

CRISIS, COLLAPSE, AND HOPE¹: METHODISM IN 1945 EUROPE

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How can we, as people in Europe, who come from different countries, each with its own political, cultural, social and denominational history and experience as well as its own unique point of view, look back today on the events of 1945 and talk about them with a common voice? Moreover, how can we briefly summarize the special situation in which Methodists in the various European countries found themselves at that time? Methodists were people with deep roots in their own nations or, at the very least, people who shared in and were affected by the dramatic political changes and developments which occurred before and after 1945. At the same time they were tied into the dynamics of a world-wide church which was reaching out beyond all the existing social and political boundaries. And that means ultimately that they, in true Wesleyan tradition, saw their religious and social responsibility to seek spiritual unity with Christians of other denominations, who, in turn, greeted them predominantly with skepticism and even hostility. This initially confused situation can be seen in a glance at the main focal points of 1945.

We can not adequately understand the difficult situation in which the Methodist Church in Europe found itself in 1945 without quickly taking into account the period after the First World War: the serious world-wide economic crisis, which also affected the churches; the historical social structures in each national context, to which, decisively, the established churches belonged; the rapid political changes, combined with border changes and changes in political regimes and their coalitions; and, finally, organizational changes within the churches through completed or ongoing unity schemes and changing conference structures.

After looking at a few examples of the different trouble spots for the Methodists in Europe on the eve of and during the World War II, we will be able to assess not only the mood of society at the time of the collapse but also, despite the catastrophic situation of the Methodist Churches at the end of the war, the hopeful position in which they found themselves. Pointers to the future were already recognizable in 1945. On all levels and in both churches, the Evangelical Church and the Methodist Church, which we will

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look at here, in conference reports and letters in 1945 we find the statement “and are we yet alive!” as a matter of fact but perhaps even more as a statement of intent and ultimately a gratifying sign of hope. All of this contributes towards the introduction to our general theme, “Methodism in Europe after 1945,” and also provides an impulse to reflection on our present day decisions in relation to the nature and role and also the opportunities and limitations of the work of the Methodist Church, which goes on within many different socio-political contexts and is more affected by them than theologians sometimes like to allow. At the same time the work of the relatively small Methodist churches is also tied not only into the international Methodist integrated system—the connexion—but also through that into the world-wide ecumenical movement. Here, too, there is a great challenge. However over and above everything else stands the commission that, in all these various groupings and global connections, we are called to make God’s love tangible in our local situation.

Crises: Methodists in Europe Before 1945

First of all we should be clear that in 1945 there were two branches of Methodism in Europe which were the forerunners of the present day “Evangelical Methodist Church.” We need to recognize the difference between them:² the “Evangelische Gemeinschaft” (EG), which had been known in the USA as the “Evangelical Church”³ ever since 1922, but which, because of the situation in continental Europe, kept its original name. The Lutheran and Reformed Churches here referred to themselves as “the” Evangelical Church.⁴ The “Methodist Church” (MC), had, in continental Europe by the middle of the twentieth century, already largely integrated the missions of the “Wesleyanischen Methodistengemeinschaft” and the “Vereinigten Brüder in Christo.”⁵ Through the uniting of the churches in 1939⁶ the congregations of the “Bischöflichen Methodistenkirche des Südens” (BMKS), which had be-

² In the following text, the terms “Methodists” and “Methodism” are used insofar as the subject matter refers to both denominations.

³ In the USA between 1891 and 1922, because of the teaching on the Observance of Sunday and the question of the use of the German language in Services of Worship, there had been a division between the “Evangelische Gemeinschaft” and the “United Evangelical Church” which united again in 1922 to become the “Evangelical Church.” A part of the “United Evangelical Church” remained independent and from 1928 was known as the “Evangelical Congregational Church.”

⁴ Because of the similar sounding name, for example, early in 1946 a shipload of aid supplies destined for the “Evangelical Church” was delivered to the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD).

⁵ In 1897, the congregations of the “Wesleyanischen Methodistengemeinschaft” in Austria and Germany were transferred into the “Bischöflichen Methodistenkirche” and likewise in 1905 those of the “Vereinigten Brüder in Christo” in Germany. The combining of Wesleyan and Episcopal Methodists was also carried out without any fuss in Portugal and Spain and also in Italy—but there not until 1946.

⁶ The “Methodist Episcopal Church,” the “Methodist Episcopal Church South” and the “Methodist Protestant Church” united into the “Methodist Church” (in German speaking areas the “Methodistenkirche”).

gun their missionary work in 1922 in Belgium, Poland, and Czechoslovakia, also became part of the Methodist Church.⁷

To complete the picture the Methodist Church in Great Britain is also of interest. For the moment it will not be considered on account of its independent development as an autonomous Methodist Church. However when we consider post-war history, aid and reconciliation work and ecumenical cooperation after 1945 it will play a decisive role.⁸

The Denominational Context

In the first half of the twentieth century in all European countries the denominational situation was still dictated by the former or extant state churches, or at least churches with traditional supremacy based on historical canonical legal rights.⁹ This had a considerable influence on the relationship of the Methodists to the state and society. In Italy, Spain, Austria, Poland, Hungary, Belgium, France, and Czechoslovakia, the Roman Catholic Church had a predominant status as the state church, if not exactly a national church. Through concordats, this was the legal position in Switzerland and Germany as well, even though until 1945 the Roman Catholic Church there had a minority status compared to the Lutheran and Reformed Churches.¹⁰ From the time of the Old Church it relied for its denominational supremacy on Matthew 16:18-19 and, in the Middle Ages, had had this dogmatically verified by Pope Gregory VII: Salvation can only be obtained and conveyed through the Roman Catholic Church.¹¹ Methodists were accordingly persecuted as heretics and their missionary and social work was restricted or thwarted in an atmosphere of mistrust. Any legal position within the state was prevented for a long time.

Orthodox Churches (Greek and Russian Orthodox) as the national churches were the predominant denomination with constitutional privileges in Russia, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, and Greece. They had even bigger congregations in Poland, Hungary, Austria, and Czechoslovakia. Amongst other things they obtained the right to have a say in decisions over the legal recognition of other denominations—and strictly denied it. Methodists were only allowed to work amongst the foreign protestant population and they were

⁷ With the agreement of the “Methodist Episcopal Church,” the “Methodist Episcopal Church South” had used their Missionary Fund which they had started in 1919 on the occasion of the 100th Anniversary of the Missionary Society to provide humanitarian aid after World War I in Belgium, Poland, and Czechoslovakia, where Methodism still had not started working.

⁸ A council of the Methodist Church, which was founded in 1966 as the Council of European Central Conferences, was extended in 1993 to include the British and Irish Methodist Church, the Methodist Church in Portugal, Italy, and Spain, as well as the Church of the Nazarene and became the present European Methodist Council (EMC). The EMC aims to represent all the Methodist Churches in Europe and to coordinate common projects.

⁹ In the following text the countries are listed in which the Methodist churches were / still are active. The names of the countries apply to 1945.

¹⁰ According to the Federal Office for Statistics the percentage of members of the Roman Catholic and the Evangelical Churches today is approximately equal.

¹¹ *Programme Guide of Gregory VII: Dictatus papae* (1075).

not allowed to proselytize. Here too not only congregational work but also necessary social and educational projects were greatly impeded.

Luther and Zwingli had needed the help of the authorities in individual countries to push the Reformation through. It is not surprising then that in European Protestantism separation of state and church only came about well into the twentieth century. In Germany, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Hungary, and Switzerland, beginning with the Peace of Augsburg in 1555, more than 350 years earlier, the foundational principle “*cuius region, eius religio*”¹² had been followed. The Lutheran and Reformed State Churches insisted on their privileged status with the support of the state authorities. Ever since they first appeared in the middle of the nineteenth century and right into the twentieth century, the Methodists had not been tolerated. They were considered to be “sectarians,”¹³ and with the help of the state authorities through deportations, arrests, and fines for not observing the sanctions which had been imposed on acts of worship and Christian assemblies, their work was continually frustrated. Participants in Methodist classes and gatherings were excluded from Holy Communion. Members could not be buried in evangelical cemeteries by their own preachers.

In the first half of the twentieth century, when the state was trying to foster tolerance, the question of state recognition for the American mainline churches was always met with strong protests from the established churches, which vehemently tried to block it. Jobs at public authorities or in church institutions (including schools, hospitals, and other social services); from time to time, matriculation in public schools and higher education establishments; and as was the case in Hungary until 1947, the issuing of passports to members of the churches were dependent on the possession of a baptismal certificate. However, because the Methodist churches were not recognized by the state, they could not issue baptismal certificates and their members found themselves hugely restricted in their freedom of movement. Without a baptismal certificate they were considered to be “without religion.”

This dire situation easily led to misguided judgments from the Methodists when they did receive legal status from the state. The speech of the German Bishop of the Episcopal Methodist Church, Dr. Otto Melle, given at the World Church Conference in Oxford in 1937 and is still the subject of much discussion, must be seen against this background. He had testified, among other things:

that the churches of the VEF (Vereinigung evangelischer Freikirchen—Organization of Evangelical Free Churches)¹⁴ were grateful for the complete freedom to preach the Gospel of Christ and to carry out works of service in evangelization, spiritual

¹² Latin: whoever rules the country, decides the religion.

¹³ Originally “sect” meant “direction, school, party.” Since the Reformation the term has referred to a “Christian fellowship which does not have any official legal authorisation and belongs to those denominations which accuse each other of heresy.”

¹⁴ VEF—founded in 1926 as an Association of the Evangelischen Gemeinschaft, the Episcopal Methodist Church, Baptists, and Free Evangelical Congregations as distinct from the German Evangelical Landeskirche.

welfare, social welfare, and church growth. They have considered the uprising of the German people to be an act of divine providence; they have directed their congregations in these critical days of change to the foundational words of the apostle Paul in Romans 13 on the position of the Christian in relation to the state and asked them to pray continually for the authorities.¹⁵

Bishop Melle was asked about his speech on several occasions in 1945. In an official statement to the Bishops' Council of the Methodist Church he explained that he had clearly made his remarks in Oxford from the perspective of the Free Churches and they were based on his most recent experiences of legal recognition and both authorized and unauthorized mass rallies—new experiences under the new government. Melle writes, however, looking back on his statement, "It was the biggest mistake of my life, that at that time I believed Hitler's assurance that he was working for peace."¹⁶

*Social Communities*¹⁷

Methodists and Methodist congregations have always considered themselves to be an integral part of the society of the land in which they live and work. Their understanding has always been that "holiness" means "life in relationship"¹⁸ and, moreover, "social holiness"—not living apart but always trying to be aware of the pressing needs in their neighborhood. The

¹⁵ The text of Bishop Melle's speech to the full session of the World Church Conference on July 22, 1937, can be found in: Karl Zehrer, *Evangelische Freikirchen und das "Dritte Reich"* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1986) 140f; and also in further reports (official minutes of the VEF drawn up by Otto Melle and Paul Schmidt, *ibid.*, 141-145; Eyewitness Accounts of the Appearance of the VEF Delegation in Oxford, *ibid.*, 145-147).

¹⁶ A more detailed translation of his comments: "At Oxford many questions were put to me about the liberty of preaching the gospel; about being allowed to take texts of the Old Testament; about the persecution of Christians in Germany. I was asked again and again whether Free Churches are being persecuted. I felt duty bound to answer these questions, not speaking of the church situation at large, but from the standpoint of the Free Churches. The Conference at Oxford took place in July. In June I had held an Annual Conference in Germany. We had the liberty, for example, on the Conference Sunday to use the city's largest hall. At the last conference in Chemnitz, Saxony, we had a hall with a capacity of 2,500-3,000 persons three times filled to capacity. We had two Evangelization tents working in different parts of Germany At Oxford rumors were already being heard about a coming war. Being against war and having worked all my life for a better understanding between Germany, England, and the U.S., I thought my testimony would help to disperse the war-clouds and to warn the churches against being taken in tow of war politics. It was the greatest error of my life, that at this time I still believed the assurance of Hitler that he was working for peace. It is not necessary to say that we were rudely awakened from this dream. I am one of those who are shocked and humiliated by the atrocities of the terrible system which has now been revealed and who are convinced of a change of mind, and are ready to work with all their power for a new and better future" (Letter from Otto Melle to the Bishops' Council December 4, 1945, in Records of the Council of Bishops of the Methodist Church, United Methodist Church Archives, Madison, NJ, USA).

¹⁷ The following examples are—unless otherwise indicated—largely the carefully researched accounts of Bishop Paul Neff Garber, Bishop of the Geneva Diocese of the Methodist Church 1944-1952 and 1965-1966. Taken from: Paul N. Garber, *The Methodists of Continental Europe* (New York: Editorial Dept., Division of Education and Cultivation, General Section, Board of Missions and Church Extension, Methodist Church, 1949).

¹⁸ From a trinitarian point of view—relationship with oneself, with God and with other people.

needs of the community are their needs too.¹⁹ These generalizations have been verified through many individual enquiries and examples.²⁰ In spite of their attempts to play a role in, and make a contribution to, the improvement especially of social and health services, and of education and upbringing, Methodists lived until 1945 (and in some countries until very much later) in a—more or less—peculiar situation characterized by disadvantages and limitations. With the connexional structure of their church they cut across the traditional and established structures of the churches in Europe.²¹ What is more, their international links in times of national uprising aroused the suspicion that they were “the open gate” for foreign political and economic influences. As a Free Church (even if they weren’t always recognized as such they nevertheless accepted the role) they were openly critical of the state church system, especially in those countries where it had been abolished by a legal separation of state and church but nevertheless remained an everyday matter of fact.²²

In connection with the global economic crisis of the 1920s and 1930s, in addition to the overall social crises, an extremely difficult situation had arisen for the Methodists. Many Methodist social projects in countries outside Germany, Switzerland, and Sweden²³ had to cope with drastic cutbacks and even cancellation of financial support from the mother church in the USA.²⁴ That led to the cancellation of building projects which had already been started, to the closure of schools, orphanages, and welfare institutions, and also to a lack of provision for pastors and their families.²⁵ These cuts especially affected the Balkan States, Belgium, Czechoslovakia and Poland, countries where new Methodist missions had initiated huge projects with the anticipated resources from the Anniversary Fund.²⁶ While these various

¹⁹ Theodore Runyon summarizes that excellently with the Trias Orthodoxy (right belief), Orthopathy (religious experience) and Orthopraxy (right practice) (Theodore Runyan, *Die neue Schöpfung: John Wesleys Theologie heute* [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 2005], esp. 161-165, 239-250 [English title: *The New Creation: John Wesley's Theology Today*]).

²⁰ Cf. Patrick P. Streiff, ed., *Der Methodismus in Europa im 19 und 20 Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart: Studiengemeinschaft für Geschichte der Evangelischen-methodistischen Kirche, 2003), and Patrick P. Streiff, ed., *Der europäische Methodismus um die Wende vom 19 zum 20 Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart: Medienwerk der Evangelisch-Methodistischen Kirche, 2005) (English titles: *Methodism in Europe in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Century* and *Methodism at the Turn of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Century*).

²¹ Connexionalism actually applied not only to the institution and organization of British Methodism but also to the close links with mission projects in continental Europe.

²² In Germany with the Weimar Constitution, 1919.

²³ Here the congregations of the Evangelical Gemeinschaft and the Episcopal Methodist Church were for the most part already completely self-reliant: Switzerland since 1931, Germany and Sweden, 1936 (cf. details: Proceedings of the 34th Session of the General Conference of the Evangelical Church [Johnstown: BMK, 1946, 293]).

²⁴ The Methodist Episcopal Church and The Methodist Episcopal Church, South—from 1939, The Methodist Church.

²⁵ Garber mentions that between 1921 and 1926 there were reductions of up to three-quarters of the promised support and further drastic cutbacks in 1929 (Garber, 71).

²⁶ Patrick Streiff speaks of budget cutbacks in the MECS until 1937 for Belgium, Czechoslovakia and Poland from \$630,000 to \$40,000 (Streiff, *Methodism in Europe*, 212).

projects were euphorically supported, they were totally dependent on foreign aid, as were the missions as a whole in each of these countries which had been entered as part of the Anniversary Fund project. For example, in Italy, the Theological Schools of the Wesleyan and Episcopal Methodists in Rome had to be closed, as were many welfare centers which had been built in cooperation with the congregations. In Bulgaria, too, the Theological School was closed and printing and publishing work was scaled down.

On top of all this there were more and more national uprisings in individual countries and increasingly the East-West political conflict came to the fore. Methodists increasingly fell between the power blocs as their churches in the East were connected with mother churches in the West, and the church in the West struggled to maintain a supporting role of the fledging church in the East. Each time the circumstances were different and often situations were made worse by the intervention of the mainline churches. In 1929, a girls' school had to close because the government was no longer prepared to authorize schools which were led from abroad. In Italy, several cumulative factors determined the reduction of Methodist work: lack of money; the concordat of the Pope with Mussolini in 1929, in which the state recognized the Roman Catholic Church as the only state religion; and the fascist regime itself. The successful education programs in the Methodist international schools, which had often been chosen by parents of the privileged classes, were seen to be an obstacle to the national unity for which the regime was striving. The transfer of funds from abroad was stopped,²⁷ and under the influence of propaganda from catholic schools, pupils were gradually being removed from the sphere of influence of the "Protestant" Methodists.

It has to be said that Methodist pastors and lay people were active in the resistance against fascism and National Socialism. Some were tracked down as partisans, taken prisoner, and deported. One Methodist youth was even executed on account of his underground work.²⁸ Congregations put themselves in danger by hiding refugees, including Jews; political suspicion affected the whole Methodist work.

The situation in Spain was similar. With General Franco's revolution in 1936, an anti-Protestant era was ushered in. Pastors were arrested and some were shot. The main emphasis of the Methodist work lay in educational programs. Nine schools, including a model school in Alicante, enjoyed a good reputation. By 1939, at the latest all nine schools had been closed.

When Bulgaria, as a satellite state of Germany, declared war on America in 1941, all Methodist property was confiscated. Funds were blocked and the Superintendent had to advise the pastors to take up secular work to support themselves financially.²⁹ The girls' school came under government control. In Czechoslovakia in the 1920s, the Methodist Church in the south of

²⁷ Referring to money from the Methodist Churches in Great Britain and the USA.

²⁸ Marco Buson, who was a student at Milan University.

²⁹ Bulgarian Methodist pastors found work as teachers, farmers, representatives, bookkeepers and factory workers.

the country, through their missionary work, had built an orphanage, an old people's home and a Bible school and had established summer camps for children and youth work. This work also ended in the 1930s due to a lack of financial support. American missionaries were called home and local pastors were dismissed because of the financial crisis. With the occupation of Czechoslovakia in 1939, a difficult time began for the Methodists. They often spoken out against National Socialism and now they took an active and leading role in the underground movement against it. Czechoslovakia was dissolved. Amongst other things Slovakia was proclaimed to be a vassal state of Germany and the Methodist Church there was closed. Superintendent Dr. J. P. Bartak was put into a concentration camp as an American citizen when Germany declared war on America. Pastors and members of the Methodist congregations were interrogated, tortured and imprisoned—some died in concentration and labor camps. The welfare center in Budalesci/Hungary was plundered by the German occupiers in 1939 and then again by the Soviets in 1945.

In France after World War I, successful education and welfare work had developed through the establishment of schools and a model farm for agriculture. Because of the reduction in financial support from the British Methodists, work in these areas had to be given up. In 1935, the majority of Methodists joined the Reformed Church. In Poland from 1922, despite opposition from the Roman Catholic Church, Methodist work in the spheres of upbringing and social work had blossomed. An English language school was extremely successful. Many future government officials, teachers and lecturers learned their language skills there. Up until 1939, 1,100 pupils were being taught there. Other schools including a Bible school and a preaching seminary were established. These schools however had to be closed between 1929 and 1935 because promised money was no longer available. An astonishing revival of this work was halted by the German invasion of Poland in 1939.

In Germany under the Third Reich, the Methodist Churches achieved corporate rights status at state level in spite of opposition of the evangelical big churches.³⁰ The deceptive appearance of a Christian government was soon exposed when youth groups were forced to become part of the Hitler Youth and children's and youth work was restricted or dissolved.³¹ Studies show that the National Socialist State, which occasionally granted the Free Churches privileges in an attempt to drive a wedge between the protestant churches, also attempted to use the foreign contacts of the Methodists for a

³⁰ The Episcopal Methodist Church, 1935; the Evangelische Gemeinschaft, 1938.

³¹ One exception was the EG who were able to protect their church youth work from state interference and carry it on because it was integrated into the work of the whole church and was not organised on a national basis (cf. Ulrike Schuler, "The Youth Work of the EG in the Third Reich," in *Die Evangelische Gemeinschaft: missionarische Aufbrüche in gesellschaftspolitischen Umbrüchen* [Stuttgart: Medienwerk der Evangelisch-methodistischen Kirche, 1998], 265-274 [English translation of title: *The EG: Missionary Beginnings in Times of Socio-political Change*]).

pro-German propaganda campaign abroad.³² In 1940, Germany occupied Norway. Most Methodist churches were seized and used as barracks. An attempt was made to use the publishing house for propaganda purposes. The resistance of the editor of the church newspaper led to censorship, confiscation and a ban on the production of printed material.³³

The Methodists had protested publicly in Denmark against the persecution of the Jews, and after the invasion of the German army in 1940 they continued their opposition from within the underground movement. Danish Methodists also ended up in concentration camps. Finland had to cope with invasions from Germany and Russia. Sixty percent of Finnish speaking Methodists lived in areas which were occupied and badly damaged by the Russians. Even though we cannot say that the Methodists everywhere in Europe took part in political opposition against illegal regimes, they certainly did, as I have said, in Spain, Italy, and Denmark. There was not a loud protest everywhere against the persecution of the Jews, but there were notable rescues of persecuted Jews. The most amazing one is that of the Swiss consul in Hungary. Carl Lutz, a lay member of the Methodist Church, was able to save the lives of 62,000 Jews through letters of safe conduct, helping people to leave the country and optimizing the use of safe houses.³⁴ In Norway, Denmark, and Sweden, too, Methodists were able to hide Jews on the run and smuggle them out of the country. Similar cases took place in Czechoslovakia and Poland, too.³⁵

The confusion of war put a huge strain on Methodists in every European country. Preachers were not excused from military service and they were called up. Often it was the wives and women who tried to coordinate the congregation and, as far as possible, to keep church life going. Preachers of the Methodist Church who had done parts of their training together in the preaching seminary in Frankfurt am Main now stood facing each other on enemy fronts.³⁶ Having left Germany most Methodist missions were carried on in neighboring countries. Now both the countries and the people were

³² On this point, cf. Roland Blaich, "Bishops Nuelsen and Melle in the Third Reich, German Methodism and the NS State," *EmKG* 23.1 (2002): 5-34; and Helmut Nausner, "The Episcopal Methodist Church in Austria and National Socialism," *EmKG* 27.1 (2006): 6-38.

³³For example, the Norwegian translation of E. Stanley Jones "The Choice Before Us" which was critical of National Socialism was seized (cf. Garber, 99). That such measures were used against Methodists is demonstrated by a hand-written copy of this book which Üllas Tankler, Estland, brought with him to the Conference in Budapest. This book gave him one of the few written introductions to the subject which were available to him when he began to teach himself theology!

³⁴Theo S. Tschuy, "The Swiss Methodist saved 62,000 Jews: To the Memory of Carl Lutz," *Mitteilungen der Studiengemeinschaft für Geschichte der EmK*, 17.1 (1996): 3-7.

³⁵ Garber, 102-104.

³⁶In the 1920s and 1930s, candidates for the office of preaching from the Baltic States, Rumania, Hungary, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Poland, France and Denmark studied in Frankfurt am Main (Cf. Ulrike Schuler, "Studierende aus aller Welt," in *Glaubenswege, Bildungswege: 150 Jahre theologische Ausbildung im deutschsprachigen Methodismus Europas*, ed. Ulrike Schuler [Reutlingen: Studiengemeinschaft für Geschichte der Evangelisch-Methodistischen Kirche, 2008], 191-199).

opponents and contacts were broken off.

Restructuring within the church was also very stressful. In 1924, the three European dioceses of the General Conference received permission to organize themselves as Central Conferences. So the North European,³⁷ Mid European,³⁸ and South European³⁹ Central Conferences came into being.

Because of political developments and in order to obtain corporate rights status, the 1935 German Annual Conference felt compelled to ask the General Conference to institute a Central Conference which would just embrace the area covered by the German Third Reich. That was approved and in 1936 the "Episcopal Methodist Church in Germany" came into being, with the Central Conference as the administering authority and legislative corporate body. For the other European Conferences this was an extremely painful development. In the commemorative publication for the fortieth anniversary of the Geneva Diocese, Wilhelm Nausner maintained:

A time of Methodist mutuality at the European level, which began full of hope and enthusiasm had come to an end. The Conferences outside Germany went back to the relationship which had existed before the Mid-European Central Conference was formed. They became a diocese of the General Conference without any anchorage in a regional corporate body. The next eighteen years were beset by constant change and uncertainty caused by war and the consequences of war.⁴⁰

For example with the annexation of Austria into the Greater German Reich in 1938 the Austrian Missionary Conference became part of the South German Annual Conference. The Central Conference of the *Evangelischen Gemeinschaft* which was established in 1922 and embraced the German and Swiss Annual conferences maintained its supranational organization. As an interim measure a "*Reichskonferenz*"⁴¹ was formed to be the leading council of the German Conferences and it worked out a constitution which would enable it to achieve corporate rights status, which it did in 1939.

Because of the difficult legal position in individual European countries the question of leaving worldwide international Methodism and establishing autonomous national Methodist Churches was considered off and on. Bishop Garber⁴² suggested this move as a possible way of protecting the congrega-

³⁷ The area comprised the former "Copenhagen Diocese" with Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden. The supervising Bishop continued to be Bishop Anton Bast.

³⁸ Former "Paris Diocese" under the supervision of Bishop E. Blake: France, Italy, North Africa, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, and Spain.

³⁹ Former "Zürich Diocese" under the supervision of Bishop John L. Nuelsens: North Germany, South Germany, Switzerland, Austria, Hungary, Russia, and the Balkans.

⁴⁰ *Seid fleissig zu halten die Einheit des Geistes: 40 Jahre Genfer Sprengel; Festschrift* (Zürich: Zentralkonferenz von Mittel- und Südeuropa der Evangelisch-methodistischen Kirche, 1976), 17 (English translation of title: *Work hard to maintain the unity of the Spirit. 40 years of the Geneva Diocese*).

⁴¹ The "Reichskonferenz" met in 1939, 1947, and 1950, when it was renamed "Kirchenkonferenz" Church Conference.

⁴² Garber, Paul Neff (1899-1972) studied theology and obtained a Doctorate in philosophy. Garber was ordained in the Methodist Episcopal Church, taught at the Duke University from 1924 to 1944 as Professor of Church History and for a time was Dean of Faculty. In 1944, Garber was elected Bishop and was Bishop of the Geneva Diocese 1944-1952 and 1962-1966.

tions from the growing restrictions and oppression of the fascist, national socialist and also, later after the World War II, communist regimes.⁴³ However, in spite of all the difficulties, the connexion was successfully maintained, even over the “Iron Curtain” during the “Cold War.”

These examples give an impression of the difficult and even dramatic situation of the international connexional network of Methodist Churches as they tried to balance between their national and church identities. They also reflect how they have learned to cope with opposition and worked tirelessly, over and above all the different external influences, in many different contexts—both social and denominational—to demonstrate unity in Jesus Christ and to reveal the love of God for all people.

Collapse: 1945

The General Situation in Europe in 1945: Setting the Mood

Objectively speaking, 1945 is the year in which the World War II ended. The end of the war was formally documented with the signing of the unconditional surrender⁴⁴ of Germany on May 8, 1945;⁴⁵ the Allied Forces gradually withdrew; and finally on September 2, 1945, the unconditional surrender of Japan after the dropping of the atomic bomb by America on Hiroshima⁴⁶ and Nagasaki.⁴⁷ For some it was a year of liberation from occupation and oppression, from captivity as prisoners of war, from forced labor and from concentration camps. For others the end of the war meant the beginning of flight, expulsion, and forced relocation. Homeless people with no roof

⁴³ Garber, 121. It is interesting that Garber as Bishop of the MK considered this solution in 1949 on the basis of his good knowledge of European relationships. Until then it had been, for other reasons, the “politics” of the Methodist Church in Great Britain, which had always been independent, to push for missions to become autonomous, whereas the USA supported the connexional model of church far more strongly with the result that structures of integration were created, for example, the Central Conferences. The Methodist Churches in Spain, Portugal and Italy became autonomous anyway after 1945. In 1955, the Methodists in Spain entered into a Church Union which had already been agreed to in 1869—the “Iglesia Evangélica Española.” In Italy the Methodists joined up with the Waldensians in 1979 to form the “Chiesa Evangelica Valdese.”

⁴⁴ The demands of the “unconditional surrender” under the terms of which the conquering powers would have the right to control all the social and political interests in the regions of the defeated “axis” had already been prepared in 1943 at a secret conference between President Roosevelt USA and Prime Minister Churchill GB in Casablanca, Morocco, in 1943.

⁴⁵ After the partial capitulation of the forces had already been signed, Senior General Jodl, on behalf of the German President and Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, von Donitz, signed the unconditional surrender of the Armed Forces on May 7 which then came into force on May 8. A further document of surrender of the Supreme Commanders of the army, air force and navy was initialed on May 9 by the acting Supreme Commanders retrospective to May 8.

⁴⁶ Dropping of an atomic bomb (“Little Boy”) on Hiroshima: August 6, 1945: 90,000 dead.

⁴⁷ Dropping of an atomic bomb (“Fat Man”) on Nagasaki: August 9, 1945: 36,000 dead.

over their heads, the so-called “displaced persons”⁴⁸ were on the move in all directions under the sun—expellees searching for a place of refuge, people who were unwelcome, strangers, exiles on their way home, full of doubts and not knowing whether they would arrive and whether things would be as they had been before. For others, after a short time of freedom, a new period of oppression, persecution and rule of violence began—it was only that the aggressors were different. More years and decades of military confrontation were in prospect. For some it was indeed the year when the horror or war came to an end but it was also the year of defeat and disillusionment, of the slow recognition that people had been led astray and made fateful wrong decisions. People were entering a period of occupation bound up with the five “Ds”—denazification, demilitarization, decentralization, dismantling of old structures, and democratization. There would be strictly controlled re-organization and all aspects of socio-political life would be affected. This roughly drawn description of life which affected all the countries of Europe was different for each individual person. Almost every aspect is to be found on almost every side.

On the stage of world politics it was also the beginning of the “Cold War”⁴⁹ which was to further divide Europe and was the starting point of the “Iron Curtain”⁵⁰ which was to divide people from each other until 1991—people who, without any choice, found themselves belonging to power blocks which intimidated each other with their nuclear weapons and claims of political supremacy. Europe was the showroom of the Great Powers, which kept themselves at a safe distance from the arena and from time to time conducted wars against each other by proxy. All of these experiences have left their mark on Europe. There is still uncertainty, fear, mistrust, shame, the longing for revenge—but also for reconciliation. There are thousands who bear responsibility—perpetrators and victims—on all sides. The fact that they are united in suffering should not lead to quick and easy generalizations which do not give sufficient room for mourning, working things through and healing. It is only when we begin to talk, not only about facts, but also about subjective feelings and perceptions that we will find an opportunity for reconciliation and respectful acceptance which is the basis for a peaceful future for everyone in Europe.

⁴⁸ “Displaced persons”—DPs for short—were initially understood to be those people who, as a result of the war, found themselves outside their national boundaries, who wanted to go home and were to be taken home. After 1947, the term “was applied to people who, as forced labor or on racial, religious or political grounds had left their country” (Cf. Christoph Klessmann, *Die doppelte Staatsgründung: Deutsche Geschichte, 1945-1955* [Bonn: Bundeszentrale für Politische Bildung, 1991], 42ff). After the end of the war there were an estimated eight to ten million DPs in Germany alone (43). In 1949, 411,654 were counted in West Germany who were either living in camps or closed communities (44).

⁴⁹ The conflicts between the Great Powers of the Soviet Union and the USA which were carried on in the spheres of politics, economics and propaganda—but not militarily.

⁵⁰ This was the name which was first used by Winston Churchill in 1946 to signify the closing off of the Soviet bloc from the rest of the Western World. It was the separation of the market orientated economies of the West from the controlled economies of the East.

Many historians refer to the very first phase of the end of the World War II as “Zero Hour.” This phrase “Zero Hour” originally comes from military jargon and refers to the precise time at which a new chain of events is set in motion.⁵¹ And that was exactly what it meant here.⁵² The expression “Zero Hour” is, for me anyway, something more than pinpointing a particular moment in time. It is to be understood metaphorically, as a synonym for our speechlessness in the face of the shattering extent of the unbelievable catastrophe of destruction at all levels of human life. At this critical point in the history of the twentieth century, for a moment, time stood still. The incomprehensible suffering wherever one looked, and which no words could describe, took our breath away. There was a numbness in the face of chaos. There was actually a wish that history might just stop, the progress of life be held up, that there could be a chance to take stock of the situation, to get through the shock, to reflect on things, to win time to find new direction, to understand what had happened, to get one’s bearings, to escape from the confusion of wrong paths and incomprehensible events.

Of course there was actually no “Zero Hour.” Life had to go on and it is astonishing how, in all the eyewitness reports a hint of everyday normality comes to the surface. However nothing was the same as it had been before - and it would never be the same again—not even for future generations. There had been a break in history—for Germans certainly but perhaps for others, too—a break in national identity. The nation of poets and philosophers and of the Reformation—right up to the present day, can no longer look back on a proud and seamless tradition. Whereas the neighboring European countries organize their National Holiday as a celebration with a firework display, for Germans, October 3 is a day of reflection, sober speeches and admonitions, memorial services and services of repentance.

In this respect, 1945 was the beginning of a new era and a new way of thinking, as indeed it had to be. We could and should leave much of what has gone before alone, but even today we still reflect on what happened, make links, name guilt and practice forgiveness. To do that we need the distance which history gives us, or—as Sören Kirkegaard puts it—we can only understand life by looking backwards—even if we can only live life by going forwards. That is the challenge and it is a hard one.

⁵¹ The expression “Zero Hour” to signify the time in Germany immediately after the War was first used in the film “*Deutschland in Jahre Null*”—“Germany in the Year Zero” (1948) which was directed by the Italian film director Roberto Rossellini, and thereafter it caused great controversy amongst historians, sociologists and politicians (cf. Falser, Michael Falser, “1945-1949 Die ‘Stunde Null,’ die Schuldfrage, der ‘Deutsche Geist’ und der Wiederaufbau in Frankfurt am Main,” in *Zwischen Identität und Authentizität: zur politischen Geschichte der Denkmalpflege in Deutschland* [Dresden: Thelem, 2008], 71-97). This was Falser’s dissertation at the Technical University of Berlin. English translation of title: “1945-1949: The ‘Zero Hour’—the question of guilt, of the ‘spirit of Germany’ and of reconstruction in Frankfurt am Main,” in *Between Identity and Authenticity: The Political History of the Preservation of Historical Monuments in Germany*.

⁵² The time when the unconditional surrender was to come into force was set at precisely 23.01 mid-European time 0.01 German summertime on May 8, 1945.

Although the allied forces of France, England, Russia and the USA had declared that the war was over, not all the fighting came to an end with the unconditional surrender. Because the communications network had been largely destroyed the news did not get through to everybody. There were also the doubters—those who thought it was a propaganda ploy or a military chess-move or an attempt by opponents to take over the armed forces. There were also fanatics who still believed in the goal of victory and were prepared to fight on to the bitter end.⁵³

Methodism in Continental and Northern Europe: Balance

This was a time of confusion and disorientation when lots of things had collapsed. The social collapse witnessed shattered families, on the move, in flight—homeless people with no roof over their heads; bemoaning the loss of loved-ones, husbands, sons, fathers, friends—fallen, missing, in prison camps; men coming home—traumatized, strangers to their children who were growing up, having to settle back into family life, unemployed, unemployable; women, children, young and old, the civilian population which had been caught up in it all, which had survived the bombing, and the wounded—physically and psychologically; orphaned children—wandering around; women who had been raped, once, many times over and who had borne children as a living reminder, and those too who had fallen in love with soldiers and brought children into the world through a love match. The list of the difficult situations people found themselves in could go on forever. There were people everywhere in Europe weighed down with problems—many were disillusioned, without hope, despondent, uprooted and, in spite of being homeless, hungry and frozen, they had to get on with life. Structural collapse saw bombed cities—houses; churches, work-places; destroyed transport systems; collapsed utilities (electricity, water, basic food supplies) and communication networks.

The six years of war had cost many people their lives—pastors, members of the congregations, soldiers and civilians. Buildings were for the most part destroyed—churches, church houses, hospitals, schools, children's homes, old people's homes. To some extent the congregations had become scattered. The *Evangelische Gemeinschaft* appointed a Missionary for Dispersed Persons in each conference, whose job it was to find people who were in flight, to gather them together and bring them back.⁵⁴ The Methodist Church

⁵³ Heinrich Böll the best known German writer of the post-war years portrays this confused and apparently senseless situation very sensitively in various scenes in his anti-war novel (cf. Heinrich Böll, *Wo warst du, Adam?* (München: Dt. Taschenbuch-Verl., 2007). (English translation of title: *Where were you, Adam?*).

⁵⁴ The setting up of a Mission for Dispersed Persons had already been achieved in the 1920s. At that time increasing unemployment meant those seeking work needed to be mobile and many members of congregations moved to new areas. The preachers responded with the appointment of a Dispersed Persons Missionary in each conference. He was to maintain contact by sending information about the church and church newsletters, if possible by visiting, helping people make contact with a congregation in their area and supporting the formation of house groups. For example, just such a house group led to the formation of the congregation in Wolfsburg which was founded for refugees from the East.

started a “search service” and established a “search database.” Meeting places had been destroyed and temporary emergency accommodation was found—for Sunday services too. Here is some more information, in summary and statistical form, from both churches.

The Evangelische Gemeinschaft (EG)⁵⁵

The congregations of the EG had developed exclusively in German speaking areas: in Switzerland, Germany, among the German speaking population of Latvia, in East and West Prussia, Pommern, Posen und Schlesien—now Poland. Altogether at the end of the war the EG recorded considerable setbacks in their church work—the loss of people and buildings, which in the context of the general German crisis of collapse made the furtherance of church work under their own steam, seem doubtful. About one sixth of their travelling preachers had been killed. The EG lost half their recorded members, friends, and relations. Similarly they mourned the loss of half their Sunday School pupils. Moreover they lost forty-two congregations to the east of the Oder-Neisse Line and with them twenty-three churches and houses which belonged to the congregations. In the first half of the twentieth century there had been a new awakening and considerable growth in the congregations in this area. After the war the areas to the east of the Oder-Neisse Line came under Polish-Soviet authority. The German population was driven out and their buildings were confiscated.

In Germany, forty-three churches were registered as totally destroyed, thirty-two as partially destroyed and forty as damaged. The church work too suffered heavy losses. In Germany the Christian publishing house in Stuttgart was badly damaged and, because of the party membership of their pastoral director, the printing house West which belonged to them, and the Herold publishing house, were placed under a property supervision order. Of the eight hospitals of the Bethesda Diakonie (social welfare organization), only the Wuppertal-Elberfelder remained untouched—and even then it was commandeered by the British Army on the Rhine until 1953 as “77 Field Hospital.” Four of the five nurses’ homes were totally destroyed.

The Methodist Church (MC)

Things were much the same in the MC, even though there is not time here to summarize the situation, there are individual portraits of war damage and losses,⁵⁶ but these soon gave way to reports of reconstruction aid and also of the new problems and danger zones, as the fears about National Socialism, which had just been defeated, were replaced by concerns about the advance of communism. Whereas Methodism in the neutral countries, Sweden, Switzerland and Spain had only indirectly been affected by the war, in the countries which had been fighting one fifth of the members had been

⁵⁵ Cf. my detailed description and sources in “Methodists in Germany after 1945,” *Kirchliche Zeitgeschichte* 2 (2000): 429-455; also Schuler, *Die Evangelische Gemeinschaft*, 170-263.

⁵⁶ Cf. Garber, 89-125.

killed. Many pastors and members died at the front or were killed in the bombing of cities. Others died in concentration camps. In individual countries up to half the total property of the Methodist Church was destroyed. In Germany alone, where Methodism was most strongly represented, according to the statistics of the 1946 Central Conference, 2,000 members, members on trial and friends were lost. Sixty-seven percent of the pastors had been called up to military service. Twenty-six pastors and theology students lost their lives. At the same time, the congregations of the MC in the eastern areas lost a further 3,000 members and forty-six preaching places. Of the 398 church buildings, 141—a third—were ruined. Forty-five church buildings were totally destroyed and thirty-nine were severely damaged. The publishing house, “Anker Verlag” in Bremen was totally destroyed. Eleven of the diaconal establishments were totally destroyed and nine badly damaged. In 1946, Bishop Mellor said in his post-war report that half of all the church’s property had been lost.⁵⁷

Bishop Paul Neff Garber, who from 1944 was the leading Bishop with oversight of the Geneva Diocese of the Methodist Church in Europe, was there at the end of the war and immediately travelled to the Methodist congregations in individual European countries.⁵⁸ As he explained in a letter to the Bishops’ Council, by January, 1946, he had already visited and established contact with the following countries in this order: Italy, Belgium, Czechoslovakia, and Switzerland. A meeting with Spanish exiles with responsibility for the Methodists took place in North Africa. He spent a month in Germany to make contact with the Methodist chaplains of the Army of Occupation and also with the German Methodist pastors and Bishop Dr. Melle. Then in October he travelled—under difficult circumstances, because the occupation zones inside Germany meant passes had to be organized everywhere—to Bulgaria and Yugoslavia and then to Poland, Austria, and Hungary.⁵⁹ His courage and his endurance in the face of the extremely difficult external circumstances seem to have been considerable. A consequence of his on the spot reports was his request for immediate targeted aid from the Crusade for Christ Fund.

In his book *The Methodists of Continental Europe*, Garber gives a succinct history of Methodist work and its main emphases in individual countries as well as taking stock of the situation after the World Wars. His work is carefully researched and an excellent resource.⁶⁰ Garber seemed to identify very much with the European work and wrote a wealth of reports to vari-

⁵⁷ Hearings of the Central Conference in Germany, 1946.

⁵⁸ Since March, 1945, he had been waiting in Algeria, North Africa and until December he travelled from there through the different European countries. In December he was able to establish an office in Geneva at the World Methodist Council.

⁵⁹ Cf. letter from Paul N. Garber, Geneva to the members of the Bishops’ Council of the Methodist Church of January 26, 1945, Records of the Council of Bishops of the Methodist Church, United Methodist Church Archives, Madison, NJ, USA, Bl. 166f.

⁶⁰ Garber, Chapter 5: “Methodism in World War II,” (89-104) and Chapter 6: “Methodism since 1945” (105-126).

ous departments, travelling tirelessly in the crisis areas in co-operation with those who were responsible, to instigate the necessary aid.⁶¹

At the first German Central Conference after the war⁶² in 1946 there were representatives of the other European Conferences and their Bishops—Bishop Arvidson⁶³ from the Stockholm diocese of the North European Central Conference and Bishop Garber from the Geneva diocese. Bishop Raymond Wade⁶⁴ took the chair on behalf of the Bishops' Council because Bishop Melle had had a severe stroke. The Bishop of the Landeskirche in Württemberg, Theophil Wurm, even brought greetings to the closing service—a sign of a new ecumenical acceptance and co-operation. The participation in the conference of thirty-eight chaplains was especially worthy of note. In Bishop Wade's report to the Bishops' Council on what happened at this Central Conference in Frankfurt am Main, he writes:

On Friday evening the Central Conference was privileged to be able to introduce and welcome thirty-eight military chaplains and in some cases also their wives. One chaplain came from Paris. For many this was a sign of the sympathy and assistance which these men give to the German people. One of the Methodist pastors from Latvia, who at the moment is living in a camp for displaced persons expressed the feelings of the others when he said: "Every chaplain is an angel." Seven of these refugee pastors from the Baltic and Slavic Conference were present. Others, who live in Germany, were not able to come. We all agree that they are in a very difficult situation and are among the most needy people in Germany.⁶⁵

This short impression of the conference is an indication of a determination to unite and to be reconciled and to send a public signal of that intent. Here, at the level of the churches and at a very early point in time, a clear and, in comparison to the official state-church, a different way of working was being lived out and witnessed to. At a point in time when the collective guilt of the German people was being propagated all over the world, when de-nazification had only just begun and a strict ban on fraternization was in place for the soldiers of the allied forces, representatives of every country—former opponents of the war—came together under the uniting leadership of the representatives of the American mother church. The assistance of the mother churches and also the sister churches in Switzerland, but also, with regard to the MC, the help of the Methodist Churches in Great Britain and Sweden,

⁶¹ The sources which are available to me and which I have used include the correspondence of Garber and other writers, which comes from the collection "Records of the Council of Bishops of the Methodist Church," United Methodist Church Archives, Madison, NJ, USA; Bishop Roy Hunter has evaluated and published this and other correspondence from bishops in *United Methodism in Theory and Practice* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1974).

⁶² The 3rd Central Conference of the Methodist Church in Germany, Frankfurt am Main, November 7-11, 1946.

⁶³ Arvidson, August Theodor (1883-?): Pastor, Superintendent of the Methodist Church in Sweden—elected Bishop of the North European Central Conference in 1946.

⁶⁴ Raymond J Wade (1875-1970): Bishop of the North European Central Conference 1928-1943 also taught at Gothenburg University, Sweden.

⁶⁵ Nine-page report of Bishop Raymond J Wade to the Bishops' Council of the Methodist Church from November 7, 1946, in Records of the Council of Bishops of the Methodist Church, United Methodist Church Archives, Madison, NJ, Bl. 276.

began immediately with the end of the war. Aid programs which had already been prepared were immediately introduced and reconstruction began.

Signs of Hope: 1945

Missionary Reconstruction Programs of the Mother Churches

It is impressive how, carefully and in the long term, both mother churches in the ecumenical context had prepared for the end of the World War II. As I have already mentioned, they immediately made contact with the representatives of their churches in the war zones and had aid programs and money for the direct supply of aid already on hand—and also trained workers at their disposal. After careful analysis of world-wide social, political and economic situations—including the trouble spots—a concept of a lasting world peace on the basis of a Christian-democratic world order had been developed. This analysis was based on the various studies, conferences and publications of the Commission on Just and Durable Peace of the Federal Council of Churches (FCC), to which among others the extremely dedicated ecumenist Bishop of the Methodist Church, Bromley Oxnam⁶⁶ belonged. It was noticed that it was the task of the churches, as a world-wide Christian community, to not only make states and governments aware of their responsibility before God, but to themselves set an example as a tolerant community which is ready to help others.⁶⁷

To this end, the Six Pillars of Peace were drawn up as political principles and distributed in a campaign.⁶⁸ They were supposed to help to break down America's isolation politics and at the same time make the American public aware of the need to take responsibility for the development of the post-war world. Specifically, among other things, the foundation of the United Nations was demanded. To this end, Oxnam initiated a huge mail campaign in which members of the MC wrote to the President of the United States, Members of the House of Representatives and Senators to remind them of their responsibility for justice and worldwide fraternity and asked them to exercise their influence to bring about international cooperation.⁶⁹

The General Conferences of the EG and the MC introduced programs to

⁶⁶ Bromley G. Oxnam (1891-1963) President of the FCC 1944-1946; 1944-1952, Chairman of the Commission to Study Post-War Relief; Chairman of the Methodist Commission on Chaplains; 1948-1954; one of the Presidents of the ÖRK; in August, 1945, delegate to an protestant group of observers on an official visit to Germany.

⁶⁷ "A Christian Message on World Order" from the International Round Table of Christian Leaders, Princeton, 1943, is a noteworthy document, which draws up concrete and reconciliatory ways of working with the opponents of war after the end of the war (Russia, Germany, Far East).

⁶⁸ "Six Pillars of Peace," a study guide based on "A Statement of Political Propositions" formulated by the Commission to study the Bases of Just and Durable Peace of the FCC (New York 1943). "Six Pillars of Peace" was also distributed through Methodist church newsletters.

⁶⁹ Campaign under the slogan: "The Peace May be Won with a Three-cent Stamp" (cf. Robert Moats Miller, *Bishop G. Bromley Oxnam: Paladin of Liberal Protestantism* [Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990], 285).

support material and spiritual reconstruction both at home and abroad. From 1942 in the Evangelical Church money was collected for a Reconstruction Fund⁷⁰ with four aims: the reconstruction of destroyed churches and priests' houses; reconstruction of other houses and building up the congregation; building new church buildings in mission areas with good prospects; and the expansion of extensive missionary initiatives and the recruiting of a larger missionary staff.⁷¹

In 1944, the General Conference of the Methodist Churches launched the "Crusade for Christ" program as a four year initiative with the annual objectives "Reconstruction and World Aid." By January 31, 1945, \$25,000,000 was to be paid into a fund and made available for the complete project.⁷² The objective for the second year was "Evangelization": to bring 400,000 people to Christ through numerous and varied evangelical events with appropriate literature and educational programs. The emphasis in the third year was Stewardship. The aim was to recruit at least 400,000 new members who would acknowledge their concrete responsibility for their special gifts and hence their task—and be prepared to commit themselves to it. Finally in the fourth year people were to commit themselves to regular attendance of the Sunday School so that five hundred new congregations would be formed.⁷³

In 1944, a publication of the Board of Missions and Church Extension (Behörde für Mission und kirchliche Ausbreitung) of the MC, "Christ after Chaos: The Post-war Policy of the Methodist Church in Foreign Lands," (Christus nach dem Chaos: Nachkriegs-Richtlinien für die Methodistenkirche in anderen/fremden Ländern) appeared. It was a careful evaluation of research into the world-wide Methodist mission fields in combat zones. A chapter each was devoted to Japan, China, Korea, the Philippines, Malaysia, Burma, Europe, North Africa, Africa, India, and Latin America. As motive for the research and its publication and for the developed programs it was said that, from a Christian point of view, the world found itself in an "acute missionary crisis which was affecting all the churches" and which demanded the acceptance of a "new missionary responsibility." In twenty mission fields of the MC there was war, work was interrupted, buildings damaged or

⁷⁰ The Kingdom's Service Fund. With the uniting of the Evangelical Church with the United Brethren Church, which had developed a corresponding program with the name Advance Fund of the United Brethren the fund was continued as the Kingdom Advance Program (cf. Schuler, *Die Evangelische Gemeinschaft*, 221-261).

⁷¹ J. Steven O'Malley, *On the Journey Home: The History of the Evangelical United Brethren Church, 1946-1968* (New York: general Board of Global Ministries, United Methodist Church, 2003), 38.

⁷² The planned distribution of this money for reconstruction projects at home and abroad is set out in *Proceedings 41st General Conference of the Methodist Church*, Kansas City, April 26-May 6, 1944, 128. The separate listing of actual world-wide expenditure is set out in the Report of the Crusade for Christ, in "Quadrennial Reports to the General Conference of the Methodist Church 1948," 47-103 (Archive of the Drew University, Madison, NJ).

⁷³ Cf. The detailed representation of the program, Ulrike Schuler, "'Crusade for Christ': Ein 'methodistischer Kreuzzug' in der Mitte des 20. Jahrhunderts? Ein Forschungsbericht," *Theologie für die Praxis* 28.1-2 (2002): 94-111 (English translation of title, "'Crusade for Christ': A Methodist Crusade in the Middle of the Twentieth Century? A research report").

destroyed, missionaries expelled or arrested and people in flight, scattered or persecuted. According to the assessment of the 1944 General Conference we can say optimistically:

The conclusion is inevitable that, since hope for tomorrow's world rests in the message and spirit of our Lord and Master, Christian forces throughout the world must act with instant zeal and unceasing devotion to re-establish those forms of work which have been devastated and to intensify the effort to make His Spirit in the affairs of men more potent.⁷⁴

There was a passionate appeal to make every effort to fulfill the Christian mission, not to leave the field to the secular powers but to work against them. Here was a unique opportunity for Christians to go forward on the world stage, to target progress and to lay the foundation of a comprehensive world peace. We should also bear in mind that America bears a particular responsibility.⁷⁵ Significantly in all these deliberations there are the explicit conclusions that the Christians in enemy countries should be included in this plan for peace and that the peace process can only succeed ecumenically.⁷⁶ Both emphases stress a specific Methodist approach.

Even though the individual churches developed their own goal-setting programs they all adopted the same basic principles and had the same aims—in my opinion, historically, this was the first time there had been effective ecumenical unity. All these strategic plans and committed programs undoubtedly had a strong influence on reconstruction, the new spiritual impetus and ecumenical developments which would progress in leaps and bounds in the second half of the twentieth century. Exactly what the connections were still warrants more research.

Chaplains; Work of Reconciliation by the Army of Occupation

As well as missionary programs both churches supported the training of military clergy. Although it is clearly stressed in the report of the Commission of the Army and Navy Chaplains to the General Conference of the Evangelical Church in 1946 that it was inherent in “the historical basic principles of the church” that “war and bloodshed were not compatible with the Good News and Spirit of Jesus Christ,”⁷⁷ the professional training and work of the military clergy was clearly acknowledged and supported. According to the report eighty-five military clergymen of the Evangelischen Gemeinschaft were in service. Chaplains belonged to the ecumenical committee of the General Commission on Army and Navy Chaplains. In addition the Methodists belonged to the Methodist Commission on Chaplains of which, up till now, no

⁷⁴ Arthur J. Moore, *Christ after Chaos: The Post-war Policy of the Methodist Church in Foreign Lands* (New York: J. D. E. C., 1944), 12.

⁷⁵ Moore, 13.

⁷⁶ Moore, 17.

⁷⁷ Report of Bishop C. H. Stauffacher, “The Representative of the General Commission on Army and Navy Chaplains,” in *Proceedings of the 34th Session of the General Conference of the Evangelical Church*, Johnstown, 1946, 267.

detailed data is available. A considerable number of Methodist chaplains were, for example, stationed with the Army of Occupation in Germany. The church historian Professor Dr. Franklin Littell, a member of the Methodist Church, led the influential Office for Religious Affairs in Stuttgart. It was he who started the ecumenical meetings in the Bad Boll Academy. We gather from a report of the Bishops' Council of the Methodist Church in 1946 that some Annual Conferences in the Evangelization year of the Crusade for Christ program had decided "unusually" to appoint returning chaplains as full-time evangelists.⁷⁸

The work of these Methodist chaplains, and likewise those of the other churches is significant in so far as they served in the Army of Occupation, for instance, in Germany.⁷⁹ As far as I know there has not been a close inquiry into the use of chaplains. Many things in various reports point to the fact that they made an important contribution to the work of reconciliation—as we have already seen with the thirty-eight chaplains who took part in the first Central Conference in Germany after the war. Bishop Melle reports in a letter dated July 12, 1945, to Dr. Diffendorfer⁸⁰ how, after the withdrawal of the Russian soldiers and the arrival of the American troops in Berlin, a Methodist chaplain of the US army had immediately promised to let him have information about the 1944 General Conference and the decision to run a Crusade for Christ campaign. It was through him that the first correspondence was arranged.⁸¹ In the report of the Secretary of the "Division of Foreign Missions" there is plethora of correspondence which makes clear that chaplains—in spite of the orders of the Allied Control Council that no contact should be made with the indigenous population—did things differently. They took part in conferences, attended the Theological Seminary in Frankfurt am Main and participated in acts of worship. Their open style of work set the bench mark and contributed to mediation and reconciliation.

Resumée

From the very beginning, European Methodism had had to struggle with considerable opposition—first of all denominational but then also political. Even if its main concern was of a spiritual nature and there was the desire, through improved living conditions, health care and educational opportunities, to set people free to become creatures in God's image and to be able to

⁷⁸ Minutes of the Council of Bishops, Atlantic City, New Jersey, February, 1946, in Records of the Council of Bishops of the Methodist Church, United Methodist Church Archives, Madison, NJ, USA, Bl.1189.

⁷⁹ In Stauffacher's report there is talk of more than thirty denominations in the FCC.

⁸⁰ Dr. Ralph Eugene Diffendorfer, (1879-1951): studied theology at the Ohio Wesleyan University, Drew Theological Seminary, and Union Theological Seminary. All his life Diffendorfer worked in various agencies of the Methodist Episcopal Church. He wrote various books and articles about Christian responsibility in society as well as Christian upbringing and mission.

⁸¹ Letter from Bishop Otto Melle to Dr. Diffendorfer dated July 12, 1945, sent by Chaplain W. F. Overhulser, Iowa-Des Moines Annual Conference, in The Report of the Executive Secretary of the Division of Foreign Mission 1945, 26.

change their lives and live according to God's will and intention, this was seen by the big churches as an encroachment on their area of responsibility, which they strenuously opposed. The various wide-spread Methodist educational, social and health programs were recognized in society but because of their association with foreign countries and their occasional financial dependence on them they were always in risk of economic and political crises. We can see from the example of the Jubilee Fund of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, how susceptible projects were. They were introduced with great euphoria and they were promised—and anticipated—support, but because of unpredictable setbacks the support never came. Expectations were aroused and then frustrated instead of doing solid and enduring reconstruction work together which would have been a possibility.

Up to this point in time no one had spoken about the hospitals and children's homes and old people's home which were run by the Methodist Diakonie. Nevertheless, they had developed branches in Germany, Switzerland and Scandinavia, and seemed more than anyone else to have an aura of permanency. Even they however were used in a way for which they were never intended and were occupied by the state and government offices when it suited them. The perseverance with which the Methodists in many countries once again met extreme setbacks and hostility is astonishing. With great energy and love, even to the extent of putting their lives on the line, the Methodists began all over again to patiently develop their areas of work. Their program of missionary reconstruction which had been developed in the USA, that is both a material and spiritual reconstruction as a Christian witness to the world, was a response to the perceived needs of the time. People in their disillusionment and misery longed for someone who would listen to them and they were open to the Good News of the Gospel. A new growth in spirituality in the post-war years confirms this. The churches were full once more, not only because the aid supplies people got there were necessary to survival, but also because they longed for lasting values, comfort and community. In short they were searching for God.

In 1945, the opportunity arose for the first time in Germany, but also for the first time in other European countries, for the Methodists to work together with the big churches. Because of the general emergency situation, in which amid the confusion and suspicion of the enemy camps, the churches were seen as the only reliable intermediaries between the occupying forces and the opponents of the war, foreign ecumenical intervention enabled the Methodists to play a part in aid work. The Methodist Church in the USA, as the biggest Protestant church, made sure that the churches in Europe took the Methodist Church seriously and worked with it, even though there it was only small.⁸²

Because of the enormous social changes brought about by the stream of

⁸² Cf. Andrea Stübend, "Freikirchen und Ökumene," in "The Role of the Churches in the Social and Political Collapse in Mid and East Europe," *Kirchliche Zeitgeschichte* 6.1 (1993): 187-210.

refugees, for the first time two spheres of influence came together—the one which had developed organically through history and the traditionally closed denominational one which had been established through the legal rights of the church. For the first time people of different denominations got to know each other and, in the truest sense of the word, to love each other. There was pressure from the ground up to tear down denominational barriers and to work together. Through the Ecumenical Movement the situation of the Free Churches began to change. And so thanks to the collapse of 1945 a new phase of Methodism in Europe began.

In my opinion, in the end the free-church connexional model of church proved its worth in the times of crisis and collapse, even if a closer enquiry into the actual and perceived freedom of the churches—both in times of persecution and subjection to external influences—would seem to be worthwhile. What was, or is, the relationship of contextual influences to the essence of Methodist identity?

Even when the network of contacts was from time to time disrupted or became the subject of suspicion, it was immediately re-established and was able to help and support wherever the opportunity could be recognized and grasped. The question, whether to be a national or a world-wide church, has been continually posed in a variety of contexts. A reflection on the different dangers confronting church work, which came about through various influences and dependencies, can still help us today to widen our horizons beyond provincial and denominational boundaries and to discover, in the structure of the church, the liberating supranational and supradenominational unity of the church of Jesus Christ and to receive it as a gift.