

German Church Conflict

The latest effort to settle the conflict in the German Protestant Church has broken down. HERR ERICH KOCH, the Nazi Governor of East Prussia, and DR. WERNER, president of the Church Senate and National Synod, last week initiated negotiations between the official "German Christian" Administration of REICH BISHOP MÜLLER and certain members of the Confessional Community, which has repudiated the REICH BISHOP and set up a rival administration with the support of the great majority of Protestant churchmen. This move seems to have been prompted by the MINISTER of the INTERIOR, who apparently hoped that after all the threats from State and party quarters, the Confessional Community would be found in a mood to compromise. The basis of negotiations was the formation of a new administration, in which both the Confessional Community and the "German Christians" would be represented. As its contribution to unity the State was prepared to see DR. MÜLLER displaced in favour of DR. MARAHRENS, the Lutheran Bishop of Hanover and head of the Confessional Administration. But apparently the State still insisted that high office should be entrusted to members of the sect responsible for the system in which heresy, chicanery, and oppression combined to work chaos in the Church. In these circumstances no agreement was possible. The Confessional Community, with unpleasant memories of DR. JÄGER's methods of unifying the Church, could hardly be expected to agree that to be a "good party man"—that is, a "German Christian"—is a sound qualification for the office of legal administrator. In the view of the resistant majority the "German Christians" have an indifferent right to call themselves Christians at all. Their positions in the Church they owe to the support of the civil power and the favour they enjoy in that quarter to the fact that in matters of Church organization and doctrine their views correspond with Nazi political and racial prejudices.

Apparently, despite HERR HITLER's declaration of neutrality, the one thing the State will not do is to allow the Church to manage its own affairs in the way the majority desire. It hopes to compel the Lutheran section at any rate into an unsatisfactory compromise by threatening the withdrawal of financial support—a threat to which the Lutheran as a Church traditionally dependent on the State is more vulnerable than the Reformed. But it is obvious from the treatment which has just been meted out to PROFESSOR KARL BARTH that grave dangers threaten the foundations of the Church if it becomes a party to any settlement which does not recognize in full that in matters of Church organization and doctrine the Church alone has a right to decide. PROFESSOR BARTH, a theologian of world-wide influence and an Evangelical churchman with the courage of his convictions, has been dismissed from his State chair at Bonn University because, among other things, he failed to give the Hitler salute in his theological classrooms. It is probable that he has not been forgiven for the famous pamphlet which, at an early stage in the Church conflict, forcefully argued the limits of temporal leadership in spiritual affairs. He has offended also by desiring on the grounds of religious conscience to add a reservation to his oath to the FÜHRER. There is a world of the spirit, PROFESSOR BARTH holds, in which the writ of the totalitarian State does not run. Until that fundamental claim to freedom of conscience is recognized by the Nazi régime satisfactory relations between Church and State in Germany are out of the question.

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