

## INERRANCY AND REVIVAL IN GERMANY

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As the nineteenth century dawned, the scholastic sky was aglow with a new sun. Reason had eclipsed revelation. Christianity had capitulated to creature worship. Neology had snuffed out the candles of supernaturalism, leaving only the smoke of forgotten faith. Theologians vied with one another for the forefront of infidelity.

Among them are names familiar to all of us. At Halle, the Prussian king had placed Heinrich Gesenius (1786–1842) in the chair of theology. His devotion to the language of the Scriptures masked his deviance from the truth of the Book. Meanwhile H. E. G. Paulus preached the power of positive thinking at Heidelberg. He shared the concept of a swooning Savior with David Friedrich Strauss (1808–74), who was a man without a faculty. He floated around academic Germany and Switzerland seeking a spot to alight. The Tübingen school submitted to the leadership of Ferdinand Christian Baur (1762–1860), who popularized the view that Peter and Paul were engaged in a doctrinal cockfight that colored all of NT interpretation.<sup>1</sup>

The credo espoused by these theological wizards would do justice to contemporary humanism. Immanuel Kant had called German academics to emerge from their self-inflicted state of mental minority. "Think for yourself," he cried, "do not depend on deity." The educational establishment of post-Napoleonic Germany rose to Kant's challenge.

Writing in the rationalistic journal *Die Allgemeine Kirchenzeitung*, Jacob Schmidt summed up the Scriptures with this line: "Without reason there is no religion. The Scriptures must stand up to the scrutiny of reason. They are only true when they pass the muster of man's mind."<sup>2</sup>

The same stream of thought flowed through a series of articles that saw the light of day in May, 1839. Under the title "On the Mystical Tendencies of our Times" an unidentified writer chopped away at pietistic Christians. He accused evangelical Lutherans of terrible traits: "Reliance on an emotional experience of God. . . fanaticism, 'enthusiasm,' denial of reason and a pedantic attachment to the letter of the Bible."<sup>3</sup>

These theological parrots reflected the views of their up-market mentors. Kant had taught that there was no true revelation of the true God that might

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<sup>1</sup>H. Hermelink, *Das Christentum in der Menschheitsgeschichte von der französischen Revolution bis zur Gegenwart* (Stuttgart, 1955), 1. 340.

<sup>2</sup>*Allgemeine Kirchenzeitung* (Darmstadt, November 20, 1827).

<sup>3</sup>*Allgemeine Kirchenzeitung* (May 3–9, 1839).

fly in the face of reason. "Anyone who speaks of revelation is bursting the religion of reason," Kant claimed, "and the critical philosophy of religion cannot therefore speak of revelation."<sup>4</sup>

In similar vein Gottfried Ephraim Lessing let the cat out of the bag when he wrote about the *regula fide*. Older than the NT in its canonical completeness, the *regula fide* is the rock upon which Christ constructed his Church. The NT according to Lessing was a later (and inferior) development of the Christian communal consciousness.

Jean Jacques Rousseau also raised reason over revelation in his *Emile* (1762), in which he included the "Confession of Faith of a Vicar of Savoy." (Incidentally, the Savoy was known as a hotbed of heterodox theology well into the nineteenth century.) At any rate, Rousseau roasted revelation. God has not given us understanding and then forbidden us to use it, reasoned Rousseau. To subject reason to revelation would insult the Maker of our mind.

The key that unlocks the logic of rationalistic religion is close at hand. Because original sin is the figment of theological masochism, man's mind can be safely trusted to produce perfect results. Adam's sin was a slip of the tongue, quite literally, and it certainly did not dim the brightness of his or our mind. "Original sin is a doctrine of the western world, especially Augustine," wrote one correspondent of the *Allgemeine Kirchenzeitung*.<sup>5</sup> So the Word of God was weighed in the balance of reason. It involved the exaltation of reason and the extinction of revelation. Thinkers of the world unite, they cried; you have nothing to lose but your inhibitions.

Unite they did, and the pupils of these professors peopled pulpits across Germanic Europe. In 1825 Professor August Tholuck spoke in London. He shocked sedate British believers with a lurid description of deviant doctrine in Germany. According to the young professor, his colleagues served up an unappetizing array of classics, botany and hygiene. German preaching was scarcely more uplifting than the daily newspaper.<sup>6</sup>

When Christian Tischhauser tallied up the destruction of nineteenth-century Protestantism, he painted a pathetic picture of poverty. One priest had preached a mildly ethical homily on Sunday morning. In the afternoon he took to the tavern with his parishioners for a bout of drinking and dicing. Sermons were rooted in reason and were rich in good advice, but they were bereft of belief.<sup>7</sup>

In 1817 Claus Harms from Kiel called Lutherans back to the faith of Luther. It was the three-hundredth anniversary of the Reformation. Harms bemoaned the sermons of his contemporaries. "The character of their preaching is this,"

<sup>4</sup>K. Barth, *Protestant Thought: From Rousseau to Ritschl* (New York: Clarion, 1969) 167-168.

<sup>5</sup>*Allgemeine Kirchenzeitung* (Darmstadt, September 20, 1829).

<sup>6</sup>Continental Society, Seventh Report (London, 1825), Appendix p. 4; *Allgemeine Kirchenzeitung* (Darmstadt, October 16, 1825).

<sup>7</sup>C. Tischhauser, *Geschichte der Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland in der ersten Hälfte des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts* (Basel, 1900) 137.

he lamented, "they substitute the prescription for the medicine."<sup>8</sup>

Rousseau realized the result of his beliefs, and he wrote in *Emile*: "The only course for every honest man. . . is to renounce the Roman Catholic Church."<sup>9</sup> This logic was not lost on the laity. They responded to the cavorting of the clergy with mass exodus.

Schleiermacher adapted Rousseau's social contract to the congregational life. The Church is "a community which arises only as a result of free human actions," said Schleiermacher, "and it can only continue to exist by the same means."<sup>10</sup> People preferred to discard the rags of rationalistic religion.

One English traveler recorded his impressions in *The Evangelical Magazine and Missionary Chronicle*. In 1814 he had found only one evangelical clergyman in Hamburg. Most churches were empty, mute witnesses to a rejected faith.<sup>11</sup>

Tischhauser showed thoroughness in his assessment of the nineteenth century. In Mannheim during 1837 the parish church boasted ten thousand members. On any given Sunday fewer than eight men and fifty women worshiped. Claus Harms claimed that in Kiel during 1815 every full church was matched by ten empty ones.<sup>12</sup>

This mass walkout of worshipers compelled observers to analyze the causes. Reinhold Seeberg summed it up in this striking statement: "Piety exists without a pastor. Piety also survives outside the church. This abandonment of the church is a remnant of rationalism."<sup>13</sup>

Even the *Allgemeine Kirchenzeitung* grudgingly admitted that the rot had set in. Behind the euphemisms there is an exasperation. The moral character of the clergy leaves something to be desired, they conceded. Personal contact between priest and parishioners has been eroded. The faith of the clerics has collapsed. What is the cause? The *Allgemeine Kirchenzeitung* chalked it all up to "the secular nature of our times." They neglected to notice that the pastors had plunged parishioners into this swamp of skepticism.<sup>14</sup>

By 1820 the prevailing winds of theological thought had begun to shift. Ernst Troeltsch spoke of a new wave of pietism arising out of "the Enlightenment and deep confusion of the Napoleonic Wars."<sup>15</sup>

Another perceptive person was Hans Lehman, who chronicled the life of the

<sup>8</sup>D. Roessler, "Zwischen Rationalismus und Erweckung: Zur Predigtlehre bei Claus Harms," *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 73 (1962) 73.

<sup>9</sup>J. J. Rousseau, *Emile*, iv, p. 8.

<sup>10</sup>Barth, *Protestant* 325.

<sup>11</sup>*The Evangelical Magazine and Missionary Chronicle* (London, December 1836) 572.

<sup>12</sup>Tischhauser, *Geschichte* 238, 535-536.

<sup>13</sup>R. Seeberg, *Die Kirche Deutschlands im neunzehnten Jahrhundert* (Leipzig, 1903) 19.

<sup>14</sup>*Allgemeine Kirchenzeitung* (Darmstadt, May 3, 1834).

<sup>15</sup>E. Troeltsch, *Geschichte der christlichen Religion* (2d ed.; Berlin, 1909) 684.

great Hamburg Lutheran Johann Wilhelm Rautenberg. "As a warming, quickening spring storm," wrote Lehman, the revival "broke up the ice of a rationalistic winter in every place and brought new life after prolonged death."<sup>16</sup>

Tholuck had slated the skeptics in his speech at London in 1825. During the same address he added: "I can testify that the state of things is continually improving; and that evidently by the special blessing of God."<sup>17</sup>

In the awakening, various streams of religious consciousness converged. The traditional mystical pietism that was identified with Spener and Francke reasserted itself. In the light of the three-hundredth anniversary of Luther's Ninety-Five Theses a strongly confessional Lutheran piety also appeared. These two elements were joined by Moravian influences to form a new revival movement. Furthermore, this revival linked up with likeminded movements in England, Scotland, North America, Switzerland, France, the Netherlands and Scandinavia.

From about 1815 until 1830 the revival crossed confessional boundaries, drawing together Lutherans, Calvinists, Mennonites and Catholics. After 1830 the revival was pressed into the doctrinal forms of various churches.

As theologians had blazed the trail to destruction during the rationalistic catastrophe, so during the revival theologians led the way back to the Bible. At Göttingen there was a rather strange professor who rejoiced in the name of Christoph Heinrich Friedrich Bialloblotzky. He stood out against the rationalism of his colleagues, and the rector of the university backed him.<sup>18</sup>

At Tübingen professors founded a branch of the British and Foreign Bible Society to distribute the Scriptures to students. August Niemeyer, the chancellor of Halle University, ordered an array of rare Bibles for the university library in hopes of winning students for Christ.<sup>19</sup>

Professor Leander Van Ess, who taught Roman Catholic theology at Marburg, had prepared his own translation of the NT into German. He distributed 500,000 copies to his co-religionists, and he also wrote a tract citing the Church fathers in favor of Bible study.<sup>20</sup>

This significant support for Scripture spawned a return to evangelical doctrines. The Berlin professor of Church history, August Neander, eloquently defended Bible doctrines such as Christ's resurrection, his deity and the substitutionary atonement.<sup>21</sup>

Within the Roman Catholic Church, Van Ess had many comrades. One of these was Martin Boos, who defended Biblical beliefs in his famous book *Chris-*

<sup>16</sup>H. Lehman, *Johann Wilhelm Rautenberg: Ein Beitrag zur Hamburgischen Kirchengeschichte der Erweckungsbewegung des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Hamburg, 1936) 4.

<sup>17</sup>Continental Society, Seventh Report (London, 1825) 42.

<sup>18</sup>Methodist Missionary Society Archives MS, Correspondence Inwards (London, November 6, 1826).

<sup>19</sup>British and Foreign Bible Society, Sixteenth Report (London, 1820), Appendix p. 120.

<sup>20</sup>L. Van Ess, *Gedanken über Bibel und Bibellesen* (Sulzbach, 1816).

<sup>21</sup>A. Neander, *General History of the Christian Religion and Church* (London, 1850), 1. xxx.

*tus In Uns Und Für Uns*. For his trouble Boos was hounded from Bavaria to Austria and back to the Rhineland.

Ernst Hengstenberg, who taught OT at Halle, also edited the *Evangelische Kirchenzeitung*. When asked to write an article for *The Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review*, Hengstenberg concluded: "The *rationalismus vulgaris*, as it is called, has been losing caste. . . . At the same time a very great increase has been going on in the number and zeal of the friends of evangelical doctrine."<sup>22</sup>

Reinhold Seeberg saw matters clearly when he wrote at the turn of the century: "A circle of glowing coals . . . reached throughout the land. Only a stormwind was needed to fan the coals into a warming glow."<sup>23</sup>

That warming wind swept the land from west to east and from south to north. Along the Dutch border was an exceptionally receptive kingdom called Berg, its capital being Wuppertal. There the revival revolved around the Krummacher brothers. Most famous among them was Gottfried Wilhelm, who wrote the little book *Elijah, The Tishbite*. It was in Wuppertal that Friedrich Engels came into contact with the awakening, but without visible results.<sup>24</sup> Krummacher and the entire Niederrhein movement was influenced by Tersteegen's reformed pietism.

If Wuppertal was a western center of revival, Berlin was the eastern capital. Professor Neander gathered around him a clutch of committed students. So strong was the impact of revival that by 1836 more than half of the Berlin clergy were evangelical.<sup>25</sup> When an English professor, John Hoppus, toured Germany in 1836 he concluded that there was a return to the "genuine principles of the inspired record."<sup>26</sup>

What prevailed across the midsection of modern Germany also obtained in the south. From Basel emanated a steady stream of spiritual light. In the southern town of Mühlhausen am Rhein, Catholic priest Aloys Henhöfer read Van Ess' NT and took it to heart. Henhöfer and all his congregation abandoned Catholicism and converted to Protestantism in 1823. "The Holy Scripture is the fountain, the spring," Henhöfer affirmed.<sup>27</sup> One of his numerous disciples was Karl Daniel Justus Rein. He wrote a powerful apologetic for the inerrancy of Scripture under the title *Alle Schrift Ist Von Gott Eingegeben* (1861). He particularly attacked the concept of partial inerrancy.

The evangelical fervor that burned in Baden also shone in the north. In Bremen, Menken and Mallett stood for the Scriptures. At Hamburg it was

<sup>22</sup>*Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* (New York, October, 1846) 526-527.

<sup>23</sup>R. Seeberg, *An der Schwelle des Zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts* (Leipzig, 1900) 17.

<sup>24</sup>F. W. Krummacher, *Gottfried Daniel Krummacher und die niederrheinische Erweckungsbewegung zu Anfang des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin/Leipzig, 1935) 44-47.

<sup>25</sup>*Evangelical Magazine and Missionary Chronicle* (London, December 1836) 638.

<sup>26</sup>J. Hoppus, *Sketches of the Continent in 1835* (2d ed.; London, 1836), 1. 173.

<sup>27</sup>F. Hauss, *Henhöfer und seine Freunde* (Lahr-Dinglingen, 1961) 24, 33, 107.

Rautenberg and Wichern, father of the inner mission. Meanwhile Claus Harms held forth at Kiel.

Whenever a powerful preacher emerged, people flocked to hear him. When Henhöfer preached at Graben near Karlsruhe, farm folks trudged upwards of one hundred miles to hear him. The entire grand duchy of Baden was awakened by Henhöfer and his friends.<sup>28</sup>

Among Catholics, Bible-study groups sprang up. Supplied with the New Testaments of Leander Van Ess, they formed illegal conventicles attended and led by laymen. Not a priest was present in most of them. Many Catholics brought the NT rather than the missal to mass, and priests gave confirmation candidates a NT.<sup>29</sup>

In 1832 *The Times* of London caught wind of the awakening in Germany and concentrated on the Roman Catholic aspect. Their reporter wrote: "A great religious change is taking place in Germany. The Bible is read with avidity by Roman Catholics; and the clergy of this religion are in many parts of the country making strenuous efforts for the abolition of celibacy and for liberty to read the mass in German. In various instances they have turned Protestants, with a great proportion of their flock."<sup>30</sup>

By 1884 the *Ecclesiastical Advertiser* of Breslau reported that entire congregations were being converted. Evangelical pastors were in high demand among Lutherans. The *Allgemeine Kirchenzeitung* fought a rearguard action for rationalism. They perceived the revival to be a great threat to the security of the state, because many abandoned the established Church to attend proscribed home Bible studies.<sup>31</sup>

How can one evaluate this revival movement? The distinguished historian of modern German Christianity, Erich Beyreuther, was typically reserved when he wrote: "As the romantic movement only touched a part of the intellectuals, so the 'Erweckungsbewegung' was able to win only a minority of church members, who joined the movement with conviction. The awakening was able to establish only a few centers and transform only certain areas."<sup>32</sup> However, Beyreuther's conservatism must not eclipse the significance of the revival.

At Nonnenweier in southern Germany, Pastor Karl Rein urged his people to take the same attitude toward the Scriptures that God took. He asserted that the Scriptures were holy in their "language and letter."<sup>33</sup>

An English observer of the movement was J. D. Morrell. Having travelled extensively in Germany, he wrote his findings for the *Congregational Magazine*.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>29</sup>British and Foreign Bible Society, *Fifteenth Report* (London, 1819), Appendix p. 198.

<sup>30</sup>*The Times* (London, May 4, 1832).

<sup>31</sup>*Allgemeine Kirchenzeitung* (Darmstadt, July 31, 1836).

<sup>32</sup>E. Beyreuther, "Die Erweckungsbewegung," in *Die Kirche in ihrer Geschichte* (ed. K.-D. Schmidt and E. Wolff; Göttingen, 1969), 4. 27.

<sup>33</sup>Hauss, *Henhöfer* 103-104.

There was a whole new class of theologians, whom he dubbed "Bibler theologians." Among them were such famous names as Hengstenberg, Tholuck and Neander. These were distinguished by their fidelity to inerrancy, and their rationalistic opponents accused them of slavery to the letter of Scripture.<sup>34</sup>

In the awakening, Martin Luther's concept of universal priesthood came of age, much to the chagrin of many Lutheran theologians. Laymen for the first time were equipped to read the Bible. Thanks to the British and Foreign Bible Society they could also afford a copy of the Scriptures. Within the framework of an emerging free-church movement, mainly Baptist and Methodist, laymen could even aspire to preach. This movement unleashed a revival movement throughout the German states in the post-Napoleonic era.

The result was immediately felt in a revived Church. When he assessed the politically potent period of 1815-48, Friedrich Nippold sounded almost like Carlyle's comment on the Wesleyan movement. Nippold asserted: "The deepening of basic religious viewpoints at the wellspring of the gospel alone could have given strength to withstand the wild weather of the [1848] revolution."<sup>35</sup>

<sup>34</sup>*The Congregational Magazine* (London, November 1841) 747-748.

<sup>35</sup>F. Nippold, *Handbuch der neuesten Kirchengeschichte* (3d ed.; Leipzig, 1906) 540-541.