenburg to Calvinize his territory. During the darkest days of the Thirty Years' War the Lutheran Church was blessed with theologians and churchmen who, first at the colloquy of Leipzig, 1631, and later at the religious discussion at Thorn in 1645 (*Colloquium caritativum*), manfully opposed a proposed union of Lutherans and Reformed, because it compromised the truth of God's Word. In the nineteenth century, however, after Pietism and the Enlightenment and Rationalism had completed their disastrous work, the situation changed. In 1830 the Prussian Lutheran Church, the largest Lutheran body, suffered a defeat from which it has never recovered. For a time the other Lutheran *Landeskirchen* were careful lest they would be influenced by their unionistic neighbor. Gradually, however, the close proximity of unionism closed their eyes to the dangers which emanated from this unionistic body. In 1871 the German states formed a united kingdom, and the Lutheran *Landeskirchen* were expected to share with the Reformed churches the spirit of unity. For a short season the dangers of unionism became evident. But in the main the dangers have been ignored for the past seventy years. And now, in 1945, the final step is taken.

In the present reorganization of the churches the Lutheran provincial churches must take a position. The other (Reformed) confession bears the germ of unionism in its constitution and therefore advocates a union at any price. For the time being the struggle goes on, although the victory of the unionistic powers is as evident as the defeat of German Lutheranism. Why? Because the unionistic power which had broken into the camp of Lutheranism has robbed the Lutheran *Landeskirchen* of their one decisive and effective weapon: a confessional position which excludes and opposes every false church body. With this weapon, Lutheranism had formerly withstood all unionistic attempts. But when it forfeited this weapon, the Lutheran churches entered into a practical and unmistakable union with the Reformed and Evangelical Church (*Uniert*).<sup>3</sup> Such a Lutheranism is no longer dangerous, for its

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<sup>3</sup> This is in accord with the resolutions of the VELKD of Treysa, June, 1947. The second thesis reads: "There is agreement that the EKID is a federation of Lutheran, Reformed, and United churches. We trust that through a united listening to the Word of God in this federation a Church in the sense of the New Testament will be realized."

very genius which distinguishes it from the Reformed Church has disappeared, namely, the insistence on rejecting all false doctrines as the self-evident fruit of unconditional obedience to the Word of God. To such an emasculated Lutheran Church the right for further existence will, of course, be granted, for, after all, that which is essential for unionism has been gained.

Four centuries ago the loyal Lutheran theologians thwarted Calvin's ambitious plan to establish a pan-Protestant union. But Calvin's plan has become a reality in the twentieth century under the unionistic theologian Karl Barth, after the great unionist of the nineteenth century, Schleiermacher, had done the preparatory work. It is of secondary importance how the EKID will ultimately be organized: whether there will be one organization for the German Church or two—a western and an eastern section. The important point is that unionism has gained the victory in the non-Roman sections of Germany, including the Lutheran provincial churches.

One more point must be presented to complete the picture of the EKID. The new German union is moving in a wider circle than the old Prussian Union. It has connections with the spiritually related churches of the entire world. The ecumenical movement, started during the First World War, has gained in importance during the Second World War. The Lutheran State churches of Germany are no longer restricted to fellowship with the Reformed churches of the Western German provinces and of Switzerland, but stand in close relation to world Calvinism and Anglicanism. These strong ecclesiastical groups are quietly aiding in the building of the EKID. The "unionistic crusades" of the Englishman John Duraeus, 1630—1690, are a thing of the past. But the past is not entirely gone, for the current unionistic crusades of middle Europe have become syncretistic crusades of a world-wide character. We are no longer concerned with the false doctrinal position of Calvinism in the traditional form. We are now confronted with all the apparent fruits of a gradual deviation from the clear Word of God and a leaning on human tradition. These errors are now offered for sale in the religious market of the world, and it is the function of the EKID to see to it that buyers are available and that they will find delight in the proffered material. The EKID is qualified to do

this, for essentially its principle is the same as that of the founders of the Prussian Union. Briefly it is this: The honorable men of the Reformation period have worked faithfully and in their Confessions have offered posterity much valuable material. But a serious consideration of their attempts prompts one to go beyond these men. One must find the focal point where the divergent lines of the Confessions finally meet. This focus is the Holy Scriptures in the sense of "the true Biblical unity." In other words, the point is reached when the bothersome confessional question loses all importance. During the first third of the nineteenth century, people were wont to say: The historical Confessions are superseded by the unity of a universally evangelical Christendom. The propagandists of the Prussian Union speak of this as the completion of the work of the Reformation. Today this same thought is expressed a little differently: The Lutheran, Reformed, and Evangelical churches must take their confessional basis very seriously; they dare, however, not forget that the Lord Jesus will shortly give them a new understanding of the truth according to His promise. Yes, in reality this has already been fulfilled inasmuch as conducting joint Communion services among Lutherans, Reformed, and Evangelicals is no longer considered to be contrary to the New Testament. Furthermore, it is evident that the dawn of a new period has come in which we are no longer concerned with the confessional question, but only with the simple either — or: for or against Christ.

This is a dangerous position, and represents the thinking of some who say that the New Testament Church was concerned about everything else except purity of doctrine and separation from all error. Likewise today only those congregations have the saving truth in whose midst "the confessing word" has become the efficient factor. In the relation of one congregation to another the question of false and true doctrine is out of order, for this disturbs the unity of the spirit and disrupts the body of Christ. Not *what* these congregations say of Christ is decisive, but *that* they somehow in active faith confess Christ and thus meet all anti-Christian elements.

That such a position opens the floodgates to various and manifold religious views is evident. Will not Lutheran pastors and congregations find Karl Barth's doctrines on Baptism and the Lord's Supper much more plausible than those of the

Lutheran Catechism, since Karl Barth also confesses Christ? Will it not be consistent to deny the substitutionary death of Christ as long as one is satisfied to find in the death of Christ somehow the love of God? Is it not more plausible to deny eternal damnation, since Scriptures can also be understood to teach the restoration of all things? Can one object if sincere Christians claim that they no longer need to live in daily contrition because in their confession to Christ they have reached the last rung of Christian perfection? The danger of syncretism is gigantic. Either the borderline of Christendom has become so fluid that men will end in the fog of fanaticism or, after a hopeless floundering on the sea of contradictory human opinion, will finally seek refuge in the man-made and apparently secure harbor of Rome. The tendencies for such a development are present in the current Church, and the Lutheran provincial churches are in the midst of it.

The situation is very similar to the conditions existing in the second century of the Christian era. Probably the most serious struggle for its existence took place when the waves of Gnosticism with their ecstatic syncretistic piety threatened to destroy the Christian Church. It seems that the conditions that prevail in the Church during its end period resemble the conditions of its beginning. At any rate, it is evident that the Lutheran Church today finds itself in a most difficult situation and that it is threatened to be drawn into the syncretistic process through which it will lose the pure doctrine and the unadulterated Gospel and end in dissolution. This danger for the Lutheran Church in Germany is greater than the physical distress of the German people. And the dire situation of German Lutheranism may someday become the plight of the Lutheran Church throughout the world.

We ask: Do the members of the German Lutheran provincial churches see the great danger? We believe that the number of those who see it is not small. On the other hand, we believe that the majority is of the opinion that the Lutheran churches of Germany will be able to meet the danger effectively and conquer it. Is this hope warranted? The answer to this question can be given only when we examine what the VELKD in reality is and what it is not.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> This examination will be offered in the second installment of this article.