

What Does It Mean Today
To Be The Church?

REGIN PRENTER

The Conflict To Renew Lutheranism

HANS-LUTZ POETSCH

The Role Of Conservatives
In An Age of Revolution

RALPH MOELLERING

Are We Getting Through
With The Gospel In Our Liturgy?

REINHART TRAUTMANN

Worship In The USA

REINHARD MUMM

Luther's Ecclesiological Significance
For The Twentieth Century
Ecumenical Movement

HARRY J. MCSORLEY C.S.P.

Ignorance About Preaching

WILLIAM F. MEYER

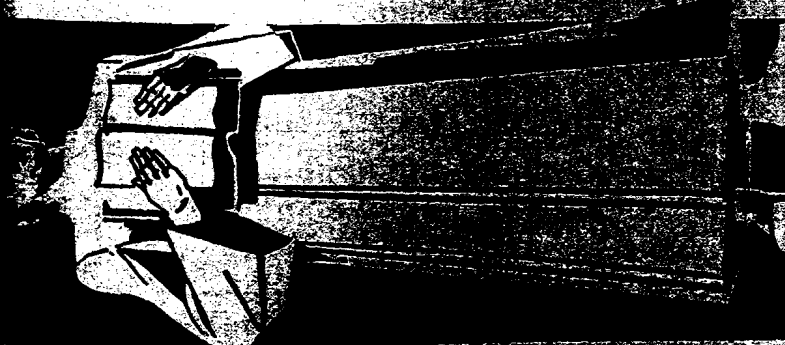
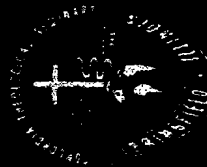
Theological Refractions
Book Reviews

the springfielder

XXXIV
VOL. XXXIV

NO. 2

SEPTEMBER, 1970



The Conflict To Renew Lutheranism

HANS-LUTZ POETSCH, *Visiting Professor*
Concordia Theological Seminary, Springfield
Regular Speaker, German Lutheran Hour

THERE ARE STILL confessionally oriented Lutheran groups inside the state connected German churches (*Volkskirche*).¹ Their number is not significantly large. In 1967 about 350 ministers organized different *Kirchliche Sammlungen um Bibel und Bekenntnis* (Churchly Gatherings for Bible and Confession). They can be found in Brunswick and Hannover, in Bavaria and Schleswig-Holstein, in Hamburg and even in Bremen. One of the most active groups is located in Westphalia, an area of a Protestant Union Church. Some men are also trying hard to found another group in Wuerttemberg. They all are convinced that church work can only be established and carried out on the basis of the Lutheran Confessions.

Do these men have a right to insist on a strong confessional status? We look at their congregations. Most of them are passive and suffer the burden of the structures typical of our *Volkskirche*. The attendance at Sunday services is about one or two per cent, Christianity is hardly more than a family ritual with almost no confessional consciousness.² There are some exceptions. Active parishes can be found in certain villages. The city of Bremen,³ strongly Calvinist in its learning boasts an active Lutheran congregation. It subscribes to the Augsburg Confession and Luther's Catechisms and confesses the Holy Scriptures as the infallible Word of God. Its Pastor Dr. George Huntemann¹ turned from extreme Protestant Liberalism to Lutheran Confessionalism under the influence of his friend, the well-known German theologian Helmut Echter nach of Hamburg, now a praesidium member of the 'Churchly Gatherings.' The average parishes, however, seem to be spiritually dead. Therefore it is astonishing, that there is still such a vital interest in confessional Lutheranism outside the German Lutheran Free Churches. What is the reason for this confessional Lutheran awakening in the state related churches?

I. SOME HISTORICAL DATA

The centers of the confessional movement in the German state related churches are located in the village Sittensen, located between Bremen and Hamburg, the town Brunswick, near the Iron Curtain, and the northern part of Bavaria. When the *Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland*, embracing all the state related churches including Lutheran, Reformed and Union was founded in 1948, two Bavarian clergymen left the established church. Professor Hermann Sasse emigrated to Australia and Pastor Friedrich Wilhelm Hopf⁵ entered one of the three Lutheran Free Churches in Germany. Later Dr.

Hopf became the director of the Bleckmar Lutheran Mission Institution.⁶ In Brunswick, Pastor Max Witte, active in evangelism work, founded the congregation *St. Ulrici-Bruedern*. He became known widely for his profound Lutheran consciousness and became the leading light in a group of pastors, which later attained fame as *Lutherischer Bruderkreis Braunschweig*. Pastor Peter Hartig of Sittensen established an academy for teachers along with many retreats and seminars in order to show how important the Confessions of the Lutheran Reformation could be in our day. The *Gesellschaft für Innere und Aussere Mission im Sinne der Lutherischen Kirche* in Neuendettelsau, Bavaria gave aid to confessional Lutheran groups in that area. In 1953 all these different groups of confessionally conscious Lutherans united under the chairmanship of Dr. Wolfram Von Krause of Neuendettelsau, who later served in South Africa.

The next stage of development lacked some of the initial enthusiasm with the result that the growth of the *Bruderkreise* stagnated. They existed merely as theological conferences coming together to study the Lutheran Confessions. On occasion they sent protests to their bishops, when the officials of the *Volkskirche* passed laws bringing Lutheran, Reformed and Union Churches closer together. Many of these confessionally centered groups died out, and only the group headed by Max Witte and his successors remained active in any way.

In the decade of the 60's there was a change in the theological climate. Liberal theology reached its zenith at the theological faculties. Rudolf Bultmann was king! The influence of Karl Barth was broken. "Existential interpretation" became axiomatic for Protestant theology. During the height of Bultmann's supremacy, the Sittensen congregation invited the Lutheran Professor Walther Künneth⁷ of Erlangen and Professor Ernst Fuchs of Marburg, a disciple of Bultmann, publicly to debate the topic: *Is Christ really resurrected from the dead?* More than 2,000 laymen, along with pastors, professors, and even bishops came for the debate. It was evident, that the overwhelming majority there did not favor Fuchs' theological position, in spite of the valiant attempt of Bishop Hans Lilje to defend him.

The growing liberalism in theology brought about another reaction some years later and a further positive step in the direction of confessionalism. More than 20,000 people met at the "Westphalian Halle" in Dortmund and confessed their conviction in the biblical based Gospel against the modern theology taught at the German universities. Walther Künneth delivered the keynote address. Most of those in attendance came from groups with strong pietistic learnings. Founded there was *Bekennnisbewegung: Kein anderes Evangelium* (Confessing Movement: No other Gospel) with Rudolf Bäumer and Paul Deitenbeck chosen as chairmen of the organization.

Because of its rallies (*Groszkundgebun*) and of its refusal to participate in the regular synodical meeting of the Church of Hannover (*Kirchentag*), they received a lot of publicity in Germany.

Still the growth of a confessionally conscious Lutheranism in Germany was rather modest. The Brunswick group and the German Lutheran Hour contacted similarly minded Scandinavian Lutheran movements under the leadership of the Bishop of Gotenburg, Sweden, Bo Giertz, the Professors Leiv and Sverre Aalen of the Free Faculty at Oslo, Norway, and the Professor Regin Prenter at Aarhus, Denmark. The Scandinavian groups are defending the Lutheran Confessions against liberalism and modernism in their countries. In addition, the Swedish *Kyrklig Samling krings Bibeln och Bekännelsen* is attempting to abolish the absolute rule that the Swedish Parliament exercises over the Lutheran State Church in that country. The Swedish confessional group has set a pattern for the German Churchly Gatherings. There is one exception. The Swedish group combines both confessional Lutherans and Pietists in one group. This is the major cause for inner tensions in the group. The Germans, on the other hand, have two groups with separate organizations. Wherever possible, the confessional and pietistic group in Germany cooperate with each other.

In 1967, the Brunswick group in Germany published 18 theses on major theological questions under the leadership of Pastor Dr. Helmut Lieberg, now pastor for *St. Ulrici-Bruedern*. After several months lapsed, the Lutheran Free Churches of Germany published an official Pastoral Letter warning against liberal trends in contemporary theology. Both documents received positive and negative reactions from all over. This provided the stimulus for establishing the first 'Churchly Gatherings' in Brunswick and Hanover. One third of all the pastors in the Brunswick *Volkskirche* subscribed to the 18 theses. In 1967 a German-Scandinavian Theological Conference for Sittensen was planned and then formally organized in February, 1968. Leading theologians delivered papers. Hundreds of clergymen from Germany and Scandinavia discussed the contemporary theological situation. Representatives from the pietistic oriented group, "The Confessing Movement: No Other Gospel," and from the confessionally oriented pastors in Berlin were also present. The Sittensen convention passed a resolution, entitled *Word to the Congregations*, warning church members of liberalism. It also boldly confessed the central dogmas of the Christian faith. Nationally circulated newspapers and magazines controlled by Axel Springer carried the story with an appeal. Later Springer himself left the *Volkskirche* to become a member of a Lutheran Free Church.⁸ Several 'Churchly Gatherings' were founded in other areas of German *Volkskirche*. A praesidium was elected with Pastor Peter Hartig of Sittensen as chairman. The writer of this article was honored in being chosen as the representative for the German Lutheran Free Churches in the

praesidium. The 'Churchly Gatherings' are thus the first confessional organizations within the *Volkskirche* officially recognized by the German Lutheran Free Churches, the sister churches of the Missouri Synod.

II. FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS

The way has not been easy for the 'Churchly Gatherings.' Many difficulties have hindered the group from having a clear concept of itself. There was the old temptation to form a number of separate theological conferences. Other members wanted the 'Gatherings' to be the basis for a well planned evangelism effort in Germany. Several plans were drafted to edit a world-wide Lutheran periodical. It was necessary to define what the attitude of the different 'Gatherings' would be to other organizations, like the *Evangelische Sammlung Berlin* or the pietistic 'Confessing Movement: No Other Gospel.' One group favored reorganization on the local parish level. Others wanted to lend their weight in influencing the *Landeskirchenleitungen*, the church officials.

The German theological climate is quite unstable. For every extreme theological liberal position there is a reaction. Those who react to liberal theology frequently support the pietistic Confessing Movement or lean in its direction. But after a while there can be a change of opinion and the 'Confessing Movement' is no longer considered with favor. The *Arbeitsgemeinschaft fuer Kirchliche Erneuerung* in Bavaria, (Conference for the Church's Renewal) wants no association with the 'Churchly Gatherings,' in spite of its own Lutheran character. It does not encourage friendly relations with the Lutheran Free Churches. Its main interest is liturgical renewal. The Bavarian Church Gathering is a mixture of confessional and pietistic Lutherans, some wanting to join the 'Confessing Movement' with others favoring a union with the 'Churchly Gatherings' in North Germany. Significantly within the next years, all the individual 'Gatherings' of a confessional Lutheran character will join the *Bundesverband*. This would be an impressive array. The 'Churchly Gatherings' of Brunswick, Hannover, Westphalia, Schleswig-Holstein, Hamburg and Wuerttemberg and the three Lutheran Free Churches, are all now included in one general type of organization.

Significant progress was made with the establishment of a periodical *Das Informationsblatt Kirchliche Sammlung* published by Stelten Publishing House (Bremen, Postfach 419509). Through it the voice of the confessional Lutheranism can be heard in the *Volkskirche* and more can be reached. The Bleckmar Mission House opened its doors for retreats and theological conferences. The Oberursel Theological Seminary of the Lutheran Free Churches gave an opportunity to the 'Churchly Gatherings' to establish their own chair of theology. Thus the future generation of pastors can be trained by the joint faculty from the *Volkskirche* and free churches. This position was first offered to Professor Dr. Joachim Heubach of

University of Kiel. He did not accept the call, but accepted the position as the *Landessuperintendentur*⁹ of Lauenburg in Schleswig-Holstein. The praesidium of the 'Churchly Gatherings' offered to take part in the editorship of the *Lutherischer Rundblick*, which formerly was only the theological organ of the Oberursel Faculty. Now it also serves as the theological journal of the 'Churchly Gatherings.' In addition a series of brochures is planned. The first, published in March by Pastor Wolfgang Büscher, is directed against the ordination of women as parish pastors. Many members already use the radio program of the German Lutheran Hour for their evangelistic activities and consider the theological organ *Das Hörer-Echo der Lutherischen Stunde* to be their periodical for practical theology. It has taken a new name, *Verkündigung*.¹⁰ The last problem will be how the 'Churchly Gatherings' will accomplish their aim of becoming active in congregational and evangelization work. The first attempt to train evangelists will begin in Bremen later this year.

III. RELATIONS WITH THE PIETISTIC CONFESSING MOVEMENT: NO OTHER GOSPEL

Now we touch on one of the most perplexing problems connected with this subject. The basic question is the result of this fight against liberal theologies as created by the Bultmann School or socialistic oriented theology, as represented by Moltmann and some members of the Bochum theological faculty. Will different groups with different confessions come together to one organization? Can unionism be avoided without at the same time losing the advantages connected with a single movement? Are unionism and separatism the only alternatives?

Some leading personalities in the confessional 'Churchly Gatherings' are also members of the pietistic 'Confessing Movement,' the older of the two groups founded two years earlier. Last but not least of our problems, some representatives of the Swedish and Norwegian "Samplings" urged our German groups to unite with the pietistic movement. The chairman of the pietistic 'Confessing Movement,' Pastor Rudolf Baeumer, considered our 'Gatherings' like confessional "orders" inside his organization. Although the representatives of these pietistic groups attended as visitors the German-Scandinavian Theological Conference in 1968, they were allowed to play no part in formulating the *Word to the Congregations*. Finally, two factors helped clarify the situation: the different attitudes toward the sacrament of baptism within the Westphalian *Volkskirche* and the consequences of the Stuttgart *Kirchentag* in 1969.

For ten years, there have been violent discussions on the sacrament of holy baptism, especially infant baptism. In his last volume of *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, Karl Barth, probably under the influence of the Berlin theologian Hanfried Mueller, rejected infant baptism. This only served to intensify the already overheated atmosphere. The

synodical convention of the Westphalian *Volkskirche* had intended to change its constitution making infant baptism optional. The pietistic 'Confessing Movement' and the confessional 'Churchly Gatherings' inside Westphalian *Volkskirche* published both theses on this subject. Both groups had differing stances on certain points. While the 'Church Gatherings' strongly emphasized infant baptism according to the Lutheran Confessions, the theses of the 'Confessing Movement' evidently demonstrated a rather pietistic influence. As a consequence the praesidium of the 'Churchly Gatherings' decided that it would be better if both groups would express their confessional and theological convictions separately in order not to offend their own consciences. Both groups will still cooperate with each other as much as feasible, but for confessional reasons there will be no merger.

The 'Confessing Movement' was given a warm invitation to participate in the *Deutscher Evangelischer Kirchentag*¹¹ by its praesidium. Many members of the 'Confessing Movement' had little heart in accepting this invitation. It was evident that this massive church convention would be used to demonstrate unity in German Protestantism which, as a matter of fact, has been dead for scores of years. There are still the traditional confessional differences between Lutheran, Reformed, and Union Churches which are still valid. But now there is the gulf between the conservative and liberal theologians, a gulf which is growing deeper and deeper all the time. But despite every admonition, Walther Künneth strongly favored participation. He considered it as a challenge for conservative theology to defend traditional Christian dogmas against men like Manfred Mezger, Gunter Klein, Willi Marxsen and Ernst Kaesemann. Rudolf Baumer finally wanted to put the matter to a vote to determine the will of the 'Churchly Gatherings.' After considerable debate participation was voted for, with certain restrictions placed on the praesidium of the *Kirchentag*. Some groups and the Lutheran Free Churches held out, refusing any kind of participation in the *Kirchentag* with the exception of Walther Künneth, who can be considered the dominant theologian for the pietistic 'Confessing Movement,' all the speakers for a more conservative Biblical position were members of the confessional 'Churchly Gatherings,' especially Professor Dr. Heubach and Pastor Dr. Huntemann. About 15,000 visitors every day attended the Stuttgart *Kirchentag* and for the last rally there were about 22,000 in attendance. (According to German standards, this is not very many. The German *Volkskirche* claims 28 million members. Some months later the German Jehovah's Witnesses had more than 200,000 at their congress in Nuremberg!) The representatives of the confessional 'Churchly Gatherings' and the pietistic 'Confessing Movement' participated in the theological section of the convention. They fought against theological Liberalism. It was entitled *Streit um Jesus*, The Conflict About Jesus. Eight thousand visitors, i.e., 50 per cent of the whole convention, came to this

section each day. The other sections with their social-ethical, political and psychological topics created much less interest, but they had plenty of demonstrations provided by the APO students, *Auszerparlamentarische Opposition*.¹² The results showed in the end that it would have been better if the confessionally oriented groups would have avoided all participation in the Stuttgart convention. The liberal theologians deceived the audience with their higher critical interpretations of certain Bible passages. Many pietists were impressed and did not understand the real core meaning of the new systems of theology.¹³ The conservative groups had a negative attitude and a traditional approach, which was not open to contemporary problems. The Wuerttemberg pietists were angry at the confessionalists from northern Germany with severe tensions as the result. Both pietistic and confessional groups felt it was better to remain separate and go their own ways, but still without ignoring each other. Now preparations for a theological periodical for the groups connected with the pietistic 'Confessing Movement' are in the works. Efforts are also being made to establish their own theological faculty in North Hannover, at Krelingen near Walsrode.

IV. WHAT ABOUT THE FUTURE?

There can be no doubt, that the state-church structure of the *Volkskirche* will come to an end quite soon. The German population is less Christian than ever before. The number of people, who leave the established churches increases every year. Opposition against the church tax quickly mounts. But what will come in the wake of the end of the *Volkskirche*? The only alternative is for active Christians, who will be a minority, to gather into small islands of faith among an indifferent or even materialistically orientated nation. Groups like the confessional 'Churchly Gatherings' or the pietistic 'Confessing Movement' will be the cells of future Protestant Christianity in our country.¹⁴

These forecasts must influence the basic concepts of both the pietistic and confessing groups. This means, that they have to consider not only the theological side of the struggle, which of course should not be overestimated as it is only one side of the coin. The groups have to avoid the danger of becoming only opposition movements, simply opposed to the theological and ecclesiastical decisions of their respective churches. They have also to make plans for the future structure of the Christian Church in the Germany of tomorrow. There have been beginnings in this direction in the 'Churchly Gatherings.' Some want to have ecclesiastical organization still without leaving their churches now. They want to build their congregations and prepare them for "V-E Day," when the present structure will give way. They are just at the beginning! They have just started and have not attained an inner unity with a strong program. But there is every reasonable hope, that they will reach it. Lutheran

Churches in other countries can help if they watch the development of these confessional groups very closely. Of course, they should support them with their prayers!

FOOTNOTES

The following notes have been added to Professor Poetsch's article by the editorial staff to provide clarification for the American reader who might be unfamiliar with German church life. The word "liberal" has been substituted for wherever Professor Poetsch had used the word 'neo-rationalist.' In German theology the term 'liberal' is used in connection with the theology associated with a theologian like Adolf von Harnack, who worked around the turn of the century. The term has a parallel meaning in American theological parlance in connection with Rauschenbusch and Fosdick. As a rule the word 'neo-rationalist' is not used in English. Poetsch uses the term to apply to the demythologizing movement that sprang up around Rudolf Bultmann and some of its even more destructive descendants. There is no exact English equivalent, however 'liberal', in spite of its inexactness, covers the situation well and is understood in a sense similar to how the German uses 'neo-rationalism.'

1. *Volkskirche* is a word and concept which defies translation and explanation in the English language. The *Volkskirche* can be explained as the ecclesiastical institution in Europe which is recognized by the state and and in some cases directly supported. In most European countries, citizenship usually implies membership in the *Volkskirche*. The European *Volkskirche* should not in any way be confused by what we call in our country "congregations."
2. An estimated 10% of the membership of the *Volkskirche* can in any way be considered practicing Christians, even by the most generous measurements. 1 or 2% are in attendance in churches. This statistic in most city congregations is a gross exaggeration.
3. The Evangelical Church of Bremen is somewhat of an anomaly in Germany. There is no one confession for the entire church, but congregations can be Lutheran, Union, or Reformed. The confessional persuasion of most churches are determined by church law.
4. Pastor Huntemann holds two doctor's degrees, one in theology and another in philosophy, both from the University of Basel, an institution made famous through its association with the late Karl Barth. Dr. Huntemann is the author of *Angriff auf die Moderne, Provozierte Theologie in technischer Welt, . . . und was die Bibel dazu sagt*, and a recently published theological biography of his life, *In der Spannung leben*. It has been learned that he will accept the position of professor at a free faculty to be established in Basel. Through special arrangements he will continue to serve his Bremen congregation.
5. Both Professor Sasse and Pastor Hopf were awarded the honorary degrees of doctor of divinity by the faculty of Concordia Theological Seminary, Springfield.
6. The Bleckmar Mission does mission work in South Africa among the Bantus. The German Lutheran Free Churches have about 45,000 members in West Germany, but there are over 20,000 in their South African mission.
7. Künne, a world famous name in theological circles, is associated with the pietistic oriented Confessing Movement.
8. Axel Springer is a member of St. Mary's Chapel in Berlin, where Pastor Dr. Jobst Schoene, 1960 St. Louis graduate, is pastor. Headquarters for the Springer newspaper magazine syndicate is located directly on the wall dividing the City of Berlin. The building can be literally seen in every corner of the Communist sector.

9. The office of *Landessuperintendentur* has no exact counterpart in the American Lutheran synods. The position is half-way between a synodical president and district president.
10. Pastor Poetsch serves on the editorial staff of both the *Informationsblatt* and *Verkündigung*.
11. The German *Kirchentag*, a type of semi-official church convention, originated in the 19th century to foster union between the Lutheran and the Reformed churches. Through its efforts the Evangelical Church in Germany was established in this century embracing Lutheran, Reformed and Union churches. At the convention in Cologne, the Neo-Rationalists took control of the group. Neo-Rationalists can be called 'liberal' in English. Further meetings in Hannover and the most recent one in 1969 at Stuttgart have started the disintegration of the German *Volkskirche*. The more moderate evangelical or slightly biblically oriented pastors and laymen no longer participate in its sessions. Plans for the 1971 convention scheduled for Cologne call for some type of meeting between Catholics and Protestants.
12. This phrase can be translated as the "Opposition Outside of Parliament." German law requires that a political party have at least 5% of the vote for any type of representation in the parliament. The APO consists of groups from the usual parliamentary procedures. To say that they are oriented to the "left" might be too timid an explanation. If they have not captured the German Parliament, they have captured the German church conventions. Their remarks about Jesus are blasphemous to the pious and orthodox, downright discourteous even to the ordinary man. They invented a tune in which it was stated that to discuss Christ was like discussing the emperor's beard. Cf. "What Really Happens At German Church Conventions," *The Springfielder*, XXXIII, 4, 57f.
13. Specific reference is made here to an episode at the Stuttgart *Kirchentagung* between Rudolf Baeumer, the leader of the pietistic Confessing Movement, and Guenther Klein of the university of Muenster. Baeumer asked Klein what he thought about what the Bible said about the last things, such as the resurrection of the dead, etc. Klein responded when a person trusts in Christ as Lord then there is no need to ask any ridiculous questions (*dumme Fragen*) about the after life. Previously, Klein had said that virgin birth was inconsequential since Jesus did not ask His disciples to believe it. All Jesus said was "Follow me." Klein is an existential theologian and his confession in Jesus should in no way be confused with what traditional Christianity has always meant by it. The pietistic element at the convention thought, however, that Klein was reiterating the biblical confession.
14. Cells have been predicted as forms for American Christianity in the future. Pastor Poetsch is speaking about small groups of confessing Christian. This is not the intent of American theologians who use the same term.