

The German Church

By the Bishop of Gloucester

I WAS talking the other day to a man who spends a good deal of time in Germany and he agreed that what was noticeable was the contrast between Germany as it really is and Germany as it is presented by the great body of English newspapers. It is not that there are no unpleasant things (as indeed there are in all countries), but the proportion of events was grossly distorted by an interested propaganda. It is the same with regard to the German Church. The idea that prevails in this country is that Christianity is being persecuted, and that a crude neo-paganism is being forced on the country by the National-Socialist party, under the direct leadership of Herr Hitler. There are some things which give colour to this picture, but they are grossly exaggerated and the picture is not true.

The following account is based throughout on personal knowledge. I have read a great deal about Germany. I have had the advantage of conversations with men of many schools of thought. I have received many private letters. When I was in Germany I had long talks with clergy belonging to very different schools of thought. I have had no motive but to arrive at the truth and I have attempted to form a balanced judgement. I may add that Dr. A. J. Macdonald had much the same experience. I can add the testimony of all those whom he met to the witnesses that I examined. I do not propose to mention any names, as people talked to me very freely, and I always explained that I should not mention names.

There is a general idea prevailing that the Confessional Church is more or less identical with the Evangelical Church of Germany and that Christianity in Germany is being persecuted. Neither of these statements is true. There are about 19,000 pastors in Germany, of whom not more than 3,000 belong to the Confessional Church, and the number is diminishing. The great majority call themselves neutral or moderate German Christians. The number of extreme German Christians was admitted on all sides not to be large.

As regards the Confessional Church, I had an interesting conversation with a distinguished German theologian who, although not a member of that party, was looked upon by them with respect. He said that a great mistake was made

he has ceased to be a member of the Church. Almost everyone in the parish was confirmed, and the young people discussed with him freely the difficulties which teaching in the school raised. The Church tax in the parish was 10 per cent. of the income tax. It was collected and administered by the State. In his parish it amounted to 180,000 Reich marks. He had no trouble from the Hitler Youth as the local leader was a good Christian.

I had similar accounts from pastors of Berlin parishes. Many people who left the Church under Communist influences were now returning. In an ordinary parish the great majority of the young people came for confirmation. That was the case with the working classes even more than the upper classes.

The point of view of the moderate German Christian is represented by Professor Fabricius. He takes the view that the National-Socialist movement represents positive Christianity, and he has written a pamphlet to prove that. He told me that Germany was National-Socialist and Christian. Others of the same school corroborated this view. When I mentioned this to members of the Confessional Church, they said that Fabricius was a professor, a good man, but he did not know anything of what was going on in the world. I may mention that I have personal friends among these German Christians, that they are good and orthodox Christians and are working to promote unity in the German Church.

I was glad to have an opportunity of meeting influential members of the Thuringian school, who are attacked as not being Christian at all. They are accused of denying the Old Testament, of denying that our Lord is the Son of God, and of putting Herr Hitler on the same level as Christ. They assured me that all these statements were untrue. Their view of the Old Testament was that of Luther. They believed in the Incarnation. They believed that Jesus Christ was the Son of God. They believed that Christianity is a religion of love. They supported Herr Hitler because he had restored to the German people their belief in God and their belief in themselves. They always said (and, as I gathered, imposed on the party) that Germany would be done for if it gave up Christianity. What they were opposed to was the theology of Karl Barth. They

on these questions and people were asking why England on the contrary seemed to have been helped by its Christianity. It seemed to have made it strong and to have helped in the building up of the Empire. They were very much impressed by the imperial attitude of the English Church.

But it is important to emphasize that this anti-Christian attitude only characterizes a section of the party. It is quite untrue to say that National-Socialism is incompatible with Christianity, as I read in *The Times* the other day. And it is a foolish and dangerous thing to say so. For it might just have the effect of driving the party more and more into an extreme course. In particular Herr Hitler himself, whatever may be his own opinions, has never associated himself with this view. He has always refused to do so. He has often acted in opposition to them. But if he is irritated by the continued opposition of the Confessional Church and the activities of English bishops; he might be driven to do so, and might use his power against the Church; that is why a moderate and intelligent policy is so essential.

Great play in foreign propaganda is made out of the neo-paganism of Herr von Rosenberg. It is very unintelligent and is intended to influence the country against Christianity. But the Germans are after all a people not without intelligence, and I was assured by almost everyone that I talked to that the movement was without any real influence. People laughed at it. To judge Germany by these efforts at neo-paganism is much the same as it would be to judge the Church of England by those Modernist utterances of Dr. Major which are circulated by Roman Catholic propagandists.

Danger may come from the Hitler Youth. The training of the young people of the country is in the hands of the Hitler Youth, and is intensely and sometimes absurdly national. It can be and is sometimes used against the Christian Church. For instance, I was told of a pastor who arranged a three days' camp for young people, that he might give them religious instruction and training. The local leader of the Hitler Youth arranged a parade at exactly the same time. Again another pastor who had a camp went out for a walk with some of his boys. Eight members of the Secret Police arrested them for taking part in sport, and sport is confined to the Hitler

the purpose of unifying the Church by the Nazi party influence. The methods that he adopted were admirably calculated to have exactly the reverse effect of what he desired. There was a general revolt against him which was successful, and he was deprived of power. The Confessional Church continued in opposition and Dr. Zollner was appointed as chairman of a committee to bring about unity. The Confessional Church still refused to come in. It is against them and in particular against Pastor Niemöller that action has been taken. They have persisted in their separate position and various administrative methods have been tried against them. On more than one occasion Herr Hitler has intervened to prevent the policy proposed.

It is not maintained that the action of the Government has not been arbitrary and ill advised. Reichsbischof Müller showed himself incapable of understanding how he should deal with a Christian Church, and Herr Kerrl's methods are not much better. The interference of the Secret Police is a method of government which is alien to all our ideas of justice, but any German citizen is exposed to the danger. The Confessional Church have been proceeded against for their schismatic teaching and for disobeying administrative orders. There is not and there has not been any persecution of Christians as Christians, and neither pastors nor congregations that abstain from political action are interfered with, and political action does not mean moral protests against the wicked policy of the German Government but disobedience to somewhat arbitrary administrative action.

All sections of the German Church were most anxious to be friendly with the Church of England, and many of those I met resented the way in which our interest was lavished on the Confessional Church. They were interested in our work in Latvia and Esthonia of which accounts had appeared in the German papers. Many would like to have similar conversations with the Church of England. I explained that we could not approach any section of the German Church, it must be with a united Church. They did not think they were ready, but I think some were of opinion that unity among themselves would be best attained by conferences with the English Church.

It must be remembered that the theology and outlook of the German Christians is much more in accordance

much the same experience. I can add the testimony of all those whom he met to the witnesses that I examined. I do not propose to mention any names, as people talked to me very freely, and I always explained that I should not mention names.

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As regards the Confessional Church, I had an interesting conversation with a distinguished German theologian who, although not a member of that party, was looked upon by them with respect. He said that a great mistake was made in England by concentrating our attention on the Confessional Church. Our intervention on their behalf did no good. This was impressed upon me on many sides. The letters, telegrams and resolutions on behalf of Pastor Niemöller chiefly served to irritate the authorities and had the opposite effect to what was desired.

Much as we might respect the Confessionals, my informant thought they were mistaken. When Dr. Zollner's committee was appointed, there was an opportunity of uniting the Church. That committee was appointed with the sincere desire of bringing disunion to an end; an opportunity which would have been good for the well-being of the Church was missed. He thought that the Church of England should give up its attitude of partisanship with the Confessional Church, and should do all it could to create a united German Church.

The Confessional Church would answer that Dr. Zollner's committee was not appointed with any such purpose as helping the Church, but simply with the purpose of getting it into the power of the Government, and that the opposition of the Confessional Church saved the situation. I believe that this view is mistaken.

I will give an account of the parish of a young German Pastor, as he described it to me. He belongs to no party, and is a devout Christian. His parish, he tells me, is a good one. It is well-to-do. There are about 5,000 people in it. Hardly any of them have left the Church. In Germany everyone has to pay the Church tax unless he has formally declared that

that I have personal friends among these German Christians, that they are good and orthodox Christians and are working to promote unity in the German Church.

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I did not find any German Christians who were unorthodox. Although I am told that they exist. The theology of most of those that I met is much more in harmony with the teaching of the Church of England than that of the Confessional Church, which has been influenced by Calvinism and by the teaching of Karl Barth. Nor do I see any reason why all parties in the German Church should not unite; and, if they did, they would make the position of Christianity much stronger.

Many of the Nazis are undoubtedly anti-Christian. This is true of Herr Himmler, the head of the Secret Police, of Dr. Ley, the Minister of Labour, of Herr Rosenberg, of Herr Balder von Schirach, the head of the Hitler Youth, and others, both in the centre and scattered throughout the country. I was told that one of the reasons was that they were renegade Roman Catholics who had no sympathy with the Evangelical Church. The origin of the anti-Christian movement goes back to the Liberalism of the pre-war period, and all the leading ideas embodied in it had their source there. There are two main theses; one is that Christianity is a religion that makes men weak, and the other that Christianity throughout German history has inflicted great injuries on Germany. They would instance particularly the Thirty Years War. There was, I was told by one informant, much discussion

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On the other hand pastors with whom I talked told me that their children had not suffered through it. Most of the pastors to whom I talked said that no harm was done to their work by the Hitler Youth. It depends upon the local leader. A local leader who is anti-Christian can make himself very disagreeable. I talked to the Thuringian Christians whom I met about this. They recognized the danger. They always insisted on the necessity of Germany being Christian. That it would be ruined if it were not so. That their policy was to work with the Hitler Youth and not to oppose it. If the Church were united there would be very little difficulty. This anti-Christian movement was something alien to the German people. The real danger was that Herr Hitler should be driven to associate himself with this movement. There was danger too, in the attitude of people in England who seemed to suggest that democracy, which many Germans think a foolish form of government, is identical with Christianity.

In no real sense is there State persecution of Christianity in Germany. The great majority of German pastors of whatever school of thought can do their work unimpeded, provided they abstain from politics. When I was in Germany there were stated to be nine pastors under arrest. The reason for the attack on the Confessional Church was that they had attempted to organize themselves as a separate Church. The one thing Herr Hitler desired was a united German Church. Reichsbischof Müller was appointed for

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It must be remembered that the theology and outlook of the German Christians is much more in accordance with our ideas than are those of the Confessional Church. The Confessional Church is largely under reformed influence and of the theology of Karl Barth. There would be among them a considerable opposition to episcopacy. On the other hand I was told by some of the German pastors that when they set up their new bishops, they had discussed the question of coming to the English Church for their consecration. What is true of the German Church as of the German people is that they very much desire our friendship.

I will conclude by an instance of the misleading sort of propaganda which goes on. Some one kindly sent me a Swiss newspaper which stated that a Protestant church had been destroyed without compensation. I made careful enquiries and the facts are as follows:—A church at Munich which blocked the traffic has been demolished. The negotiations took place between the Staatsminister Wagner and Bishop Meiser and were entirely satisfactory. In the meantime rooms in the Polizeiprasidium have been placed at the disposition of the congregation for the church services and will remain available until the new church is ready, for which compensation will be paid. This information is stated to be absolutely correct. "Bishop Meiser in no way denied the necessity of pulling down the church and both parties came to a complete understanding on the matter after the State declared its readiness to pay the full compensation of costs. Also the provisional arrangement for the church services were made by mutual agreement."