GERMAN METHODISM AND THE GREAT WAR

by Donald Carl Malone

The history of Methodism is marked by schism and reunion. These events impress us so much that we tend to divide Methodist history into periods following such events. If we are accurate in weighing schism and reunion as primary in importance, then an event where a division should have occurred but did not is equally important. Such an event happened between American and German Methodism during the Great War. This essay is the story of how German Methodism survived this most trying time.

The story is about what happened to German Methodism during the Great War and the reconstruction period after the war. But we cannot understand what happened until we first understand a movement, German Methodism, and a man, Bishop John Nuelsen. The story finds its conclusion in the period between the two World Wars when German Methodism reached its maturity and became a self supporting and self determining Methodist conference.

I

Methodism in Germany did not come into being out of a concern of American Methodists that the gospel be preached on German soil. Rather it resulted from the concern of German immigrants for their families and friends across the sea.

The “Father of German Methodism” was William Nast, who was born in Stuttgart, Germany on January 15, 1807. Orphaned in his teens, he became the responsibility of his eldest sister and her husband, Dr. Süsskind, who was a Lutheran theologian. The theological atmosphere of his home undoubtedly had an effect upon young Nast. When he was fourteen he was enrolled at the Lower Seminary at Blaubeuren to prepare for studies at the University of Tübingen four years later.1

At Tübingen Nast faced the crisis of his life. Although he was an adequate student, he could not reconcile his intellectual studies with his religious fervor and felt that he had been “lost in the labyrinth of Pantheism.” He left Tübingen after only two years’ study, disgracing his family and Dr. Süsskind, who urged him to sail to America. Nast landed at New York on September 28, 1828, a dejected and confused young man.2

After being in America almost two years, Nast secured a position

---

2 Ibid., pp. 10f.
as the tutor on Duncan’s Island in Pennsylvania at the mouth of the Juanita River. His life at Duncan’s Island was marked by a religious self searching.\textsuperscript{3} Nast became interested in Methodism while an instructor at Kenyon College in Ohio in 1834. One day he accompanied a Methodist preacher, Adam Miller, on his circuit that he might assist him in the German language since Miller preached to German people. This seemed to be a pivotal experience for Nast for he was converted at a Methodist meeting in Gambier, Ohio shortly thereafter. He rose rapidly in Methodist ranks, was placed on trial in the Ohio Conference on September 15, 1835, and was immediately called to German work in Cincinnati, Ohio.\textsuperscript{4}

A German Methodist Mission had been in operation in Cincinnati since 1833, but it had been doing poorly. German receptivity to Methodism was marked by suspicion and even hostility. But Nast was persistent and meticulous, and his work slowly bore fruit. In 1836 the Ohio Conference assigned him to superintend German Methodism throughout the state.\textsuperscript{5}

Most notable of Nast’s accomplishments in Ohio was the founding of his German paper \textit{Der Christliche Apologete}, which was sponsored by the \textit{Western Christian Advocate}. He was editor of the paper for many years after its founding in 1839.\textsuperscript{6}

German Methodism was built by the converts of Nast and by the followers of his converts. Foremost among these were Engelhardt Riemenschneider, Ludwig Sigmund Jacoby, and Franz Nuelsen.\textsuperscript{7}

The German Methodist Mission in Germany was started by British Wesleyan Methodism. A converted refugee of Napoleon’s army, Christopher Gottlieb Müller, returned to Germany from Britain in 1830 and began a Methodist movement in Württemberg, which had about 600 converts.\textsuperscript{8}

As soon as Methodism gained momentum among Germans in America, letters began to be sent to relatives in Germany telling of the new denomination they had found. There was an indication that interest in Methodism was mounting in Germany. By the time of the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1844, the revolution in Germany was raging, making a Methodist mission urgent. Therefore, the General Conference sent Nast to Germany to explore possibilities for a mission there. His stay was short, but while he was there Nast preached throughout the country and set a colporteur to work.\textsuperscript{9}

\textsuperscript{3} \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 12-22.
\textsuperscript{4} \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 23-39.
\textsuperscript{5} \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 40-44.
\textsuperscript{6} \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 83-85.
\textsuperscript{7} \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 461.
\textsuperscript{8} \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 175f.
\textsuperscript{9} \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 176-178.
In 1849 the General Mission Committee sent Jacoby to Bremen, Germany because it was one of the few free cities. The first step was to set up a preaching place in a saloon, to publish a semi-monthly paper, and to establish the Bremen Book Concern. Soon a Methodist church was built, and by 1851 there were 750 people attending Methodist services. Out of alarm the Lutheran State Church began a movement of opposition. In 1850, Charles H. Doering and Lewis Nippert were sent to assist Jacoby.10

In 1851 Ehrhardt Wunderlich started work in Waltersdorf on his own. Doering was sent to Hamburg and Heinrich Nuelsen and Engelhardt Riemenschneider were assigned to Bremen.11

The first Annual Conference of the German Methodist Mission met on March 11-17, 1852. Jacoby was the district superintendent over Riemenschneider, Nippert, Nuelsen, and Doering. Wunderlich was on trial.12

A small theological school was begun in Bremen in 1858. In 1866 a millionaire, John Martin of Baltimore, contributed $25,000 to the school. It was moved to Frankfort on the Main, where it is today, and was called the Martin Missionary Institute.13

Under capable leadership the work progressed rapidly. After forty years there were 15,000 Methodists in north Germany.14

II

Franz Nuelsen, a convert of Nast, was to make his mark upon German Methodism primarily by the influence he had upon his family. Nuelsen was a Catholic immigrant. After his conversion to Methodism, he began writing letters to his family about his new found faith. His worried mother took the letters to her priest, who informed her that Franz had lost either his faith or his mind. So, at the insistence of Frau Nuelsen, the family of six children moved to Cincinnati to redeem the soul of the lost son. But instead two daughters and two more sons were converted to Methodism by Franz. One of the daughters was to become Mrs. Ludwig Jacoby; one of the sons was Heinrich Nuelsen.15

Heinrich Nuelsen became a Methodist minister, and in 1851 he was sent as a missionary to Germany.16 On January 19, 1867, John

11 Ibid., pp. 985f.
12 Ibid., pp. 986f.
13 Ibid., pp. 990f.
14 Wittke, op. cit., p. 179.
Louis Nuelsen was born to Heinrich and Rosalie Nuelsen in Zürich, Switzerland.17

John Nuelsen was educated in Germany at the Gymnasiums of Bremen and Karlsruhe. At the age of eighteen he came to the United States to study at Central Wesleyan College in Missouri. He received his B.D. degree from Drew Theological Seminary in 1890 and then returned to Central Wesleyan College to take his M.A. degree in 1892. Nuelsen was then appointed to the position of professor of ancient languages at St. Paul’s College in Minnesota. The young scholar attracted much attention and was a popular speaker for Epworth Leagues, conventions, and camps.18 In 1894 he returned to Central Wesleyan College where he was professor of exegetical theology until he was called to a professorship at the newly created Nast Theological Seminary of Baldwin-Wallace College in Berea, Ohio in 1899.19

At the General Conference of 1908, John Nuelsen was elected to the episcopacy of the Methodist Episcopal Church by an overwhelming majority on the first ballot, which made him one of the youngest men ever elected to that position. He was assigned to the Omaha Area where he spent an uneventful four years, but where he was silently becoming a skilled parliamentarian and a master of the Methodist Discipline. At the next General Conference, Nuelsen was assigned to the Zürich Area over all of Europe, Scandinavia, and North Africa.20

Bishop Nuelsen’s theological position is defined by a friend, John Diekmann:

As a theologian he was not a straight laced fundamentalist, thank God! nor a negating modernist, thank God again, but with emphasis! He was an essentialist.21

Nuelsen was at once scholarly and evangelical. That he was a scholar is evidenced by his record of scholarship. In addition to his earned degrees, he received honorary doctorates from the University of Denver and the University of Nebraska. He also studied at the University of Berlin and the University of Halle in Germany. He was a college and seminary professor for fourteen years.22 He wrote no less than twenty scholarly books both in English and in German. He was respected among German theologians and served as an

18 John A. Diekmann, a speech recorded in “Retirement Service,” Daily Christian Advocate, I (May 1, 1940), 191ff., 209-216.
20 Diekmann, loc. cit.
21 Ibid.
22 Price, loc. cit.
important liaison between theological scholars of America and Germany.\textsuperscript{23}

That Bishop Nuelsen was evangelical is betrayed by a question he raised in reference to a Christian movement in Russia with which he was deeply involved. He said of the leaders of this movement:

Are these men evangelical? Are they converted? They are seekers after God, seekers after the meaning and power of the Gospel of Christ. They do not yet walk in the full light of day. But their hearts are right and they are in a receptive attitude.\textsuperscript{24}

Although he was a scholar, Bishop Nuelsen saw it a Methodist position to rely on faith rather than reason. He said:

Methodism has never placed the emphasis upon intellectualism. It has always believed that the great facts of the religion of Jesus Christ touched the whole of human life, hence it has never been willing to make the force of its message depend upon the results of processes that are peculiar to and restrictive of one function of life.\textsuperscript{25}

Evangelical Methodism had a particular flavor to Nuelsen which was described by him in later years:

Not only in so called protestant countries but in the Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox countries as well, we are not there to fight existing churches or to weaken them, but we aim to strengthen the religious and moral life by building up cells and centers of New Testament works of personal faith and labors of self sacrificing love.\textsuperscript{26}

This last statement indicates that Methodism has a world mission. Nuelsen's place in the world is difficult to understand. He was German, but he was American too. To him Methodism was German, yet it was American too. He had family ties on both sides of the Atlantic, and he felt a loyalty and indebtedness to both countries. He had experienced Methodism in both settings.

Because Methodism was American to Nuelsen, he saw it in possession of a special power. America and Methodism had a purpose which was common to both. He explained this purpose to the First National Convention of Methodist Men:

The larger world furnishes to Methodists the larger opportunities.

\textsuperscript{23}Diekmann, loc. cit.
Wesley's word, "The world is my parish," means vastly more to us than it could possibly mean to him. Today we can, yea we must, speak of a world influence, of world power, of world obligation. . . . America, the threshold between the two large oceans around which modern life pulsates; America, with her immense material resources; America, with her mixed population, in which we can trace lines of influence to nearly every hamlet in every country of the world—America has today opportunities for world influence as no other country ever possessed. Men of Methodism, the Methodist Church is the strongest Protestant church in America.27

Thus the duty of church and country transcend national boundaries. This concept was the principle behind the policies Nuelsen would initiate in future years.

The two great lights in the life of John Nuelsen were John Wesley and Martin Luther. Bishop Nuelsen thought that Methodism was particularly suited to the German people and that it had something special to offer them; and he thought that German culture (and German Methodism) had something special to offer to American Methodism. He therefore devoted much of his efforts toward a better understanding between German theology and American Methodism. He translated a selection of John Wesley's sermons into German in John Wesley: Ausgewählte Predigten, and he introduced American Methodists to Martin Luther in his book Luther: The Leader. In Some Recent Phases of German Theology he tried to interest Americans in the subject. In that book he stated that Methodism is consistent with the new "Modern-Positive Theology of Germany" and suggested that it be used as a foundation for Methodist thought.28

In Luther: The Leader, Nuelsen found a close comparison between Martin Luther and John Wesley. Both men were deeply religious, both were high church, both lived clean lives, both sought personal holiness, both had a sense of sin and depravity, both engaged in self-examination and self-abasement, both read the scriptures, both groped in darkness, both had an extended conversion, and both emphasized the how instead of the time of conversion.29 One can easily see that Bishop Nuelsen stretched some points to find a comparison between the two men, but his efforts found fruition in the comparison of Luther's and Wesley's emphasis upon the lay move-

ment. To Nuelsen, Wesley revived the lay emphasis which Lutherans had lost.\textsuperscript{30} He summed up this point in a rather bold statement:

There is no other great religious leader since the days of Martin Luther who emphasized the ritual points of his theology as much, and at the same time brushed aside his scholastic opinions as did John Wesley, and it is interesting to note that, of late, German theologians are inclined to consider the founder of Methodism as "the greatest Lutheran whom England has ever produced."\textsuperscript{31}

Bishop Nuelsen faced many difficulties in his efforts to strengthen the ties between American Methodism and German culture. When he was appointed to the Zürich Area, German Methodism had about completed its organizational development. There were ten German-speaking conferences in the United States, two conferences in Germany, a conference in Switzerland, a mission conference in Austria-Hungary, publishing houses in Bremen and Zürich, and a chain of deaconess hospitals and welfare institutions.\textsuperscript{32} In spite of this strength, there was still national opposition to Methodism in Germany. When he went to Europe, Nuelsen said:

State, pulpit, and professor's chair unite to fight Methodists. Are there not in our age, saturated with unholiness at the end of the nineteenth century, other powers which one ought to make war against other than that little group of order loving, peaceful citizens whose only crime consists in their desire to serve their God according to their best knowledge and conscience? "Alas, alas, what a reformation country this is!" John Wesley cried a century and a half ago.\textsuperscript{33}

But Bishop Nuelsen had not begun to know difficulty. Two years after his appointment to Zürich, war broke out in Europe.

III

When Bishop Nuelsen was appointed to the Zürich Area, he seemed to be the best possible man to superintend the work in Europe. Little did the General Conference of 1912 realize that his task was to be far greater than leading the European mission, and little did Nuelsen realize the burdens he was to bear. Yet he proved to be a man capable of the greater task. John Diekmann said of him:

Never has the Methodist Church made a wiser and more providential appointment than that; and little did the young bishop dream that the appointment in a few short years would bring crushing burdens,

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., p. 182.
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., p. 245.
\textsuperscript{32} Douglass, op. cit., p. 130.
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., p. 117.
tragical responsibilities and heartbreaking experiences to his life. No
Christian statesman has ever served a quarter of a century through
more trying and difficult days, nor has ever one served more coura­
geously, wisely and faithfully. 24

When the war broke out, Lewis O. Hartman, editor of the Zions
Herald, who often worked with Bishop Nuelsen and who was later
elected to the episcopacy, fled from Switzerland and pleaded with
Nuelsen by telephone to do the same. To this Bishop Nuelsen re­
plied, "My place is here just now," and he remained through the
war. 25

All plans were immediately halted and the work came to a stand
still. Communications were stalled although Nuelsen was still able
to travel freely throughout Europe. The work of the church was
supplanted by the war efforts.

Of the 375,000 members of the Methodist Church in Europe,
74,700 were living in belligerent countries. Of the twelve confer­
cences, eight were involved in the war. Laymen and preachers on
both sides found themselves in arms. But the most serious blow to
the church was the spiritual depravity which follows any war. 26

One of the largest Methodist churches in Europe, Jerusalem
Church in Copenhagen under Pastor Anton Bast, was destroyed
early in the war. However, members began almost immediately to
rebuild. One half of the clergy in Austria-Hungary was called to
arms. In Italy two professors, several pastors, and 300 laymen were
drafted into military service. But work went on in spite of difficul­
ties, most of it consisting of war relief which was greatly assisted by
the Methodist War Relief Fund. Relief programs were in opera­
tion for soldiers, women, and children. In every country deaconess
homes and hospitals were active. The Deaconess Hospital in Zürich
was strategically located in the war area and accomplished the
most. 27

The most serious problems were in Germany. The church immedi­
ately faced a financial crisis. One third of the preachers and 4,500
of the 29,000 laymen were in arms. When the Annual Conference
was held in 1916, nearly all of the members were in uniform. Martin
Missionary Institute was converted to a hospital for soldiers. But
even in Germany, deaconess relief work was active. One deaconess
received an Iron Cross from the German Government for her
work. 28

24 Diekmann, loc. cit.
25 Douglass, op. cit., p. 194.
Advocate, XVIII (May 2, 1916), 26f.
27 Ibid.
28 Ibid.
At the General Conference of 1916 the chairs for the delegates from Germany were empty. However, a spirit of understanding prevailed and a message of greeting was sent to the German conferences. Bishop Nuelsen began his address to the General Conference with:

In looking back over the quadrennium the events of the first two years seem like ancient history; the last two years are as a quickly changing but continuous succession of horrors beyond expression.

Thus he candidly and effectively shared his burden with his colleagues. The task in Europe since the war had grown too great for Nuelsen, and the bishop appealed to the General Conference for greater episcopal supervision of Europe. Bishop William Anderson was appointed temporarily to assist Nuelsen in France, Russia, and Finland.

Bishop Nuelsen's position in Germany was difficult. He was born in Germany, but he was an American associated with an American church. It was an act of patriotism for Germans to oppose American Methodism, and German Methodists were patriotic too. But Bishop Nuelsen continued to travel in Germany as long as he could. However, he was eventually forced to discontinue this close contact. His presence, giving the appearance that the German church was under American control, placed German Methodism in jeopardy. In April of 1917, under orders of the United States Department of War and State prohibiting communication with a country at war with the United States, he was forced to retire to Zürich. Thus the work in Germany was left entirely in the hands of the district superintendents. However, this seemed to work well for the district superintendents proved worthy of the responsibility, and the German Government was satisfied with the arrangement.

German Methodism also faced a crisis in America. During the war Methodists saw patriotism as a part of their religious duty. Patriotism was freely preached from Methodist pulpits. One church, the First Methodist Church of Duluth, Minnesota, went so far as to set aside a Sunday school room as their "Patriotic Room." In the room were pictures and displays of Christian and patriotic events.
A statement by the Board of Bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church at their semi-annual session in Grand Rapids, Michigan in April of 1917 makes clear the position of Methodism toward the war:

God himself makes peace. . . . There can and there ought to be no peace, until it stands squarely based upon righteousness. . . . We urge that your patriotism take on sacrificial forms and without the delay of an hour. . . . We stand with the President in his message to Congress where he said: "The right is more precious than peace. . . . The wrongs against which we array ourselves are not common wrongs, they cut to the roots of human life. The world must be made safe for democracy." 47

As admirable as such patriotism may be, it placed considerable hardship upon all Germans in America. One Methodist bishop in the mid-west conspired with a secret service man to gain the confidence of and to tempt one of his German-born preachers who was later punished for his statements which were considered unpatriotic. From a pulpit in Cincinnati, the home of German Methodism in America, came the words, "There are not enough telegraph posts in Cincinnati to hang all the German Huns that should be hanged," and "I would rather kiss a pig than shake hands with a Hun." One of Bishop Nuelsen’s closest friends, John Diekman, was forced to remove a picture of Bishop Walden from the walls of his office because a secret service man mistook it for a picture of Bismarck.48

In sharp contrast to the Bismarck era, in which German Americans pointed with pride to the German ancestry which linked them with the people across the sea who in a brilliant conquest had unified Germany and had brought peace to Europe,49 Germans in America now began to deny their ancestry and to become wholly American. Thus the war contributed greatly to the ultimate absorption of German churches into English-speaking churches.50 There is no story of German Methodism in America after the Great War.

To all this was added a great embarrassment to Methodists and especially to German Methodists. One of the world’s most erudite linguists was a German Methodist, Dr. Emil Luering. Dr. Luering had mastered thirty languages, including oriental and dead languages. Although he was assured a prominent position in the scholarly world, Dr. Luering spent two years in pioneer missionary work for the Methodist Church in Borneo and Malaysia.51 When the war

46 "My Country 'Tis of Thee!" Christian Advocate, XCIII (June 27, 1918), 796.
47 Douglass, op. cit., pp. 191f.
48 Ibid., p. 190.
49 Wittke, op. cit., pp. 128f.
50 Ibid., p. 79.
51 Douglass, op. cit., p. 261.
erupted he was a professor at the Martin Missionary Institute. Nothing was heard of him during the war until in 1918 a report came from London that he had been found in that city and had been shot for spying.\footnote{Raymond J. Wade (ed.), \textit{Journal of the General Conference}. New York: Methodist Book Concern, 1924, p. 58.} The incident was an unfortunate mistake for Dr. Luering was very much alive at the General Conference of 1924.\footnote{Douglass, \textit{loc. cit.}}

Such unhappy experiences on both continents placed a terrific strain on the Methodist Episcopal Church. Methodists in both Germany and America desired a schism. Such a rift would have been as natural as the divisions of many American churches during the Civil War. German Methodists considered separation from the American church a patriotic duty, and American Methodists were repulsed by their German brethren.\footnote{William Warren Sweet, \textit{Methodism in American History}. New York: Abingdon, 1954, p. 353.}

Bishop Nuelsen, who belonged to both sides, stood against both views. He wanted the German Methodist Church to remain a part of the main body, and for good reasons. In 1907, the Methodist mission in Japan gained its autonomy from the main body. As a separate church it did well and thus set a precedent. It was generally considered a good policy for Methodist conferences in other countries to work toward self support and self determination and when strong enough, to gain it.\footnote{Douglass, \textit{loc. cit.}} This was Bishop Nuelsen's position. But Bishop Nuelsen believed that the German church was not yet ready for autonomy and that war should not force it into autonomy for two reasons. First, the German church could not finance itself, especially not in time of war. Secondly, German Methodism was not mature enough to stand on its own. It needed the guidance and counsel of a larger church, and without it Methodism in Germany would soon become a sect.\footnote{Douglass, \textit{loc. cit.}}

Bishop Nuelsen therefore pleaded for a viewpoint which looked beyond national interests:

There is no German Christendom, no German faith, any more than there is an English or an American. Christianity is supernatual. In the Kingdom of Christ there are no trenches and no customs boundaries. Human beings are the same everywhere. They must be brought under the power of the spirit, purified and consecrated as human instruments to the service of God—not by isolation but by contact. It would be as much a tragedy for our German peoples as well as our Christendom if the many sided and mutual relationships built up over so many years should be broken. I hold it for one of the most important tasks of peace to build the bridge again, to tie together the broken cords so that the Christians of different lands can learn to

\footnote{\textit{Has Dr. Luering Been Shot?} \textit{California Christian Advocate}, LXVII (June 13, 1918), 4.}
understand one another again, to win each other's confidence, to enrich our mutual contact. . . . The separation from America just at this time would have the effect of accelerating the divisions of Christendom.  

At the General Conference of 1920, Bishop Nuelsen described this struggle to hold the church together:

While the war was raging it seemed almost inevitable that Methodism in Germany would be compelled to sever its organic connection with an organization that emphasized so markedly its Americanism. I counseled moderation and delaying decisive steps until passion should cool down, judgments could be clarified, and the whole situation be normal again. . . . To my mind, it would have been a great pity if any branch of the Church of Jesus Christ, especially a church that places the emphasis not upon externals but upon the spiritual message, should separate on national lines—while other agencies, some of them indifferent, even hostile to Christianity, strain every effort to extol the ideal of universal brotherhood above national issues. I am glad to report that both the annual and the lay electoral conferences have passed resolutions in which their organic relation to the world embracing Methodist Episcopal Church is taken for granted.  

Thus the tide had turned. It had been commonplace for Protestant churches to divide over almost any issue. Now a church had held together in spite of staggering odds. There was reason and desire to divide, but Bishop Nuelsen held the church together. After the war three Methodist denominations began seriously to consider reunion. It was perhaps providential that on April 24, 1940 in Atlantic City, New Jersey Bishop John Nuelsen, as the senior Bishop, stood before the delegates of what had been three Methodist denominations and said:

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, I do now call to order this historic Conference, the first General Conference of The Methodist Church. 

IV

The war had its positive effect upon the church, presenting an opportunity for service it had not known before. Europe had to be rebuilt, and the church wanted to help. Before the war's end, the General Conference of 1916 planned for a Centenary Program to last during 1918 and 1919 and hopefully for many more years. Some even dreamed that it would last forever. The Centenary was to be a celebration of the centennial of Methodist missions which began with a mission to the Wyandot Indians in 1819 and was to increase funds and efforts for missionary work. Methodists responded won-
fully to the program, and missions saw their best days during the
program. Centenary came just in time for reconstruction after the
war, and it was this emphasis combined with the war cry, ‘Over the top,’ which made Methodism an important agent in rebuilding war-devastated Europe.

After the Armistice of 1918, Bishop Nuelsen knew that he still had a battle to fight. The situation after the war had made his task clear. Nuelsen noted that there was great despair in Europe, but he looked upon this as an opportunity for the work of the church. The same philosophy which motivated him to hold the church together during the war provided him the means of reconstruction after the war:

... The Methodist Episcopal Church has the advantage of being a world church, not a national church, and yet representing the strength of American Christianity. There are today two tremendous currents deeply affecting the European mind, apparently divergent and yet lifting up a higher common level. The one is the newly awakened nationalism, the other the emerging of a new supranationalism largely influenced by American minds... Nationalism, unchecked by the ideal of international service, nationalism without the vision of the kingdom of God that has no frontiers, is a bane, a curse... Nationalism that aims to develop the finest and best racial and national gifts and talents of mind and character in order to put them to the service of humanity; and internationalism, or better, supranationalism that unites the best and truest of every nation in a common agency for protection and uplift means the solution of the political and economic problems of today. The Methodist Episcopal Church faces this problem today in the European countries as no other organization does.

Through the years it had become increasingly apparent that Bishop Nuelsen could not administer all of the European work alone. At the General Conference of 1920 Anton Bast and Edgar Blake were elected to the episcopacy on the seventh ballot. During the same conference, Bishop Bast was appointed to the Copenhagen Area which included all of Scandinavia; Bishop Blake was appointed to the Paris Area which included France, Spain, Italy, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, and North Africa; Bishop Nuelsen was appointed to the Zürich Area which included Germany, Switzerland, Austria, Hungary, and Russia.

All over Europe, and especially in the belligerent countries, people were hungry and homeless. Bishop Nuelsen was able to begin a relief program immediately because he had never left his post.

60 Sweet, op. cit., pp. 38f.
61 Nuelsen, loc. cit.
62 Ibid.
A center was established in Zürich, Switzerland for relief work in all of the countries.\textsuperscript{64} The work centered in Switzerland because the church there was intact after the war, the country was central, and the deaconess homes and hospitals there were the best. Cooperation with the Hoover feeding program strengthened the relief work in Switzerland.\textsuperscript{65}

For his work Nuelsen needed assistance from the Methodist churches all over Europe, but especially from the churches in Switzerland and Germany. He also needed the support of Methodists in America. This made his position difficult for Methodists in Germany suffered from a natural lack of spirit, and American Methodists still harbored ill feelings for the Germans.\textsuperscript{66}

Bishop Nuelsen's administration of relief work in Europe was indispensable, and his fund raising in America was extraordinary. The Methodist Episcopal Church in America cabled funds to Nuelsen with which he purchased three carloads of food and clothing in Switzerland. The supplies were then sent to Methodist pastors in Germany for distribution. Carloads of children from Austria and Germany began to arrive in Zürich to be housed in Swiss Methodist homes. German Methodists in America raised over a half million dollars for Nuelsen's work.\textsuperscript{67}

Southern planters had no money to contribute to relief work, so Nuelsen took cotton instead. Then he went into the North to collect money to send the cotton to Hamburg to be manufactured into clothing. He issued "Vacation Certificates" for ten dollars each which entitled a needy child a month's rest at the expense of an American family. Thirty-three thousand mite boxes were distributed to German Methodist families in America for the collection of their funds. Sunday schools and Epworth Leagues were asked to contribute. Christmas donations brought in large sums. A Methodist European Relief Office was established in New York.\textsuperscript{68}

Nuelsen set up a foundation to expand homes and relief work among children, but this required more money. When he was in New York he received a wire from his co-worker, Otto Melle, advising him that a home in Turnitz, Austria could be purchased for $8,000. That same day Nuelsen met with the trustees of the First German Church of New York in a small prayer room. That evening he returned to his hotel room with $10,500 in checks and immediately wired Melle, "Buy Turnitz." \textsuperscript{69}

\textsuperscript{64} Nuelsen, loc. cit.
\textsuperscript{66} Douglass, op. cit., pp. 197-198.
\textsuperscript{67} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{68} Ibid., pp. 199f.
\textsuperscript{69} Ibid., p. 201.
The work was to be completed by 1922. But a steadily growing post-war inflation increasingly hindered operations. Even this was turned to opportunity by Nuelsen. In April of 1923 he bought 25,000 one-mark notes for a dollar and sent them to friends in America with this note:

Dear Friend:

Will you accept this brand-new one-mark note with my best wishes? Before the war it was worth twenty-five cents in American money. Do you know what it is worth today? When you receive this letter I could get 80,000 for a dollar. But please tell your friends that for the twenty-five cents which this was worth before the war, I can give to hungry children two or three cans of condensed milk. 70

Work in Vienna was vital because the devastation there left the town in political chaos and left many children homeless. But it was difficult work because of Catholic dominance. Austrian relief was primarily among the children. 71

The effectiveness of Methodist work in Vienna was evidenced by a conversation which Bishop Nuelsen had with a Polish Government official in Poland in 1920. When the official learned from Nuelsen that there were two Methodist pastors of congregations in Poland, he replied:

I have sought for Methodists in vain. I longed for a Methodist to come. I prayed that they might be here in this time of transition. I prayed God to lead Methodists into our country, and you are really here. Even in this day there are miracles!

He explained his enthusiasm by saying that he had found a "home for his soul" with Methodists in Vienna. 72

Relief work in the Ruhr region was the most urgent because war raged on in that area. Women and children were being killed. Children were undernourished and homeless. Nuelsen himself took charge of the important work which consisted primarily of distributing cans of condensed milk to children. His work gained such recognition among Christians in America that it was said that he invaded the Ruhr before the French. 73

Before the war the Methodist Episcopal Church had done no significant work in France. Relief work provided incentive for Methodism to spread throughout that country. Orphanages were established at Lyons and Grenoble, and thirty-two villages were restored. 74

---

70 Ibid., pp. 202f.
71 Ibid.
72 "A Home For His Soul," Christian Advocate, CXV (December 30, 1920), 1729.
73 "Invasion of the Rhur by the Methodists," Christian Century, XL (July 26, 1923), 956f.
74 Nuelsen, loc. cit.
a relief center in the Elephant Hotel at Chateau Thierry.75

During the War Anton Bast, "the poor man's pastor of Copenhagen," had begun relief work centering around his Jerusalem Church in Copenhagen. The work was so effective that he gained influence in all of Scandinavia.76 When Bast returned from the 1920 General Conference a bishop, he maintained Copenhagen as a relief center for Northern Europe.77

Bast's program in Copenhagen was instrumental in sending relief supplies to Russia through Finland during the Russian Famine of 1920 and 1921.78 The famine swept Russia as a combined result of a drought and Bolshevik misrule. The country was thrown into a chaos which frightened the world and later paralyzed Russia.79

Bishop Nuelsen was interested in Russia in an uncanny way, viewing it as the farthest point which Methodism could reach.80 Therefore he was personally involved in the shipment of American relief supplies through Finland to a small Methodist church in Petrograd.81

After relief work was well underway, attentions were turned toward the reconstruction of the Martin Missionary Institute and the building of a faculty for the seminary. By 1924 the school had become the training center for Methodist pastors from all parts of Europe.82

The work could not have been done in Europe in this crucial time had it not been for the Centenary program. Funds from the program came just in time, but they decreased sharply in the years following the war.83 Although the Centenary was a blessing in time of need, there was much resentment over the decrease in giving after 1922, for much of the work begun in Europe had been planned with the expectation that funds would continue. By 1924 it was apparent that many new projects would have to be abandoned and that many European churches would have to support themselves.84

76 Nuelsen, loc. cit.
77 "Signs of Progress in Northern Europe," *Christian Advocate*, XCV (November 18, 1920), 1540.
79 "The Third Horseman Rides in Russia," *Literary Digest*, X (August 12, 1921), 7-10.
80 Nuelsen, loc. cit.
81 "Personal," *Christian Advocate*, XCVII (October 12, 1922), 1282.
82 Douglass, *op. cit.*, p. 158.
83 "Methodist Pull in Missionary Lines," *Christian Century*, XLI (December 11, 1924), 1612.
84 John L. Nuelsen, "Bishop Nuelsen Describes Conditions in Germany," *California Christian Advocate*, LXXI (February 21, 1924), 6f.
V

After the war German Methodism took up the task of establishing
themselves within Germany as a free and independent church.
Although it cherished its relationship with American Methodism, it
had long been hampered by its dependence upon a foreign church.
As long as this dependence existed it could never be regarded as
indigenous to German culture, and therefore could never be looked
upon with respect. So German Methodism’s search for a place in its
own country and its striving for self support was one movement.

After the war there was much hope. Bishop Nuelsen wrote in
1924 that German Methodism was growing in strength and that
with this growth there came a new respect from the Lutheran State
Church. Perhaps Bishop Nuelsen was overly hopeful, for in 1926
the bishop reported bitterly that Methodists were persecuted by
being taxed to support the state church. Germany was involved in
a political upheaval over land rights and the authority of the govern­
ment after the days of the Kaiser. The Lutheran Church was deeply
involved in a reactionary movement, making the matter a religious
controversy from which Methodists could not escape.

Through all this the German Methodist Church continued to
strive for self support. At the meeting of the Methodist Board of
Foreign Missions in New York, November 14-17, 1927, a declaration
of self support was received from Bishop Nuelsen for four of the
conferences in central Germany. With the declaration came an
admission that the church was ill equipped for such a venture and
that the declaration was an act of faith rather than an act of
wealth. However, the German Church seemed to thrive on self
support for success became a problem. Growth was rapid, evangeli­
cal tent meetings spread throughout the country, deaconess hospitals
grew stronger, the seminary at Frankfurt continued to grow, and
the conferences immediately became contributing conferences in­
stead of missionary conferences.

At the General Conference of 1932, Bishop Nuelsen reported
that there were 70,000 Methodists in the Zürich Area with 367
pastors and 1,234 preaching places. The small church had a great
task to do. Europe had become increasingly disturbed and increas­

---

88 “A Landmark in Missions,” Northwest Christian Advocate, LXXV (December 1, 1927), 1135.
ingly sinful. Germany seemed to cry for a dictator, and Nuelsen viewed the rise of Hitler with considerable apprehension. 90

When in 1933 the National Socialist Revolution established the Third Reich in Germany, Methodism was again threatened by a schism over national interests. But the threat was only momentary. The church in Germany had caught the spirit of a united Methodism working beyond national interests which was so much a part of Bishop Nuelsen's life. The desire of German Methodists to continue in relationship with the mother church was strong, and they immediately sought a means to maintain that relationship and yet to live within the Third Reich. 91

By necessity the Methodists in Germany maintained a position of understanding and cooperation with the leaders of the Third Reich. From Methodists in England and America came a rustle of discontent because of this close relationship. As he had done in the past, Bishop Nuelsen counselled patience and the delay of hasty decisions. 92

Methodism in Germany had been organized into five annual conferences recognized separately in nine states. To satisfy the new government the conferences were organized into one central conference recognized as one national corporation. This was a more workable organization, and the guise of separation from a foreign church was less threatening to the Third Reich. 93

The German Central Conference was organized in Germany without authority from the General Conference. The General Conference of 1936 looked upon the existing Central Conference and saw the necessity of it. Therefore the conference freely made the German Central Conference legal. 94 A central conference must elect a bishop from its own leadership. The German Central Conference was summoned into session at Frankfurt in September of 1936, and on the first ballot, almost unanimously, elected as their bishop the president of the seminary at Frankfurt, F. H. Otto Melle. 95

A central conference is autonomous in that it is self supporting and self determining. However, it maintains a relationship with the mother church. This relationship is nebulous and varies with the political situation. Methodist conferences in Japan and Mexico maintained a relationship which was by necessity loose indeed. 97

---

91 Douglass, op. cit., p. 247.
92 Ibid., pp. 2471.
93 Ibid., pp. 250; 257.
94 Ibid., pp. 248; 250.
95 Ibid., p. 248.
96 Ibid., p. 249.
97 Ibid.
The relationship of the German Central Conference was considerably stronger. At its formation, delegates of the German Central Conference voted almost without opposition to remain in connection with the Methodist Episcopal Church and to conduct a mutual search for ways to make this possible.98

This independence which the German church had gained was an object of pride and the manifestation of maturity, although the church had only 43,283 members and 286 preachers.99 This was a climax to the long and difficult way they had come. When Bishop Nuelsen opened the German Central Conference on September 17, 1936 he declared:

No longer can the Methodist Church in Germany be called an “alien plant,” a colony of a foreign organization. The Methodist Episcopal Church in Germany is from now on exclusively under German leadership. German Methodists can now look their racial comrades in the eye and say, “Methodism is German.”100

---

98 Ibid., p. 247.
99 Ibid., p. 250.
100 Ibid.