

Vachlars Vammundsen

My Kgl. Saml. 2700, Königl. Bibl. Kopen
hagen

Haderslev, Sept., 3rd, 1935.

My dear Bishop. ² G. Zell

First of all I must again thank you for our good cooperation at Chamby.

Pastor Koechlin told me, that a relative of his, who lives at Milano, had been at Bale recently; he was quite astonished that at Switzerland the war with Abyssinia was spoken of as a possibility - to him it was already a fact. I think this is a good expression of the feeling in Italy. It is terrible. But I shall write no more about that; by the time you receive this letter you will know things which to me to-day are still uncertain.

This immense crisis is apt to push other questions into the background. But it is our duty still to do the things that are before us. Therefore I will tell you what I have learned about the Church situation in Germany. I am afraid, it will be rather a long story. And perhaps it is best that you do not take this letter into Germany.

Koechlin had been on a holiday and did not know very much. Heckel on his way to Chamby had asked Koechlin to meet him at the station; Heckel had been rather nervous about what was going to be done at Chamby.

Karl Barth was not at Bale, but I saw his intimate friend Thurneysen; also from Koechlin I got some information about him. You remember, that before Christmas he was sentenced to dismissal, but appealed to a higher court, and so the matter remained uncertain for some months. In the meantime negotiations were carried on about erecting a chair as professor for him at Bale. In a conversation a high official told him, that there was some opposition against him in Switzerland, because he was said to be a strong antimilitarist. Barth answered, that in his younger years he had been so, but now he found it quite natural for Switzerland to protect herself; he added, that he even could understand, if they would fortify their northern frontier. This utterance came into a Swiss paper and caused much annoyance in Germany, also in the Confessional Church. Thurneysen

said, that Barth deplored to have to leave his disciples, who were now in the fire in Germany. Thurneysen also showed me Barth's letter of farewell to his friends. It was rather bitter and revealed the inner conflicts in the Confessional Church. There had been plans about Barth becoming a professor at a seminary for future pastors of the Confessional Church in Germany. Barth then had said, that they must give him a definite offer, but this had not come by the time of his dismissal, and therefore he had to accept the professorship at Bâle. He had the impression, that many looked upon him as being rash and dangerous; he had been asked not to take part in the Synod at Augsburg. He found the position taken there too timid. At the end of the letter he spoke about politics: I have always repudiated the actual government; a long time I have been rather reticent, which I now regret, although politics are perhaps not my business, being a Swiss. But now, he asked, can the Confessional Church again and again simply proclaim their loyalty? I know, that many think about the Nazis just as I do. How can they always repeat Rom.XIII? As if Germany was still a state for establishing right (ein Rechtsstaat) in accordance with the conception of St. Paul. Are there no other passages in the Scriptures about the State than Rom.XIII? Is nothing said in the Apocalypse? Do not the Psalms pray against unjust rulers?

In Germany I tried to ascertain a little about the political situation. But it is very difficult. Officially of course all is well. But well informed people say, that there is much dissatisfaction and tried to prove it by pointing to the hard new measures of the Government against the Jews, the Roman Catholics and the Conservatives (Stahlhelm, Student's corporations). Some trustworthy people said, that in non-Nazi circles it was ^{now} regarded as certain, that the Nazis themselves had put fire on the Reichstag, and that July 30th 1934 they had killed a lot of people who had a dangerous knowledge. But I remark expressly that my sources about these things are not the Confessional people, which I met at Hannover. There we only touched upon politics, when it was absolutely necessary for discussing the situation of the Church. I happened to arrive in the midst of the big Conference of the Confessional Church with 4000 members. None of them

than I had expected, were the Swastika as indication, that they belonged to the official Nazi Party.

They had wished to have their meetings in the big Stadthalle. That had been granted by the local authorities, but refused by order from Berlin. So they had simultaneous meetings in two big Churches. The leader was not Mehrrens, but Rev. Hamburg, who also is ^{my} the Vorläufige Leitung, an old friend of mine from the Student Movement.

The first evening I listened to an address by Niemöller. Hamburg had asked me to say a few words, I and I had promised to do so the next day. Herr von Thadden-Trigloff, who was in the chair that evening, officially welcomed me and the audience rose. I was glad, that I had not immediately to reply after Niemöller's speech. It was ^a very able paper, and he is singularly eloquent. But his subject was: "the inner power of a soldier", and in his utterances there was more of the ancient submarine officer than I could agree to. War, he said, was an immense evil, and we must bless all work for peace. But in this world of sin we must be prepared for war, and ~~kann~~ therefore we must approve of conscription ~~having~~ been reestablished. But what can give a soldier the inner power? We, who fought in the war to the bitter end, know, that patriotism and enthusiasm is not enough. In summer 1918 the chaplains tried to call forth our reserves of human power, but failed. The German people now, he thought, was in a parallel situation to 1918. (This assertion of course first seemed very strange. Later I had testimonies, that now many Nazi leaders are nearly in despair, utterly disappointed, having all the external power, but not the power of the spirit).

One of the main objects of Niemöller's speech was to refute the assertion of modern heathendom, that Christianity weakens man's courage and to prove, that just the faith in God engenders such courage; as examples he quoted Luther and two great generals, who had stuck to their faith against the current tendencies of their age: "Zieten (a prussian general) in the period of Rationalism and Hindenburg in the period of Alfred Rosenberg".

The next morning I listened to an excellent biblical lecture by Hamburg and a paper by Asmussen on the message of Jesus as an education.

onal force (able, but a little artificial, strongly Barthian). Then I conveyed a greeting from the Oecumenical Movement and spoke on Eph. III. 14-21.

The meetings as a whole ~~made~~ a favourable impression; the congregations were earnest, the singing powerful. The whole tendency was constructive, theological and edifying. But of course the conflict in the Church was always the background, for instance at the lecture of Humburg on Num. XIII: the faith always looks to God, unbelief to the powerful foes.

On the oecumenical problems I had the opportunity of speaking twice to Mahrerens, also to Praeses Koch, Dr. Breit (the representative of Bavaria in the Vorläufige Leitung) and to Asmussen. Also in accordance with a letter, which Dr. Oldham had sent me at Hannover, I tried to point out how important it was that we should have full connexion with the Confessional Church, for our work, because we needed them as being practically the heirs of the German Reformation and their particular experiences, and for them because they needed that larger fellowship. I said that we could not, however, constitute ourselves as a tribunal, which could condemn ^{us} the Reichskirche as heretical; we could not expect Heckel, ^{but} ~~we~~ knew, that his claim to represent the whole German Evangelical Church was impossible, and therefore we would invite Mahrerens and Koch to our meetings, and if they could not come themselves, we would ask them to send substitutes. I think they fully agreed to this. They have no confidence in Heckel, but they realized that we could hardly dismiss him. As to Stange they did not wish to express their opinion.

I spoke about your coming visit to Germany. Their synod at Berlin will only be for the Old Prussian Church; Koch fully understood that they ought only to invite you in ⁱⁿ ext^{ra}ordis. Perhaps they would like to give a reception for you. Koch ~~said~~ said, it might be well for you to see Hess, although he was ^{not} likely really to understand the problem.

Herr Kerl had one day had a Conference with the "German Christian" bishops, another day he had called the Leaders of the Con-

fessional Church. They felt they had succeeded in presenting their case clearly, and some neutral Church leaders, who were present, had in the main taken the same line as they themselves. Herr Kerrl had spoken an hour; he seems to have a certain religious feeling, but how he will deal with the Church problems they did not know.

The whole situation is uncertain. A very grave thing is the problem of youth. In the official camps the doctrine of Rosenberg is taught. In one camp for girls the leader had said, that Christianity and National Socialism were incompatible, so that they would have to choose. A daughter of Pastor Stoevesand had answered, that she would choose Christianity. Then she was dismissed without certificate and is therefore ^{ex}cluded from the Universities. On the other hand the meetings which the Confessional pastors arrange for boys and girls are well attended.

These are my personal impressions. You probably will know some later events from the papers.

Please remember me and Mrs. Ammundsen to Mrs. Bell.

Yours ever sincerely