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Original publication:

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Germany since 1870

In: Timothy J. Wengert (ed.), *Dictionary of Luther and the Lutheran Traditions*

Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, Grand Rapids 2017

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(1990–). The second form is the *Freikirchen* (free churches), whose members are defined by commitment only, not geography.

Within this setting Lutheranism took form in three kinds of ecclesial institutions: in confessional Lutheran *Landeskirchen*, territorial churches with an exclusively Lutheran membership; united *Landeskirchen*, embracing Lutheran and Reformed members in one body without dissolving the confessional distinctness of their parishes and pastors; and Lutheran *Freikirchen*. In 1870 there were twenty-eight *Landeskirchen*, the largest Lutheran ones in Saxony, Hannover, Württemberg, and Bavaria; the largest among the united *Landeskirchen* and indeed among all Protestant churches in Germany was the church of Prussia, which comprised nearly half of Germany's Protestants. Among the *Freikirchen*, all very small, the most important was the Old Lutheran Church in Prussia, founded in 1830 in protest against the Prussian Union. A few others emerged in other regions. Most of these free churches merged after World War II into the *Selbständige Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche* (Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church).

As long as Germany was made up of monarchies, dukedoms, and similar nobility-ruled territories, their rulers were the temporal heads of the respective *Landeskirchen* (*Landesherrliches Kirchenregiment*). This did not mean that the *Landeskirchen* were state churches, as they had been in the late Holy Roman Empire. After the Napoleonic era most states of the German Federation were at least biconfessional, with both Protestant and Roman Catholic inhabitants, and the states were confessionally neutral, with the citizens enjoying legal parity. This did not preclude a special relationship between the Protestant churches (Lutheran as well as Reformed and United) and the rulers as persons, who continued to be their *summepiscopi* (highest bishops). The princes who held such positions did not need to belong to the church over which they presided; for example, the *summus episcopus* of the Lutheran Church of Bavaria was the Roman Catholic

Germany since 1870

Since the first half of the nineteenth century, Protestantism exists in Germany in two organizational forms. The first is the *Landeskirchen* (territorial churches), whose members constitute all Protestant citizens of a given territorial unit. These units were originally coincident with the self-governing territories within the *Deutscher Bund* (German Federation), created in 1815 (after Napoléon's defeat) as successor institution to the Holy Roman Empire, but they largely continued to define the boundaries of the churches even beyond the political structure of 1815 throughout the Second Empire (1871–1918), the Weimar Republic (1919–33), the Third Reich (1933–45), the phase of political separation (East/West), and into the time of the reunited Federal Republic

king of that state. Yet the actual government of the Protestant churches was in the hands of consistories, the holders of episcopal offices (superintendents, general superintendents), and of the synods that arose during the nineteenth century in nearly all churches.

Thus, with the collapse of the Prussian empire in 1918, princely oversight of church governments ended, and separation of church and state was enacted. The *Landeskirchen* already possessed stable governing bodies, which continued their work. They only had to substitute ordained pastors for the princely *summe-piscopi*, creating an ecclesial episcopacy for governance. The plurality of many distinct Lutheran, Reformed, and United churches, some large, some small, remained the same. Already in the nineteenth century there had been advocates of a less fragmentary structure, ideally of one Protestant church for the whole of Germany (*Reichskirche*). Such ideas reemerged after World War I. They failed, but after Adolf Hitler had come to power and *Führertum* (authoritarian one-man leadership) became the ideal for all fields of life, Protestants who sided with the new regime, the Deutsche Christen (German Christians), renewed those older deliberations. Because they had gained majorities in the synods of all *Landeskirchen* except the Lutheran Church of Bavaria, they created a *Reichskirche* with one *Reichbischof*, causing the *Landeskirchen* to lose their independence (1933). Sharp protests, especially from several Lutheran churches that refused to be integrated in a *Reichskirche* (not least because that necessarily had to be a United Church), resulted in the official restitution of their independence (1934).

In the renewal of the churches after World War II, the ensemble of independent *Landeskirchen* was taken for granted. Any attempt toward creating a strong common structure met with the suspicion of the Lutheran churches that such a structure would be a vehicle for a United Church. They could voice their opposition all the more forcefully since union-minded Lutheranism within the

huge United Church of Prussia had suffered a severe blow: Silesia, East Prussia, and Pomerania, whose Protestants had been practically all Lutheran, were ceded to Poland (a small part also to Russia), and their inhabitants had either fled or were driven out. Thus the Prussian church shrank enormously, and in the remaining parts the Lutheran element was greatly weakened; the western parts (Rhineland, Westphalia), where the Reformed tradition was strong, gained strength. Soon after the war the Prussian church was dissolved into several regional United *Landeskirchen*. However, although the Lutheran churches successfully resisted becoming part of one larger church, they agreed to set up a common institution to deal with common concerns, the Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland (EKD, Protestant Church in Germany), which comprises all Lutheran, Reformed, and United *Landeskirchen* (1945). Until the Leuenberg Agreement (1973) they were not in communion with each other. This was different from the start (1948) in the Vereinigte Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche Deutschlands (VELKD) (United Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Germany), which unites most of the Lutheran *Landeskirchen*, and in the common body of the United churches (originally Evangelische Kirche der Union, EKU, now Union evangelischer Kirchen, UEK). During the decades of separation for the Federal Republic of Germany (West) and the German Democratic Republic (East), the eastern member churches of the EKD were forced to organize a body on their own, but they reversed this step after reunification. In the last years there has been a growing tendency to strengthen the EKD and abandon special bonds and prerogatives of the VELKD. Bishops were elected across confessional (Lutheran, Reformed, United) borders. In some cases Lutheran and United *Landeskirchen* merged. Occasional Lutheran confessional reservations have met with little response, but nowadays they seem to gain weight.

Most Protestant theologians in Germany were and are Lutheran. There was and is,

however, a spectrum of theological viewpoints among them. In 1870, on the one hand, confessional Lutherans, not only but predominantly in the Lutheran *Landeskirchen*, defined Lutheranism in confessional terms, as adherence to the Lutheran confessions (as defined by the theological faculties of Leipzig and, in a modernizing fashion, Erlangen). For other Lutheran theologians, what was decisive in the Wittenberg reformer, indeed in the Reformation as a whole, had been a new religious and cultural impulse. For the “conservative” or “positive” theologians this impulse meant a piety and ethics faithful to the New Testament understood in a more or less literalistic way, a view that brought them into fierce conflicts with the rising historical-critical exegesis. For the “liberal” theologians who admitted or even affirmed the distance between the New Testament and both the Reformation on the one hand and their own time on the other, the impulse initiated by Luther was the rediscovery of a balance between justification as the religious dimension of Christian existence and the ethical dimension realized in working faithfully toward the kingdom of God understood as communion-oriented social order (Albrecht Ritschl) or the rediscovery of the freedom of conscience before God and other human beings, with everything thereof implied culturally, socially, and so forth (Adolf von Harnack). Thus Lutheranism could claim to be at the forefront of modernity without denying the obvious premodern traits of Luther and the Reformation. The revolutionary religious impulse given by Luther was set against its ecclesial, social, cultural, and political implications realized only later, in Pietism and the Enlightenment—a differentiation that led to the distinction between old Protestantism and new Protestantism (Ernst Troeltsch). A movement of enormous momentum that came out of liberal Lutheranism, but led into its rejection, was the so-called Luther Renaissance during and after World War I (Karl Holl); on the basis of hitherto unknown sources of Luther’s early years, the “young Luther”

appeared as a figure who had little to do with the Luther images of later times, particularly those of the late nineteenth century, but was before all else the exponent of redemption from tribulation through justification by faith alone. This Luther, put forward against the liberal *zeitgeist*, met the existential needs of the generation after World War I and, as its adherents claimed, the needs of all humankind before God. With its program the Luther Renaissance exercised widespread influence across theological camps and generations (e.g., all “dialectical theologians,” Emanuel Hirsch, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Gerhard Ebeling).

Alongside these theological movements, the decades after 1870 saw the rise of the “National Luther.” The Wittenberg reformer appeared as the embodiment of the German nation, politically realized in the Second Empire under the (Reformed) Hohenzollern dynasty (1871). This vision was promoted by (though it did not dominate) the Luther jubilee of 1883. In World War I and the jubilee of 1917, the nationalistic use of Luther, despite serious warnings from different theological quarters (Holl, Hirsch, Troeltsch, Martin Rade), became all embracing. When, after Germany’s defeat, racist views that had appeared already in the late nineteenth century in certain nationalistic circles intensified and became prominent in the ideology of the National Socialists, Luther was used for this ideology too; abridged folk versions of his anti-Jewish writings, which for centuries had been hardly read, were reprinted and promulgated by National Socialist propagandists and their Lutheran allies, the *Deutsche Christen*. On the other hand, the Confessing Church claimed to be the true heir of Luther and the Reformation (Karl Barth, Bonhoeffer). The creedal document of the *Kirchenkampf*, the Barmen Declaration (1934), was a reinstatement of the confessions of the Reformation.

After World War II the theological currents of the previous decades, except for the German Christian movement, continued, with the dialectical theology of the Barthian direction

and the exegetical program of demythologization (Rudolf Bultmann) dominating the academic scene. Confessional Lutheranism lived on in those churches (Hanover, Bavaria) and faculties (Erlangen) where it had earlier been strong, accompanied by efforts toward a positive reevaluation of the creeds as a result of the *Kirchenkampf* (Edmund Schlink). A hermeneutical theology in dialogue with the philosophical trends of the time attempted to open up Lutheran theology to new perspectives (Ebeling). Reflection on the failure of large parts of the German Protestantism in the Third Reich led to a break with theological nationalism as well as to a positive affirmation of the democratic order, expressed in a series of *Denkschriften*, ecclesiastical memoranda on acute socioethical and political problems. From the 1960s a new generation of Lutheran theologians who had not been shaped by the currents of prewar theology insisted that history had to be taken more seriously as a theological category than had been the case in a theology primarily molded by the concerns of the religious and ethical individual (Wolffhart Pannenberg). More recently the theological and socioethical perspectives of Schleiermacher reentered Lutheran theology.

After the Second Vatican Council (1962–65) the ecumenical dialogues with Roman Catholicism became a matter of interest for academic theologians and churchmen alike. However, the documents that resulted from these dialogues, national or international (The Condemnations of the Reformation Era: Do They Still Divide?, 1986; the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, 1997; the Joint Official Statement, 1999), met with widespread criticism by theologians and were received by the churches with explicit reservations (Joint Declaration) or not at all (Condemnations; Joint Official Statement). This did not prevent the *Landeskirchen* and the Roman Catholic Church in Germany and their parishes from common services and close collaboration in many fields. The most successful ecumenical dialogue in which the German

Lutheran *Landeskirchen* participated was the dialogue between European Lutheran and Reformed churches that led to the Leuenberg Agreement (1973), opening up full communion among the signatory churches, later on also with the Methodist churches. The Meißen Agreement (1988) and further dialogues in its wake allowed many levels of communion below the episcopal level with the Church of England.

See also Althaus, Paul; Barmen Confession; Barth, Karl; Bonhoeffer, Dietrich; Bultmann, Rudolf (Karl); Catholicism; Confessing Church; Ebeling, Gerhard; Ecumenical Dialogues; German Christians (Deutsche Christen); Liberalism; Pannenberg, Wolffhart; Troeltsch, Ernst; World Wars I and II

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