

Concordia Seminary - Saint Louis

Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary

Bachelor of Divinity

Concordia Seminary Scholarship

4-15-1927

Ecclesiastical Union Verses Christian Unity

Theodore Moeller

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, ir_moellert@csl.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/bdiv>



Part of the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Moeller, Theodore, "Ecclesiastical Union Verses Christian Unity" (1927). *Bachelor of Divinity*. 687.
<https://scholar.csl.edu/bdiv/687>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Concordia Seminary Scholarship at Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. It has been accepted for inclusion in Bachelor of Divinity by an authorized administrator of Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. For more information, please contact seitzw@csl.edu.

ECCLESIASTICAL UNION VERSUS CHRISTIAN UNITY

Theo. Moeller.

The tendency of Protestantism to split up into various sects has not infrequently been noted and variously explained. Roman Catholics, especially, make the most of this situation and point with pride to the unity of their church. "If once you permit individual judgment to be pitted against authority all the followers of the revolter will, in turn, claim the same privilege against him. The result is obvious. Even before the revolting church had made its position secure against the church of Rome disunion and separatism had come into its ranks." This condition has often been deplored and the cry of today is to unite Protestantism in order that it may present a solid front against the forces of evil. Declarations of this nature have not been unheard of in the past. The purpose of this paper shall be to review the history of several outstanding efforts at ecclesiastical union in Europe since the time of the Reformation. In connection therewith the writer purposes to show that true Christian unity must be "sine qua non" of church union if the consequences are not to be disastrous.

In our investigation it will be observed that in such cases where doctrinal differences were not underestimated, and where polemics was not evaded, the attempts at union were not feigned or superinduced by outward circumstances. Whenever differences are acknowledged and are thoroughly discussed we may rest assured that the effort to arrive at a true unity is sincere. On the other hand, in such instances where differences were considered insignificant and where they were ironed out by a mere peaceable compromise, the true spiritual unity, indispensable for union, was all the more remote. As soon as differences are connived at merely for the sake of establishing a union there can be no spiritual unity. This fundamental difference is noted between the earlier and the later unionistic tendencies. The former go to the end of the Thirty Year's War; what follows may be classified under the latter group. In our discussion we shall treat both types. The first type includes those efforts at union where doctrinal differences were carefully weighed. As representatives of this type we shall direct our attention to the Marburg Colloquy and the Wittenberg Concordia. The methods employed to attempt a union

2

in these instances were in accord with Scriptures. The second type includes efforts at union where differences were simply ignored. As representatives of this type we shall discuss the endeavors of the Great Elector, Frederick of Brandenburg to unite Protestantism in his realm, dwelling especially on his conflict with Paul Gerhardt, and finally the forced Prussian Union of 1817.

After the Reichstag at Speier in February 1529, where it was decided, by a majority decision, that Roman worship should be permitted in Lutheran lands, and that Roman authorities should be restored to their former rights, the Protestant prospects seemed dark. The situation seemed all the more critical since the cause of the Reformation appeared to be threatened by controversies between the German and Swiss Reformers and the rapid spread of the Anabaptists. Landgrave Philip of Hesse was of the opinion that circumstances demanded a defensive union, which he at once undertook to secure. He wanted to reconcile the opposing sections and for that reason invited the leading theologians of both parties to a conference at Marburg, 1529. His main motive, however, was political, for he saw that in union was strength and he wished to make an alliance between the German Protestant states and the Swiss cantons.

The Lutherans consented to go to Marburg only after they had been pressed on all sides. Their reluctance occasioned all manner of talk concerning their "lack of love, fear, and uncertainty". But they had not only often given expression to the fact that the true union and peace of the Church was dear to them, but they had also demonstrated it by deeds. And not out of feint, but on the contrary, because they were so certain of their position did they at first decline to participate. They considered it fruitless in the very beginning. Luther told the Landgrave that they knew each other's position. Luther and Melancthon feared that if the Reformed refused to yield it would only give rise to new occasion for the strife which had barely been settled. This they wanted to avoid. When we consider the results of the Colloquy we shall see

that this fear was not at all ungrounded.

In order to arrive at a better understanding of the affairs that transpired at Marburg it will be necessary briefly to point out the wide differences between the personal experiences of the two reformers, Zwingli and Luther. This difference in their careers accounts, in a great measure, for the divergence of their opinions and their general attitude toward the Word of God. Zwingli had received a humanistic training and with him the intellectual side of reform was prominent. Luther had gone thru a period of spiritual anguish and with him the forgiveness of sins was the central point. Zwingli had never felt this need so strongly; the central idea of his theology was that of Christian fellowship. This explains why Luther, at Marburg, clung so tenaciously to every word of Scripture which was so dear to him, whereas Zwingli was imbued with that in our day much abused "spirit of charity" which fosters fellowship at the expense of doctrine.

As to the matter to be discussed at the conference nothing definite had been determined beforehand. The Sacramentarian controversy was generally considered to be the central point of discussion, but Luther insisted that all articles in question be treated. In accord with the will of the Landgrave a private conference between Luther and Oecolampad, and between Zwingli and Melancthon preceded the Colloquy. Luther used this opportunity to determine the differences. It was pointed out to the Reformed that Zwingli had taught that original sin is not real sin, that the Holy Ghost works immediately, without Word and Sacrament, and that some of the Strassburgers' writings smacked of a denial of the deity of Christ. On all these points the Reformed willingly abandoned their former teachings and accepted the scriptural doctrines as taught by the Lutherans.

The public conference, if it can be called that, opened on October 2nd. Some fifty or sixty notables were present. The chief disputants on the Reformed side were Zwingli, Oecolampad, Bucer, and Hedio. The Lutherans were represented by Luther, Melancthon, Caspar Creuziger, Justus Jonas, Osiander, Brenz, Myconius, and Agricola. It is unfortunate, as Brenz assures us, that there was no secretary present to record the proceedings. Since neither of the parties were permitted

to employ a secretary all the information we have regarding the relations on both sides was afterwards written from memory. Yet these accounts agree so fully in essentials and the conclusions drawn from them differ so greatly, that both guarantee the historian the complete truth of the matter.

The Sacramentarian controversy, which had hardly been touched upon on the previous day, was now the center of discussion. The principal points were: the construction to be placed upon Christ's words: "This is my body"; the relevancy of the sixth chapter of John to the doctrine of the Lord's Supper, the patristic teaching on the subject, and the nature of the body found in the sacrament. The debate went on for two days, interrupted only by meals and sleep. When Luther saw that the Reformed insisted all the stronger on their contentions, he for his part, closed the colloquy. He thanked Oecolampad and Zwingli that they had discussed the matter in such a friendly manner, added, however, that he would have to leave them to divine judgment, and that he would pray the Lord that He would enlighten them and bring them back to the way of truth. When the conference had thus been broken up, the Landgrave who was anxious to have some tangible result, induced the two parties to draw up a statement of their common beliefs, known as the Marburg Articles. Fourteen of the articles were on points agreed to by both sides; the fifteenth defined the Eucharist and stated that the subscribers were unable to agree "on the bodily presence of the body and blood" in the elements. Zwingli, with tears in his eyes, declared that there was no one on earth with whom he would rather be at one than with the Wittenbergers. He and his associates agreed that they would be willing to teach that the body of Christ is truly present in the Lord's Supper, but in a spiritual manner, if the Lutherans would then recognize them as brethren. Not only Luther himself, but also the rest of his colleagues insisted on strict unity of faith, and therefore declined this offer. Luther replied: "You have a different spirit than we". He even expressed his surprise at the fact that they should desire to regard him as a brother if they seriously believed their own doctrine to be true. He regarded it as an indication that they did not consider their cause to be very important.

In general, the tone of the colloquy was as friendly as could be expected of men who on both sides realized that they were standing before God, and that they were dealing with matters pertaining to the eternal welfare of man's souls. Many historians give the impression that the Swiss and Strassburgers alone merited honor in this respect. The words of Brenz (Quoted by Rudelbach, pg. 350) dare to correct this impression: "Omnia humanissime et summa cum mansuetudine transigebantur, nisi quod Oecolampadius, quem omnes sperassemus mitiorem, interdum videbatur paulo morosior, sed citra contumeliam, et Zwinglius duritiam sermonis sui in naturam rejiciebat. Audivisses ibi nullor alios titulos, quam hos: 'Amicissime Domine, Vestra Charitas; et id genus alios. Nulla ibi mentio *εξ ἰσχυροῦ*, nulla *ἀπὸ βίας*.' Dixesses Lutherum et Zwinglium fratres, non adversarios."

The immediate result of the Colloquy was a temporary pacification. The Lutherans cherished the hope that the remaining scruples would be removed and a brotherly concord be established. The articles which were signed were drawn up by Luther and they not only refuted individual points, but struck the heart of the entire Zwinglian trend of thought. The Reformed could little have signed them if they had any intentions of remaining true to their former teachings. The following is the article on Original Sin: "Zum viertem glauben wir, dass die Erbsünde sei uns von Adam angeboren und aufgerbt, und sei eine solche Sünde, dass sie alle Menschen verdammet, und wo Jesus Christus uns nicht zu Hilfe kommen wäre mit seinem Tod und Leben, so hätten wir ewiglich daran sterben, und zu Gottes Reich und Seligkeit nicht kommen müssen." (Rudelbach, pg. 666). The article concerning the Word as a means of grace was drawn up thus: "Zum achten (glauben wir), dass der Heilige Geist, ordentlich zu reden, niemand solchen Glauben oder seine Gabe gibt, ohne vorhergehende Predigt oder mündlich Wort, oder Evangelium Christi, sondern durch und mit solchem Wort wirkt er und schafft den Glauben, wo und in welchem er will. Rom. 10." (Rudelbach, 666). It is evident that Zwingli did not feel himself bound to these articles for in his confession what he submitted at Augsburg, 1530, he still taught that original sin is not real sin, and that the Holy Ghost works immediately, without Word and Sacrament. Plitt,

(Geschichte der Evangelischen Kirche, pg. 488), makes the same point. We quote his words: "The confession which he (Zwingli) submitted to the Kaiser in the following year clearly shows that he could not have subscribed to the Marburg Articles without interpreting the words in a far different sense than, as every one must know, they were understood by Luther. If he had accepted them in their true meaning then the Romans, who were watching the strife with joy, and the Anabaptists would have been right in their assertion, that he had completely forsaken his previous position. He remained true to himself and insofar as the Swiss Reformation received its character from Zwingli and not from Oecolampad, its further development is separate from that of the Lutheran Church." Bucer expressed the opinion that the Reformed had signed the articles only out of love to God. Oecolampad, who was otherwise always peaceably inclined, wrote (Relation an Haller, Rudelbach, 361): "man sei durch diese Disputation um keinen Schritt weiter gekommen." In view of this action on the part of the Reformed certainly no one will ask which party violated the agreement and neglected the prayer for enlightenment, much to the detriment of the Church.

Luther was willing to confer with the Reformed in an effort to bring about unity. Such conferences are perfectly in order and it has always been the practise of the Lutheran Church to discuss doctrinal differences with our opponents. But Luther was not willing to have fellowship without perfect unity in doctrine. He would have no "sham-peace" at the expense of peace with God. His attitude toward the Reformed at Marburg finds ample support in Scriptures and therefore this conference may well serve as an example of the scriptural manner in which an ecclesiastical union may be attempted. The differences were not underestimated, neither were they overestimated.

The "Wittenberg Concordia" marks the next stage in efforts to harmonize the Lutherans and the Reformed. Philip of Hesse was again the mediator. He was of the opinion that it was only a theological dispute between Luther and Zwingli. Naturally he was inclined to favor those who appeared to him to be most peace-loving and reasonable, and Melancthon reports that the Reformed left nothing

undone to win him over to their side entirely. In a letter to the Landgrave of May 20, 1530 Luther endeavored to impress upon him that not a trivial matter, but the old faith of the fathers was at stake. He reminded him that the division was not called forth by a single doctrine, but that it involved a long chain of truths which were based on the very foundation of faith. First of all the Landgrave directed himself to Melanchthon and Brenz and pleaded with them that they might do all in their power to reconcile the opposing parties and effect a union. He even appealed to Scripture, stating that Christ commands us to have regard for the weaker brother. But in reply to this Melanchthon and Brenz called his attention to the distinction between erring brethren and those who obstinately persist in and defend error.

In the meantime Bucer conferred with Luther at Coburg. The latter insisted that a union could be effected only on the basis of a confession. The differences were again carefully weighed and hope was kindled in the bosom of Luther. He assured Bucer that he would be willing to lose his life three times if true unity could thereby be brought about. In a letter to Bucer dated January 22, 1531, Luther writes: "Ich habe gesehn wie noetig uns eure Gesellschaft sei, was sie dem Evangelio vor Ungemach bisher gebracht und noch bringe, so dasz ich gewisz bin, dass alle Pforten der Hoellen, das ganze Papsttum, der ganze Tuerkei, die ganze Welt, und was ueberall Boeses ist, dem Evangelio nicht so viel haette schaden koennen, wenn wir winig waeren." (Quoted by R., 366). With all sincerity Bucer continued to strive for harmony. And it was this Christian spirit of his, which Luther also exhibited, that occasioned the Conference at Cassel between Melanchthon and Bucer in December, 1534 and January, 1535. This conference marks a bright spot in the history of negotiations preceding the "Wittenberg Concordia". Before attending this meeting Luther gave Melanchthon this bit of sound advice - That it is not advisable for the sake of union, to set up a compromise. That would be a falsehood in itself since it should unite opposite opinions. It would only confuse consciences and finally people would believe nothing. He also reminded him of the distinction between tolerance and true unity of faith. Melanchthon followed this advice of Luther and at the close of the discussion Bucer promised that he, and those preachers

THE LUTHERAN MEMORIAL LIBRARY
 CONCORDIA SEMINARY
 ST. LOUIS, MO.

that shared his opinion, would in the future teach according to the Augsburg Confession and the Apology.

Luther did not wish to hasten the union. He realized that it was a matter of the whole church and he did not want this union to be founded merely on the sand of good intentions. He considered the past, the present, and the future. In July, 1535, the preachers of Augsburg, together with the representative of congregations sent Gereon Seyler and Caspar Hubernius to Luther. The latter gave them a very friendly reception and harmony seemed to have been established. In August the Strassburgers followed the example of the Augsburgers by sending a letter to Luther in which they stated that practically all had accepted the confession which Bucer had prescribed. Luther's heart beat with joy. In his answer to the Strassburgers he said that if unity could be arrived at he would sing with joyful tears, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace." He was willing to do and suffer anything that would render a true union possible.

On May 22, 1536, Bucer and Capito conferred with Luther at Wittenberg. They agreed to recant orally all false doctrine that they had preached, and in writing all such errors as had appeared in print. Luther emphasized with all earnestness that a true unity should be effected or none at all. Regarding the Lord's Supper he said it would be necessary for them to make a clear statement whether or not they taught and practised that the bread is the true body of Christ, given for us, and the wine the true blood of Christ, shed for us, by virtue of the words of institution, regardless whether the minister who distributes it or the one who receives it is worthy or unworthy. On the following day, May 23rd, they met again and Bucer and his associates declared themselves to be in full accord with the Lutherans even on the doctrine of the Lord's Supper. Peace and unity had been secured. Melancthon was chosen to draw up the Formula of Concord and on the 25th of May he submitted it. It was signed by the theologians on both sides. With regard to the introduction of the "Concordia" it was further agreed that nothing should be praised about it until it should be generally accepted; that the real presence be clearly and fully taught, and that the proposed articles

7

be taught in such language as would best serve for the furtherance of the particular truth.

Bucer and Capito were very sincere. They promised to overlook nothing in their endeavor to fully comply to the "Concordia". The upland cities gladly supported the work. Augsburg also sponsored the undertaking. In Strassburg they even desired conformity as regards manner of expression in matters of faith. In Switzerland the spiritual forces were divided. Bucer and Capito stood on the one side, the friends of Zwingli on the other. The Zwinglian theology had been so thoroughly inculcated in the Swiss that Bucer's attempts to introduce the "Wittenberg Concordia" were encountered by much opposition. Bullinger and his supporters endeavored to incite the people by identifying the introduction of the "Concordia" with the introduction of popery. In Zuerich the opposition was greatest and in spite of the relentless efforts of Bucer no peace and harmony could be established. All of which demonstrates that error, when once deeply rooted, refuses to yield even to the clearest testimony of the truth. The Concordia was never accepted with real earnestness in Switzerland and it was easily ignored. History is silent regarding the fate which betided its few friends in Switzerland. But Rudelbach (pg. 395) remarks concerning Bucer: "Bucer aber, oft schwankend, und oft wieder klarer bekennend, gleich einem Lichte, das bald zu verloeschen droht, und dann wieder aufflackert, schloz zuletzt doch seine Laufbahn mit einem Bekenntnisse, in welchem man deutlich erkennt, welche Macht die Gnade einst ueber sein Herz gehabt hatte."

The Wittenberg Concordia teaches us a few lessons. In the first place it shows us with what fidelity our forefathers preserved the true Gospel, and at the same time it illustrates their willingness to participate in a union which is based on a definite scriptural confession. Incidentally, very many historians persist in declaring that Luther yielded a point to Bucer when the latter refused to admit that the ungodly receive the true body and blood of Christ in the Sacrament. But the ungodly do not come into question in the treatment of the Lord's Supper since they are not admissable at all to communion.

Schaff-Herzog, commenting on the reception given the "Concordia" makes this statement: (Vol. XII, pg. 399) "In most of the cities people were indeed astonished at the new articles. In Ulm they openly spoke of a new doctrine; they quickly perceived that Luther had made not the least concession." In contrast to the indifference which characterizes the unionistic tendencies of today the "Wittenberg Concordia" is evidence of the fact that in addition to true willingness for union there must also be unconditional agreement with the confessions of the church, and combined with this - love and patience. The "Concordia" originated in a small circle of god-fearing men; every step was measured and weighed, all civil and secular assistance was held in contempt. And yet their efforts gained little ground. Few men are qualified for this sort of work. Our restless age is not prone to give attention to details. ^{What} a warning voice, therefore, the "Wittenberg Concordia" should be to us who are living at a time when the spirit of unionism is widespread!

--

After the death of Luther the Church was troubled with many controversies. There was constant struggle between the Lutherans and the Reformed. The Religious Conference at Leipzig, 1631, was an attempt at union during the Thirty Year's War. The conference lasted twenty days but the efforts at union were futile. The Great Elector, Frederick William, altho he accepted the Altered Augsburg Confession was a patron of the Reformed. At first he was tolerant of the Lutherans, but his attitude changed. This change was brought about by Louis XIV of France. When the latter persecuted the Protestants, Frederick gave the French refugees a home in Brandenburg where they were permitted to start various industries. These Frenchmen were Reformed in doctrine. Since the Lutherans and the Reformed were constantly at strife, and to such an extent that they often became personal, the Elector thought it his duty to bring about a union between the two parties. Similar attempts of the fifteenth century should have taught him that the task was not a simple one. But he was determined. Did not other rulers act on the principle: "Cuius regio, eius religio"?

On June 2, 1662, the Elector published an edict in which he demanded that all

candidates for the holy ministry should sign a promise not to say or preach anything against the Reformed Religion. Those who were already in the ministry were also to observe this proclamation. Should there be any who considered this well-meant order an act against their conscience they could see to it that they left the country. This edict really meant that the Lutherans were asked to break their ordination vow, for they considered it their duty - and rightly so - to refute the Reformed doctrine which was so prevalent.

It is at this stage that the well-known hymnwriter, Paul Gerhardt, proves himself to be the staunch confessor of truth. In this latter capacity his name is not so well known. In fact, many of his admirers would rather not refer to his dealings with the Great Elector. They consider it a weakness in him that he should have resisted his Elector so obstinately. But it is just in this respect that he merits honor.

On August 21, 1662, Frederick sent a letter to the Berlin Consistory, requesting that a friendly colloquy be held to bring about peace and investigate why the Lutherans and the Reformed could not unite. Paul Gerhardt, who was a very influential member of the Lutheran Ministerium of Berlin, had his misgivings and he did not hesitate to express them. He foresaw that the Reformed desired a Syncretism which would lead to the ultimate introduction of their doctrine, and he warned against it. But the Elector was persistent in his demands and the conference was finally brought about. Meetings were held in the Elector's castle from Sept. 1, 1662 to May 29, 1663. Wackernagel's opinion regarding Gerhardt (*Lehre und Wehre*, 1907, pg. 57) is very pertinent. He writes: "Paul Gerhardt erscheint im Laufe der ganzen Verhandlungen als der lauterste Charakter; er war die Seele, ich moechte sagen das gute Gewissen der berlinischen Geistlichkeit. Ihn leitete weder Eigensinn noch Leidenschaftlichkeit. Sein amtliches Geschaeft war, die Angriffs- und Verteidigungsschriften zu entwerfen. Diese sind mit groeszter Gewandheit und Schaerfe, nicht selten mit lutherischer Kuehnheit in ueberraschenden Gegenbewegungen, ja mit logischem Humor verfasst und liefern einen neuen Beweis, dass sich kritischer Verstand gar wohl mit dichterischem Gemuet vereinige. Denn

wenn man diese nach dem Zeitgeschmack so wunderbarlich mit Latein durchschossenen Artikel liest, sollte man kaum meinen, dass derselbe Mann zu derselben Zeit sich und den Seinigen zu Trost die schönsten geistlichen Lieder dichtete." After the seventeenth session the conference came to an end and all the efforts expended had been fruitless. The Lutherans, of course, were blamed for the failure of the union and were forced to bear all manner of calumny.

On September 16, 1664, a new edict was issued demanding that both parties cease to attack one another, especially in the pulpit. They were also not permitted to charge one another with teaching doctrine that had been arrived at by drawing conclusions, which the opposite party denied. Any one who refused to sign the promise was threatened to be deposed from office. All the Lutheran pastors of Berlin were greatly perturbed by this edict. On October 29, 1664, they sent a petition to the Elector asking that he respect their conscience. Compliance with this wish would mean that they would have to sever their connections with the Lutheran Church and this they by no means intended to do. They did not have to wait long for an answer. November 2nd, the Elector blankly refused their request, stating that he had never intended to force any one's conscience, but to him it appeared that the Lutherans' freedom of conscience consisted only in slandering the Reformed. When, in their distress, the Lutherans had asked for "opinions" from the universities of Wittenberg and Jena, as to whether they ought obey the Elector, Frederick became furious and demanded that the original manuscript of the "opinions" be handed over to the consistory on April 28th, at 8 a.m. The members of the Berlin Ministerium were to appear in person in order that they might immediately sign the edict. Propst Lilius and the Archdeacon Reinhardt refused to sign. They were at once deposed from office and Reinhardt was even exiled.

We find allusions to these troublesome times in the hymns of Paul Gerhardt. It is generally accepted that Gerhardt at this time composed the hymn (#366 in our German Hymnal): "Ist Gott fuer mich, so trete gleich alles wider mich". In the thirteenth verse of this hymn we read:

"Kein Zorn der groszen Fuersten
Soll mir ein' Hindrung sein."

The action of the presumptuous Elector might well have suggested those lines to him. Such hymns as, "Befiehl du deine Wege", "Schwing dich auf zu deinem Gott, du betruete Seele!", "Warum sollt' ich mich denn graemen?", "Weg, mein Herz, mit dem Gedanken, als ob du vertoszen waer'st!" all express the warm comfort of one who knows how to sympathize with the Christian in distress.

On February 6, 1666, Gerhardt was brought before the Consistory to sign the declaration. They were willing to give him eight day's time to think the matter over. On the spur of the moment he accepted the extension, but in the same meeting he declared that he had thought it over already for a long time and that there was no possibility of his changing his mind. In the name of the Great Elector he was thereupon informed of his dismissal from office.

Paul Gerhardt, the most popular and most beloved preacher in Berlin, deposed! The entire city rose in his defense. Dallmann (Paul Gerhardt, pg. 35) writes: "Great sorrow came over the good Berliners on the news of Gerhardt's removal from office. The Unions of the Business Men, the Tailors, the Weavers, the Shoemakers, the Leather Workers, the Butchers, the Bakers, and the Tanners held a mass-meeting, passed resolutions of protest, and sent them to the Mayor and the Aldermen.. Tho some of the Aldermen were Reformed, they endorsed the protest and sent it to the Elector, adding that 'the beloved preacher and pastor' had never attacked the Reformed faith, much less, slandered it. They pointed with pride to his blameless life, and to the fact that the Elector himself had in 1658 put thirty-three of Gerhardt's hymns into the Reformed Brandenburg hymnal. They feared the judgment of God were so godly a man driven from the city. Let him be excused from signing the decree." But the petition had no effect upon the Elector. A second one only aroused his ire all the more. However, after the estates of the realm had entered a plea to the effect that Gerhardt be reinstated and the remaining preachers also be excused from signing the edict, Frederick became more favorably inclined to Gerhardt. On January 9, 1667, he announced that he would reinstate Gerhardt since the latter had evidently misunderstood the edict. But now Gerhardt was facing a new struggle. On that same

January 9th, the Elector had sent his private secretary to Gerhardt informing him that he would be expected to observe the decree without signing it. The faithful preacher considered this an act of treason against truth. To him an oral promise was just as binding as a written one. His conscience would not permit him to take up his office under these conditions. The only answer that further entreaties on the part of the people received was that if Gerhardt were not willing to accept these terms a successor would be chosen for his office. And that is what happened. He remained in Berlin till 1669, when he accepted a call to Luebben where he dies, June 7, 1676.

The stand which Paul Gerhardt took is certainly worthy of our consideration. It was the only course of action for a truly Lutheran pastor to take. It is our God-given duty to refute error and if secular authorities presume to interfere then "we ought to obey God rather than man" (Acts 5,29). The example of Gerhardt shines forth as a beacon light in an age that was darkened by Syncretism. What a noble character for every servant of the Word to hold before his eyes! And tho he resigned his office, Gerhardt was by no means defeated. His example inspired other with courage and the opposition to the Elector became so great that he was finally forced to dispense with the edict. Thus the Great Elector's efforts to unite the Lutherans and the Reformed met with failure. And it was due, to a great extent, to the bold and staunch confession of Paul Gerhardt. What the Elector Frederick failed in doing one of his successors, Frederick William III., king of Prussia, succeeded in doing in 1817 when he forced the Lutherans and the Reformed into the Prussian Union. This union will now engage our attention.

--

To begin with, it will be necessary to allude to a few factors which contributed to the realization of this union. Pietism had prepared the way. Its shibboleth was: Practical Christianity! But its emphasis on practicability was inversely proportionate to its adherence to doctrine. Pietism failed to appreciate the importance of learning and was consequently doomed to indifferentism. It substituted for the theology of the Bible the theology of the heart. The spirit and life were the only things deemed important. Then came the period of enlightenment which brought with it indifference with regard to confessionalism.

1)

Reason would not stoop to indulge in an unreasonable combat over mere form. Inter-confessional religiousness was called forth by the period of Rationalism. In view of the prevailing conditions it was, therefore, much easier for the representative of the two confessions to extend to one another the hand of fellowship in 1817 than it had once been at Marburg in 1529.

Outward circumstances were indeed favorable for a union. The illustrious military exploit of Prussia during the War of Independence put all hearts in high spirits and everybody looked with admiration to the king. He exercised a very great influence upon religious sentiment. He had visited England and there had seen the State Church in operation. He pointed out that many reforms in church and school could be made possible by a union. The year 1817 marking the Tercentenary of the Reformation was considered a very appropriate time to bring about the union. Enthusiasm for the Reformation festival ran high. Luther and the Bible which he gave to the German people were extolled. It was held that the idea of union is basic in the conception of Reformation in the spirit of Protestantism. The union should only be a continuation of the immortal work of the Reformation. This clearly shows that they had not informed themselves, either historically or dogmatically, concerning the conception of union or of Reformation. It cannot be denied that the things which once worked separation were not noticeable any more. Nevertheless, they had not disappeared. Pietism, Reason, and Patriotism had merely put them out of effect. Accordingly, as soon as thought directed itself along historical and doctrinal lines the differences appeared, and all the more so since the union was forced from above.

On September 27, 1817 a royal proclamation appeared in which the king stated that it had been the intention of his forefathers already to unite the two Protestant confessions, but a sectional spirit had prevented it. He did not wish to force the union because he realized it would be of no value in that case. To take the lead with a good example he celebrated the Lord's Supper in a joint service of the Lutherans and the Reformed in Potsdam. The divines

of Berlin of both confessions complied with the royal request and decided to delebrate communion jointly on October 30th, in one of the Lutheran churches of Berlin. The provision was made that the Reformed rite of breaking the bread be observed, but that the formula of distribution be worded historically: "Christ, our Lord, said, 'Take eat etc.'." In the same manner the Protestant Theological Faculty of Berlin celebrated communion in a Reformed Church on October 31st. Since the congregations had not been consulted regarding this matter the Berlin Synod, with Schleiermacher at its head, was obliged to publish an official explanation on October 29th. In this explanation the motives were set forth, but nothing definite was said regarding the nature of the new union, except that thru this celebration of the Lord's Supper a church-body which has no dogmatical union of confessions was being called into existence. In other words there was a union without unity. And such unions are dangerous since they are unscriptural.

The new Agenda was considered to be the most appropriate and efficient vehicle for the full realization of the union. The king had expressed the hope that a new Agenda would bring the two confessions closer together in spite of their differences. The liturgical commission was composed of members of both confessions. Conformity of church usage was desired, but union went hand in hand with this.

In 1821 the Agenda for the Dome Church in Berlin appeared. It was recommended to all superintendents and preachers. The manifest Christian element in it caused many sincere pastors to overlook its unionizing tendencies. The Agenda apparently was to take the place of a confessional declaration, rather than merely serve as a means for bringing about a union. It was not only meant to establish liturgical unanimity, but it was to be conciliatory. It should present a form of worship which both confessions could adopt. The method of procedure was purely mechanical. While much of the Lutheran material was retained, nevertheless, very much Reformed was introduced, as well as a lot of heterogenous matter. The Agenda did not give expression either to the Lutheran or the Reformed type. To unite both for the sake of catholicity was more than

a precarious undertaking, because it denied catholicity to either or both of the confessions. This explains why so many were reluctant in accepting it.

In 1824, after attempts at compromise had been made in the third edition, to meet the objections which had been raised, a threat was issued that all divines who instigated opposition to the Agenda would be prosecuted. When, in the same year, the pastors were requested to give a final "yes" or "no" with regard to accepting the Agenda, it was found that of the 7782 Evangelical churches in Prussia 5343 had accepted it. On October 29, 1825, an edict was issued to the effect that no one could accept a clerical position without first having pledged himself to accept the Agenda. The supporters of the union had hoped to abrogate confessionalism. The only thing that resulted from the many complaints that were raised, was that a "Corpus Liturgicum" was appointed for each province.

This revision of the Agenda by the separate provinces which took place between 1826 and 1828 gave the union a new impetus and by 1830 the Agenda was quite generally accepted. On February 28, 1834, a royal proclamation was issued to this effect: that congregations should join the union free-willingly. The Agenda, however, would have to be accepted because of the "Ius Liturgicum" of the ruler. Agenda and union really have nothing to do with each other. Strictly speaking, a united church does not exist, but simply separate congregations, who according to voluntary decision, joined with members of the other Evangelical faith in common worship and celebration of the Lord's Supper. Joining the union does not mean giving up your previous confession but simply that you possess a mild and moderate spirit, which will not permit doctrinal differences to preclude church-fellowship with another. Enemies of the union, however, are not permitted to form separate church bodies.

There are a few men who are outstanding in their opposition to the union: Claus Harms published a set of ninety-five theses, in 1817, in which he attacked Rationalism but in which he also testifies against the union. He writes: (Quoted by Seeberg, "Kirche Deutschlands im 19ten Jhd., pg. 73) "Als eine arme Magd moechte man die lutherische Kirche durch eine Kopulation reich machen. Vollziehet dem

Akt nicht ueber Luthers Gebein! Er wird lebendig davon, und dann: 'weh euch!'

- "Sagen, die Zeit habe die Scheidewand zwischen Lutheranern und Reformierten aufgehoben, ist keine reine Sprache. Es gilt, welche sind abgefallen von dem Glauben ihrer Kirche, die Lutheraner oder die Reformierten oder beide." - "War auf dem Colloquio zu Marburg, 1529, Christi Leib und Blut im Brot und Wein, so ist er es noch 1817." J.A. Tittmann represented the Saxon church in an amiable manner. He used the weapons of irony. Prof. J.G. Scheibel of Breslau, had the courage to voice his opposition and as a result he was suspended in 1830 and deposed in 1832.

Suspensions, imprisonments, dragonnades - all proved to be of no avail in the efforts to break the opposition. New life was awakened in the church and the Lutheran confession won more and more hearts. New churches were organized in Pommern, Halle, Naumburg, Magdeburg, and other cities in Saxony. The king finally had to confess: (Seeberg, pg. 75) "Ist sehr unangenehm, dawz das gute Werk der Eintracht Zwietracht herbeigefuehrt hat. Habe es aber gut gemeint. Die meisten in anderen Provinzen sehen dies auch ein; fatal!" He had not forced the act of union out of carelessness, but he was entirely inapprehensive of the consequences of a union without unity.

This union not only brought disorder and confusion in Prussia, but its example gave rise to similar efforts at union elsewhere. Indifferentism caused these false ideas of union to win favor. Theologians saw in this Prussian Union a most important step toward the overthrow of confessionalism. Many orthodox churches were destroyed when attempts were made to unite them with the Reformed. In Wuerttemberg the Waldensians were joined with the Lutherans. Unionism was likewise practised in Nassau, Rheinbayern, Hanau, and Baden. But a Lutheran church of Prussia independent of the national church was constituted by a general synod at Breslau in 1841 and received recognition by royal favor in 1845.

The Prussian Union is the most glaring example of undisguised Unionism. Doctrinal differences were brazenly ignored and hence any semblance of true spiritual unity was conspicuous by its absence. How different at Marburg and Wittenberg! The Great Reformer took every precaution to preserve the pure and true doctrine

in the church. When such a spirit is revived the Word of God will not be considered as something with which men can deal according to their pleasure. Unionism promotes error and error leads immortal souls to destruction. The conferences at Marburg and Wittenberg give expression to the scriptural manner in which a union may be attempted. The efforts of the Great Elector of Brandenburg, in the middle of the seventeenth century, as well as those of Frederick William III. of Prussia to force a union, in spite of differences, are decidedly anti-biblical.

Scriptures give us the true conception of unity. It is oneness in faith as taught in the Gospel of Christ. St. Paul writes I. Cor. 1, 10: "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment." The same apostle warns the Romans, (Rom. 16, 17) "Mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them." The language is very plain. False doctrine causes division and destroys the unity of the church. Error cannot remain unchallenged for truth is of such a nature that it precludes all error. In II. John 10, 11 we read: "If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds." Thus the Bible has forbidden church-fellowship with those who teach false doctrine. In no instance are we permitted to deviate from the Word of God in the least particular, even for the sake of peace. The Missouri Synod has often been charged with bigotry and separatism because of its stand against Unionism. But may she ever be strengthened and encouraged by the fact that she has Christ's command and His promise attached thereto, namely: "Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you, and lo I am with you always even unto the end of the world."

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Rudelbach, "Reformation, Luthertum und Union" - Leipzig, 1839.
- Preserved Smith, "Martin Luther" - Boston & New York; Houghton Mifflin Co., 1911.
- S.M. Jackson, "Huldreich Zwingli" - New York & London; Putnam's Sons, 1901.
- Plitt, "Geschichte der Evangelischen Kirche"
- Reinhold Seeberg, "Die Kirche Deutschlands im 19ten Jahrhundert" - Leipzig, 1904.
- Adolf Zahn, "Kirchengeschichte im 19ten Jahrhundert" - Stuttgart, 1888.
- Wm. Dallmann, "Paul Gerhardt" - Concordia Pub. House Print.
- Lehre und Wehre, "Paul Gerhardt, der Bekenner" - 1907.
- Philip Schaff, "History of the Christian Church" - New York; Scribner's Sons, 1923.
- Schaff-Herzog, "Encyclopedia" - Funk Wagnalls Co., New York, 1908.
- F. Pieper, "Unionism" - Essay, Convention Oregon & Wash. Distr., 1924.