

CONCERNING THE PROTESTANT CHURCH IN GERMANY¹

It was in 1937 that one of the Gestapo-men who were then questioning me asked whether the Protestant Church was not in full collaboration with the Catholic Church. When I denied this, he insisted that one of our ministers had made that statement at a certain meeting. As I had attended that meeting myself, I pointed out that he had only spoken about the unprecedented friendliness that existed between the Churches, but not about collaboration. 'And what is the reason for these extraordinary good relations?' I could not help asking. 'It is that both Churches to-day have to defend the same thing, viz. the world beyond.'

I remember another, very different experience. In the winter of 1928-29 I was the only non-Catholic to address a Catholic conference at Boppard, on the Rhine, one of the other speakers being Dr. Brüning, shortly to be Chancellor of the Reich.

For two reasons the struggle of the Church of Christ against Nazism has been different from any other. In the first place the Church no longer suffers passively as during the times of persecution even down to that of Bolshevism, but has passed from the defensive to the attack. Secondly, the enemy in so far as he makes his appearance within the Protestant Church itself—the 'German Christians'—does not represent a new heresy but the old rationalistic ones, though joined to the political power. Thus the Church in Germany is fighting neither against sects nor against the State, but against a combination of both, which we call the 'heretical State.'

It was above all Martin Niemöller who from the beginning denounced the State of the Nazis as the Kingdom of Antichrist. It is governed by a multitude of spiritual sorcerers and magicians, false prophets and demagogues. To-day the Church of Christ fights against the transformation of State and people into a gigantic lunatic asylum, she fights against St. Paul's 'wickedness in the high places'—one of the most frequently quoted passages in the Protestant Church conflict. This is why Hitler fears Niemöller so much, the man who wrote the fight against this Kingdom of Antichrist upon

¹ Dr. Ehrenberg, who is a pastor of the Evangelical Church in Germany and has known and suffered with Niemöller, has kindly consented to give these details of one aspect of the struggle of his Church against Nazism.

his banner. It is true, the Nazis know how to honour courage, and have treated him accordingly—I was told this by a hardened S.S.-man when, during the winter of 1938-39, I was for several months in the same concentration camp. But they did not dare to free him from his solitary confinement, since he would have become the virtual commander of the whole camp. A health visitor of the camp, a thorough atheist, called him a man of iron.

But the Church resists, 'obeying God rather than men.' She resists in her members who sacrifice honour and possessions. She resists, further, by accusing. In an unending flood of moral and religious accusations she denounces the destruction wrought by the Nazis. She resists by condemning, of which more later on. She resists in exorcising evil spirits, this in cases of conscious blasphemy. Yes, she 'overcomes evil with good,' without hatred, but also without kindness *à la* Buchman of the Group Movement, but it 'rather gives place unto wrath' of God (Rom. xii, 19).

Since the nineteenth century the Protestant Church, less protected by an authoritative Church Government than the Church of Rome, had been undermined by the modernist spirit of the times. Yet it had never been wholly without its doctrinal tradition and had experienced a steady theological and, later, ecclesiastical restoration, especially during and after the Great War. Thus, when it was attacked by false teachers in the shape of the 'German Christians,' it had to defend not only its outer but also its inner front from the Church Quislings, the enemies of the Church within the Church. It was then that the Church experienced the truth of our Lord's words: 'When they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak; for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak' (Matt. x, 19). The Church could deploy all its forces and train its soldiers in a unique way—and when the Nazis awoke to the fact, they could not regain the lost territory.

But have not the Nazis done immense damage to the Church in Germany as well as in other countries? Yes, indeed, the more so as the Church had just then been developing certain external activities such as social services, etc. They have done damage also in the sphere of education which had slipped from the Church to the State already in the Liberal period. But despite all damage—which is not irremediable—Hitler has also done the Church an immense service. The Modernism in the Protestant Church, already shaken, disappeared at the first blow. Its remaining representatives fled into the camp of the Nazis, *i.e.* to the 'German Christians.' In an instant the whole doctrinal tradition of the Protestant Church, consisting of the old creeds and the confessions of faith of the Reformation,

were resurrected, and apart from slight tensions and certain differences between Lutheran and Calvinist traditions, the Church attained to the unity necessary for the struggle. It found its expression in the *Reichssynoden* of the Confessional Church. In this ecclesiastical way the ministry and the congregation were always called together, so that the old competition between the professional and lay priesthood, which had been a bone of contention in the Protestant Church, ceased to exist. This was a great boon for the ministerial consciousness; ordination regained its old significance, and the congregation recognised that it profited by this renewal of the divine office. Thus the Church as Church experienced a renewal from below as well as from above, though this must not be compared to a pietist revival. The 'cloud of witnesses' increased, for there are now thousands and thousands of Niemoellers in Germany.

A Church that has witnessed in its clergy and laity is alive. Where, before Hitler, the Church had almost been dead, it began to come to life again. Empty churches in middle and northern Germany were filled as many of those that had apostatised recognised that the real Church was totally different from the one they had known before. Indeed, every member experienced the danger and shame of the Cross, he experienced that he was called to bear witness, he experienced the simple reality of the Church as the Body of Christ. We know what the Church in Germany has lost through the persecution and that especially most of the leading classes and of the younger generation have turned away from it. We know that the Church has lost its direct influence on public life, but by way of compensation Hitler has forced it to become more 'spiritual,' to believe in her full power, and to trust in her Head alone, and so to gain new though indirect power on public life. Some of those in other countries who do not understand the Church conflict have blamed the Confessional Church for its reserve in the matter of politics. We know, however, that our fight became the more political the more it kept away from politics. This is the consequence of the enemy being the 'Heretical State.'

The blessings resulting from the Church conflict were for many of us fighters so overwhelming that in some cases it became a temptation to prefer the state of war to that of peace. Indeed, at the present time Germany is being more and more purged of all religious indifferentism and developing into a country where one is either a convinced Christian or a fanatical neo-pagan. The Nazis, bound to the iron law of their ideology and its consequences, cannot recover what they missed at the beginning. Thus Hitler has lost the religious battle once and for all. From time to time, it is true, he has

uttered threats of founding a totally new Church, the Church of the so-called 'God-believers' (so the Nazis who have left the Church call themselves). This is the Church of the new pagans, or, better, of the precursor of Antichrist, the Church of the apostates and false prophets whose creed is: 'God is God and Adolf Hitler is his prophet,' which we of the Confessional Church call the 'Christ-less,' magic Nazi religion. But this Church will always remain a paper threat. The Nazis have neither strength nor unanimity enough to carry it out. For they, too, are descendants of modernism and rationalism. And I am convinced that Hitler could devastate only one generation of German youth, and even that not without exceptions. The next generation will probably be un-Christian, but in some degree amenable to missionary efforts. Only then will the Protestant Church of Germany be confronted with the question whether it has preserved the fruit granted to it in the time of conflict. The promise given to the Church for this coming time does not only rest on the blessing of the struggle, but also on the spiritual fact that in the Kingdom of God upon earth the future is not only determined by the youth. It is also affected by those whom the world, *i.e.* the Nazis, think harmless: the old woman and the weak, the sick and the lowly, the unwise and the powerless, those whom the Nazis allowed to keep their Christianity because they regard it as the false religion of the weak and the foolish. Through their faith there will in time to come be again a Christian youth in Protestant Germany.

The Church struggle has been called a rearguard action of the Church. Certainly, such it is, but from its beginning it is, at the same time, an attack. In my parsonage, before the open outbreak of the struggle, shortly before Whitsun 1933, the first confession of faith was drafted on the lines of the Confessional Church which was soon to come into being (*Confession of Westphalian Pastors*, printed in 'Die Bekenntnisse des Jahres 1933' by Professor K. D. Schmidt, pp. 33-35). Afterwards Niemoeller, native of Westphalia, then in Berlin, signed the Confession. Both of us, Niemoeller and I, had been ordained almost simultaneously ministers of the Church in Westphalia in 1942; he was then thirty, I forty years of age. I cite the fourth paragraph of the confession, headed 'Of false doctrine and blasphemies.'

1. 'We condemn, besides the old errors (such as Baptists, Donatists, Adventists, Pentecostists, etc.), the new error concerning the first article of the Creed (*i.e.* the Nazi Race Religion), and declare: All peoples and races are under the curse which rests upon everything natural. No people (Volkstum) redeems itself out of the depths of its being, for the depravity reaches into the depth. In the same

way we condemn all ecclesiastical pronouncements on the order of creation and the Law of God which are made apart from the Gospel—they originate in the same error.

2. 'We condemn the devaluation of Scripture according to moral points of view and the exemplarity (*Vorbildlichkeit*) of the Biblical historical matter. The Bible is not a book of ideals, but of the realities of sin and the promise of grace, and does not admit of any eclectic principle through which the unity of the word of Revelation of the Old and New Testaments would be endangered.

3. 'We condemn all minimising in the statements on Christ's work of Redemption because we acknowledge the full substitution of Christ, the shame of the Cross, and the humiliation of sinful man, through the mercy of Christ. Clericalism, and idealistic ideology of mediation, the racial Christianity (*artgemaesses Christentum*), the slogan of the German Christians—blaspheme grace by minimising it.

4. 'We condemn the Church's fear of teaching the doctrine and work of Christ. If the Church does not exercise its doctrinal office it loses the present and eternity at the same time, gives itself over to the State, and is guilty of the inner death of its congregations and their members.

5. 'We condemn as Liberalism all mixing and confusion of the function of the Church with the function of the State: In the same way do we condemn as Liberalism the equation of the mission to the Jews with that to the Gentiles for the sake of the eschatological position of Israel, and condemn the splitting of the Church which wants to separate the Jewish Christian from the Church of the Gentile Christians.²

'Lastly, we condemn the claim of the State to be totalitarian, which has its roots in the liberalist-idealistic false doctrine of the State (Fichte, Hegel, Marx).'

Nazism is thoroughly perverted Christianity. There has never been a challenge of the Church like that, never.

In the concentration camp where I had to live without the least bit of the visible Church I felt that all the words of Scripture threatened to leave me. Yet I still heard One Voice saying: Follow Me.

The enemies of Christianity have the same experience from the other side. For however much they may drive Christianity back to the catacombs, they always meet its power in their own sphere. And Satan becomes infuriated when he feels that though he may be able to imprison the Church he is even then encircled by the Church, and

² Two small parts of this paragraph have been omitted because they are to-day rather difficult to understand.

wherever he may turn he meets Christ and Christ's members. For we are living in a post-Christian world and in as much as the neo-pagan is worse than the old heathen, so the position of the revealed religion of the Triune God is more powerful than it was in the beginning of Christianity.

Thus though Christendom be filled with unspeakable grief for the millions of lost and reprobate who have yielded to the modern temptation, yet so much brighter shines forth the glory of the grace of the Lamb of God who alone is 'worthy to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honour and praise and glory.'

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THE LITURGICAL MOVEMENT IN GERMANY

TOWARDS the close of the nineteenth century Ernest Renan wrote: 'I have studied Germany and believed I entered a temple. All I have found there is pure, elevated, moral, beautiful and moving. O my soul, it is a treasure indeed, it is the continuation of Jesus Christ. Their morality fills me with admiration, how sweet and how strong they are! I believe that Christ will come to us from there.' What he meant by 'Christ' was: 'A pure cult, a religion without priests and without exterior practices, resting entirely on the heart's feelings, on the imitation of God, on the immediate relation of our conscience with the Heavenly Father . . . Jesus founded religion in humanity as Socrates philosophy . . . Jesus founded absolute religion, excluding nothing, determining nothing except the sentiment.' That is one of the strong currents which Germany sent into the maelstrom of modern European civilisation. Kant, Hegel, Strauss, Baur, Goethe were the sources.

In 1936 Abbot Ildefons Herwegen spent four weeks in Italy. In an audience the late Pope said that he had himself been able to establish that liturgical life in Germany was on the increase, and that this was a strong support for Holy Church in these days of strife and suffering. And this is another current of which Maria-Laach is the source.

Europe is one. Its unity is not an opposition of races and nations overcome by commercial, diplomatic or cultural contacts. It is one