

OCTOBER 6, 1938

THE BRITISH WEEKLY

II

Life, Literature and Affairs

LATEST DEVELOPMENTS IN THE
GERMAN CHURCH SITUATION

(From Our Special Correspondent)

JUST after the Austrian Anschluss Reichskanzler Hitler, it is reported, called his district leaders together to receive "direction-giving" instructions as to the forthcoming election. One of his pronouncements concerned the church problem. Hitler is quoted as having said, "Gentlemen, for years I have been studying Christianity and the Church. I have as yet not been able to make up my mind about this matter. Until I do, I beg of you not to make up your own minds." At any rate, 1938 is called the year of armistice in the Church-struggle.

Shortly after the Oxford proclamation, things loomed pretty black. It was impossible to receive the delegation bearing the Oxford message. Passports were seized, the party Press fulminated against the Church, ecumenical relations were declared ended. But shortly following Niemöller's internment in concentration camp Sachsenhausen (Oranienburg), Christian leaders began to sense a moderation of the State's attack.

Dr. Asmussen, for example, applied for his passport, saying he had been invited to deliver theological lectures in Great Britain; permission was granted him. Professor Martin Dibelius had a lecture tour to America. All Protestants agree that the Press campaign has lessened. The attacks on Catholicism also moderated until the Pope made his recent statements on overemphasised racialist nationalism.

I

Surprisingly enough, ecumenical relations are being allowed. Indeed, the German Propaganda Ministry has extended to the World Alliance for International Friendship through the Churches an official invitation to hold their 1940 meeting at Cologne or Leipzig. A delegation of five has been permitted to attend the Alliance assembly at Oslo. Permission has been granted in principle for a delegation of six to attend the World Missions Council in Madras. Negotiations are under way regarding who shall be delegates, but it is agreed that German Christians will not be in the majority, and they may not be represented at all.

Various factors explain this seeming armistice. One may be the sincere inability of Hitler to disregard the part Christianity has played in European history. Again, it may seem desirable to give the group around the Bishop of Gloucester some samples of evident tolerance. Or it may be pointed out that the Government's policy is not to

he does not buy his own food but only extras such as chocolate.

The former submarine commander is an increasing hero in the very devout province of Westphalia, which hails him to-day as their "Martyr Bishop." Delegations of miners and workers have called at various ministries in Berlin pleading for the release of their "Landsmann."

In Westphalia one hears amazing accounts of these Christian laymen. One story described a gaunt miner, a party member as most of the delegates have been, who arose in one of the Berlin ministries to add his plea. "I have the fatal lung disease which we of the mines get," he declared. "My father died of it, his father died of it. My son has just entered the mine with me. If you take away from us miners our Christ, what do we have left?"

III

It has been stated by the Bishop of Gloucester that Niemöller could be released if he would promise to refrain from "mixing in politics." No basis can be found for this assertion in official party circles in Germany. Twice the Bishop has been asked to furnish the source of this information so that negotiations could be begun, but both times the Bishop has curtly refused to discuss the matter. Indications are that at the moment Niemöller would not be released until he would consent to leave the ministry. This severe demand might not be indefinitely maintained, however.

While in Moabit it was possible for Niemöller to communicate rather freely with his friends and well-wishers. Now even the two monthly letters which he may write his wife are practically devoid of his former spiritual utterances. The single Bible reference which he has cited bears a significance which no comment could enrich. In one letter he wrote, "I Kor. ii, 16." This proves to read, II. Cor., 4, 16: "Wherefore we faint not; but though our outward man is decaying, yet our inward man is renewed day by day."

This summer I especially visited the leadership and clergy of the moderate confessional wing. The attitude of the radical wing is known. But the Bishop of Gloucester awakened the impression that only "one-sixth" of the confessional church follows the Niemöller direction. As a matter of fact, all sides of the church struggle rather agree that there are about 5,000 of the 17,000 pastors who comprise the radical wing; 3,000 German Christians is a liberal estimate, and the remaining 8,000

five pfennigs apiece netted over forty marks!

V

I went to visit the offices of the Christian Student Movement in Berlin. The building was in the hands of the secret police, everything evidently having been confiscated. The delegates to Adolf Keller's seminar in Geneva were turned back at the frontier by the German authorities. The younger secular teachers who are giving the weekday religious instruction as one of their three subjects are increasingly proclaiming other than Christian ideas.

Theological students cannot get into the party or into the more important party organisations—why? The church has no access to the public Press, and its own Press is so censored that the Christian people of Germany have no opportunity of learning one-tenth of what is actually happening to Christianity in Luther's own land.

Countless facts such as these weigh on the moderates as well as on the radicals. Both sides see the dechristianisation of German youth as the aim of the party hierarchy. Both sides agree that Christianity is being forced out of public life into a one-hour-a-week home for the aged. But the disagreement comes as to what practically should be done about it. The Niemöller group gave classic expression to their conviction in the 5,000-word appeal given to Hitler two years ago. If the further dechristianisation of Germany goes on, they declared, the youth of Germany in the future will arise to curse our memory that we did nothing while Christ was being taken from the life of our Fatherland.

Hence when Rosenberg attacks Protestantism in his "Protestantischer Rompilger," they will reply, even though their replies are confiscated, their publishing house temporarily closed, and their leading authority on Rosenberg compelled to flee the country. The radicals feel they must keep their parishes informed of the facts of arrests of preachers, of those who leave the church, of anti-church utterances made by important controllers of public opinion. This is termed "mixing in politics."

The moderates are more inclined to balance the positive achievements along

social and economic and national lines over against the perils to religion and culture. The Anschluss has greatly strengthened the Nazi prestige among the masses, and this historic reunion has not been without emotional influence on the more orthodox Lutheran clergy who have been traditionally very nationalistic. They claim a longer historical perspective. At one time the church made Christian faith depend on unity with a *Weltanschauung* (Ptolemaic cosmology), at another time with another *Weltanschauung*, evolutionism. Both of these have passed, but Christian faith has survived, say our moderate confessionals.

So it will be with racialism. It is to be welcomed as a reaction against the race-denying humanitarianism of the nineteenth-century liberalism, but it does not have enough total depth to maintain itself as the sole basis for German thought and life.

VI

I do not want to end on a note of pessimism, but the rise and dominance of eschatological thinking in the Evangelical Church seems to me filled with peril for the future of Protestantism in Germany. In 1936 Niemöller said to me: "All that the word human stands for means to me disillusionment." A leading spiritual force of the moderate confessionals said: "Your American and British persistence in believing in the possibility of social redemption almost seems to make any ecumenical relations extremely difficult."

Professor Althaus has published two articles in the pastors' official magazine accusing American and British Christianity of over-exalting and over-estimating the task and social influence of the church. The leading pastor of one of Germany's chief cities said: "The world is brutality itself; it is evil, utterly unworthy."

Theologically, this is only one of the possible interpretations of Jesus' teaching, and possibly not the soundest historically. Practically, it will increasingly drive men and youth from the church. The clue to the strength of Catholicism lies just here. The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof, Rome asserts. The church abides, reaching out to win the world for Christ. Woe to Protestantism if it loses this world-redemptive summons and leaves to Catholicism and dictatorships the formation of the social and political structure of all human life.

A new church is being born in Luther's land. I have faith to believe that it will be worthy of the Great Tradition. A Christian Youth leader said to a Hitler Youth leader the other day: "We are grateful to you for forcing us to abandon all that has become mere traditionalism, and to seek to base Christianity on its spiritual truth and reality."

AUDION'S COLUMN

MR. CHAMBERLAIN'S
CRITICS

I FIND it very difficult to be patient with Mr. Chamberlain's critics.

Thank heaven that the country's gratitude is greater than the party politicians'. It was almost nauseating to read the reports of the speeches in the House of Commons debate on Monday—the smug thankfulness that we were not actually blowing up each other coupled with undigested criticism of the superhuman efforts which prevented that catastrophe.

The fact that we are not now wallowing in a European war is surely one of the most stupendous triumphs in all history. As I see it, Mr. Chamberlain was endowed with superhuman power and, I am prepared to add, superhuman insight. I, for one, never believed, on Tuesday morning of last week, when I was writing the article to fill this column in last week's issue, that there was one hope in a million that the catastrophe would be averted. And, what is more, neither had those comfortable critics in the House of Commons one ray of hope. Yet they can sit back in comfort this week, knowing that they will not have to take the responsibility of governing the country because nobody has any faith in them, knowing that they are going to be allowed to live in peace for a while and yet criticising that peace as though it were not preferable to war, which, as everyone knows, was the alternative.

BUT this self-righteous smugness goes even further. It tries to play on our emotions by describing our villainy in throwing the "poor little Czechs" to the wolves, sacrificing a small nation to save our own skins. That is false—utterly and absolutely false. If we have been villains (as we may have been) it was in being party to the creation of Czechoslovakia, not in helping to save their men, women and children from being blown to bits—as they most certainly would have been if war had come. No one could have prevented it, however the war had gone in its later stages.

WE were ready to fight and we were going to fight if reason, backed by the prayers of the peoples of every nation in the world, including Germany, had not triumphed. And, if we had fought, who is going to say that the Czechs would have gained anything? In fact, who will say that they would not have lost ten thousand times more than they have lost by the Munich agreement?

The Czechs have made as great a sacrifice in the interests of peace as can ever have been made. I do not minimise that sacrifice. It is they who

ONWARD, CHRISTIAN SAILORS!

By G. PRESUTTEROS

tended to the World Alliance for International Friendship through the Churches an official invitation to hold their 1940 meeting at Cologne or Leipzig. A delegation of five has been permitted to attend the Alliance assembly at Oslo. Permission has been granted in principle for a delegation of six to attend the World Missions Council in Madras. Negotiations are under way regarding who shall be delegates, but it is agreed that German Christians will not be in the majority, and they may not be represented at all.

Various factors explain this seeming armistice. One may be the sincere inability of Hitler to disregard the part Christianity has played in European history. Again, it may seem desirable to give the group around the Bishop of Gloucester some samples of evident tolerance. Or it may be pointed out that the Government's policy is not to attack on too many fronts at once, and that the Jewish campaign is the present focus. A fourth factor may be the awareness of the division within Germany which increases with each new defamation of Christianity.

Then, too, there is the world-wide reaction to the Niemöller imprisonment. There is the crisis regarding Czecho-Slovakia and the necessity of having internal unity. Finally, the Government has achieved remarkable success in its work-creation programme and by its great recreational organisations; the widespread appreciation of this by the German masses, including Church circles, lends a feeling of momentary security.

II

At present, three confessional Christians are in concentration camps. One is Martin Niemöller. Another is Pastor Schneider, from the Rhineland, who excluded certain parishioners (including party members) from Holy Communion. The third is a layman from Oldenberg, who has been incarcerated since May 29. In addition, Pastor Lücking, of Dortmund, and five laymen are in gaol. Nine additional pastors are under arrest. All this, however, does not approach the waves of arrests which mounted as high as 120 last summer.

In spite of the partial armistice, 77 pastors and church administrators are to-day suspended from their office. Forty-nine pastors have been forbidden to enter their parishes; seven of these are in East Prussia, the others are scattered through 16 additional church governments. Most crippling of all are the speech prohibitions (Redeverbote) which silence much of the most effective church leadership.

An intestinal gripe, somewhat prevalent in Berlin this summer, has further injured the health of Martin Niemöller. Most of the prisoners at Sachsenhausen have an ample window from which they may look and which affords them sunlight. Niemöller only has a narrow window which is so high that the view and sunlight it permits are negligible. Contrary to certain rumours, he has always had the entire Bible, he has always had a pencil with which he could make notes,

even the two monthly letters which he may write his wife are practically devoid of his former spiritual utterances. The single Bible reference which he has cited bears a significance which no comment could enrich. In one letter he wrote, "1 Kor. ii, 16." This proves to read, II Cor., 4, 16: "Wherefore we faint not; but though our outward man is decaying, yet our inward man is renewed day by day."

This summer I especially visited the leadership and clergy of the moderate confessional wing. The attitude of the radical wing is known. But the Bishop of Gloucester awakened the impression that only "one-sixth" of the confessional church follows the Niemöller direction. As a matter of fact, all sides of the church struggle rather agree that there are about 5,000 of the 17,000 pastors who comprise the radical wing; 3,000 German Christians is a liberal estimate; and the remaining 9,000, which I chiefly visited this summer, are neutral not in theology but in their judgment of immediate policy in the Church-State struggle.

IV

I found almost unanimous resentment at the views attributed to the moderates by the Bishop of Gloucester. Only the German Christians, the "official church" (administrative officials like Dr. Werner and Bishop Heckel, appointed by the State), and free-churchmen like Bishop Meile welcomed the utterances of the Bishop of Gloucester.

One moderate leader after another gave me concrete facts of the church struggle and asked, "Did not the Bishop of Gloucester know facts like these?" Finance commissioners have been placed in all church governments except four. Few, if any, are believing Christians. Money given by devout Christians is placed at the disposal of the minority German Christian party wherever possible. Von Schmidt, the finance commissioner for Mark Brandenburg appointed by Karrl, recently told a delegation of farmers that they were misled by listening to the confessional pastor of their church.

To their reply that they had paid the money and should have a say as to what Christianity is preached in the village of Netzbruch, he responded with the remark that, other means having failed, the confessional church would now be suppressed by financial withdrawal. Confessional churches of both wings still have German Christian local synods in numerous cases. These are hangovers from the political intervention into the church administration dating from 1933 and 1934. To avoid the seizure of money by such an unrepresentative German Christian local synod, one pastor read the prescribed announcement of the collection and added, "As many of you as can give with your conscience will find boxes at the door. Pamphlets at five pfennigs will also be distributed. They are old and you have had them before, but you can give them to your friends."

After the service the regular collection which the German Christians sacked amounted to less than five marks, but some twenty pamphlets at

Hence when Rosenberg attacks Protestantism in his "Protestantischer Rompilger," they will reply, even though their replies are confiscated, their publishing house temporarily closed, and their leading authority on Rosenberg compelled to flee the country. The radicals feel they must keep their parishes informed of the facts of arrests of preachers, of those who leave the church, of anti-church utterances made by important controllers of public opinion. This is termed "mixing in politics."

The moderates are more inclined to balance the positive achievements along

ONWARD, CHRISTIAN SAILORS!

By "PRESBUTEROS"

IT is surprising that in a maritime country like ours the Christian Church should emphasise its militant attitude to sin and evil in terms peculiar to land forces, rather than in terms of the naval or merchant service.

True indeed it is that at Holy Baptism we receive the child into the Ark of Christ's Church, and pray that it may pass over the waves of this troublesome world, but beyond these early nautical references very little is brought into the teaching of children that might suggest a navy of aggressive Christians, sweeping from the seas all that might make shipwreck of their Christian calling and profession.

Close to the Sea

Much of the Gospel is centred in a seafaring atmosphere. The Galilean narratives are coloured by the sailors' life. Our Lord chose fishermen to be his protagonists of His Kingdom against the world. He used the stern of a boat as a pulpit from which He proclaimed His message on more than one occasion. He bade Peter fish for men, and tried out his faith on the tossing wave. He taught the great lesson of the storm-tossed Church, becalmed by His Presence. His "Peace, be still!" loses its force when removed from its maritime setting.

Yet, in Church, there is still little in our vocabulary to remind us of these truths. We still speak architecturally of the nave of our church. Does it bring home to the hearer the truth that he or she is a partner in the "navus"—the ship?

New Synonym Wanted

A few hymns pay grudging reference. "See round Thine Ark, the hungry billows curling," "When storm winds drive us from the shore"; but how weak and ineffective in appeal these are when compared with the aggressive "Onward, Christian Soldiers!" and "Soldiers of Christ, arise, and put your armour on." There seems to be no equivalent to the whole "panoply of God" that expresses in naval terms the equipment of the true and devoted sailor of Christ. A new synonym is needed here, which will at once express not merely hostility to

Rome asserts. The church abides, reaching out to win the world for Christ. Woe to Protestantism if it loses this world-redemptive summons and leaves to Catholicism and dictatorships the formation of the social and political structure of all human life.

A new church is being born in Luther's land. I have faith to believe that it will be worthy of the Great Tradition. A Christian Youth leader said to a Hitler Youth leader the other day: "We are grateful to you for forcing us to abandon all that has become mere traditionalism, and to seek to base Christianity on its spiritual truth and reality."

evil, but an urgency for extending the good.

A careful writer has recently made the point that our Lord launched His Church as a fishing smack, to engage and land souls for His service, but the same writer fears that as He looks down to-day upon that Church it will resemble more an overcrowded pleasure-steamer. No time to catch men—too busy saving sin-sick passengers from throwing themselves overboard. No time to fish—too busy with internal organisation and entertainment.

A change of metaphor and a new vocabulary would re-emphasise the meaning and purpose of the Church. Our people have been lulled into security and fatal inertia by the mass suggestion of "an army, terrible with banners," which is a doubtful truth. There are plenty of helmets, shields and swords, but of what use is this equipment if we have not the troops to wear it?

"Ship-shape"

Individuality is better expressed in seafaring terms. The security of the ship and the crew may depend upon each sailor. Every man on board should be a specialist, knowing and doing his job. Do the members of our Church know their job? Do they pull their oar, or take their full watch in responsibility? "Ship-shape" has become an adjectival commonplace—it suggests that a vessel is adapted to meet the rising tide of waters. Is our church "ship-shape"? Is it able to meet the rising tide of indifference, sin and doubt, and prove itself seaworthy? The Recall rather suggests otherwise!

Therefore in these days of opportunity and recall to religion there is an opening for a new teaching and a new emphasis, the terminology of which would suggest the life of a sailor, ever fishing for the souls of men, ever voyaging to discover new lands wherein to proclaim the Gospel—truly a missionary adventure.

Moreover, such a language would more accurately express our belief that the Master is on board, the Cross is nailed to the mast, and we, His sailors, must serve before that mast until we cross the bar.

ing to save their men, women and children from being blown to bits—as they most certainly would have been if war had come. No one could have prevented it, however the war had gone in its later stages.

WE were ready to fight and we were going to fight if reason, backed by the prayers of the peoples of every nation in the world, including Germany, had not triumphed. And if we had fought, who is going to say that the Czechs would have gained anything? In fact, who will say that they would not have lost ten thousand times more than they have lost by the Munich agreement?

The Czechs have made as great a sacrifice in the interests of peace as can ever have been made. I do not minimise that sacrifice. It is they who have made peace possible. But do not listen to people who try to bring tears to your eyes and self-condemnation to your heart by talking about our villainy in forsaking the Czechs. Remember the alternative and remember that those who now cry loudest about the "betrayal of a small nation" are those Liberals and Socialists who, ever since 1919, have condemned as futile and immoral the policy which created the Czech frontier in the first place.

If only we could have a General Election now we would show Mr. Chamberlain in whom we put our trust.

MR. CHAMBERLAIN has proved himself a man of action, and I am satisfied that under his leadership, with a unified nation behind him, he could do some of the other things which must be done.

Here are three of the most important: (1) We need a National Register of some sort, which takes stock of the human material available for an emergency and decides beforehand as far as possible how it can most usefully be used. In peace time each individual could train for his emergency duty.

(2) It is time that we accepted the principle that every citizen should, at some time in his life, give his service to the State for a limited period. I am not suggesting compulsory service in the armed forces. But I am suggesting compulsory service in some peaceful work on the land.

(3) I refuse to believe that the unemployment problem is unsolvable. If Germany can reduce her 6,000,000 unemployed to nil, then we can reduce our 1,798,618 to nil, because armament work and fortifications have not absorbed 6,000,000 workers. I do not know how it can be done, and I am sure that it means sacrifices from everyone. But whatever it means it should be done, and could be done, now.

THESE three great tasks should be undertaken forthwith. People are in a mood to accept them now, whereas soon—so soon—they will have sunk back again into a lazy acceptance of the status quo, having forgotten that there ever was a crisis.

AUDION.