

Statement by the Council of the Protestant Church in Germany to the Representatives of the Ecumenical Council of Churches (October 19, 1945)

Abstract

During the Third Reich, the “German Christians” within the Protestant Church had actively supported National Socialism. The Council of the Protestant Church in Germany, newly established in August 1945, included prominent bishops and pastors from the “Confessing Church” [*Bekennende Kirche*], among them Theophil Wurm, Otto Dibelius, and Martin Niemöller. They acknowledged the guilt the Germans bore for the crimes of the Third Reich, lamented that they had not opposed the regime more vigorously, and demanded a fundamental renewal of the Church.

Source

Stuttgart, October 19, 1945

The Council of the Protestant Church of Germany welcomes the representatives of the Ecumenical Council of Churches to its meeting in Stuttgart on October 18 and 19, 1945. We are especially grateful for this visit, because we know that we, along with our people, are not only in a community of suffering, but also in a community of guilt. It causes us great anguish to state that we have brought unimaginable, unending suffering upon many peoples and many countries. What we have often testified to in our communities, we now declare in the name of the whole church: it is true that we fought for many long years against the spirit that found its terrible expression in the violent National Socialist regime; however, we also accuse ourselves of not having professed our faith more courageously, of not having prayed more faithfully, of not having believed more joyfully, and of not having loved more fervently.

Now there is to be a new beginning in our churches. Grounded on the Holy Scripture, directed in all earnestness toward the Holy Lord of the Church, our churches are working to cleanse our faith of false influences and to organize themselves. We place our hope in the God of grace and mercy – that He will use our churches as His instrument and that He will give the churches full power to proclaim His Word and to enforce obedience to His Will amongst ourselves and all our people.

That we are closely tied to the other churches of the ecumenical community in this new beginning fills us with great joy.

We hope to God that, through the common work of the churches, the spirit of violence and revenge, which is trying to become powerful once again today, can be guided in the proper direction throughout the world and that the spirit of peace and of love – the only spirit in which a tortured humanity can recover – will triumph.

Thus we ask at a time when the whole world needs a new beginning: *Veni creator spiritus* (Come, creator spirit)!

signed. State Bishop D. Wurm

State Bishop D. Meiser

Bishop D. Dr. Dibelius

Superintendent Hahn

Pastor Asmussen D. D.

Pastor Niemöller D. D.

Landesoberkirchenrat Dr. Lilje

Superintendent Held

Pastor Lic. Niesel

Dr. Dr. Heinemann.

Source: Erklärung des Rates der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland gegenüber den Vertretern des Ökumenischen Rates der Kirchen (19. Oktober 1945); reprinted in *Ursachen und Folgen. Vom deutschen Zusammenbruch 1918 und 1945 bis zur staatlichen Neuordnung Deutschlands in der Gegenwart*, edited and compiled by H. Michaelis and E. Schraepler, vols. 17–26, Berlin (no date), vol. 23, p. 307f; also reprinted in Christoph Kleßmann, *Die doppelte Staatsgründung: Deutsche Geschichte 1945–1955*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986, p. 378.

Translation: Jeffrey Verhey

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