

ASSEMBLY AFFAIRS IN GERMANY (1937)

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A Few Papers Relating to
Assembly Affairs in Germany (1937)

arranged by
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NOTE

The original text is unaltered, but where it is ambiguous or erroneous it has been clarified or corrected with footnotes, using alphabetical superscripts.

Deryck Noakes
20 October 1998

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A Short Account of the Principal Events relating to German Assemblies during 1937

1. The following statement is issued to afford some recent information regarding the assemblies in Germany and the changes introduced into their relations to the State and to other Christian companies. When the serious difficulties with the State arose,^a the German brethren did not wait to become of "the same mind in the Lord" in attempting to solve them. Consequently, wide divergences have occurred among them, which are causing widespread concern among their brethren in the Lord and their fellow-members in the body of Christ in other countries.
2. Lack of unanimity in assemblies is invariably due to the quenching of the operations of the Holy Spirit by the activities of the flesh, the two being antagonistic to each other (Gal. 5). It is well known that for the past ten years there have been growing feelings of discord between the older and the younger brothers in the various German assemblies, contrary to the apostolic injunctions to Timothy on this head.

Their views differed considerably both in interpretations of scripture and in spheres and modes of Christian service. Various efforts towards adjustment were made without avail. Spiritual power was lacking to remove these differences and dissensions by the scriptural methods of wise instruction and vivid example. In this state of spiritual weakness, the saints became an easy prey to the assaults of the great enemy.

3. Accordingly, in April last, the wolf raided the flock. By a Government interdict of the 28th of that month all meetings of the "Christian assembly," gathered to the name of the Lord Jesus, were forbidden in Germany. The main reasons for this drastic measure appear to have been (a) the absence of any external organisation among the brethren, and (b) the consequent danger to the State of secret teaching and plotting against its welfare. No specific instance of political disorder seems, however, to have been cited either in justification or in support of these allegations.
4. Some of the brethren then ascertained that the State refused under any circumstances to withdraw the interdict, but agreed to do so if the "Christian assembly" were re-constituted on an entirely new basis. This proposal of compromise between the State and the truth was hastily accepted.
5. After a conference in Elberfeld of representative German brethren on May 30th, a new scheme of assembling on this basis was prepared with explanations, and signed by Dr. H. Becker and nine other brothers on June 10th. The subversive character of the scheme with some of its more important details forms the subject of the "Remarks," which are printed below on pages 5 - 11. In the new organisation, the essential truths of the assembly of God according to scripture are not only distorted and debased in principle, but destroyed in practice.
6. The essential features of the new organization ("Bund" or Union), described in the document of June 10th, are embodied in a code of formal regulations, a summary of which is given on page 4.
7. The new movement accepts into the Bund or Union any Christians, unattached to the Churches, who comply with its conditions, and whose belief agrees with the faith of the Reformers. This latitude of reception is plainly expressed in the Statutes; see, for instance, Article I (page 4).
8. Having formulated a scheme for the new community, whose Constitution would be approved and registered by the State, and having also provided for the incorporation of unattached companies of believers, relations with those known as "Open Brethren" were considered from the same point of view. After a conference by representative brethren from the two parties, a declaration, dated August 20th, was issued, stating that in their judgment there was no scriptural reason against their fusion or amalgamation. The seriousness of this second retrograde step was made the subject of entreaty and remonstrance in the joint "Appeal" of October last made by brethren in Switzerland, France, England, and elsewhere. The greater part of this "Appeal" is printed on pages 12 - 15.

^a Because of the advent of Nazism.

9. From the few salient facts mentioned above, it is evident that a crucial test of fidelity and devotion to the Lord and His word has been applied to the saints in Germany. As the result of this test, the approved will be made manifest (1 Cor. 11:19). Undoubtedly, the Lord has those even in these last days who will prove to be "fine gold," and will not accept the terms of the Bund, nor of the associations apart from which they have by His grace long walked. For such valiant men, we can thank God and rejoice, while with them we would share the sorrows of a ruined and afflicted church, walking together with them in the truth until the hour of glory and victory which is at hand.

10. It is hoped that the perusal of the following selection of papers will drive the readers to their knees. Undeniably, they affect the name of the Lord as Head of His church, and the true spiritual welfare of a large number of our brethren and sisters in Christ; they therefore are of personal concern to us.

The serious condition of the saints in Germany (and in Rumania also) forms a pressing occasion for individual and united humiliation before the Lord because the members of His body have become carnal and worldly, a state from which we cannot dissociate ourselves, and the present state of confusion and dishonour is the result.

We ought also to unite with our Continental Brethren (see page 16) in earnest, persevering prayer that the Lord would graciously intervene for the preservation of assembly witness in Germany and Rumania in spite of the prevailing declension and defection. Neither ought we to forget to intercede for many simple saints, who seem to have been ensnared unwittingly into the acceptance of worldly principles, and to be drawn aside from the path of rectitude and obedience according to the truths of scripture given for these last days.

Should a like testing-time come in this country, may we have the constancy of grace and the courage of faith to suffer affliction, if need be, in the name of the Lord and, at whatever cost, to keep intact that deposit entrusted to us by the Holy Spirit Who dwells in us (2 Tim. 1:14).

W.J.H.
29th December, 1937

Brief Summary of the Statutes of the Union of Christians Not attached to the Churches

- I.**
1. This Union is a community of Christians whose belief corresponds with the Reformer's profession of faith, and which rests on the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, also on the Holy Scriptures as a manifestation of the divine will.
 2. The objects of the Union are :
 - (a) to proclaim salvation by Jesus Christ ;
 - (b) to practise the life of faith ;
 - (c) to realize the Biblical unity of all believers ;
 - (d) to practise Christian love ;
 - (e) to use every effort to attain these objects.
 3. The union is a registered association with its seat at Dortmund, the members being attached to various local communities.
 4. [The political responsibilities and activities of the members are then defined.]
- II.**
1. The conditions of entrance into the Union are :
 - (a) to abide on the same confessional ground ;
 - (b) to maintain an irreproachable life ;
 - (c) to support the Hitler government absolutely.
 2. Entry into the Union is through the local community with the approval of the local official.
 3. The qualification for membership is forfeited :
 - (a) by voluntary resignation ;
 - (b) by exclusion.
 4. A member is excluded if opposed to the above conditions of entrance. This is decided by the local community with the approval of the local mandatory. Every act of exclusion is determined according to the constitution of the community (Art. V), and is beyond appeal.
- III.**
1. The management of the Union is vested in the State mandatory, assisted by the Council, composed at first of the founders of the Union. Afterwards, it will be elected by the assembly of the district mandatories, as also will the State mandatory (III. 5).
 2. The State mandatory is president of the Union, and will arrange its procedure and watch its interests.
 3. Local communities are directed by the local mandatories, who are chosen by the community, and approved by the State mandatory. These are assisted by a council of brothers, chosen by the community. The local mandatory may be overruled by the State mandatory according to the constitution of the community (Art. V).
 4. In large districts, the local mandatories choose a district mandatory every two years, subject to the State mandatory.

5. Every two years, the district mandatories choose the State mandatory, who will summon them to meet at any time at the request of two-fifths of their number.
 6. On his violation of any of the provisions of Art. II, the State mandatory loses office, provided the majority of the district mandatories withhold their confidence from him.
 7. [A further provision regarding the powers of the State mandatory.]
 8. The meeting of district mandatories takes the place of that of the members of the union, but, on the request of one-tenth of the latter, the State mandatory will summon a general meeting.
- IV. Funds are provided by the voluntary contributions of the members of the Union. The State mandatory or his mandatories control the financial arrangements in each community.
- V. In collaboration with the Council of Management, the State mandatory will issue a "Constitution of the community."

N.B. According to rules laid down by Dr. Becker, the word, "Versammlung" (assembly), should no longer be used; this is to be replaced by "Gemeinde," formerly used alternatively with "assembly." In the foregoing translation it appears as "community" to indicate the literal meaning.

Further, it may be observed that members of the communities are enjoined to conclude all their business letters with the words, "Heil Hitler," as well as those letters relating to the interests of the communities and the children of God.

Some Remarks^a on the Report

prepared by DR. H. BECKER, AND DATED THE 10TH JUNE, 1937

This report is a summary of explanations given by Dr. Hans Becker in a meeting held at Elberfeld on 30th May, 1937, following the official suspension on the 28th April of the gatherings in Germany known as "The Christian Assembly." It is signed by Dr. Becker and nine other representative brothers.

The contents of this report have reference for the most part to three distinct topics as follows :

- I. The formation of a new organization, which will receive a State licence for assembling, and will be under State control in both its external and internal relations and activities.
- II. The modification of the spiritual constitution of the new assembly, and of its general aims and pursuits, in order that State interests may be more effectively promoted than they have been in the past.
- III. Certain strictures upon the "Brethren" made by Dr. Becker and those associated with him by signature to the paper.

This document, therefore, deals with matters of transcendent importance, and with subjects of the holiest character conceivable, but there is no appeal to any authority higher than the German State. The proposals affect the honour and glory of the Head of the assembly, for which He gave Himself, but He is passed by in silence. We are moved to exclaim like Mary, "They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him." The assembly is the habitation of the Holy Spirit, but His name is not mentioned. The church of the living God is "the pillar and ground of the truth," but there is no reference to the word of truth, the holy scriptures, as the authority for the formation of a new organization. It is astonishing to find a new scheme affecting the spiritual lives of between sixty and seventy thousand saints introduced without even an attempt to support it by passages of scripture showing it to be according to the mind and the will of the Lord.

^a by W. J. Hocking

I. State Licence and Control

The German State has seen fit to issue an interdict, forbidding the exercise of all ecclesiastical functions by "The Christian Assembly." This ban will not be removed until a new and different organization is formed, pledged to yield unqualified obedience to the State, and submission to the permanent control of its affairs by the State. The acceptance of such a domination of the world^a in spiritual matters by the brethren is not only opposed to their former practice (this is admitted in the document), but is opposed to New Testament teaching throughout.

The world (*kosmos*) is man's ordered or organized government of human affairs, where God and His word are ignored.^b The Lord said of Himself, "I am not of this world" (Jn. 8:23), and, of His disciples, "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world" (Jn. 17:16). His kingdom is not of this world (Jn. 18:36). Satan is its prince (Jn. 12:31; 14:30). The friendship of the

world is enmity against God (Jas. 4:4). The world hates and persecutes the believer (Jn. 15:18; 1 Jn. 3:13). And *all that is in the world* is not of the Father, but is of the world (1 Jn. 2:16).

Moreover, the attitude of the world towards the assembly was defined immediately after its formation at Pentecost. The life and liberty of the disciples were immediately threatened by the Sanhedrin, and they in these threats recognized the spirit of the world, of the combination of Jewish and Gentile powers which had crucified the Lord of glory (see Acts 4:26-30). When the governing body in Jerusalem forbade the apostles to speak or teach in the name of Jesus, they refused to hearken to it more than to God; in the face of this interdict they boldly claimed that they ought to obey God rather than man (Acts 4:10 ; 5: 29). Did the three Hebrew youths submit to the control of their worship by the king of Babylon? or Daniel to the Medo-Persian decree as to prayer? Men of ancient faith of whom the world (or the State) was not worthy wandered in deserts and hidden places when forbidden the liberty of public assembly (Heb. 11:38). They suffered for their faith in God, refusing to deny or renounce it at the will of the State.

Any kind of coalition or compromise between the assembly and the State is unknown in the New Testament. Even resort to the law-courts by brothers with differences is condemned (1 Cor. 6:1, 2). The wide distinction between the church and State was recognized by Gallio the Roman pro-consul, who refused to investigate a question about Christian worship, regarding it as a matter unsuitable for the civil tribunal (Acts 18:14, 15).

Now, in the light of the above and of other scriptures, believers ought to expect that, because of the enmity of the world to Christ and His own, Satan acting through the organized forces of the kingdoms of this world is likely to obstruct the public assembling together of the saints. They gather together in the name of the Lord Jesus because of His promise to be in the midst (Matt. 18:20). They make this gathering a regular practice, because they are bidden not to forsake the assembling of themselves together (Heb. 10:25). Here they have the divine authority for meeting together, and the divine inducement to do so, that is, the presence of the Lord Himself. If the State (the world power)^c forbids such meetings under penalties for disobedience, those penalties are the sort of persecution that early believers endured because they were Christ's, and were counted worthy to suffer for the kingdom of God. Are we better than they? Is it consistent conduct in believers today to seek to evade such penalties by unworthy compromise with worldly authority?^d Can such an evasion be regarded as loyalty to Christ?

Therefore, we conclude that the public assembling of saints in the name of the Lord is based upon the scripture, which shows that it is the will of the Lord, is sanctified by His presence, is illustrated by recorded instances in the Acts and the Epistles, and is not to be abandoned. In this matter we ought to obey the Lord Who commands it rather than the State which forbids it.

^a Rather 'State'.

^b The world (*kosmos*) had its being through Christ.

Indirect government is of God, although it can come under Satan's control.

^c The State is a secular power.

^d Satan acting through the authority of the State.

There are, of course, incidental matters in which the State may exercise its control, and to which believers are exhorted in the scriptures to be obedient. Registration of births, deaths, domicile, sanitary and fire precautions in public buildings, taxes, etc. —such State regulations are covered by such scriptures as Rom. 13; 1 Pet. 2:13, 14, and do not raise any question of conscience toward God. We are to submit without resistance even if some of the impositions may be considered unjust and exorbitant. But it seems that punctual compliance with such regulation is now considered insufficient, since the State demands whole-hearted political service from the brethren. But of this particular requirement it is proposed to speak under the heading which follows this.

Now it must suffice to point out under this head that the State asserts its authority over the brethren, not only as individual citizens, but in their corporate capacity as belonging to the body of Christ. Now we know that Christ is Head over all things to the assembly, which is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all (Eph. 1:22, 23), while the Holy Spirit is the source of all energy and activity in the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12). How incongruous to bring the authority of the world^a into such a domain! Babylon, the false church, and the beast are linked together for future judgment in the Apocalyptic vision (Rev. 17). The germ of this unholy alliance seems to be with us even now as the basis of the proposed organization in Germany.

^a 'State'

II. The Modification of Spiritual Truths for Political Ends

A new organization is to be formed on an entirely different basis. Formerly, the assembly was composed, in accordance with scriptural instruction, of the members of Christ's body, recognized by their fellow-members to be such by their sound doctrine and godly walk. For the new organization, other qualifications of a political nature, unknown to scripture, are introduced. By these innovations, a fundamental change in constitution is made, and the new organization cannot be regarded as a scriptural assembly.

The three most striking of the innovations introduced are :

- (1) The new test for membership ;
- (2) The new title ;
- (3) The new scheme of mandatory government.

- (1) *The new test for membership.* The Lord entrusted to "His own" exclusively the responsibility of receiving into and excluding from their company (Matt. 18:18 ; Jn. 20:23), the rules for their guidance in this service being found in the Holy Spirit's later communications to the assembly. But now the State has formulated a new condition, of which there is not even a hint in scripture. It is now stipulated that only those Christians will be admitted to membership who undertake to render an unqualified obedience to the State. It is emphasized that this allegiance must not be of a neutral, negative, passive character. The entire energies and abilities of each member of the new organization must be devoted to working for the good of the German people. In the new organization, therefore, the time, strength, and capabilities of believers must be spent in furthering the interests of the German nation, and not in preaching the gospel to sinners and in ministering the word to the saints, as they are enjoined in the scripture to do with their utmost energy and in their fullest measure.

A new standard for the purpose and manner of life of those in the new organization is also indicated. Our heavenly citizenship, as it has been understood, is denied. The exhortations in the Epistles to walk worthy of our heavenly calling are all ignored. It is insisted that the objects and occupations of this life are to be followed wholeheartedly, such as arts, sciences, sports, etc. An effort is made to secure some scriptural support for this change from a spiritual ideal by saying that when our Lord said, "Seek ye *first* the kingdom of God," He did not mean, "Seek ye *only* the kingdom of God," and therefore we may seek earthly things as well. But the Holy Spirit said, "Seek those things which are above . . . Set your mind on things above, and *not* on things on the earth" (Col. 3:1, 2). God claims from us "the whole spirit, soul, and body" for sanctified service (1 Thess. 5:23). The Lord also said, "No servant can serve two masters . . . ye cannot serve God and mammon" (Lu. 16:18). We cannot serve Christ and the world that crucified Him, and that still hates and despises Him. Therefore, the change is *not* supported by Matthew's gospel 6:33, as they imply, and as they might have seen even from a verse just before it (ver. 24).

- (2) *The new title.* The new organization is to be called "the Union of Free Christians." Hitherto, the brethren have, with the help and grace of God, "endeavoured to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3). Henceforth, they are to be distinguished as "the Union of Free Christians," an entirely different conception from the unity formed by the Holy Spirit between the Head and His body, and between the diverse members of His body. What is of man is substituted for what is of God; "union" is made by man, but "the unity" is already formed by the Holy Spirit.

The word, "union," may imply amalgamation or confederation. The term may have been devised to describe a possible coming together of different Christian communities for mutual convenience and benefit. At any rate, the hope is expressed that the new organization will attract other Christians, not belonging to "the Christian assembly." And one of the seven principles of the new "Union" is a conscientious effort towards union with all believers (Dr. B's Report).

- (3) *The new scheme of mandatory government.* The State demands that the new organization shall be provided with a uniform system of representation in all its branches throughout Germany. Each local gathering elects its own representative or mandatory. The local mandatories in each district choose one of their number to be the mandatory for the district. Again, the district mandatories choose one to be mandatory for the Reich. This scheme is purely a State regulation. There is nothing like it in scripture, except the selection of seven men to administer the alms of the assembly in Jerusalem as an emergency measure (Acts 6).

The *full* powers of the mandatory for the Reich are not stated, but they evidently are very extensive.* It is said that he is the servant of all the assemblies, though not their chief, but he will authorize all itineraries of the Lord's servants for preaching and ministry. Even Paul did not assume such control; for example, he only "begged" Apollos to go to Corinth, and even then Apollos was not free to go at the great apostle's bidding (1 Cor. 16:12).

The other mandatories are responsible (presumably to the State) for the maintenance of order in the districts and local communities. They must furnish the police with lists of the members. They will also be answerable for the spread of any information concerning persons and events. They are to take energetic measures for the suppression of irresponsible gossip in the gatherings. The intention of the State is to ensure that nothing contrary to the State is concealed under cover of christianity; accordingly, all private communications in the assemblies will be censored by the mandatories.

It is clear that by this scheme the assemblies are placed under the full political control of the State. It is said that the State will exercise no influence upon believers in matters of faith and doctrine. But who will decide whether a certain doctrine is prejudicial to the State or not? The State has already decided that it is opposed to State interests for believers to be heavenly minded, to be strangers and pilgrims, to seek a better country, that is, a heavenly, to love not the world, nor the things of the world. No one who strives to act according to these scriptural truths would be admitted to the new organization, and, if discovered there, would be excluded.

These three provisos, without considering others, establish the true character of this new community. It is *not* a purely Christian community, though it claims to be so and not to be a political one. It is in fact a politico-Christian organization, in which Christian obligations are to be placed on the same level with obligations to the German State and people, to co-religionists, and with the natural relations of life in this world. Such a hybrid company is a phase of Laodiceanism. Allegiance to the Head in heaven is mixed with allegiance to the State on earth; it is neither cold nor hot: and being lukewarm by its very profession the Lord will spue it out of His mouth (Rev. 3). The Lord is outside this company, but He stands at the door, and knocks! What grace!

* The wide powers of this supreme official are set out in the Statutes issued later. See articles iii – v. (page 4).

III. Strictures upon the Brethren

In the course of the paper, some censorious remarks are made with regard to the past conduct of brethren, to some of which attention is drawn, not for the purpose of justifying the brethren, but of showing that the remarks are not scripturally correct, nor strictly just and true historically.

It is said, for example, that the brethren, while professing to witness to the truth of the one body, have failed to exhibit a corporate unity, and by their quarrels, disagreements, and divisions have nullified this witness. The fact that there have been many divisions during the past century is a matter of history and cannot be denied. But the accompanying fact is not mentioned by Dr. Becker that when the fundamental truths of Christianity were assailed division became essential for the very same reason that caused brethren at the first to stand apart from the sects of Christendom. Further, it is untrue that brethren professed to exhibit a corporate unity as if they themselves were a replica of the one body. Those who had left the confusion of the great house realized they were but a shattered remnant of the whole company of those whom the Lord knows to be His. Moreover, in taking the separate place of witness, they did not assume that they would thereby be exempt from the failures due to the world, the flesh, and the devil, which are seen in other believers. The failure of the brethren can thus be explained, though not excused. Also, while the brethren have confessedly failed in their testimony to the truth of the assembly, the truth itself of the assembly has not changed, nor have its demands upon the consciences of believers in any wise diminished because of the divisions among brethren.

It is also said in the paper that brethren have manifested a spirit of pride and intolerance towards other believers in holding aloof from them. Pride and a lack of forbearance there may have been, for "in us, that is, in our flesh, dwells no good thing." Wherever such a spirit exists it is undeniably wrong. But to stand aloof from a disordered and defiled Christendom is a scriptural injunction: "Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord" (2 Cor. 6:17), and there is also the personal exhortation to purge oneself from the vessels to dishonour (2 Tim. 2 : 20, 21). To take such a place is not to be sectarian in spirit nor to build a wall of separation, for other believers are equally free to take the same stand apart from erroneous teaching and practice in company with ourselves.

It is said further that our relations “with other circles of brethren” must be reformed root and branch and that the suspension of “the Christian assembly” shows that this reform is the will of God. Ought we not to expect at least one passage from God’s word to show that the brethren have been acting contrary to the will of God by standing apart from the sinful follies of Christendom during the past century? Not a syllable is given. The arbitrary act of the State in prohibiting all gatherings is assumed to be the will of God. On this ground, it is said, “We hope that soon in Germany a *united* organization will exist which will include all believers outside the churches (official) of the State, and into which *our new organization will enter*. We shall preserve our especial convictions, but *not our especial organization*. This seems to us to be the will of God.” This proposed introduction of the brethren into a heterogeneous confederation must utterly destroy their identity as a witnessing company for the Head of the church, which is His body. Their lampstand will thereby be removed out of its place, except for those who repent, and do the first works (Rev. 2: 5), resisting the will of the State as of an enemy to the truth.

Entrance into this comprehensive “Union of Free Christians” is made compulsory by the State. However various the convictions of these companies of Christians, the State will regard them as a single community. Any subsequent division into different communities will render them liable to suspension, as in the case of “the Christian assembly.” Is this determined opposition by the State to those who seek to obey the word of the Lord anything but the world’s enmity of which the Lord has warned us? He said, “if ye were of the world, the world would love its own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you” (Jn. 15:19). It was because the brethren were not “of the world” that they are censured by Dr. Becker, and their meetings were suspended by a Government decree. The meetings are now to be restored if the brethren will agree to become “of the world,” and be “a hundred per cent.” partizans of the State. This is the price that the world asks the brethren to pay for the liberty of gathering together in the name of the Lord. The members of what is called here “the Christian assembly,” now suspended, will not be admitted into the new organization unless they agree to be completely subservient to the State. They must again choose whom they will serve. This is the plain issue for all godly and pious men.

As an argument in favour of the new mandatory system, it is said in the paper that “the Christian assembly” already possessed an organization, and therefore the brethren could not raise any objection. But, apparently, this reference is to the brothers who were responsible to the assembly for the distribution of money, collected for the purpose, to the Lord’s servants for the expenses of their living and travelling. This procedure is founded upon scriptural practice. For example, the Philippians sent a gift to Paul for his needs in Rome; this they did by the hands of Epaphroditus, whom they chose to be their messenger. Also, several brothers were concerned in conveying to the poor saints in Jerusalem the collection made in the assemblies of Galatia, Asia, Macedonia, Achaia, and other places. Those who were entrusted with this service were chosen and approved by the saints who made the contributions (1 Cor. 16:3; 2 Cor. 8:18, 19 ; et al). A selection of persons who will be responsible to the saints as unto the Lord to distribute their donations wisely and righteously is thus authorized by approved examples in scripture. It is by this means “we provide for things honest, not only before the Lord, but also before men” (2 Cor. 8:21). But the mandatory system is of a different character; it does not deal only with financial matters, but is established to preserve moral, spiritual and *political* order in the new organization, and its officers are chosen from the saints and by the saints. We read nowhere in the scriptures of any governing body of this kind among the early saints, and it is a mistake to compare the new officials with those chosen to handle the collections on behalf of the saints, and held responsible for their custody, transmission, and distribution, as the case might have been.

CONCLUSION

Much more might be said about this paper, but my intention was only to refer to its main features, which has been done at greater length than was anticipated. The fact that it is a formal document of a legal nature may possibly account for the entire absence of “the mind of Christ” in its composition; but this fact does not excuse the incorporation of the false and disparaging extract relating to “Darbyism.” The appearance of the quotation is the more regrettable, because it is admitted to be false. What purpose then is served by publicly traducing the name and writings of a honoured servant of the Lord? But the world that vilified the Master will not spare the servant.

In these few remarks, it has been endeavoured to let the document speak plainly for itself. The sheep accustomed to the voice of the Good Shepherd will not be deceived by the voice of strangers, but will flee from it and them.

In spite of repeated protestations in Dr. Becker’s paper that the truth of God and the confession of faith are untouched, the new organization differs fundamentally, not only from what the brethren formerly knew and enjoyed, but what is far more serious, from the scripture itself. By placing the assembly under direct and continuous State jurisdiction, and by denying the

heavenly character of the saints and commandeering their services for the political world of Germany, the organization will indeed be “new,” not only in the sense of starting afresh, but in the sense that it will assume a nature contrasted with its former one. It is not the addition of Judaism to grace, as in the assemblies of Galatia, but the addition of worldly politics to grace, and it is by this amalgamation of opposed principles therefore analogous to that early departure from the truth. Surely, the apostle’s remonstrance to the Galatian saints has an application to any who accept the terms of the German State: “I wonder that ye thus quickly change, from Him that called you in Christ’s grace, to a different gospel, which is not another one; but there are some that trouble you, and desire to pervert the glad tidings of the Christ” (Gal. 1: 6, 7). May the Lord grant wisdom and fidelity to all His own during the “little while” remaining before the fulfilment of the blessed Hope of His assembly.

W.J.H.
20th August, 1937

Extracts from the Appeal addressed to the Brethren in Germany attached to the Union of Free Christians

Zurich, the 10th Oct., 1937

Dear Brethren in the Lord,

(The first part of the Appeal deals with their acceptance of the terms of entrance into the Bund or Union, expressing regret and remonstrance. The nature of these terms may be gathered from the preceding “Remarks,” pp. 5-11, and also from the Summary of the Statutes, p. 4 The Appeal then refers as follows to the proposed alliance with the Open Brethren.)

We desire to draw your attention to the extreme gravity of the way to which you have pledged yourselves by following your leaders. By their declaration of the 20th Aug., 1937, they affirm that you can walk therein fearlessly, asserting that there is no scriptural reason to hinder you from the amalgamation of your assemblies with those of the Bethesda brethren. In their judgment, the original separation from the latter was due to a simple and culpable quarrel between brothers, from which there is no opportunity to recover, except by regarding it as a mistake on the part of the brothers who have preceded us in the Christian career and conduct, and as a mistake which ought now to be rectified by a stroke of the pen. The manifesto of the 20th Aug. declares as follows, “We consider all that has separated us in the past as suppressed once for all. We believe, therefore, that it is our duty before God to recommend to our brethren to renew the bond which has been severed for ninety years.”

We observe with pain that brethren who signed the declaration, who were present at our interview on the 3rd Sept. in Elberfeld, carefully concealed from us the grave decision arrived at on the 20th Aug. This declaration falsifies entirely your attitude relative to the collective witness which we are called to render to the Lord, and to the truth revealed in His word concerning the assembly on earth. Further, this decision seriously compromises your relation with brethren who, throughout the whole world cannot accept Bethesda ground, not, as they are accused, on account of narrowness and pride, but on account of the solemn conviction received from the Lord that this ground is not that of the truth respecting the assembly of God.

A work published by the Open Brethren and recently translated from German into French, a work which pretends to give an exact account of the sorrowful events which led to the separation in 1848, has proved to us that our Bethesda brothers always attribute this separation virtually to our respected brother, J. N. Darby, whom they falsely charge with showing a domineering and tyrannical spirit. They obstinately refuse to recognise that it was his ardent zeal for the glory of the Lord dragged in the mire by the heresy of B. W. Newton, which obliged him to combat the lax principles of Bethesda. “The numerous and serious accusations” brought against this faithful servant of the Lord are as impossible to prove as were those alleged against the apostle Paul by the Jews, the enemies of the Lord and His work (Acts 25:7). In these circumstances, communion with Bethesda is impossible for all those who desire to remain faithful to the Lord and His word. For them this communion would be a denial of the truths for which our valued forerunners during a century have contended, and which were dearer to them than life.

We do not wish to re-state the history of this division, but we desire only to prove to you, if possible, that it did not arise at the time through a simple quarrel unworthy of brothers in Christ, but through a furious attack by the adversary directed against the Person of our Lord, which ought to be resisted by all those who have His glory at heart. Your circular affirms that

“in this day it is impossible to determine what was the measure of failure on the two sides.” This idea is profoundly erroneous. If you had carefully and impartially examined, under the eye of the Lord, in harmony, with the brethren with whom you have walked nearly a century, and who, through conscience towards God, could not follow in the way of Bethesda, what were the **true causes** of separation from Bethesda assemblies, you would have walked with your valued forerunners, whom the Lord has honoured by richly blessing their work for Him in Germany.

Instead of this, without consulting your brethren in other countries, you have acted in great haste, and decided of your own will to walk with the Bethesda brethren, who left the way opened by the Spirit and the word of God, a way recovered through faithful souls in the nineteenth century. This haste is the consequence of what characterised your acceptance of the destructive principles of the “Union of Free Christians.” Be sure, dear brethren, that if you do not forsake this way you will plunge further into evil, so as to lose completely the distinctive character of a witness for God. We fear lest you lapse into a gross blindness, for you are much more responsible than the greater part of the Bethesda brethren, who have been schooled in their own ecclesiastical principles, without knowing the blessed truths that you have learned from your respected fathers, and which you have maintained up to the sad day, when you allowed yourselves to be carried away into a compromise, laden with momentous consequences.

Why have you accepted as the principal head of your organisation a man whom you surely knew was not well respected, being **unsound in doctrine**, and who for a long while has been a subject of grave concern among the brethren? If you do not judge these things, the leaven which you have allowed to introduce itself, and which has already spread considerably, will leaven the whole lump (1 Cor. 5:6, 7 ; Gal. 5:9).

We will add a few words of explanation as to the reasons for our refusal to enter the path of Bethesda. In 1847,* it was discovered that B.W. Newton, a respected brother, was propagating a doctrine which represented our Lord as being exposed, on account of His relation to Adam, to the sentence of death pronounced upon the whole human family, and so to the curse and to the condemnation. He added this which follows : “He had the experiences of a man not converted but elect. He was farther from God than was Israel when they made the golden calf. Being exposed to the wrath and displeasure of God, as a man born of Adam and as a Jew, He had to make His escape by prayer and by piety under many sufferings, which it was necessary for Him to endure. Indeed, He suffered so much during His life that He had an unpleasant appearance, and men hid their faces from Him.”

In spite of the condemnation of this shocking heresy, and the separation from Newton made by faithful brethren in his locality (Plymouth), the assembly of Bethesda (Bristol) received for the breaking of bread many friends of the false teacher who continued at the table with him. This took place in spite of the remonstrances of pious brethren in the local assembly. After some painful months, Bethesda solemnly confirmed her refusal to judge the act of independence that she had committed, and also her public identification with those holding the heresy of Newton. The decision, taken on the 3rd July, 1848, and signed by ten brethren, was the affirmation of two unscriptural principles, which, having never yet been judged, still characterise the Bethesda ground in God’s sight :-

1. The fellowship expressed in the breaking of bread with the holders or defenders of an evil doctrine does not defile, provided that the person or the assembly that allows it does not partake of that doctrine.
2. A decision taken by one assembly does not bind another assembly. This statement contradicts the fact that we have been baptised by one Spirit into one body (1 Cor. 12 : 13), and also that we ought to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Ephes. 4:3) in order to manifest the unity of the one body.

These unscriptural principles open the door to all kinds of disorder and to the most formidable errors. Not having been judged, they still operate in Bethesda assemblies although many of them include brothers faithful and devoted to the Lord. It is certain, for example, that some pernicious statements, such as the final reconciliation of all men, that is, the non-eternity of punishment, and that which attributes to the Son of God a sinful humanity when here below, have been put forth by certain Bethesda brothers. Then, Mr. Craik, one of the signatories of the Letter of the Ten, in all boldness and without shame, wrote that if Christ had taken poison, or if He had fallen into a ditch, He would have died even as any other man, and that if He had grown old, He would have become a wrinkled old man, and would have died. He put forth this perverse and diabolical doctrine in three letters, of which one was printed, and he justified it before the Bethesda assembly, where he **remained until his death as one of its trusted leaders**. This alone affords proof, with many other facts, that the door is open in Bethesda to errors which overthrow the faith of the saints. We could mention many other facts in support of what we affirm in respect of the ground on which this assembly stands and all those which have followed it.

In November and December 1848, seven meetings of the assembly took place at Bethesda, at which the tracts of Newton were examined. The following decision was reached : “Whoever defends, maintains, or upholds the views or tracts of

* See Note (1) by W.J.H. at the end of the Appeal (page 14).

Mr. Newton ought not to be received into fellowship.” This decision left the door open more widely than ever for those who broke bread with the false teacher to say that they did not defend, maintain nor uphold his heresy, though taking the Supper with him, and be received for the breaking of bread at Bethesda. The condemnation of the “Views of Newton” announced in these terms was a complete illusion, and on this account we affirm that this heresy which overthrows Christianity has never been judged. † This grave decision has never been revoked, any more than the preceding declaration in the Letter of the Ten, by which this assembly justified its reception of the adherents of Newton. Many times in the course of their history, the Bethesda brethren have defended the attitude taken in 1848, thus proving that the lax principles adopted by them at that juncture still characterise the ground of their assembling.

It is true that Newton published an acknowledgment (retraction) of his errors, but what was the consternation of the friends of the truth when some months later he issued a new pamphlet, containing in a more subtle form the greater part of his heretical statements.

Under the scrutiny of Him Whose eyes are as a flame of fire, and Who has been wounded afresh in the house of His friends, we earnestly pray you, dear brethren, to consider the gravity of the errors against which we are striving, and to judge in His light the dangerous way into which the adversary is seeking to rush you. We pray to the Lord to deliver you, while there is yet time, from the snare of the fowler, so that you may not lose the prize of the combat, and may live faithful to His truth until we see Him face to face.

With a repeated expression of our profound grief, of our sincere brotherly love, and of our sympathy in your difficult circumstances,

We remain, Beloved brethren,
Yours very affectionately in the Lord,
*(signed by representative brothers in Switzerland, France,
England and elsewhere).*

*** Note 1.**

In support of the personal quarrel theory of the cause of the separation, it is alleged that Mr. Darby left the Plymouth meeting in December, 1845, which was some time before Mr. Newton’s evil teaching came to light in 1847.

But, while these dates are correct, the occasions were different and disconnected. In 1845, the differences related to the prevalence in that gathering of a clericalism by which the free operations of the Holy Spirit were quenched. Unsound doctrines were also taught even then. The detailed reasons for Mr. Darby’s withdrawal are fully set out in his “Narrative of the Facts” (Coll. Writings, vol. 20, pp. 1-109).

It is an egregious error to confuse the local disorder at Plymouth, from which Mr. Darby personally withdrew, with the erroneous teaching concerning the Person of Christ, which subsequently came to the surface there, and to which particular reference is made in the Appeal. The personalities of His servants do not come into this question.

W. J. H.

† Note 2.

As the incident which took place in July, 1849, between Mr. Darby and Mr. Muller has been revived, an extract relating to it from a tract by Mr. Kelly is added, showing that the conversation has little or no practical bearing upon the question at issue.

“As much is made of J.N.D.’s visit to G.M.^a after these meetings at Bethesda, it may be stated that Mr. D.’s hopefulness was not shared by his brethren, who knew that Bethesda never owned its sin in receiving Mr. N.’s partisans, and never repented

of the false principles in the Letter of the Ten (adopted by a formal vote of its constituents). It never so much as noticed the sin, after the seven meetings, of receiving back two of the Ten who had gone out and publicly supported Mr. N. Before all Bristol. In the face of grave facts like these, what was the value of theoretic censure of the doctrine? Mr. M.'s rude repulse only compelled Mr. D. to feel, as others already felt, the hollowness of Bethesda throughout. Mr. D.'s power lay in expounding the word, not in disciplinary action, as he used to own freely throughout his life."

The Doctrine of Christ and Bethesdaism by W. Kelly, 1887.

W. J. H.

^aGeorge Müller

Call from Lausanne for Special Prayer and Humiliation^a

A circular issued from Lausanne, dated December, 1937, and addressed to the brethren meeting in the name of the Lord Jesus, pleads that joint supplication with humiliation should be made to Him Who abides in the midst of His own by the gatherings in Switzerland and elsewhere on account of the sorrow and distress so widely prevailing among the saints at the present time, especially in Germany and Rumania.

It is pointed out how active the enemy is in promoting widespread division among the saints of God and in destroying the corporate witness to Christ and His one body. In Germany, the greater part of the brethren, under pressure of events,^b have accepted the unscriptural organisation of assemblies, established in accordance with the statutes of a new community, and substituted for that which witnessed to the assembly of God.

Many continue in the old paths, in spite of hardship and reproach, refusing to enter the less difficult way of disobedience to the word of God. Others in fear or despair have abandoned altogether their former place of separation. The circular implores the saints to pray earnestly with one heart and one mouth for our faithful and suffering brethren, and for those who have been led astray from the truth by unprincipled leaders. The mercy of the Lord should be sought for the latter that their eyes might be opened and their steps retraced.

The circular calls further upon the saints to confess with one heart before the Lord, amongst other things, their failures and inconsistencies, their lack of devotion to the things of Christ, their worldliness, their failure to judge themselves for the contention and strife which have appeared in many gatherings.

^a See also Ministry of Jim Taylor Volume 150 page 57.

^b The rise of Nazism.