

Bekenntnissynode der Deutschen Evangelischen Kirche

Wuppertal-Barmen, am 31. Mai 1934

An die Evangel. Gemeinden und Christen in Deutschland

In Barmen hat vom 29.—31. Mai 1934 die Bekenntnissynode der Deutschen Evangelischen Kirche getagt. Hier haben sich Vertreter aus allen deutschen Bekenntniskirchen im Bekenntnis zu dem einen Herrn der einen heiligen, apostolischen Kirche einmütig zusammengefunden. Glieder lutherischer, reformierter und unierter Kirchen haben aus der Treue zu ihrem Bekenntnis heraus ein gemeinsames Wort zur Not und Anfechtung der Kirche in unseren Tagen gesucht. Mit Dank gegen Gott glauben sie gewiß, daß ihnen das gemeinsame Wort in den Mund gelegt worden ist. Sie wollten weder eine neue Kirche gründen, noch eine Union schaffen. Denn nichts lag ihnen ferner, als die Aufhebung des Bekenntnisstandes unserer Kirchen. Vielmehr war ihr Wille, der Zerstückung des Bekenntnisses und damit der evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland im Glauben und in der Einmütigkeit zu widerstehen. Den Versuchen, durch falsche Lehre, durch Anwendung von Gewalt, Unlauterkeit des Vorgehens die Einheit der Deutschen Evangelischen Kirche herzustellen, setzt die Bekenntnissynode entgegen: Die Einheit der evangelischen Kirchen Deutschlands kann nur werden aus dem Worte Gottes im Glauben durch den Heiligen Geist. So allein wird die Kirche erneuert.

Darum ruft die Bekenntnissynode die Gemeinden auf, sich im Gebet hinter sie zu stellen und sich unverrückt um ihre bekenntnistreuen Hirten und Lehrer zu scharen.

Lasset euch nicht durch lose Rede verführen, als wollten wir der Einheit des Deutschen Volkes widerstreben! Höret nicht auf die Verführer, die unser Wollen verkehren, als hätten wir vor, die Einheit der Deutschen Evangelischen Kirche zu sprengen oder die Bekenntnisse der Väter zu verlassen!

Prüfet die Geister, ob sie von Gott sind! Prüfet auch die Worte der Bekenntnissynode der Deutschen Evangelischen Kirche, ob sie mit der Heiligen Schrift und den Bekenntnisschriften der Väter übereinstimmen. Findet ihr, daß wir wider die Schrift reden, dann hört nicht auf uns! Findet ihr aber, daß wir in der Schrift stehen, dann lasset keine Furcht und Verführung euch abhalten, mit uns den Weg des Glaubens und des Gehorsams gegen das Wort Gottes zu beschreiten, auf daß Gottes Volk in einerlei Sinn auf Erden stehe und wir glaubend erfahren, daß Er Selbst gesagt hat: „Ich will dich nicht verlassen noch versäumen“. — Darum: „Fürchte dich nicht, du kleine Herde, denn es ist eures Vaters Wohlgefallen, euch das Reich zu geben“.

Theologische Erklärung zur gegenwärtigen Lage der Deutschen Evangelischen Kirche

Die Deutsche Evangelische Kirche ist nach den Eingangsworten ihrer Verfassung vom 11. Juli 1933 ein Bund der aus der Reformation erwachsenen, gleichberechtigt nebeneinanderstehenden Bekenntniskirchen. Die theologische Voraussetzung der Vereinigung dieser Kirchen ist in Art. 1 und Art. 2, 1 der von der Reichsregierung am 14. Juli 1933 anerkannten Verfassung der Deutschen Evangelischen Kirche angegeben:

Do not let yourselves be led astray by loose talk, claiming we wanted to resist the unity of the German people! Do not listen to the tempters, who pervert our intentions and claim we intended to destroy the unity of the German Evangelical Church or abandon the confessions of the fathers!

Try the spirits whether they are of God! Try also the words of the Confessional Synod of the German Evangelical Church whether they accord with the Holy Scripture and the confessional writings of the fathers. Should you find that we speak against the scriptures, then do not listen to us! Yet should you find that we stand within the scriptures, then let no fear or temptation hold you back from treading the path of faith and obedience to the Word of God along with us, so that God's people may be of the same mind on earth and we may experience in faith that He Himself said: "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." — Therefore: "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."

Theological Declaration on the Current Situation of the German Evangelical Church

The German Evangelical Church, according to the introductory section of its constitution of July 11, 1933, is a federation of the Confessional Churches grown out of the Reformation which enjoy equal rights. The theological basis for the union of these churches is stated in Art. 1 and Art. 2.1 of the German Evangelical Church constitution, recognized by the Reich government as of July 14, 1933:

Art. 1: The inviolable foundation of the German Evangelical Church is the gospel of Jesus Christ, as it is attested to us in the Holy Scripture and came to light anew in the Confessions of the Reformation. This determines and restricts the authorizations that the Church requires for its mission.

Art. 2.1: The German Evangelical Church is divided into member Churches (Regional Churches).

We, the representatives of the Lutheran, Reformed, and United Churches, free synods, church congresses, and congregations, united to form the Confessional Synod of the German Evangelical Church, declare that we stand on the common ground of the German Evangelical Church as a federation of the German Confessional Churches. What brings us together is the confession to the one Lord of the one holy, universal, and apostolic church.

We publicly declare before all Evangelical Churches in Germany that the commonality of this confession and thereby also the unity of the German Evangelical Church are under the greatest threat. It is threatened by the doctrines and actions of the dominant ecclesiastical party of the German Christians,

Confessional Synod of the German Evangelical Church

Wuppertal-Barmen, May 31, 1934

To the Evangelical Congregations and Christians in Germany

The Confessional Synod of the German Evangelical Church convened in Barmen from May 29–31, 1934. Representatives of all German Confessional Churches came together unanimously here in confession to the one Lord of the one holy, apostolic Church. Out of loyalty to their confession of faith, members of the Lutheran, Reformed, and United Churches sought a common message on the Church's distress and impugment in our times. With gratitude to God, they have faith that this common message has been granted to them. They wanted neither to found a new Church, nor to create a union. For nothing

was further from their minds than repealing the confessional status of our Churches. Rather, their intention was to resist the destruction of the confession of faith and thus of the Evangelical Church in Germany, in faith and in unanimity. In opposition to attempts to create an insincere process of unity in the German Evangelical Church through false doctrine and the use of force, the Confessional Synod states: The unity of the Evangelical Churches in Germany can only come about from the Word of God in faith through the Holy Spirit. This is the sole way to renew the Church.

Therefore, the Confessional Synod calls upon the congregations to stand behind it in prayer and to gather adamantly around their pastors and teachers who are faithful to the confession.

which has become increasingly visible during the first year of the German Evangelical Church's existence, and by the administration of the Church, supported by the former. This threat consists of the fact that the theological basis upon which the German Evangelical Church is united is being constantly thwarted and rendered ineffective by outside principles, both on the part of the leader and spokesman of the German Christians, and on the part of the administration of the Church. Should these principles apply, the Church ceases to be a Church according to all confessions applying to us. Should these principles apply, the German Evangelical Church is thus rendered impossible as a federation of the Confessional Churches.

As members of the Lutheran, Reformed, and United Churches, we may and must speak jointly on this matter today. Precisely because we wish to remain faithful to our various confessions, we may not remain silent, as we believe we have been granted a common message in a time of common distress and impugment. We entrust to God what this may mean for the relationship between the Confessional Churches.

In the face of the falsities of the "German Christians" and of the current Reich Church Government that are desolating the Church and thus also the unity of the German Evangelical Church, we confess to the following evangelical truths:

1. "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." (John 14:6).

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door to the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved." (John 10:1-9).

Jesus Christ, as is attested to us in the Holy Scripture, is the one Word of God that we are to hear, that we are to trust and obey in life and in death.

We reject the false doctrine that the Church could and ought to acknowledge other events and powers, figures and truths than God's revelation as the source of its propagation, apart from and alongside this one Word of God.

2. "But of him are ye in Jesus Christ, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." (1 Cor. 1:30).

As Jesus Christ is God's assurance of forgiveness for all our sins, so and with the same solemnity is he also God's strong claim to our entire lives; through him we experience joyful liberation from the godless fetters of this world toward a free and grateful ministry to his creatures.

We reject the false doctrine that there are areas of our lives in which we are to honor not Jesus Christ but other masters, areas in which we do not require justification and sanctification through him.

3. "But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: from whom the whole body fitly joined together." (Eph. 4:15-16).

The Christian Church is the community of brethren in which Jesus Christ currently acts in word and sacrament through the Holy Spirit as the Lord. With its faith and with its obedience, with its teachings and with its order in the midst of the world of sin, the Church of the pardoned sinners has to attest that it is solely his property, that it lives and wishes to live solely from his solace and from his instruction in expectation of his epiphany.

We reject the false doctrine that the Church might change the form of its teachings and its order as it sees fit or according to changes in prevailing ideological and political convictions.

4. "Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister." (Matt. 20:25-26).

The various offices in the Church do not give cause for dominion of one above the others; rather, the exercise of the ministry, which is entrusted to the whole community.

We reject the false doctrine that the Church could and might give itself or be given particular leaders equipped with powers of authority beyond this ministry.

5. "Fear God. Honor the king!" (1 Peter 2:17).

Scripture tells us that the state has the divinely appointed task of ensuring justice and peace in the not yet redeemed world in which the Church also exists, according to the measure of human insight and human ability, and by means of the threat and exercise of force. In gratitude and veneration to God, the Church acknowledges the blessing of this His appointment. It calls to mind God's kingdom, God's commandment and righteousness, and thus the responsibility of those in government and those governed over. It trusts and obeys the power of the Word, through which God upholds all things.

We reject the false doctrine that the state should and could, beyond its specific mandate, become the sole and total order of human life and thus also fulfill the purpose of the Church.

We reject the false doctrine that the Church should and could, beyond its specific mandate, take on the nature, tasks, and dignity of a state and thereby become an organ of the state.

6. "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." (Matt. 28:20).

"The Word of God is not bound." (Tim. 2:9).

The mandate of the Church, upon which its freedom is founded, consists of delivering the message of God's free grace to all people in the place of Christ and thus in the service of his own word and work, through preaching and sacrament.

We reject the false doctrine that the Church could place the word and the work of the Lord in the service of any arbitrarily selected wishes, purposes, or plans, in human self-aggrandizement.

The Confessional Synod of the German Evangelical Church declares that it regards the recognition of these truths and the rejection of these falsehoods as the essential theological foundation of the German Evangelical Church as a federation of the Confessional Churches. It calls on all those capable of joining in its declaration to bear these theological findings in mind in their decisions on church politics. It asks all those concerned to return to the unity of faith, love, and hope.

Verbum Dei manet in aeternum.

Declaration of the Confessional Synod on the Legal Situation of the German Evangelical Church

1. The inviolable foundation of the German Evangelical Church is the Gospel of Jesus Christ, as it is attested to us in the Holy Scripture and came to light anew in the Confessions of the Reformation.

The current Reich Church regime has abandoned this inviolable foundation and committed numerous violations of the law and the constitution. It has thereby forfeited the right to be the lawful executive of the German Evangelical Church.

Only those who hold by the Holy Scripture and the confession to the Church as the inviolable foundations and who are determined to bolster the primacy of both these foundations are suitable to speak and act lawfully in the name of the German Evangelical Church.

Those congregations and Churches united in such a confession are the lawful German Evangelical Church; they coalesce to form the Confessional Synod of the German Evangelical Church.

2. In the current state of distress in the Church, the Confessional Synod has the task of gathering together and representing the confessional community in the German Evangelical Church, of taking care of its community and joint tasks, and of ensuring that the Evangelical Church is run in accordance with the gospel and confession, observing the constitution and the law.

3. It is not possible to separate the outer organization from confession in the Church. Thus, the structuring of the German Evangelical Church into Regional Churches as laid out in the constitution is founded on confession. Regional Churches of particular denominations may not be robbed of their independence through incorporation into the German Evangelical Church by means of administration or outside pressure, because their outer church organization always has to justify itself before their confession. The incorporations carried out by the Reich Church government to date have no legal validity.

4. The unity of the German Evangelical Church will not be created through the ruthless expansion of a central commanding authority, which takes its justification from a worldly leader principle that is alien to the nature of the Church. The hierarchical structuring of the Church contradicts the Reformatory confession.

5. The German Evangelical Church can only gain its true unity as a church by

a) maintaining the Reformatory confessions and encouraging an organic coalition of the Regional Churches and congregations on the basis of their confessional status,

b) allowing the congregation its proper place as the proclaimer of God's Word.

Its earnest concern must be that the spirit of Lord Jesus Christ and not the spirit of worldly rule holds sway in the Church of our fathers.

In obedience to the Lord of the church lies such powerful uniting strength that we can stand together despite the diversity of the Reformatory confessions, for the sake of a united intention and action in the German Evangelical Church.

The Fraternal Council

Praeses D. Koch, Bad Oeynhausen.

Bishop D. Meiser, Munich.

Bishop D. Wurm, Stuttgart.

Pastor Asmussen, Altona.

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Pastor Bosse, Raddestorf/Hannover.

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Director of Studies D. Hesse, Wuppertal-Elberfeld.

Pastor Karl Immer, Wuppertal-Barmen.

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