

# “Union Decree”

**Friedrich Wilhelm III, King of Prussia**

*Order-in-Council - September 27, 1817*

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Already my revered ancestors now resting in God, the Prince-Elector Johann Sigismund (1), the Prince-Elector Georg Wilhelm (2), the Great Elector (3), King Frederick I (4) and King Frederick William I (5), have with pious concern attempted, as the history of their government and life proves, to unite the two separate Protestant churches in Their country, the Reformed and the Lutheran, into one evangelical Christian one. In honour of their memory and their salutary intention I am most pleased to follow them. I wish to execute this God pleasing work that encountered difficulties arising from that previous unhappy sectarian spirit, since now, under the influence of a better spirit, we can put aside all non-essentials (*Ausserwesentliche*) and hold fast to the main point of Christianity, in which both confessions are One, to the honour of God and for the welfare (*Heil*) of the Christian Church.

I would like to see this effort initiated in the states of My realm during the upcoming centennial celebration of the Reformation. Such a truly religious union of both Protestant churches that are divided merely by certain external differences is in accord with the great purposes of Christianity; it is in agreement with the original intentions of the Reformers; it exudes the spirit of Protestantism; it pro-motes appreciation for the church; it is salutary for piety in the home; and it will be the source of many useful improvements in churches and schools, something that has for too long been prevented by the confessional differences.

Desired for such a long time and now wished for with such a loud voice, in which the Reformed Church will not become part of the Lutheran Church, and the latter will not become part of the former, this salutary union will form a new vibrant (*neubelebte*), evangelical Christian church in the spirit of their sacred Founder. Nothing in the very nature of this effort can reasonably be opposed to it, if only both parties seriously and honestly want it to happen. This (union) would cause us to express our gratitude which we owe to divine Providence both for the incalculable blessing of the Reformation and our remembrance of its great initiators, continuing their immortal efforts by our deeds.

But as much as I would wish that the Reformed and the Lutheran Church in My states would share with Me this My well considered opinion, yet, honouring their rights and liberties, I am far from forcing upon them My will or issue decrees and decisions in this matter. This union will only be of real value when it is effected neither by persuasion nor by indifferentism, rather that it should arise out of the free conviction of those involved, so that it is not only a union in mere external form but indeed has its roots and vital strength in a unity of the heart, according

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to genuine Biblical principles. In this spirit I Myself will observe the upcoming centennial celebration of the Reformation by uniting the Reformed Parish at the Royal Court and the Lutheran Garrison Congregation in Potsdam into one evangelical Christian congregation and partake with them of the Lord's Supper. I therefore hope that this My Own example will serve as a beneficial encouragement to all Protestant congregations of My country and urge them to follow suit in spirit and in truth. I will leave it to the wise leadership of the Consistories, the pious zeal of the clergy and their conventions (*Synoden*) to decide on the external form of this act of union; I am convinced that the congregations will gladly want to follow them.

All who seriously and honestly, without any ulterior motives, look upon the essentials in this great and sacred matter, will easily find the proper form, so that the external form will justly derive out of the internal sub-stance in a simple, dignified and true manner. May that promised point in time not be far off when all, under one common Shepherd, will form one flock in one faith, in one love and in one hope!"

*Potsdam, September 27, 1817*

***Frederick William***

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**(1) Prince-Elector Johann Sigismund** (1572) 1608-1619

On Christmas Day 1613 he officially converted from the Lutheran faith to Calvinism in *Berliner Dom*.

**(2) Prince-Elector Georg Wilhelm** (1595) 1619-1640)

**(3) Prince-Elector Friedrich Wilhelm** "The Great Elector" (1620) 1640-1688

**(4) Friedrich I King in Prussia** (1657) 1688/1701-1713

**(5) King Friedrich Wilhelm I** (1688) 1713-1740

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