

# The German High Church Union

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## The German High Church Union.

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The second Annual Meeting of this society was held on December 1<sup>st</sup> in Berlin, the Vice-President of the Evangelical Supreme Church Council, Dr Lahusen, attending as a visitor. About 250 members of the H. C. U. are now enrolled, 150 of them being pastors. A steady increase in numbers is undeniable, although this society is naturally confronted by strong opposition, arising chiefly from the traditional aversion of German Protestantism to everything "Catholic". In Germany Catholic is generally understood to mean "Roman Catholic". The H. C. U. publishes a monthly paper, which is being widely read in Germany and abroad (England, U. S. A., Holland, Switzerland, Sweden). The founder of the Union, Pfarrer H. W. Mosel in Hetzdorf (Uckermark), was one of the members of the Geneva (Preliminary) Conference on "Faith and Order", where he attended as representative of the society. He has published a detailed account of the conference in the monthly organ, of which he is the Editor. It is interesting to note the attitude attributed in this report by Pfarrer Mosel to the H. C. U. respecting the Lambeth Quadrilateral (1) The Holy Scriptures, (2) The Nicene and Apostles' Creeds, (3) Baptism and the Lord's Supper, (4) The Ministry). He says: "The position taken up by the H. C. U. regarding the Bible and Creeds is quite clear. It is firmly rooted in God's word and rests on the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds. The 'Confession of Augsburg' (1530) begins by declaring that the Lutheran Church faithfully retains the three Œcumenical or Catholic symbols, to wit the Apostles', Nicene and Athanasian Creeds. And we regard it as a happy feature that also the Evangelical-United Church has found a place for the Nicene Creed in her official service books, in addition to the Apostles' Creed. We have retained, too, the sacraments of

Baptism and Lord's Supper, and recognize them as having been instituted by our Lord. The H. C. U. can thus accept unreservedly the three first points of the Lambeth Quadrilateral. But what about its fourth part, the Ministry, that 'is to possess not only the inward call by the Spirit, but also the Commission of Christ and the Authority of the whole Church?'". I mentioned already that a sharp divergence was noticeable within the Conference in this respect, the watchword on the left being "Freedom", and on the right "Authority". The arguments of the Swedish representative steered a middle course. He declared that the Swedish Church, as contrasted with the "Episcopal" Churches of Norway, Denmark and Finland, did indeed possess the Apostolical Succession, but that she did not attach any decisive importance to it, and did not consider herself as separated from other Churches who had lost it. Bishop Gore, author of the book "The Church and the Ministry", a work of primary importance to the Anglo-Catholic conception of Church and Ministry, replied to my question what he understood by a Ministry as indicated in the Lambeth Quadrilateral: "The Apostolic Succession". This view represents without doubt the opinion of the Lambeth Conference as a whole. Now I am well aware that such a theory would easily be styled by Protestants as "Catholic", viz. Roman Catholic, and would be rejected without any further reasoning or without seriously attempting to grasp its meaning. But I quite agree with Bishop Herzog who in private conversation expressed the opinion that this question was much too serious to be brushed aside by cheap phrases. It struck me as remarkable to perceive with what joyful satisfaction the Swedes received the tidings that this year's Lambeth Conference had recognized, after careful investigation, the existence of an unbroken Episcopal Succession and of a real Priesthood in the Swedish Church. Some time ago I received a letter from a clergyman of the Prussian Evangelical Church in which he stated, that he had repeatedly felt doubts as to the legitimacy of his office, not having been episcopally ordained. Who could be so frivolous as to jeer lightheartedly at such scruples, even if he himself inclines to a wider point of view? In "Warnecke's Missions-Zeitschrift" Pfarrer Jehle last year pleaded for Bishops with Apostolical Succession for our missions; he thinks that it could easily be transmitted to us by the Bishops of the Moravian

Church, overlooking the fact that the Moravian bishops do not possess an unbroken line. The last Hessian Church Assembly also discussed the question of the Succession. These and other indications go to show that a better and deeper appreciation of the question is approaching with us, and that by degrees a historic and reverent sense is beginning to awake, even in our unhistoric and irreverent age. It can no longer pass by with indifference the importance of the apostolic rite of imposition of hands. I for my person would therefore wish that, when the increasing demand for Evangelical bishops is being fulfilled, they may not lack the Succession. I refrain from defining my own principles in this matter, and would only point out those important reasons of utility that seem to recommend the restoration of Episcopacy. It would enable us to enter into more intimate relations with the great non-Roman Episcopal Churches, and the conviction to belong to the Universal Church of Christ would not rest any longer on spiritual arguments alone, but on an outwardly visible fact seen by all the world—the consecration of our Bishops. Our Church would no longer be isolated, but increase in œcumenical character; also our missions would have the benefit of it. At the same time those bearers of the ministerial office who feel disquieted in their conscience could get a new assurance of the validity of their Ministry in a way more effective according to their views by the imposition of the hands of a Bishop standing in the Succession. The simplest way to bring it about would be to apply to the Swedish Episcopate and its head, the Archbishop of Upsala, for obtaining the Succession. Even without this, there exist intimate relations and manifold sympathies between us and the Swedish Church. But the Old Catholic Episcopate might also be approached, provided its willingness, for the Old Catholic Church upholds Evangelical truth. In this case it would be unnecessary to go abroad because there is at Bonn an Old Catholic bishop. It is of interest to mention in this connection that even the Roman Catholic Church is obliged to recognize the Old Catholic Episcopate as canonically valid. In conclusion, be it said that we subscribe to that theory of the Ministry which claims for it not only the “inward call of the Spirit, but also the Commission of Christ”, for it is a substantial feature of our High Church Movement that from its inception we have

strongly emphasized the Divine institution and commission of the Ministry. The Episcopal office seems consequently indispensable to us, and with all the force at our command we aim its re-establishment. The problem of the Episcopal Succession appears to us to deserve of most serious consideration, and by the time this office has been re-established with us we shall hope to have obtained full clearness on this point. Pfarrer Mosel has published in his monthly paper a German translation of the recent Lambeth "Appeal to all Christian people". — The chief feature of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Meeting of the H. C. U., which was preceded by an "Evangelical Mass" with Catholic ritual, was an exhaustive address on "The Theory of the Church" given by Pastor Støevesandt-Berlin (Dreifaltigkeitskirche). Pfarrer St. submitted the following theses: „(I) The High Church Union, having for its object the development of the Churches of the Reformation with regard to their constitution and cult, and defining in II, 6 the Church as the visible Arc of Salvation founded by Christ and the Apostles, needs for the upholding of such definition and of its work and aims a theory as to the character of the Church founded on Holy Scripture and borne out by history; (II) the germs of varying conceptions of the Church, as later propounded, are contained in the New Testament, but the primitive development as illustrated in St. Paul's chief passages on the Church as the Body of Christ forcibly points to the theory of a Divine Arc of Salvation, wanting to influence all mankind through Word and Sacrament by the instrument of a Spirit-made Ministry; (III) the Roman Catholic theory of the Church has retained substantial elements of the Biblical doctrine of the character of the Church, after various vacillations in history; it, however, minimizes the New Testament conception by laying an unwarranted stress on the juridical-institutional side of the Church; (IV) the conception of the Church as understood by the Reformers strains one-sidedly the personal aspect of the Church, and thereby weakens the power of the Church's organization to hold its own against worldly civilisation, to represent effectively in Divine Service that which is holy, to guide the individual soul, and to penetrate the people in its entirety with the Christian spirit; (V) the High Church movement in the Evangelical Churches of former and present times, by firmly upholding the Biblical theory of the Church,

tries to avoid the mistakes of the Roman Catholic and Reformation Churches, being conscious at the same time of the necessary tensions between the institutional and the personal aspects of the Church; by so doing it firstly tries to strengthen the conviction of the independence of the Church as a Divine institution; secondly to cultivate the oecumenical theory of the Church, which is being observed in lesser or greater degree in the various Church bodies; thirdly to present efficaciously in Divine Service by means of the Divinely appointed Ministry the sanctity of the Church, and to make it bear fruit in the cure of souls, and fourthly to make full use of the catholicity of the Church, by drawing upon the treasures of ecclesiastical tradition as much as possible, restoring church customs and shaping the manifestations of moral life according to the mind of the Church." Pastor Støevesandt's paper will appear in full in one of the next issues of the monthly organ. The Catholic spirit by which the H. C. U. is animated was shown in a motion put by Pastor Mosel that its name be changed into "League of Evangelical Catholics". Pfarrer Mosel gave as his reasons for the change what follows; "The name '*High Church Union*' has given rise to some dissatisfaction, because it may be regarded as merely wanting to copy Anglican tendencies. To this must be added that it only designates part of our programme, viz. our high valuation of the Church and its Ministry, whereas the word 'Catholic' carries with it the views and aims of the H. C. U. in their entirety. Men like Archbishop Söderblom, Professor Heiler and others, and in no lesser degree our own paper having introduced the idea of Evangelical Catholicity into the Protestant mind, and having clearly demonstrated its substantial difference from Roman Catholicism we need not fear that the name of '*League of Evangelical Catholics*' would lay us open to the suspicion of romanizing tendencies. We want to be *Catholic* in the sense of feeling ourselves united to all those who believe in our Lord Jesus Christ and are baptized in the name of the Trinity, no matter to what age, country or particular Church they may belong. We want to be Catholic in that we hold fast, with St. Vincent of Lerins, that which has always, everywhere and by all been believed, and by looking for the whole truth in the Church Universal alone. We want to be Catholic in that we desire the restauration of those ecclesiastical institu-

tions and customs that have once been the common property of the entire Church, and the retention of which has been abundantly blessed to this day in those particular Churches that have a Catholic flavour. But we desire to be *Evangelical* Catholics, measuring everything by the standard of the Gospel and refusing everything at variance with its truth and clearness; Evangelical also in this sense that we mean to cultivate our relations with other Christian people in the spirit of the Gospel, i. e. in the spirit of the love of Christ.”. Pfr. Mosel’s report on the satisfactory development of the H. C. U. in 1920 ended with these words: “Our Evangelical Church also will have to learn to make concessions to the Catholic feelings of many Evangelical Christians, lest she drive them out and into the Roman Church. ‘*A Church, Catholic and Evangelical* at the same time, Christian and Universal, a Church the *soul* of which is *Evangelical* and whose *body* is *Catholic*’ (Heiler) that is the vision before our eyes. That this picture may become truth and reality is our aim, is what we work and pray for.” — The chief endeavour of the H. C. U. is at present directed towards getting Episcopacy restored in the German National Churches. There is reason to believe that in some ecclesiastical provinces at least this object will be attained, f. i. in Hanover. A special Committee has drawn up a treatise on Episcopal Government. It is being printed in thousands of copies; all members of the National Church Assemblies of Prussia and the other States will be approached in this way. Much arduous work is also being done to compose a Breviary for the daily use of clergy and laity. Auricular Confession is beginning to be practised again. One of the topics discussed at the last meeting was the foundation of an Evangelical Monastic Order, to be in charge of a Retreat House. From all this it would seem that the H. C. U. in Germany is called by God to act as intermediary between the German Evangelical Churches and the non-Roman Episcopal Churches of the world (Old Catholics, Anglicans, Swedes, Orthodox). The latter have therefore every reason to watch the movement of the H. C. U. carefully, and to support it to the best of their abilities.

H. M. CYRENIUS.

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