

THE NEW EVANGELISTIC MOVEMENT IN THE
GERMAN CHURCH.

BY FRANKLIN JOHNSON, D.D., LL.D., PROFESSOR IN THE
UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO.

At various times during the last three years obscure reports have come to us in America concerning the multiplication of meetings for the exposition of the Bible, for prayer, and for conference in the Lutheran and Reformed churches in Germany. But the movement did not appear to be extensive and, where it was observed, seemed to be in the hands of the pastors. The last number of the official "Church Yearbook"¹ devotes thirty-three pages to it, and shows that it has rapidly assumed astonishing proportions. The "Church Yearbook" is the official report of the German church in all its branches, and is now in its thirty-fourth year. So highly is it appreciated in Germany that the Prussian government pay out of the church funds to place a copy of it annually in the hands of every church officer. It is from this official publication that I shall draw such particulars concerning this revival as seem to be most important.

I. THE NAME.

The writer of the report, pastor Ernest Bunke, of Berlin, has some trouble to find a name for the movement. The report is entitled "Inner-Church Evangelization." He gives us three names, however, showing that the movement is yet in its infancy, so that both its promoters and its critics are undecided as to its most appropriate designation. The three are "inner church evangelization," "awakening movement," and "associations movement."² But generally he uses the third

(1) Kirchliches Jahrbuch, auf das Jahr 1907. 34. Jahrgang. Gütersloh. Druck und Verlag von C. Bertelsmann.

(2) "Erweckungsbewegung;" "innerkirchliche Evangelization;" "Gemeinschaftsbewegung."

of these phrases, "associations movement," evidently attracted to it by the facts that the movement has led to the formation of voluntary associations in the local churches, and that the term is preferred by the members of these bands.

II. SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MOVEMENT.

The movement takes various characteristics in various places. But in general the following features are prominent.

1. It has seized upon the laity more extensively than the clergy. Some pastors favor it, but it prospers without the aid of the pastor where this is withheld. The more liberalistic and skeptical pastors dislike it. The dry-as-dust orthodox pastors, who place their confidence in a correct and elaborate theological belief, dislike it. The ritualistic pastors who hold that baptism, confirmation, and the Lord's Supper are the chief means of salvation, dislike it. But there are many pastors who sympathize with it and enter into it; and there are some pastors of other kinds who are shrewd enough to wish to get hold of it in order to turn it about withersoever they will. As yet, however, it is distinctively a movement of the laity.

2. It is a movement of the relatively young. The fathers and mothers, accustomed to older things, and satisfied with them, do not enter into it as do the sons and daughters. Few of its most active promoters are over forty. The relative youth of those who are engaged in it gives it the power of fresh enthusiasm and unimpaired energy. At the same time, the lack of the more mature brings to it, in some cases, greater zeal than discretion.

3. The writer of this report tells us that in some places the movement exhibits traits of "Darbyism", the name by which the views and practices of the Plymouth Brethren are known in Germany. He tells us also that some persons call it unfavorably "the new pietism", thus associating it with the pietism of the eighteenth century, which ran into extremes of emotion and superstition. One of the Church Inspectors is quoted as instituting a comparison between what he calls the old

and the new pietism. To the old pietism he attributes three great advantages: Its dependence on the Word, its perfect reliance on free grace, and its tendency to a life of meditation and quietude. As its defects, he names its rigidity, the narrowness of its horizon, as contrasted with the entire broad field of saving truth, and the limitation of its work to the edification of its own adherents. As the failures of the new pietism, he mentions its disregard of that which has become historic, and its overestimation of its own importance, as if it alone were right. As its advantages he mentions its interest in the evangelization of the entire people, its disposition to seek publicity, and its strong assertion that justification must manifest itself in the sanctification of the daily life.

III. THE EXTENSION OF THE WORK.

The progress of the movement has been remarkable for its rapidity. "It strides forth," says our report, "and that not in general by the mere awakening influence of one person over another, or of one place over another. No; its representatives are fully conscious of their aim, and have the full intention to propagate it through special persons and extraordinary preparations."

We have a detailed statement of the regions in which the associations are growing, and these embrace almost the entire empire. They are East Prussia, West Prussia, Pomerania, Posen, Silesia, the Kingdom of Saxony, the Province of Saxony, Brandenburg, Mecklenburg, Schleswig-Holstein, Hamburg, Hanover, Thuringia, Hesse, Westphalia, the Rhine province, the Palatinate, Alsace-Lorraine, Baden, Wurttemberg, and Bavaria. In all these territories one observes "only energy, advancement, and a loud manifestation of enthusiasm and confidence."

IV. THE METHODS OF ACTION.

Some of these are obscure to me, and, as they are mentioned

only incidentally, need explanation. Thus at a conference of the associations at Gnadau, there were enthusiasts who introduced the custom, imported from Wales, for several persons to pray loudly at the same time, and had to be silenced by the leader. Mention is made of after-meetings of persons interested in the movement, and it would seem that in some places these follow the regular Sunday morning service, and pastors are advised not to forbid or hinder them. It appears further that there are itinerant evangelists who offer aid to pastors in holding special meetings; and, as they are not usually highly educated, and are not ordained, they cause perplexity, and pastors are advised what attitude towards them to take. It appears still further that the members of the associations like to observe the Lord's Supper in their own assemblies, so that there is rather a burning communion-question in Germany, and pastors are advised to yield to the demand. These things may be clear to the German reader who has observed the movement, but they need to be explained a little further to us who live at a distance. To what extent do they prevail? What are their special causes? Whither do they tend?

In general, however, the chief activities of the associations can be understood from this report. They embrace

1. The organization of an association within every church which will permit it. Thus we have a large and growing church, within the church, a body of spiritual men and women rapidly becoming conscious of their power. This is precisely what Luther at one time desired and advocated. He abandoned the plan, however, because he became convinced that under the circumstances existing in his time it could not succeed.

2. Meetings for prayer and conference and for the exposition of the Scriptures, the last being in many places the chief feature. These meetings seem to be the heart of the entire movement. They are marked by much informality, and voluntary song and prayer and testimony are made prominent in them.

3. Regular district conferences led by the wisest and warmest members, sometimes pastors, sometimes influential noble-

men, sometimes lay-evangelists. Here the exercises are not so informal as in the local meetings; the recognized leaders are heard, plans for more aggressive campaigns are discussed, mistakes are brought forward and criticised, and new methods of work are suggested. More than thirty of these district conferences are announced in the one monthly paper, "Philadelphia"; four of them are appointed for Berlin; but the series covers the empire. It is interesting to observe how some of these conferences have become specialized. One is for "believing merchants"; another for "believing bakers"; another for a "course of Bible study". Several are announced as aiming to promote a deeper life of faith. These conferences are not narrowly local; in the majority of instances they are designed to bring together the representative workers of entire regions. One is announced as a summer festival of all the associations in Schleswig-Holstein. The movement has been greatly stimulated by these district meetings while by the same means it has entered upon a process of self-criticism and attained a better balance and methods at once more reasonable and more influential.

4. Evangelists who travel from place to place in order to form or to encourage associations wherever they go. They are usually laymen. They are much more numerous, if I do not mistake, than those who offer to aid pastors in special revival meetings.

5. Men of thorough education who labor among the university students and other people of culture. They give courses of lectures, which in some cases are largely attended.

6. The publication of magazines and newspapers in the interest of the movement. They are characterized in this report as "cheap weekly sheets, and all sorts of monthlies". They are "constantly increasing in number."

7. The maintenance of schools for the training of the laborers. Fourteen of these are named, and many of them are described at some length. A few are small, but the majority have an attendance of sixty or eighty, with graduating classes of ten or fifteen. For entrance only a desire to do religious work, a public school education, and bodily and mental health,

are required. Some of these schools are for women, some for men. One of them is in Berlin, and is managed by Herr Köhler, who was formerly a pastor in the established church, but laid down the office, had himself immersed, and entered on the work of the associations.

8. The erection of buildings for the meetings. This is a marked feature of the movement in all parts of the empire. Take East Prussia as an example. In Königsberg the association has purchased ground on which it is to build a hall capable of seating twelve hundred persons. In Osterode a hall has just been dedicated. In Pilkallen a hall has been purchased. In Lyck a house is planned. There seems to be a determination to secure buildings everywhere. This shows that the church buildings are not adapted to the wants of the associations, or else that the pastors are not willing to have them used for anything but the stated services. It shows also a dangerous tendency of the associations to draw away from the established church.

V. THE THEOLOGY OF THE MOVEMENT.

Every great movement in the history of religion has a dogmatic basis. The movement of Abraham out of Chaldea, the movement of the Israelites out of Egypt, the great outburst of Buddhism, the conquests of Islam, the early Roman Catholic missions to Western Europe, the Reformation, the Wesleyan revival; take these as familiar examples of the truth which I have stated. A religious organization may have an abundance of correct dogma, and yet be dead. Dogma is not life. Nevertheless, a religious organization without dogma is always without life. The church without a creed, either written or unwritten, is a dead church. We may be certain in advance that these associations in the German church have a definite theology which the evangelists can preach and the people comprehend. What is it?

Two statements of it are given in the Yearbook, from two different sources, and they are in substantial agreement.

The first and longest is from a young theologian named Gardtell, who labors chiefly among theological students, and has great influence with them. He is a Lutheran, but has had himself immersed, not to raise the question of baptism among his hearers, but to be personally just right, or, as our Lord said, "to fulfill all righteousness." He speaks only in secular buildings, does not open his lectures with prayer, avoids all show of special piety in dress and speech, and discusses all questions in a strictly scientific manner. He rejects absolutely the "theological fairy-story that the Germans as a whole are Christians, though many of them are not conscious of being Christians." He rejects both the elaborate confessional and the liberal theologies, and desires to return to the simple substance of the apostolic preaching.

In a meeting at Blankenburg this man set forth the following statement of principles:

"1. We stand upon the ground of the entire holy Scriptures, which we acknowledge as the sole authority in doctrine and life. To us, the infallibility and absolute sufficiency of the holy Scriptures stand firm.

"2. We emphasize the deity and the vicarious sin-offering of Christ in the full apostolic sense.

"3. We demand of every human being a personal and total decision of the will for Jesus, as also a separation from sin and the world. We believe in the eternal condemnation of all who do not accept Jesus.

"4. We desire to win students and other educated persons to Jesus, and to lead them into a deeper personal and scientific understanding of primitive Christianity.

"5. We serve no special denomination, nor will we support any special program of church politics. But we guarantee, so far as in us lies, to every man full freedom of conscience to serve God without respect of persons, according to his Biblical knowledge."

The second statement is from an itinerant preacher named Wittekind, who has traveled extensively to promote the work of the associations, and knows them thoroughly. He begins by

declaring that they have no thought of separating from the established church, but desire only to work unhindered within her communion. He then continues:

"1. We teach justification through faith alone, as an experience of the heart, and this brings us somewhat into conflict with the doctrine of baptismal regeneration.

"2. The holy Scriptures are our highest authority, our only norm of faith and life. They are to us the whole revelation of God, and are therefore inerrant. This brings us into conflict with the present-day Biblical critics.

"3. The church, according to article VII of the Augsburg Confession, is to us the community of those who truly believe.

"That we are engaged in the effort simply to make these principles effective has for its consequence that the diseased and putrid places in the body of our established church are revealed.

"Our associations can no longer endure preaching in which the unbelief of modern theology finds expression. They simply refuse any longer to hear such preaching. They cannot be constrained any longer to attend church out of reverence or in the traditional manner."

VI. FRICTION.

The author of our report begins it with this word. There is friction between the established church and the associations, and also within the bosom of the associations themselves.

The friction between the established church and the associations arises, in part, from their unavoidable antagonism to a high and dry orthodox preaching, which has no relation to the daily life, to ritualistic preaching, which bids the people put their trust in the sacraments; and to skeptical preaching, which takes its texts from the Bible, and proceeds to tell how faulty the Bible is. The antagonism of the associations to these kinds of preaching amounts to a positive revolt. As there are thousands of pastors who give the people no real gospel, they are in danger of becoming embittered against the associations. In

some of the German states there are laws which forbid religious assemblies not licensed by the government. In one of these states not long ago some of the pastors invoked the aid of the police to arrest those found in the meetings. Of this measure, however, they seem now to have become ashamed, and they no longer resort to it. In some other states the laws forbid voluntary meetings where singing and prayer are had, and in these states, when certain pastors complained to the police, the associations simply gave up singing and prayer, and limited the exercises to the exposition of Scripture and to testimonies like those of our conference meetings; and thus nothing could be done against them. On the whole, the legal opposition seems to be ceasing of itself, in very shame.

If some of the pastors oppose the associations, many of the representatives of the associations oppose certain classes of the pastors without hesitation. Here is an extract from an editorial in the weekly journal, "On the Watchtower", for December 9, 1906:

"In the majority of the congregations that I am acquainted with, in most of the churches in which I have been, a false Word of God, not consciously false, but nevertheless a really false word of God, is preached; and it would be better to have no preaching than to have a false so-called Word of God preached.

"Wherein consists the falsity? (1) That when the commandments of God are spoken of, nothing is said of the curse of eternal condemnation for those who transgress the law. (2) Much is often said about the gospel, of a very beautiful and enthusiastic kind, and the chief emphasis is laid on the worth of baptism, which is so strongly presented that no room is left for conversion, and in the majority of cases the gospel of the cross is not preached, and the grace flowing from the wounds of the Lamb is not presented. (3) The Word concerning the law without hell, and the Word concerning the gospel without the cross, are so mixed that no distinction is made between the converted and the unconverted among the hearers. Such preaching is deadly, whether it is interesting or not. Where there is such a false Word of God men can no more come to

a living faith than wheat can grow where destructive tares are sown."

Another leader of the associations, who labors chiefly in West Prussia, is quoted as saying in a newspaper article that "it does not pay to do any more patchwork on the established church; she is ripe for destruction; therefore, the associations labor with redoubled vigor, and without much regard for her." He entitled his article, "The Evangelical Established Church in her Death Struggle."

These, it is admitted, are extreme expressions, and yet evidences of an emotion which exists in many hearts; in some, not yet brought up fully into the light of consciousness; in others, only reserved from speech, but clearly and strongly felt.

On the whole, the attitude of the church towards the associations, as of the associations towards the church, is one of suspicion, though not of pronounced antagonism.

There is some friction also within the associations, as there has been among those promoting every forward movement of the past, from the apostolic age to the present day. Some are more strongly attached to the church than others, and are timid in their counsels and their conduct with reference to it; while others, more nearly weaned from the mother, scorn all semblance of dependence, and criticise without reserve. There are conflicting tastes; the educated and the ignorant have not yet learned to work together in entire harmony. "The inner-church evangelization," says our report, "presents to us no picture of unity."

VII. THE FUTURE.

What will become of this movement? Will the German church do with it what the Anglican church did with the Wesleyan movement? Or, will she encourage it, keep it within her bosom, and derive new life from it? If she shall choose the latter course, will the associations themselves continue warm and vital, or will they be chilled and frozen by their too friendly and too frosty surroundings? One cannot predict.

Nor can one be confident of what he ought to desire. Our Lord said that it was better for His disciples to separate themselves from the Jewish organization, that His new wine must be put into new wine-skins, His new cloth be made into a new garment, instead of being wasted in the effort to patch the old. This was better for the original Lutheran movement, for the Zwinglian movement, for the Wesleyan movement. Separation, differentiation, is the general condition of progress, as Herbert Spencer long ago pointed out. If a division in the German church shall take place, let us not feel discouraged.

Thus far the higher ecclesiastical authorities have shown a disposition to protect the associations against the opposition of hostile pastors. For example, in one of the small towns of Brandenburg one of the associations fell under the condemnation of the pastor and the school teacher. These men at length went from house to house warning people against it. They threatened the more needy attendants at the meetings with the withdrawal of aid from the poor funds, and the pastor declared that he would not officiate at the funerals of the members of the association. The matter went so far that the children of the place became divided, and those who attended the meetings of the association were derided and jostled in the streets by the others. At length an appeal was made to the General Superintendent of Religion at Berlin, a Cabinet officer. He visited the place, which is left nameless in our report, assembled the church officers and strongly protested against their attitude, pointing out the great need which the German church had for such new life as that offered by the associations. If this wise course shall be pursued by all the higher ecclesiastical officers, the associations may remain in the church, for at present they do not want to go out. May the will of the Lord be done in this matter, and, if there shall be an outburst of wrath, may the wrath of man praise Him.