

THE STUDENT WORLD CHRONICLE

More on Germany

The development of the ecclesiastical situation in Germany is of so great an importance to the whole of the Christian world as to demand the closest attention. Here, seen objectively, is the course of events since our last article.

The elections of the general Prussian synod, the synod of the largest German Church, took place on July 23rd; at the same time synodal elections were also held in most of the communities. It is unfortunately an indisputable fact that these elections were not carried out fairly; pressure from outside the Church was brought to bear on the participants; the list competing with those of the "Deutsche Christen" candidates were prevented from having the ordinary means of propaganda and publicity; the opinion was circulated that persons choosing to vote for candidates outside these "Deutsche Christen" lists would give proof of a contra-revolutionary mentality, hostile to the national-socialist state. As everyone knows, the chancellor himself, in a broadcast speech on the eve of the elections, advised pollers to vote for the "Deutsche Christen". All these manifestations tended to identify the domain of political thought and action with that of faith and the activity of the Church. Thanks to this outside pressure, and thanks also to the fact that a large number of voters took part in the elections, who until then had taken little or no interest in Church matters, 75 % of the elected candidates belonged to the "Deutsche Christen" party, the importance of which, in the whole evangelical community, is unquestionably infinitely less than this proportion indicates. The result of these elections is that all the important positions in the Church, from the parish councils to the general government, are occupied by the "Deutsche Christen", to the exclusion of representatives holding other views.

In spite of several official affirmations that, after the elections, all past differences of opinion and opposition would be forgotten, merged henceforth into a common effort to work solely for the religious life of the Church, the situation has developed in the most radical direction. The general synod of Prussia, which elected as its bishop the pastor Müller (who has since been raised to the dignity of bishop of the whole German Church), has adopted the Aryan clause in all its force. At present, the extreme wing of the "Deutsche

Christen" is responsible for the whole of the government of the Church. The "Geistliche Ministerium", a body representing the highest authority in the Church in Germany, consists of five persons, of whom only one does not belong to the "Deutsche Christen".

It must also be noted that, up to the present at least, no opportunity has been allowed for making any official manifestation divergent from the theological and religious position of the "Deutsche Christen". In the general Prussian synod, the minority was not allowed to express its opinion through the representative they had chosen; the minority decided therefore to leave the assembly-room and to refrain from taking any further part in the discussions of the assembly.

Thus the "Deutsche Christen" have, at the moment, effective control of the life of the Church. Among them, no doubt, are many who wish to remain faithful to a positive Christianity; there are also many, who do not approve of the methods of rigorous constraint employed by their leaders to make sure of their power — let us add also as a positive feature of the aims of the party, the will to incarnate the community spirit, which they find in the Gospel, concretely into the national and social domain; but none the less they seem dangerously to confound two different things: loyalty to the State and purely religious Church matters.

In spite of this, there are obvious signs that many in the Church refuse to submit to this oppression. Let us indicate three of these signs. The success of the pamphlet by Karl Barth, *Theologische Existenz heute*¹, which had a sale of several thousand copies in a few days, on the very eve of the elections, is both significant and remarkable. In this document, the theologian of Bonn rejected categorically, as non-Christian, the theological position of the "Deutsche Christen", at the same time giving a serious warning to the Church and even to the "Jungreformatorische" Movement and appealing to all Christians not to let themselves be influenced by the national or political situation of the moment, but to consider any reorganisation of the Church only from the point of view of the Bible and of the confession of faith.

Two other important documents have just appeared. The first is an appeal to the national synod of the Evangelical Church at Wittenberg, backed by two thousand members of the evangelical clergy, and reading as follows:

1) "The manner in which new regulations have been applied to the Church causes the gravest anxiety to countless sincere Christians. In

¹ See also under Book Reviews. - An English résumé of this pamphlet (price 50 Swiss centimes) can be obtained from the W.S.C.F. offices, 13, rue Calvin, Geneva.