

Paul Bräunlich, Report on the Progress of the “Away from Rome” Movement (1899)

Abstract

In the decades prior to the First World War, nationalists in the German lands became increasingly fearful that Catholics were more loyal to the pope in Rome than to the governments of their respective countries. In Austria, dissatisfaction with the status quo—political, confessional, or other—was often expressed by leaving the Catholic Church and converting to Protestantism. The “Away from Rome” [“Los von Rom”] movement tried to politicize discontent with the Church and combine it with the larger project of uniting Austria with the German Empire. The following report from Paul Bräunlich (1866–1946), a Protestant pastor and the travelling secretary of the Evangelical Union in Berlin, paints Catholicism in the bleakest anti-German colors.

Source

Preface to the Second Edition

The friendly replies from the German south were so plentiful that today I shall repeat my greetings with even greater confidence.

It seems to me that we Germans are on a good track, and soon so many greetings will be exchanged back and forth that we will hardly be able to comprehend what it was like when we did not get along.

And that would be the greatest benefit of the wonderful spiritual awakening of our times. For even if we never let go of the open-hearted Christian love that takes pity on any and every person in need, whoever he may be, our hearts and lives still belong **first** and foremost to our **German** brothers.

The old Apostolic teaching still applies: “But if any provide not for his own, and especially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.”

But why then the survey of foreign peoples even in the new edition of the booklet? That is perhaps the question of many whose hearts are full, overflowing with the one great need of the German nation.

After all, when you’re trying to make your own home more comfortable, it’s not entirely unhelpful to look at your neighbor’s house once in a while. And if only that would encourage people to get down to work.

For that reason, I am leaving the second chapter. It will be of value to some. No one has to read it.

At the same time, it remains our most heart-felt wish that our dear mother community [*Muttervolk*] reflect on its spiritual unity, which has been lost.

Epiphany, 1899

The Author

[....]

III. Mother Community

We have not yet spoken about a nation or people, the nation or people that we all like to think about most—because it is ours.

The **German** people! Has it forgotten the old glory of the Reformation? Has Luther's blood been outdone by others? It almost seems as though the Catholic part of the German nation has succeeded in destroying the power to act in the religious and ecclesiastical realm along with the right to think independently.

One could almost believe that the "nation of thinkers and poets" only has the energy to sigh and to sing, like its latest Catholic priest-poet:

Heady delusion! Not I shall bring it about,
Not I shall succeed in this deed!
The spark that glows in these veins
Is too early to light the flaming torch;
The spark must glow on, change further,
Shoot forth from one heart to the next;
Until in the distance the man rises up
Who can make my dream truth;
Until he comes, he who shall speak the words
For the second time, into chaos: Let there be light!

[....]

The great national danger of Slavic inundation forced the Germans of the Eastern March [*Ostmark*] to at least inwardly seek an alignment with their Protestant compatriots to the north in order to at least secure their moral support, something upon which they could not completely depend so long as they, as Roman Catholics, remained separated from them by a deep inner chasm.

To that end, they had to convince themselves that Protestantism is the strongest wall of our people's nation, that a German nation unified in the Protestant faith would be invincible and invulnerable to all future dangers. The following excerpts from German national newspapers and letters in our possession from respected Catholic Austrians may serve to explain these manifold national considerations:

"Either Luther's church is the national church of the Germans, or it is not. If it is, then all Germans should profess it.... If we Austrian Catholics of German stock are more sympathetic to the Evangelical Lutheran crusades of the German Emperor than the actual Protestants, who have an incomprehensible fear that Evangelical Lutheranism might become the dominant world religion instead of Catholicism, then we are not to blame. We just carry that thought somewhat further and say to ourselves: the German nation and Evangelical Lutheranism are so intimately connected that the prosperity of the brothers is interdependent, that the decline of the one prompts the decline of the other as a necessary consequence."

"We in Austria are doomed if we remain Catholic."

"Germany has the choice of either increasing the number of European states ruined by the papacy or finally liberating itself from Rome after a thousand-year struggle."

“We Germans need a religion that allows us to simultaneously act German and feel German....**To be German means to be Lutheran.**”

“If the profound damage to our lives today does not make it clear enough that **the influence of religious views on every kind of national development is decisive**, then the history of the Reformation imparts this insight all the more effectively. Before the beginning of the Reformation, the Germans of the Eastern March were among the most highly regarded and leading Germanic tribes; poetry found no better home than in the German Eastern Alps, etc.... Then the Reformation brought a greater need for education.... But while this development could proceed freely in Northern and Central Germany, the restoration of previous conditions was pursued with all means in Bavaria and the Habsburg hereditary lands. As a result, these German men were left behind intellectually and Germany’s center of gravity slowly moved northward from there on.”

....“We must pick up where the thread was torn; **the Reformation must be recommenced. Victory or the defeat of Germanness in the Eastern March depends on it.**” (*Ostdeutsche Rundschau*, September 29, 1898)

“If it is not possible to unify the entire German nation nationally and culturally, then it will succumb to the onslaught of the Slavic peoples. **The fate of Germany itself depends on that of the Austrian Germanism.** If the latter were not Catholic, then the matter would be far different. As always, cultural separation spells the ruin of the Germans. That is why I so urgently press for the German people of the Eastern March to be converted to the Evangelical Lutheran faith.... **A Protestant German Austria will be saved; a Catholic Austria lost.**”

“In the return of the Evangelical Lutheran faith, which was stolen from our forefathers, we see a powerful aid in preserving of our threatened national culture in Austria.”

[....]

“**‘Away from Rome,’** gentlemen, is the slogan that resonates ever more clearly, and we of the German nation should actually be most grateful to the current ministry, the majority, and the German clerics for the fact that, in this respect, too, the cause is moving forward more quickly in our interests than would otherwise have been the case. **‘Away from Rome,’** dear sirs, must and will become a reality; it will happen; more and more, the forces are gathering.”

“And let there be no mistake, gentlemen, about the dead seriousness of these times; we should not give in to the hope that suddenly, perhaps by chance, a savior will appear. A savior will most likely not come. But salvation will come, gentlemen, by taking action, by carrying out the appeal that I repeat for the third time: **‘Away from Rome!’**”

And on January 15, 1899, after the police had made every effort to prevent the meeting, the conference took place at his instigation in Vienna, as the following report describes:

“A meeting of delegates called by [Georg Ritter von] Schönerer took place in Vienna; at it, leaving the Catholic Church was discussed. Eight hundred people from almost all the Crown lands appeared; Bohemia was especially strongly represented, the Delegates [Karl Hermann] Wolf and [Karl] Iro, and many women. At the suggestion of Schönerer, a basic resolution in favor of leaving was passed **unanimously** at the beginning of the meeting, since it was anticipated that the meeting would be interrupted by the police. The withdrawal would take place when ten thousand people had declared their intention to do so. A debate followed. Labor leader [Franz] Stein from Eger endorsed conversion to Lutheranism. The representative of the Old Catholic Union declared his approval of conversion and does not intend to promote support for the Old Catholics; leaving [the Catholic Church] is the main thing. The attorney Dr. [Anton] Eisenkolb from Karbitz [Chabařovice] reported on the movement in

German Bohemia and emphasized that religious and moral reasons were also of critical import for the conversion movement. 'It is all too natural and justified,' he continued, 'so it can now and never can be stopped, even if Delegate Schönerer should turn away from it and become Minister President. The greatest obstacle for our movement is the half-hearted behavior of some of the Evangelical Lutherans, which is fortunately increasingly giving way... We do not believe that we can win our farmers over to the conversion movement if we remain silent about moral-religious reasons.' During this speech, the police commissioner appeared and demanded a list of those present. This demand was declared illegal, whereupon the commissioner, clearly acting on instructions from higher up, prohibited the meeting. Vehement shouts: 'Away from Rome,' 'Hail to Pan-Germanism,' 'Down with Thun.' While 'Deutschland, Deutschland über alles' was being sung, the hall cleared out. In the afternoon, a private discussion about the organization of the movement to leave [the Catholic Church] took place. Very important relevant decisions were made."

Source: Paul Bräunlich, ed., *Berichte über den Fortgang der „Los von Rom Bewegung“: Die neueste katholische Bewegung zur Befreiung vom Papstthum*, no. 1 (1899), Preface, pp. 30, 43, 44, 48.

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