THE FATHERLAND REVISITED; THE RELATIONSHIP OF
THE EVANGELICAL ASSOCIATION IN EUROPE
TO THE AMERICAN MOTHER CHURCH (1912-1940)

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Recent Research has probed significant aspects in the history of the European free churches in the twentieth century, including Episcopal Methodism and the Evangelical Association. However, there is need for an understanding of the ongoing relationship between this free church movement and the American mother churches that were primarily responsible for their inception and initial growth. This is especially apparent in the case of the Evangelical Association, the subject of this study, whose history is less extensively familiar to United Methodists. It is noteworthy that there was greater parity in membership between the two bodies in Europe than in America at the time of union in 1968.

Further, the older denominational histories have chronicled the founding and early development of Evangelical missions in Europe within the nineteenth century, but little research has been devoted to more tenuous period in their continuing relationship with the mother church in the early twentieth century, especially between the world wars. This was an era when the nurturing ties became strained by unprecedented political issues that threatened to sunder the longstanding trans-Atlantic “Verbundenheit” altogether. This was also the era when unprecedented strains were placed upon those twin themes of “Scriptural Holiness” and German cultural identity that had served as the main threads of linkage in that relationship from the beginning.

1See Birgit Deiss-Neithammer, Das Verhältnis der Methodistischen Freikirchen in Deutschland zu Staat und Gesellschaft in der Zeit der Weimarer Republik (Stuttgart: Christliches Verlagshaus, 1985); and Ulrich Ziegler, Mission-Anpassung-Veränderung; Die Geschichte der Evangelische Gemeinschaft in Esslingen a N., 1852-1945 (Stuttgart: Christliches Verlagshaus, 1987); both of these titles were published through the Beiträge zur Geschichte der Ev-M. Kirche, herausgegeben von der Studiengemeinschaft für Geschichte der Ev-M. Kirche.

2The EUB in Europe were known as the Ev. Gemeinschaft because of the lack of United Brethren presence. The smaller UB mission had been absorbed into Episcopal Methodism at an earlier date.

3See especially R. W. Albright, History of the Evangelical Church (Harrisburg: Evangelical Publishing Co., 1956.)
Our primary source of information is the firsthand data available in the issues of the two American denominational organs of the period, The Evangelical Messenger and its German-language counterpart, Die Christliche Botschafter, as well as significant documents obtained from archival sources within Germany.4

Historical Background

By 1912, Evangelicals had been ministering in Germany for some seven decades. Their modest roots in Europe paralleled their like origin in late-eighteenth century America, when they were founded under the Spirit-imbued ministry of Jacob Albright (1759–1809), a converted farmer and Revolutionary War veteran whose burden had been to bring the apostolic and Wesleyan message of the new birth and the life of holiness in Christ to the German immigrants of his native Pennsylvania. By 1912, the number of Evangelicals in Europe had grown to more than 22,000 members, which by then included 6900 members in Switzerland which was organized as a separate conference in 1880. In the early decades of its ministry in Europe, the Evangelical Association gained strength by its consistent adherence to the message of regeneration and sanctification in Christ as matters of conscious experience requisite for salvation, and also by its calling to minister this gospel to persons of German cultural and linguistic identity. By 1914, Evangelicals were about to enter an era of unprecedented tension when these loyalties would increasingly come under attack by forces within Europe and America alike. The nature of those tensions, that have contributed significantly to the present situation of the free churches in Europe, need now to be examined.


Evangelicals in 1914 seemed to be well on their way toward the realization of the challenge that had been presented by Bishop Reuben Yeakel (1827–1904) of the Missionary Society when he said, “Brethren, we are going to take possession of the whole of Germany.”5 Since the mission to the German Fatherland had become so integral to its own identity due to the German heritage and constituency of Evangelicals in America, it is not surprising that the traumatic events of these wars were to send profound shock waves through the Association that would permanently transform the transoceanic relationship. The era of close, filial relationship

4Most significant is the unpublished historical manuscript by the former European church editor, M. Richter, Die Entwicklung unserer kirchlichen Verwaltung und Regierung in Europa seit 1914 (13 pp.), that was kindly provided to the author by Dr. Karl Steckel.

between the two sectors of the church, that might be called an age of innocence, was forever passing away.

At the outset of these years, when the age of innocence was still intact, the German culture was still viewed as a mission field in need of the gospel, but it was also coming to be perceived as having achieved moral and spiritual progress. Not only was the general society viewed as being healthier than in former years. The health of European Evangelicals was regarded as an example for American Evangelicals to emulate. An American visitor noted that, “The people seemed fresher to me, and more attentive at nine than Americans usually are at eleven on Sunday morning.”\(^6\) At Koenigsberg in East Prussia, 15,000 marks were given in a single mass service which, exclaimed Spreng, “are sums to make some of our American conferences blush.”\(^7\) In the first two decades of the twentieth century, significant church growth occurred in each conference year, and wide use was made of such American religious techniques as camp meetings, Sunday schools, and Y.P.A. (Young People’s Alliance) societies.\(^8\)

There was a sense in which the German culture was coming to be regarded as a high embodiment of Christian civilization. American Evangelicals not only venerated the memory of Washington and Lincoln; they also had begun to extol the virtues of the German Kaiser Wilhelm II as a model of Christian piety and leadership.\(^9\) Full-page photographs of the Kaiser appear on the cover of the *Evangelical Messenger* in 1912 and again in 1913, on the occasion of his twenty-fifth year in office, that also featured a drawing of the Reichstag (parliamentary) building in Berlin.\(^10\) A translation of an editorial in the *Evangelische Botschajter*, the leading periodical of the Church in Europe, extolled him on this anniversary date as a great Christian emperor who “by the blessing of God . . . has preserved peace among our people and in our realm when war was imminent.”\(^11\)

After the eruption of hostilities in 1914, both the *Evangelical Messenger* and the *Christliche Botschajter* proceeded to print articles that favored the German point of view regarding the European war situation.\(^12\)

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\(^{\text{6}}\)EM, (September 15, 1921): 2.

\(^{\text{7}}\)EM (September 15, 1921): 2.

\(^{\text{8}}\)CB (July 11, 1914): 9.

\(^{\text{9}}\)Beside an article noting Washington’s birthday was a lead editorial entitled, “Ein schönes Kaiserwirt”—CB (February 22, 1913): 31.

\(^{\text{10}}\)EM (August 7, 1912): 1; and (June 11, 1913): 16. Also CB (January 25, 1913): 19.

\(^{\text{11}}\)“The Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of the German Emperor,” EM (July 12, 1913): 4–5. (Note: the *Evangelische Botschajter* is not to be confused with the *Christian Botschajter*, the German-language paper of the American Evangelicals).

Very rapidly this became more than a theoretical discussion, as a majority of Evangelical laymen and over half of the pastors of the German conferences found themselves being drafted into the German army. Soon the seminary at Reutlingen was closed and remained so until September 1917. The appeal the American Evangelicals took to heart was for “earnest intercession” on behalf of the afflicted families and congregations and for generous financial aid to meet the unforeseen emergency. Both were supplied in abundance. Hearts were moved when in 1915 the Messenger reprinted a letter from a lieutenant in the German army who wrote that while, “We can hear shooting from a great distance, . . . I have just conducted worship” for the battalion. The soldier was R. Carchet, the Evangelical missionary to Riga, Russia.

Although the devastating effect of the War upon the European mission of the Evangelical Association soon became evident to the mother church, the ethnic and political sympathy with the German cause did not cease until America entered the conflict in 1917. The record of the 1916 North Germany Conference proceedings as printed in the Messenger mentioned that the Conference had “sent a telegram of admiration to the German Emperor at the headquarters,” and that “after two days we received an answer containing thanks and good wishes.” Meanwhile, the toll of war mounted. American bishops were now unable to attend European conference sessions, as reports were coming to the church papers announcing “15 pastors absent and four died at the front” in the 1915 session of the South Germany Conference, and “22 pastors serving in the army and four dead,” with a membership loss of 267, in the 1915 report of the North Germany Conference. A report from 1916 still refers to the German Fatherland, although that term will be reserved for the United States after 1917. In the final months before American entry into the War the editor of the Messenger adopted a strong peace stance in which he suggested that if the government fails to intervene on behalf of peace in Europe, then the American churches should take that initiative.

Practically all communications with the European conferences were sundered by 1917. The editor of the Messenger, T. C. Meckel, was only


14 Eller, p. 164; also CB (September 12, 1914): 5; and CB (October 10, 1914): 3.


17 EM (July 28, 1915): 1, 16; and (August 4, 1915): 11-12.

18 "We have 173 preachers in the field, every one of them a native of the German or Swiss Fatherland"—G. Heinmiller, “Our Work in Europe,” EM (January 19, 1916): 24.


able to secure data on the proceedings of those conferences by consulting copies of the European *Evangelische Botschaft* that had been sent to a Philadelphia pastor and had been reproduced in the American *Christliche Botschaft*. Calling for intercession on behalf of "the suffering, sorely tried constituency of our own Evangelical Association in Europe," Meckel's editorial for March 1917 is the last to appear on this subject in the *Messenger* until May 1918, long after American entry in the War. In his 1917 editorial he observed, "It is sad to contemplate that many of our Evangelicals in Germany are in the army and many Evangelicals in America have responded to their country's call, and that these will clash on the battle front." With the blackout of communications between the two sectors of the church, the church press fell silent on the European mission, until a renewal of these contacts took place after the Armistice in November 1918. There were only occasional critical remarks of the popular tendency to slander everything German or to swear against the name of the Kaiser that the editor considered demeaning and vulgar. The *Messenger* printed editorials supportive of the American war effort in the fall of 1918, and a revisionist reading of history now appeared, as the church editor suddenly announced that "the people of Germany... have been, lo these many decades, under the influence of a wrong educational and military system of instruction and practice." On the occasion of the Armistice, an editorial expressed concern that the treaty would be equitable to all parties concerned—a hope that would be severely disappointed for German Evangelicals in the postwar years.

**The Era of the Weimar Republic (1919–1933): The Search for New Identity**

A predominant theme in the postwar reports of the European conferences to the mother church was the need to regroup and advance the mission of the Evangelicals in a post-imperial era in which German national and cultural interests were at a decided disadvantage within Europe. Now, for example, the work of the Evangelical Association that had formerly been under German governmental authority in East Prussia and Alsace-Lorraine found itself under new flags—Polish and French, respectively.

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23 EM (May 1, 1918): 12.
Within postwar Germany, the attitude of Evangelicals toward the Weimar Republic was ambivalent. It was also ironical that the Evangelicals in Germany were beginning to identify more with the German “Volk” than with the American mother church, although as a free church it was better integrated and accepted within the “international, ecumenical plane, than within the national, ecclesial landscape.”

This was an era in which the personal ties with the mother church were gratefully renewed, with American Evangelical bishops once again conducting well-received episcopal visits. At the same time, there was a growing sense on the part of the European Conferences that a return to prewar “normalcy” was improbable. Bishop Spreng reported that German Evangelicals had been “heartbroken” over American entry into the war against them, and “they seem to think that the Germans in America should have prevented it.” A greater structural autonomy for their work, under the general oversight of the mother church, was in order. This would hopefully prevent the recurrence of the kind of disruptions in leadership that had occurred during the war years. This more independent outlook was also encouraged by the trend toward disestablishment of the state churches in Germany after 1919 under the aegis of the new Weimar Republic that fostered the hope for better treatment for Evangelicals within their indigenous German culture. However, the movement toward greater ecclesial autonomy from the mother church was to be countered by the ensuing economic depression of the 1920’s that made European Evangelicals rely more and not less upon the mother church for needed financial support.

Within the context of these broad developments it is necessary for us to identify the crucial phases of negotiation and the key personalities involved on both sides of the Atlantic. First, the negotiations.

In 1918-1919, the North and South Germany Conferences prepared a memorial that was presented to the 1919 Evangelical General Conference. The memorial, petitioned that a “general synod” be formed for Germany that would have authority to oversee the work of the conferences and to elect a resident bishop who would also hold membership in the denominational board of bishops. A joint American and European body was commissioned to meet in Stuttgart early in 1920 to formulate a proposed structure. The different ways in which these negotiations were reported

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27 Deiss-Neithammer: 43-44.
32 Richter: 8.
by the American and by the European representatives is noteworthy. For the Americans, the chief consideration was to reestablish contact and "normal" relations with the European mission. For the Europeans, the greater consideration was given to finding a way of securing legal recognition and incorporation as a free church from the provincial German governments. 33 This meeting in Stuttgart invested greater energy in developing a plan to provide much needed war relief for the thousands of European Evangelicals suffering from hunger and lack of shelter than to resolving the issue of autonomy. The right of the Association to hold legal title to its property was finally achieved in 1920 before the implementation of the proposal for autonomy. This movement toward incorporation and autonomy was also taking shape in Europe at a time when the Evangelical Association in America was moving toward reunion with the United Evangelical Church, the group that had favored a greater use of English among American Evangelicals, resulting in the formation of the Evangelical Church of North America in 1922.

Further insight into these changing patterns in the postwar relationship of American and European Evangelicals is illuminated by focusing upon the key personalities involved in these negotiations. Chief among them was a member of the forenamed commission, Bishop Gottlieb Heinmiller (1853-1921), a German-American, whose ministry was uniquely shaped to bridge the concerns of the European and American sectors of the church.

Heinmiller was the first bishop to preside over the postwar European conference sessions in 1921 and he was able to conduct extensive episcopal visits throughout the European mission that helped replenish the reservoir of good will among European Evangelicals for the American mother church. In that year of postwar revival he reported the largest numerical gains in the history of the work in Europe. He attributed the real reason for the increase to the ineffectiveness of the state churches in providing spiritual nurture for the people and, since they have now been "shorn of (their) one time great autocratic power," 34 it has become possible for the free churches of Germany to reap the results.

The success of Heinmiller's episcopal visit may have been due not only to his fervent preaching and pastoral leadership, but also to his propensity to think like a German, as well as an American. For example, he noted critically the decision of the French government to declare the Evangelical work in Alsace-Lorraine a "foreign body" and to prevent them from claiming damages to church property that was damaged by French artillery fire in the War. 35 At the same time, Heinmiller's American

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33 EM (July 18, 1921): 8.
34 EM (October 3, 1921): 8.
35 G. Heinmiller, "From the Garden of Germany to Beautiful Switzerland" EM (July 18, 1921): 7.
identity provided him with a leverage that was unavailable to a European Evangelical. Hence, when he was denied entry into Poland to inspect Evangelical work there, Brother Wecke, the senior Polish missionary, pled with him to “come to his relief,” believing that “a bishop as the representative of church in America might prevail upon the authorities in Poland not to treat our preachers as they have treated many German Lutheran ministers who were deported.”

This 1921 episcopal visit by Heinmiller to Europe was to be his last. He was prevented by death from accepting his appointment by General Conference in 1922 to serve as the first resident bishop in Europe. This conference had also granted the Europeans their long-awaited autonomy and Heinmiller would have presided over the newly-formed European Central Conference that first met in Stuttgart in 1924. Lacking his leadership, the sentiment for autonomy would be nurtured for the next quadrennium without the guiding influence of an American leader who deeply understood the European point of view. Mindful of the growing chasm between the American and the European sections of the church, the General Conference had also provided for the German translation and revision of the book of Discipline for its more effective use in Europe. Church editor Richter described the significance of these actions from his European viewpoint, noting:

As the Evangelical Association in Europe, we must not remain altogether dependent upon the development that has to be taken by our mother church in its homeland, with regard to the ever more prominent changes within the areas of linguistic, religious, and missionary concerns, as well as in other respects.

The growing need for an effective resident bishop was underscored by additional reasons. From 1922-26 the European Conferences were served by an American bishop, L. H. Seager, who could not communicate in German. Also, for the first time, reports from the European mission field to the American papers contained notes of internal demoralization that was in part a function of the growing economic and social chaos in Germany. Less than half of the 307 congregations in Germany owned their own property, and in Poland church property was liquidated. In Alsace, the suppression of the German language and the continuing denial of civil rights to their congregations were cited.

The first American church leader since Bishop Heinmiller to be received as “one of their own” and hence to receive the unqualified endorsement of the European Evangelicals was the new resident bishop

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36 F. Wercke further noted that as a result, “70 to 80 Lutheran Churches in Poland are without pastors.”—EM (August 1, 1921): 71.
37 CB (July 24, 1923): 3.
38 CB (July 24, 1923): 9.
39 EM (September 27, 1924): 12; and EM (July 4, 1925): 20.
elected by the 1926 General Conference, S. J. Umbreit (b. 1871). The former head of missionary work in Japan, Umbreit was fluent in German and, even more importantly, he had a strong inclination to identify himself with the people he served. For the next two quadrennia he did much to restore the vitality of the European mission and serve as its sympathetic interpreter in the higher councils of the church in America. As early as June 1927, a report from Berlin, the newly developed episcopal center, had reached the Messenger that this “faithful man of God who has quickly won the hearts of all, has been in Berlin since the tenth of April.”

Over 1250 Evangelicals in Berlin heard him preach on Easter of 1927 in the auditorium of the largest high school in Charlottenburg. A new day had come for the Evangelicals of Europe. Umbreit’s acceptance not only by Evangelicals but also by other German church authorities was remarkable.

In reading Bishop Umbreit’s reports to the American church press during the late 1920’s and early 1930’s, it becomes evident that he was increasingly adjusting his outlook to that of a German Christian of the interwar era. The new resident bishop found himself rejoicing in the returning sense of German industrial, cultural, and national self esteem and progress that began to assert itself during these years.

In a published interview with an American newspaper, Bishop Umbreit, from his headquarters in Berlin, was asked, “What is the attitude of the average German toward the United States?” He replied that although the Germans “cannot even yet understand how the United States came to enter the war,” he had found “no unfriendly feeling toward the United States,” especially since “American capital has put Germany on her industrial feet.” He asserted that another war is “absolutely certain to come” unless the terms of the Versailles Treaty of 1918 can be changed, such as the isolation of East Prussia by the Polish corridor, the prevention of Germany from the power to colonize, the “amputation” of the Saar basin from Germany, and the forcing of Germany to admit she was “altogether responsible for the war.”

He was hopeful that these changes would come by peaceful means. He was also hopeful the “anti-God movement” of the Soviet government would “eventually burn itself out,” and that a revival of religion would come to Russia as well.

Umbreit was even more hopeful regarding the postwar prospects for the Evangelical mission in Europe that is “thoroughly organized for

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40 Joyous news of his election was recorded by the European delegation to the General Conference—EM (November 6, 1926): 8.
43 EM (September 27, 1930): 11.
44 EM (September 27, 1927): 52.
aggressive evangelistic work.\textsuperscript{45} Above all, it possesses an evangelistic message that focuses less upon practical, moral issues, as in America, and more upon an inward, Christ-centered “crisis theology,” that recognizes the “utter hopelessness” of man and disparages personal initiative.\textsuperscript{46} Anglo-Saxons expect the world to get “better day by day in every way” until the Kingdom of God appears on the earth, while continental Evangelicals look for “a sifted group of select people and then judgement, and a cataclysmic establishment of God’s kingdom.”\textsuperscript{47} Umbreit found grounds for a hopeful outlook on the European mission not only in the perceived spiritual vitality of the congregations but also in the aggressive planting of mission in new fields, in Vienna, Paris and in securing a promise from the Polish government for the eventual return of expropriated church property.\textsuperscript{48}

He also rested his hopes for European mission in the founding and enlargement of benevolent homes and schools throughout the Central Conference, plus the completion of a new seven-floor home for the Stuttgart Publishing House. However, Umbreit’s positive assessment of the European mission and its prospects contrast with the more cautious and at times negative assessment by leaders from within the German conferences. They seemed to be sensitive toward issues that the residing American bishop did not notice, although they consistently regarded him highly. Hence, J. Sturzenacker of the North Germany Conference reported in 1929 to the \textit{Messenger} that, “The debts upon most of our church buildings are a source of much concern.”\textsuperscript{49} Again in 1931, he wrote, “the worldly spirit of the times is entering.”\textsuperscript{50}

Perhaps the most penetrating critique of the European mission in relation to its transatlantic ties was offered by M. Richter of the South German Conference in his unpublished historical study.\textsuperscript{51} In 1933, he was sensing the detrimental effects of the decades when there was no resident bishop in Europe. In their formative years, they had become a body that was lacking a head, despite the fact that the Discipline called for full-time episcopal leadership, there was no one in authority to speak for the Evangelical Association. As a result, the office of District Superintendent was enlarged beyond its proper scope, and the Annual Conferences allowed themselves to be developed into an “unsound democracy.”\textsuperscript{52}

\textsuperscript{46} EM (December 10, 1927): 11.
\textsuperscript{47} EM (December 10, 1927): 11.
\textsuperscript{48} S. J. Umbreit, “In East Prussia,” EM (April 9, 1932): 13. He reported in August that this request still had not been acted upon.—EM (August 27, 1932): 13.
\textsuperscript{49} EM (September 13, 1930): 20.
\textsuperscript{50} EM (August 29, 1931): 11.
\textsuperscript{51} Richter: 10–13.
\textsuperscript{52} The title for this office had been changed from Presiding Elder to District Superintendent at the General Conference of 1930. Richter did applaud the inclusion of lay delegates in the European conferences after 1930, noting that this was consistent with the doctrine of the general priesthood of all believers.—Richter: 2.
In Richter's view, this tended toward the inculcation of mediocrity with persons assigned to responsibilities for which they were less than qualified. It also inhibited the emergence of qualified leaders, who had a holistic view of the mission, since such persons knew that their proposals would easily be defeated in a popular vote. These views, coming as they did at the outset of the National Socialist era, reflect Richter's disenchantment with the cumbersome democratic process that was seen as a failure in the Weimar Republic. It was an era which called for strong, decisive leadership. The ecclesial changes that were occurring in 1933 were needed, said Richter, "because they were inclined toward the 'Führer-thinking' of this new age."

The Early National Socialist Era (1933-40): The Unexpected Danger

This was an era of desperate hope. Evangelical leaders were increasingly alarmed by the sense of potential danger, but they remained anxious to latch onto any signs of credibility in the National Socialist regime. The era began with a sense of euphoria. The new day would call for strategies for the church. European church editor M. Richter exclaimed that, "In our new Germany, that the thinking of the Führer is bringing fully into expression, we will even have to reorder our episcopal constitution more radically and fully." In 1933, the Messenger printed articles for American Evangelicals that introduced Hitler's "eight point plan," his adoption of Protestantism over Catholicism, his declaration on non-interference with the free churches, his denial that an increase in armaments will be sought, his teetotalism in support of the German Anti-alcohol Society, and his advocacy of the "simple" life, based upon moral values. On the other side, articles also appeared that announced the requested emigration of large numbers of Jews, Hitler's threat to remove children from non-Nazi homes and his proposal of euthanasia for incurables, as well as reports of Protestant and Catholic opposition to the radical, "neo-pagan" elements of the emerging Nazi 'Volkskirche.'

Bishop Umbreit reflected a defensive posture as he proceeded to guide the European area of the church, with its constituency of more than 100,000 persons, into the new era. He joined Bishop Nuelsen of the Methodist Church and several prominent Berlin pastors of the Prussian

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53 Richter: 2.
54 Richter: 13.
56 EM (May 27, 1933): 4; (July 22, 1933): 5; (September 16, 1933): 5; (November 1, 1933): 4; (October 14, 1933): 5.
57 EM (July 1, 1933): 4-5; (October 21, 1933): 5; (December 2, 1933): 5.
Protestant Church in opposing the "fabrications" and "horror propaganda" from New York and London that threatened Germany with an economic blockade for its "alleged" anti-Semitic policies. The blockade of Jewish shops in Berlin, that was soon to follow, was regarded as a "strange spectacle," although it was described as nonviolent and as directed against persons who "have a heavy account on the wrong side of the moral ledger." The committee promised that such "commercial drives" would cease when there is a cessation of foreign Jewish agitation. They further assured the west that "Reawakened Germany is determined to rid herself of the baneful present and future results of Bolshevism, and restore a sane and sound Christian state."

Similar sentiments were sounded by R. Kücklich, the South German Conference Secretary, who gave a theological interpretation to a new era: "God . . . gave new conditions to the German people this spring. We see a wonder before our eyes. The battalions of the godless are no more. The church faces new opportunities." However, in another context, Kücklich urged Evangelicals to have as little as possible to do with political involvement, in distinction from the strong pro-Hitler stance adopted by the Landeskirchen. Umbreit, too, was convinced that the radical (neo-pagan) element in the Landeskirche was not reflective of the position of the government that has repeatedly declared it is "Christian to the core." Hitler's rise was coinciding with the "coming of age" of the free church Umbreit headed. Since legal recognition, "we no longer live in the corners or bends of European life." Furthermore, "There is no question," he stated, "but what we will continue as an independent denomination, serving God and the state . . . ."

Despite oppressive economic conditions that had required preachers' salaries to be slashed by 40% in 1934, Umbreit remained optimistic as he was also striving for financial independence for the European mission. However, by 1934 he was having to describe conditions in Germany in a more qualified way. Increasing attacks from zealous agitators within the Landeskirchen (the "blood and soil" neo-pagans) were reported to be intimidating many Evangelicals, and the young people's societies (YPAs) were now dissolved and merged into the state-operated youth societies for

61 EM (July 15, 1933): 11.
63 EM (October 7, 1933): 17.
64 EM (November 11, 1933): 13.
66 Still, he was asserting that the government and the "Reichsbischof" were seeking to defend the rights of the free churches.
the inculcation of National Socialism that he incredibly viewed as being suitable "to meet the needs of the German young people better than the old method."67 Toward the end of his report, he abruptly announced that "It is not clear what the legal status of the (Central Conference) really is."68

This is the last word reported from Europe by Bishop Umbreit. With little discussion, he was recalled by the 1934 General Conference and, under apparent German political pressure, the European bishopric was discontinued.69 In the light of its ambivalent status, the Central Conference did not meet for five years and the old pattern of conferences being chaired by visiting American bishops was resumed.70 In 1935 the government pressured the South German Conference to absorb congregations lying within Germany that had been under the jurisdiction of the Swiss Conference.71 Finally, in 1938, the Central Conference convened to petition the General Conference of that year to establish an all-German "Reichskonferenz" with a supervising bishop to be selected by themselves to oversee the mission within German boundaries.72 The congregations in France and Switzerland were to be excluded from its jurisdiction, thus damaging the international fellowship that had been nurtured among European Evangelicals. Feeling helpless to dissent, without courting the danger of disrupting the autonomy that it was still trying to respect, the General Conference in the United States gave its consent and thus collaborated with the capitulation of their mission to the rising statism.

With this reorganization pending, in line with the prevailing German nationalist sentiment, the German government agreed to grant the Evangelical Association the coveted "Corporation of Public Rights for the whole of Germany," that was gratefully acknowledged by the German annual conferences in 1938.73 The report of the American-based Missionary Society observed that the incorporation rights would strengthen the mission, although it was recognized that the German people were being led by their new social and political agenda.74 At the first session of the "Reichskonferenz," held in Berlin, in April 1939,75 the election of a German

70J. S. Stamm, who succeeded Umbreit, continued his effort of describing the German culture in a positive light. EM (July 20, 1935): 10.
71Eller: 191.
72Eller: 191.
73EM (July 23, 1938): 16.
74EM (October 1, 1938): 17.
75Eller: 169.
bishop was deferred and, in the chaos of the War that followed, was indefinitely postponed.76

Conclusion

With the eruption of the Second World War, the transatlantic communications were once again fully severed. The mission had passed from unexamined bonding with the mother church to autonomous identity to an era fraught with unexpected danger. In the American church there was a weariness and some loss of interest in the "troublesome" German mission in which so much had been invested for so long. The Evangelical historian Paul Eller, writing in the first month after American entry into the War, summarized this attitude by saying,

the development in Germany of a political doctrine which in zeal and comprehensiveness rivals the claims of the Christian faith has alienated the interest and sympathy of many Evangelicals from this enterprise.77

This outlook, together with the process of Anglicizing the American part of the church, greatly increased the distance with the European mission. It has left those of us who have inherited the mantle of this promising transatlantic mission venture with a task to resume and strengthen those neglected ties, in the Name of the Lord of the nations. At this is done, a judicious awareness of the pitfalls of its interwar history may possibly yield insight for its present-day successors who face the prospect of bearing witness to the faith amid the uncertainties of the current German national resurgence.

76 "Since the German bishop was not yet elected by the German Reichskonferenz, it was necessary to elect the chairman of the South Germany Conference" — R. Küklich, "Proceedings of the South Germany Conference," EM (July 15, 1939): 16.
77 Eller: 169 (note: Eller's work was published in January, 1942).