

# THE GERMAN CHURCH

## Christ or Hitler?

### A CAUSE FOR ALL CHRISTENDOM

#### "Back to the Bible!"

The measures taken under the superintendence of Herr Hanns Kerrl, the German Minister of Ecclesiastical Affairs, to which Dr. Karl Barth refers, for settling the conflict between the National Socialist State and the "Confessional Church" are briefly as follows:—

All the efforts of the State to impose its totalitarian conceptions on the "Confessional Church" (which represents the Protestant "opposition") having failed, Herr Kerrl took over the management of ecclesiastical finance. The "Confessional Church" thereupon created its own funds. These were confiscated by the State. Herr Kerrl then set up a special department to deal with the conflict. "Ecclesiastical Councils," described as "neutral," were formed to reorganise the Church and bring it under the control of the State.]

By Dr. Karl Barth

The new decrees issued by the German Minister of Ecclesiastical Affairs, Herr Kerrl, represent the most formidable attack that has so far been made on the Church by the National Socialist regime. The attack is directed against the very substance of the Evangelical Church, against the Faith itself. It is for the Faith that the struggle is being waged to-day in the deepest and most decisive sense.

The fundamental question is this: Shall the Church obey the Bible and the Gospels, or shall the doctrine of the "German Christians," the doctrine that Revelation is to be found in the national life ("Volkstum"—Christ and Hitler), have validity?

The doctrine of the "German Christians" represents the final product and the most modern synthesis of a long evolution that has proceeded within the realm of religious thought. The currents of the eighteenth century ("Revelation and Reason"), of the nineteenth century ("Christ and Civilisation"), and of the twentieth century ("Christ and Socialism") have been replaced by "the Gospels and the Nation." The bearers of this last synthesis are the "German Christians," considerable sections of the National Socialist Party, and the "Ecclesiastical Councils" established by Herr Kerrl.

The whole weakness of Protestantism is revealed in the theory of "the Gospels and the Nation" as in those that preceded it, the weakness of a Protestantism that has always sought alliances and coalitions with stronger forces. But why have these things become so perilous only to-day? Why are they such a menace to the Church? The explanation is simple. A disease that is two hundred years old has broken out. The previous theories were subjects of discussion—opinion was set up against opinion. But the "German Christians" have turned their theory into a doctrine. The authority of the State, its power, its propaganda, and its coercion support this doctrine. The Church is thereby called upon to make a decision, and, as the decision concerns the Faith itself, the fight now being waged by the Confessional Church is, to a certain extent, a fight that concerns the destiny of the other Churches in the world.

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Only now has the synthetic procedure adopted by Protestantism in imitation of Roman Catholicism brought its own revenge. Only now do we see a State and a society take up the offensive against the Church. That State and that society will relent only when the Church is ready to submit unconditionally to the doctrine referred to. But the Church will not submit.

#### CHURCH AND STATE

Bound up with the question of doctrine is the other fundamental question—namely: Who is to determine the character of the Church? The Church itself or an alien body? The conviction that it must be the Church itself has not always been as strong as it might have been, even among the German Confessional clergy. And it is precisely the hesitations felt and shown in this respect that have led to much indecision. The lack of inner solidarity in the Confessional Church with regard to this very question has, during the last two years, led to many useless "attempts at mediation" and changes in outward attitude. This weakness also made it possible for the Confessional Church to evade decisions whenever National Socialism found decisions inconvenient because there was tension elsewhere.

But now the Confessional Church knows that it can only *suffer* under National Socialism and that faith in Jesus Christ *and* Adolf Hitler is impossible. The servants of the Church have had to go through a long schooling to achieve this knowledge. But that schooling is now complete. The opponent is recognised and so is the path along which the Church will have to go. The uncertainty that prevailed hitherto has been replaced by a determination that will greatly help to overcome future difficulties.

Two statements that have already been significant in the German religious conflict have only now acquired full significance. The decision reached by the Synod of Barmen in 1934 becomes the axis of the whole struggle to-day. This decision must be quoted afresh, for its significance cannot be overrated: "Christ, as Holy Writ bears witness, is the one Word of God, whom we hear, in whom we trust and confide in life and in death." I insisted that these words be included in the decision of the Synod, and I repeat them when I say "Back to the Bible!"

#### THE ONE STANDPOINT

A certain section of the Confessional Church has complained that when these words were taken up in the decision of the Barmen Synod I imposed "my" theology on the Confessional Church. I did not impose

"my" theology. I feel obliged to state that there are matters in which not a *variety* of standpoints or opinions are of weight but where there can be only *one* standpoint—where there can only be *the* standpoint.

To-day I rejoice that I remained steadfast then.

But there are other words occurring in the history of the German religious conflict that now have the greatest actuality. They have acquired immense significance as the guiding principle of the Confessional Church in the present phase of the struggle. This is the decision of the Dahlem Synod of October, 1934, which, in a certain sense, was the logical development of the Barmen Synod. The words are as follows:—"We submit this, our decision, to the Government of the Reich. We request the Government to take cognisance of this decision and demand recognition that, in matters relating to the Church, to the doctrine and institutions of the Church, the Church alone is called upon to judge and to decide, regardless of the supervisory rights of the State."

With the attack of the National Socialist regime on the very substance of the Church these decisions of the Confessional Church must become the unalterable guiding principle in all the actions of the Church.

In Germany there is a younger generation of theologians who are ready for the fight. Herr Kerrl will bother them, he will try to paralyse them, he will persecute them—but, nevertheless, he will not with his methods and his brown and black hordes win the fight.

The Church will not retreat before these oppressions. The Confessional Church will continue to exist. It will, to the astonishment of all timid and cautious persons, always be present, despite persecution, oppression, and terrorism. Perhaps the Confessional Church has not been consolidated outwardly—but inwardly it has been consolidated. We cannot tell as yet what outward forms the Church will be forced to adopt under the pressure of National Socialism, but we do know that the German Confessional Church will certainly be steadfast in all tribulations.

#### AN APPEAL TO ENGLAND

I have said that the struggle of this Church is not a German ecclesiastical struggle. All other Churches can draw their conclusions from this fact. The most decisive help which, for example, the English Church can render the struggling German Church is to recognise that this struggle *has now become an absolute necessity*. As long as English Churchmen are only interested in the struggle of the Confessional Church because it is a struggle against Hitler and against National Socialism no help is possible, for the Confessional Church cannot derive assistance from political emotions. But if the English Church will understand that the cause of the German Confessional Church is the cause of the whole Christian world, then help is indeed possible.

Let us assume that matters come to a head. The English Church need then do no more than declare that "The Faith of the German Confessional Church is our Faith also, the cause of the Confessional Church is our cause also." The effect of such a declaration and the help it would give would be great indeed. Such a declaration of solidarity would be the strongest aid that could come to the Confessional Church in its struggle. But it must be a declaration made in community of faith. If this community does not exist, it would be but a pious mumbling, for true intercession can only come of a profound community of faith.

Perhaps it will be said that I am trying to inflict "my" theology on England, just as it was said that I tried to inflict it on the Barmen Synod. But I repeat—it is not true, for I speak not of *my* standpoint but of *the* standpoint. If this standpoint is present, then the community of faith is present—and messages and declarations of solidarity achieve their highest value.

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That this community of faith be attained is my strong hope in consideration of the cause for which the German Confessional Church is fighting. That cause is the cause of all Evangelical Christendom.

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## RAN INTO FRONT OF LORRY

A verdict of accidental death was returned yesterday at an inquest held by the Montgomeryshire District Coroner on a three-year-old child who was knocked down and killed by a motor-lorry. The child was Margaret Sadie Moseley, daughter of William Thomas Moseley, a bus-driver, of Belmont, Penygoen.

Mabel Moseley, the mother, said whilst she was in a shop the child's attention was attracted by some passing cows. She ran out. The witness saw a lorry swerve, and the child dead on the road.

The driver, Joseph Daden Stretton, of Earl Street, Crewe, said he had driven from Stoke that day, leaving about noon, and reaching Penygoen—80 miles away—about four o'clock. He had not made any stop on the way and had not touched alcoholic drink for three weeks. He slowed down to about twenty miles an hour on seeing a warning sign about three hundred yards from the scene of the accident.

The witness saw the cows going down a lane opposite to where some children were standing. A little girl ran across the road directly in the path of the lorry, and the witness had no chance to avoid her, although he swerved in an attempt to do so. The witness added that he had been driving for eleven years and had a clean sheet.

Police Sergeant John Davies, Machynlleth, said there were no paths on either side of the road. After making inquiries the witness was satisfied that the lorry was driven with due care and attention and that it was under proper control.

The jury exonerated the driver from all blame.

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## MARITIME TRAINING

### Hull's Claim as Examination Centre

Hull City Council yesterday passed a resolution requesting the Board of Trade to reinstate Hull as an examination centre for maritime candidates.

The Lord Mayor (Alderman F. Till) said unnecessary hardship was caused to candidates by compelling them to go to Newcastle or other centres for the examination when there were all the facilities available at Hull. It necessitated financial assistance in many cases and it was causing a serious reduction in the number of students for maritime training. Hull was the third port of the United Kingdom.