

LUTHERAN LOYALTY

August 1914: Lutheran Responses to the Outbreak of War

This year Australians and New Zealanders commemorate the ill-fated landing of our troops at Gallipoli a century ago. LOIS ZWECK, on behalf of Lutheran Archives, has collected from church and regional papers the responses of Lutherans to the announcement of war.

When Britain declared war on Germany on 5 August 1914, Australian Lutherans found themselves confronted with a dilemma.

Although by then the overwhelming majority of them were Australian-born, the church was commonly perceived to be 'the German Church', with most pastors born and trained in Germany and most worship services and congregational life conducted in German. At the time there were ten Lutheran synods in Australia and New Zealand.

The major synods acted quickly to assure the Australian government and people of their 'unswerving loyalty' to the British Empire and the Commonwealth of Australia. Church leaders dispatched letters to the Governor-General, state governors and premiers as well as to the press, and held meetings at parish level, reporting their resolutions to the local papers. These reports were often picked up by the local press in other areas, so Lutheran expressions of loyalty to Britain received broad coverage and generally favourable comment throughout the country.

The Evangelical Lutheran Synod in Australia (later ELCA, with 'Church' replacing 'Synod') was the largest single synod, and in a sense the least German. In South Australia, for example, only ten of the 30 pastors in 1914 were German born and trained, the remainder being Australians or Americans and trained in Australia or America.

Already in 1913 the synod began publishing *The Australian Lutheran*, the first English-language Lutheran paper in the country, edited by Pastor Alfred Brauer. This prayer for peace appeared in its August issue, which went to print after hostilities had commenced but before Britain had entered the war. The official publication of the ELSA, *Der Lutherische Kirchenbote für Australien* ('The Church Messenger'), published the official statement of the synod president and editor, Pastor Theodor Nickel, in its second issue for August.

THE AUSTRALIAN LUTHERAN

August 1914, p7

A Collect for Peace and Quietness

O God, who art the author of peace and the lover of concord, in knowledge of whom standeth our eternal life, whose service is perfect freedom; we humbly confess unto thee that by our evil doings and continual disobedience we have deserved Thy chastisements; but we earnestly beseech Thee, for Thy name's sake to spare and succor Thy suffering people, that Thy word may be declared faithfully and without hindrance, and that we, amending our sinful lives and serving Thee with a

quiet mind, may enjoy peace and quietness all the days of our life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Never in the history of their country have Australians had greater reason for praying for peace and quietness than at the present moment. A war, the potentialities of which are staggering humanity, is threatening the world. The situation is particularly cruel for citizens of German nationality or extraction. The thought that the Empire of which we are citizens should be involved in a war with the nation from which we have sprung is a terrible one.

Apart from all self-interests – it is a matter of our own hearths and homes – we of course know where our duty lies. While our hearts ache on account of the calamity threatening the land of our fathers – the mighty Russian Colossus attacking from the east, France from the west, and possibly England from the north – we know it is our duty to remain loyal to the land of our birth or adoption, where we enjoy privileges and benefits denied in the Fatherland. Holy Scripture says: ‘Let every soul be subject to the higher powers’ (Rom 13:1). The ‘higher powers’ under which we live is of course the British Government. Let us pray with our whole hearts that the hostilities commenced may be speedily ended and peace restored. As Christians, let us also not forget that war is frequently a rod of chastisement in the hand of God for humbling individuals and nations ...

KIRCHENBOTE

20 August 1914, p133

‘From war and bloodshed, dear Lord, preserve us.’

‘Render unto Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s.’

The church of God has the promise that the gates of Hell will not prevail against it. This grave time calls us to repentance and compels us to prayer. As subjects of the British monarchy, as citizens of this land, and above all as Lutheran Christians we are obliged and prepared to keep the oath of loyalty we have sworn to our King and the government of our land. As soon as it became known that England had declared war against Germany, the following dispatch was sent by the undersigned to the Governor General in Melbourne:—

Whereas war has been declared to Germany by Great Britain, as President of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod in Australia incorporated, comprising the congregations in South Australia, Victoria, Western Australia, Queensland, and New South Wales, I beg to assure your Excellency of the true loyalty of all the members of our church. Although we deeply deplore that Great Britain has been compelled to declare war against Germany, the land of our fathers, we are well aware of our duty as British subjects, and shall always be willing to defend the honour of our beloved King and of our dear country with goods and chattels, body, and life.

I am, your Excellency’s obedient servant,

T. Nickel.

His Excellency has replied:—

Deeply gratified and touched by your message of loyal devotion to King and country in the hour of trial, which finds you standing, in His Majesty’s words, ‘united, calm, resolute, trusting in God’.

R. M. Ferguson.

LUTHERANS IN THE PRESS

Metropolitan and regional newspapers across the nation carried glowing messages of support

for Australians of German descent. The following reports in Adelaide's *The Register* and the Riverland papers is indicative of the Lutherans' highly visible demonstrations of loyalty to Britain and the press's eagerness to publicise them.

THE REGISTER

Adelaide, Wednesday 12 August 1914

Our Lutheran Subjects.

Expressions of Loyalty.

An outstanding feature of the present European crisis, from an Australian point of view, is the unswerving loyalty to the British flag which has been shown by the German subjects of the King in this country. Enthusiastic meetings were held last week at Lyndoch and Rosenthal by Lutheran congregations, the members of which are of German descent, but, with a few exceptions, Australian-born. The minister (Pastor J. Georg), addressing the meetings, said that all present deeply regretted the turn of events in Europe, but being true subjects of the British Crown, they fully grasped their divine obligation to honour, serve, and obey their King and his Government.

The speaker also recalled to the minds of his audience the manifold blessings which had been enjoyed by the Lutheran Church from its first beginnings in Australia. It was the British Government which, about a century ago, opened its doors to those persecuted in Germany on account of their faith. It was under the British flag they had enjoyed religious liberty and had been able to prosper in their earthly callings.

The British Government could therefore rest assured that true Lutherans would not forget the just and liberal treatment they had received at its hands. He felt convinced that each member present would show his gratitude by willingly and faithfully fulfilling his duties and obligations to his beloved Sovereign and country, by loyally supporting and assisting, as much as lay within his power and means, the Government in the present crisis. The meetings passed the following resolution:—

We do hereby declare that we, being lovers and advocates of peace, are nevertheless fully aware of our duties and obligations towards our Sovereign King George V., and our beloved country, and that we, as true Australians, express our undivided loyalty to our King and his Government. Furthermore, we, as loyal subjects of the British Crown, are willing to make all the sacrifices of life and property necessary for the welfare of our beloved Australia and its Motherland England.

The meetings closed with the National Anthem and enthusiastic cheers for King George V. and his Government.

A further demonstration of loyalty was witnessed at Rosenthal on Monday, when, in the presence of a considerable number of English and German residents, the Union Jack was hoisted in the village. The children from the Lutheran school were present and sang the National Anthem and other patriotic songs. As the breezes unfurled the folds of the much-loved flag, hearty cheers were given by the crowd for the King, the flag, and Australia.

MURRAY PIONEER, AUSTRALIAN RIVER RECORD

Thursday 20 August 1914

Lutheran Pastor on the War.

The Rev. Martin Kuss, pastor of the Loxton Lutheran Church, was greeted by an unusually large congregation on Sunday morning, his intention to preach upon the war having become known through a note in last week's *Pioneer*. Taking his text from the Scripture lesson for the day, Luke XIX, the preacher selected the prediction by Christ of the destruction of Jerusalem in verses 43 and 44, and referred to its fulfilment in A.D. 70.

'All the people of Israel took part in the defence of the city', said Mr. Kuss, 'and we don't hear of any avoiding military service. It is not to the interest of our people to go through the world as a separate body, but they should enter into the life of those among whom they dwell. A Christian, as a true patriot, should recognise all the blessings of his Fatherland or Motherland, and it would be indeed strange if he should not be willing to give his life for his country in time of need. The Scripture tells us to be loyal to our country. St. Paul says, in the Epistle to the Romans, that everyone must be subject to the Higher Powers. A Christian must take part in a war to defend his own country.

'It is natural for descendants of Germans to sympathise with Germany, but history tells us that members of our church were persecuted in Germany, services were disturbed and the worshippers cast out, thereby causing the greatest distress. These were Lutherans and being unable any longer to endure persecution many sought refuge under a flag that would ensure them the freedom they had so long sought. In this way several Lutheran pastors came here with their flocks in 1838. Here they found the flag of Britain that insured them freedom. Therefore, we are indebted to Britain, and must give our support to the country that has protected us for so many years'.

The preacher, later in his address, said that they had no need to be ashamed of the ties of blood which connected them with the German Fatherland, 'but the ties of faith were of greater importance than those of blood'. It was his sincere wish and hope that the British flag would be victorious, and he emphatically urged the young people, if the call to arms came to them, to go.

DEFENDING AUSTRALIAN GERMANS

When the German Turnverein (Gymnastics Club) in Melbourne was subjected to a violent demonstration of anti-German hostility on 6 August, the attack was vigorously condemned in the local press. The police provided protection for a meeting of the Eastern Hill Lutheran church a week later, prompting public expressions of loyalty by the chairman of the congregation and its recently retired pastor Hermann Herlitz, as President of the Synod.

In view of the suspicion and discrimination suffered by Lutherans and other Germans later during the war, the *Hamilton Spectator's* is indicative of the reasonable and positive statements on German settlers and the predicament faced by German-Australians. They were remarkable for their objectivity and even empathy.

MARYBOROUGH AND DUNOLLY ADVERTISER

Victoria, 12 August 1914

Growls. (By 'The Grumbler'.)

'Keep calm' is the admonition of our political leaders, and no doubt it is sage advice. But that there is great excitement among the Australian people is only natural; but we must be careful not to permit our excitement to degenerate into injustice to any section of the community ... A regrettable feature of the 'excitement' was the conduct of those low scamps who made the disgraceful attack on the Turn Verein, upon inoffensive German citizens, and on the Chinese

quarters in Melbourne. So far as Great Britain is concerned, the war is not against individuals, but against a nation. Anyone who has come in contact with Germans must admit that they are in the forefront of our law-abiding, industrious citizens ...

Every law-abiding citizen, no matter what nationality, should have the full protection of our laws. If you meet a German treat him as you would like to be treated if you were a denizen of Berlin or Frankfort. We want brigades of guards, not blackguards. Surely there never was such a time of the lions and the lambs being at peace as the present. There has been a closing up of the ranks of the British people all over the world, and they stand shoulder to shoulder as they have never stood before. It is just splendid!

KYNETON GUARDIAN

Victoria, 13 August 1914

Boys in War Time.

Donald Macdonald writes thus pertinently in 'Notes for Boys' in *The Argus*:—

Australia has once before had experience of war, but it was not a war that seriously challenged the position, safety or greatness of our Empire. No boy reading these notes to-day will probably live to see or hear again in his lifetime of a war so great as that into which we have just been plunged. It is a time of wild excitement, when people are apt to do things which in cold blood and in saner moments they would be ashamed of.

We have amongst us many Germans and Austrians, but especially Germans, who came here to establish homes for themselves and to become Australians. They are in no way responsible for this great trouble, do not sympathise with it, and will take no part in it. Yet in periods of excitement – and there may be such times ahead – they are often attacked by 'crowds' who think that they show their loyalty by assaulting people who have done them no harm. I would appeal strongly to boys who read these notes to take no part in demonstrations against Germans, who have come here in good faith to live amongst us, on the contrary to do all they can to prevent anything of the sort taking place ...

HAMILTON SPECTATOR

Victoria, 10 August 1914

Methodist.

The following reference to the war was read at the Methodist Church yesterday:—

We all deplore the fact that war has broken out between Great Britain and Germany. We are bound together by the ties of blood, religion and commerce; these we thought strong enough to keep us at peace with each other, in spite of the huge armaments built up in the spirit of rivalry. Our hopes have not been realised, and it behoves us to show a calm and Christian spirit. We will rejoice in victories of our grand old flag, and we should pray that they will result in a world-wide and lasting peace.

With regard to the German population in our neighbourhood we should show every feeling of good will. On their own initiative they have enthusiastically proclaimed their loyalty to Britain, and we should be wanting in British fair play and justice did we not clasp their hands with fervour, and welcome them as brothers. Moreover, there should be special sympathy shown to the old Germans, whose youth was spent in Germany. Appreciating as they do the liberty they have enjoyed under the British flag, they nevertheless feel, and feel strongly, the ties of kinship

and nationality. This war tears their hearts in twain. They hope for Britain's success, yet that very success must be gained at the expense of the lives of their relatives in the old world. Hence their joy in victory will be doubly tinged with sorrow. Our hearts go out to them.

Those Germans who are members of this beloved church are assured of their minister's and brethren's regard. And now for us there is only one thing to do – to wait patiently. We cannot help glorying in our heritage as sons and daughters of Britain. Our cup of joy will be filled as we hear of her success on land or sea. As wives we will speed our husbands, and as parents our sons, to stand for loyal Australia on our Great Mother's behalf. The lips may tremble, – but the word and step shall be strong. We have been blessed under the old flag, and for her we will give till best to possess. Let us meanwhile pray God that He may grant success to Britain's arms, arms which are being wielded in the sacred cause of liberty, and that soon peace may lay her loving touch upon the whole wide world — God save the King!

The full version of this essay can be read or downloaded from the Lutheran Archives page on the LCA website www.lca.org.au/archives