

ESTABLISHMENT OF A UNITED GERMAN PROTESTANT
CHURCH AND PROMULGATION OF THE CONSTITUTION
OF THIS NEW CHURCH.

Memorandum
prepared by
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DEVELOPMENT OF THE CHURCH CONFLICT AFTER THE INSTALMENT OF
STATE COMMISSIONERS.

The conflict between the twenty-eight Protestant church organizations in Germany and the Hitler Government regarding the establishment of a United Protestant Church for all Germany has come, at least outwardly, with the promulgation of the Constitution of the new German Protestant Church which took place on July 15, 1933, to a satisfactory conclusion.

When, as was reported in despatch No. 1418 of July 10, 1933, from this Consulate General, the Prussian Minister of Culture, Rust, appointed a head commissioner for the Prussian Protestant Churches, this was greeted by a storm of protest from the great mass of the clergy as well as from the majority of those who have always taken active interest in church matters. The public press which is entirely controlled by the present regime published only small items indicating the real sentiment among the Protestants. On the other hand most of the press articles contained enthusiastic approval from members of National Socialist organizations. The principal National Socialist spiritual organization, the "German Christians" was so besieged with applications for membership that it had to close its ranks to new admissions. Most of these applications were, however, made by people who, as in-

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licated by Reverend Dr. Schowalter in an article in the "Berliner Tageblatt" of July 14, 1933, never had seriously interested themselves in church matters before or even had seen the inside of a church for years.

As was to be expected the appointment of state commissioners for the Prussian Churches did not end the National Socialist onslaught on the Protestant Churches. On June 28, Army Corps Chaplain Müller, Hitler's representative and plenipotentiary in Church matters, assumed leadership over the German Federation of Protestant Churches and appointed sub-commissioners for nearly all of the Protestant Church organizations outside of Prussia. All of the state commissioners including those appointed by the head commissioners for Prussia, attorney-at-law Jäger, were members of the radical National Socialist religious organizations, that is, the "German Christians", whose aims and methods were explained in previous despatches of this Consulate General. At the critical moment, on June 30, the President of the Reich, von Hindenburg, after a personal conversation with Chancellor Hitler, addressed a long letter to Hitler in which the veteran President made a strong plea for a settlement of the dispute agreeable to both the National Socialists and the conservative Church elements. The President said in his letter:

"Numerous telegrams and letters addressed to me show that the Evangelical Christians of Germany are deeply stirred by these conflicts and by anxiety for the inner freedom of the Church. From the continuance, let alone the exacerbation of these conditions the gravest damage must result to our people and to the fatherland, as well as injury to our national unity.

From my discussions of these questions with you, yesterday, I know that you, Herr Chancellor, have

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the fullest understanding of these anxieties and are prepared to cooperate toward reconciling these oppositions".

This letter which was the President's first important intervention since the advent of Hitler's Government offered Hitler an excellent chance to suppress in part the over zealous "Gleichschaltung" efforts of the German Christians. The danger was indeed considerable that nationalistic enthusiasm would do irreparable harm to what is termed "the most difficult and delicate problem with which the leaders of the new regime have as yet been confronted". The interference of innumerable Government appointed and also self-appointed "commissioners" in private enterprises, the forced coordination (Gleichschaltung) of various industrial associations, as also the dismissal of Hugenberg and his capitalist followers, had created many severe critics of the National Socialist regime so that the talk of a "second revolution" was at its height. At this moment Hitler and his advisors did not deem it expedient to add to the many critics of his economical policy also powerful adversaries in a spiritual matter. Hitler, therefore, answered Hindenburg's appeal for a peaceable settlement of the church conflict in a most conciliatory manner, assuring the President that the State would bring no further pressure to bear and that the work of establishing a United Protestant Church would be completed in a very short time.

The work of drawing up the constitution of the German Protestant Church progressed rapidly and on July 12th the representatives of the Federation met in the Federal Ministry of the Interior and through the mouth of Rev. Dr.

Marahrens

Marahrens proclaimed the new constitution. The document does not differ very much from the draft constitution originally prepared by the three representatives of the Church on June 3, 1933. This may be taken as a proof of the fact that the German Christian state commissioners did not bring pressure to bear, at least, on the drawing up of the constitution. Only in the haste with which the usually slow moving church apparatus worked in this special case was political pressure noticeable. The principal authors of the constitution are: Dr. Kepler, Dr. Marahrens and Dr. Hesse, the three men chosen as representatives of the 28 German Protestant Churches joined in the Federation of German Protestant Churches. The constitution of the United German Protestant Church was accepted unanimously and bears the signatures of the representatives of each of the 28 German Protestant Churches and also the signatures of the Commissioner Jäger and Hitler's representative, Rev. Müller. With the signing of the constitution the State commissioners were withdrawn.

THE CONSTITUTION OF THE UNITED GERMAN PROTESTANT CHURCH.

In conformity with the overwhelming majority of all German Protestants the newly founded German Protestant Church has chiefly lutheran characteristics, i.e. the office of a Federal Bishop is set up. (Bishops are entirely unknown to the Presbyterian constitutions of the Reformed Churches). However, the independence of the Reformed creed is fully guaranteed and the same rights and privileges are conceded to its believers.

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The 28 regional churches which are now united in the German Protestant Church retain their identity. A certain number of small adjoining church organizations, similar in character and structure may be united; but the majority of the existing church organizations is to remain. Their position of full independence, however, disappears. Whereas in the Federation of German Protestant Churches, the predecessor of the German Protestant Church, the different regional Churches were loosely joined to an interconfessional organization with very limited powers, in the German Protestant Church the regional Churches are only districts of one united Church. The German Protestant Church has the right to issue guiding regulations according to which the regional Churches must draw up their constitutions; so that the constitutional conformity between the different churches is assured. The guiding regulations must not, however, interfere with any belief peculiar to a regional Church.

Aside from the differences of creed existing between the different regional Churches there are reasons of cultural and political nature why the federative system has been adhered to. As compared to the universal uniformity of Catholicism the ability of Protestantism to adjust itself to local cultural conditions has been a certain advantage. The regional State Churches in Germany have in four hundred years of development adjusted themselves to local cultural peculiarities and a severing of these bonds would greatly weaken these Churches. Besides German Protestantism has in the past been an important

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political bond between Germany and other central European countries in which there is a strong body of Protestants. In fact this is probably the only bond between Germany and these countries, which, in these troubled times, still exists. Such States are Finland, the Baltic States, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Switzerland.

To the Germans living outside of the German borders, both as racial minorities in neighboring States and as emigrants in other continents, German Protestantism has been one of the most important connecting links with the Fatherland. These German Protestants outside of Germany are not connected with German Protestantism in general, but have through historical development maintained specially strong relations to one or the other of the regional Churches, mostly with the Reformed ones. They would certainly mistrust dealing with a Central Protestant Church savouring of State and especially National Socialist control, but would continue collaborating with the regional Churches.

Leading officers of the different regional Churches are to be appointed only after getting in touch with the central authorities of the German Protestant Church

RELATION OF CHURCH AND STATE.

A remarkable change of attitude is noticed in all articles of the constitution dealing with the relation between State and Church. The Church is to abandon its neutral attitude towards the State and is to actively cooperate with the State in educating the youth and administering to the spiritual needs of the nation. Never-

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theless the new Church is not a State Church. All fears that the State would impose its sovereignty also over Church institutions and the Church creed for the moment seem dispelled. The independence of the German Protestant Church is guaranteed by the constitution. The only authority which the Church, according to the constitution, need acknowledge is the Gospel as is laid down in the Scriptures.

One of the principal effects of the establishment of a United German Protestant Church is that now the State has to deal only with one representation of German Protestantism, and that the treaties between the Church and the State will not any longer be concluded with a big number of large and small Churches, having diverging interests, but with one German Protestant Church. Hitler has frequently expressed the viewpoint that he would prefer dealing with one Protestant Church just like he can deal with one Catholic Church. It is self-evident that from a political viewpoint this is of greatest importance. The educating of the youth to National Socialist ideals can, according to many National Socialists only be accomplished with the assistance of the Church, and it will be easier for the State to gain control over one Church than over twenty-eight.

NO RACIAL DISCRIMINATION IN THE GERMAN PROTESTANT CHURCH.

Much to the chagrin of the German Christians the constitution contains no clause excluding Non-Aryans from the German Protestant Church. The "Völkische Beobachter", official organ of the National Socialist Party rather lamely excuses this omission. It says in its edition of July 13th:

"As the new German Protestant Church is not a State Church, the constitution contains no clause excluding Non-Aryans. The exclusion of Non-Aryans

is a national necessity, the constitution of the New Church is determined by the Gospel and follows religious necessities. This does not mean that the influence of a strange race especially among the leaders of the Church may not be combated. Racial purity among the Church leaders can only be attained by carefully selecting the candidates for the theological calling. This is the point regarding which the Protestantism of the entire world especially that of the Anglican countries must try to understand i.e. the historic will and the Christian earnestness of German Protestantism."

This is clearly a defeat of the German Christians. A defeat which may not be considered final, because it is the very essence of National Socialism to try to bring all temporal and spiritual organizations under its control. A conflict with both the Protestant and the Catholic Church is certain to arise when the National Socialistic Government, as is a part of the program, issues racial and eugenic marriage laws directed principally against marriages between Jews and Germans. Race discrimination in marriage is contrary to the doctrines of both the Catholic and the Protestant Church and it would be the end of independent religion if the Churches would in this matter bow to the State.

THE ORGANIZATION OF THE GERMAN PROTESTANT CHURCH.

The new Church consists of the following principal elements:

- I A Federal Bishop
- II A Spiritual Cabinet
- III A National Synod
- IV Advisory Chambers

The Federal Bishop: At the head of the Church is a Federal Bishop of the Lutheran faith. He is to personify the unity of the spiritual life of the regional Churches and is to

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insure a uniform leadership of the German Protestant Church. At regular intervals he is to confer with the leading officers of the regional churches. The Federal Bishop appoints and dismisses the officers of the German Protestant Church. (Art. 6 Par. 1 and 2).

The spiritual leadership of the Federal Bishop finds its expression in the fact that he is entitled to undertake all spiritual ministrations. He is entitled to preach, to make proclamations in the name of the German Protestant Church and to prescribe special penitential and festival services (Art. 6.3)

The principles of leadership, i.e. the principle that one leader is responsible for the whole of the organization entrusted in his care, which is one of the leading principles of National Socialism, has been included in the Church constitution. The powers conferred upon the Federal Bishop are the most far reaching ever conferred upon a German Protestant prelate. Also in accordance with the principles of leadership there is the stipulation that the Federal Bishop is not to be elected but is to be proposed by the heads of the regional Churches in conjunction with the Spiritual Ministry and thereupon appointed by the National Synod. Of course, everything hinges on the personality of the Federal Bishop; and no prophecy regarding the future course of the German Protestant Church can be made until he is finally appointed.

THE SPIRITUAL CABINET

The Federal Bishop is assisted by a Spiritual Cabinet which, under the leadership of the Federal Bishop, directs the German Protestant Church and issues Church laws. The

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members of the Spiritual Cabinet are appointed by the Federal Bishop. The Spiritual Cabinet consists of three theological members and one member learned in law. The three theological members represent the three creeds united in the Protestant Church, viz.; the Lutheran, the Reformed, and the United creeds. The members of the Cabinet educated in law hold the office of legal adviser of the Evangelical Church of the Old Prussian Union which is the largest of the regional Churches. This is a similar measure as has been adopted in the Reich where also a member of the Federal Cabinet (Minister Goering) serves as liaison officer to the Prussian Cabinet.

THE NATIONAL SYNOD.

The parliamentary idea of representation has through the events of the past two years been much discredited in the eyes of the German people. It was therefore to be expected that the parliamentary idea would be contained in the New Church constitution only in a very diluted form. The representative body of the German Protestant Church is the National Synod and consists of 60 members of which two thirds are delegated by the regional Churches out of their synods. The remaining third of the members of the National Synod will be appointed by the German Protestant Church out of a number of persons who have rendered especially valuable services to the Church. The exact details of this procedure and the distribution of the regional Church is to be regulated by a special church law. The members of the National Synod hold office for six years. The National Synod must convene at least once annually.

The constitution provides that all young and active

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forces within the German Protestant Church shall be given special consideration in the forming of the National Synod. This may be taken as an indication that the German Christians will be prominently represented in the National Synod, no matter how church elections should turn out.

ADVISORY CHAMBERS.

The fourth institution of the new Church, the advisory chambers are to collect all the constructive and vital powers in the Protestant Church and give them the possibility to cooperate creatively in helping the Church fulfill its duty to people and State. The advisory chambers are to advise and assist the Spiritual Cabinet in all matters where an intimate knowledge of a special subject is necessary, and they are to be a sensitive medium between the Spiritual Cabinet and the current of opinion among the Church members. How the advisory chambers are constituted and how they are to function is not stated in the constitution. Most likely they will be chambers for the religious education of the youth, social welfare, church law, etc. etc.

THE CHURCH ELECTION.

The principal condition under which the National Socialist Government permitted the Protestant Churches to found a United Protestant Church alone and without interference was that the representative bodies of all the 28 regional Churches should be newly elected. The National Socialist hoped that their protégés "The German Christians" would receive a majority in these elections and that they thereby could get the German Protestant Church under their control. The representative bodies of the Evangelical Church of the Old Prussian Union, the largest of the German Protestant Churches, are

- 1) State Synod
- 2) Provincial Synods
- 3) District Synods
- 4) Parish Councils.

In the Evangelical Church of the Old Prussian Union only the lowest representative body, the Parish Council, is directly elected by the Church people; the higher representative bodies are indirect forms of representation and are elected by the members of the next lowest representative bodies. In a few of the 28 regional Churches also the higher bodies are directly elected; but this is not the rule.

The election of new Parish Councils took place on Sunday, July 23, 1933, all over Germany. Only two lists of candidates were submitted to the voters. The one ticket was that of the National Socialist "German Christians", the other was the ticket supported by the majority of the clergy which bore the name "Gospel and Church". In the ticket "Gospel and Church" not only the conservative Church elements were united but also the young intellectually and socially inclined group called the "Young Reformers", which is very powerful among the religious youth. In the ticket "Gospel and Church" all those groups were united which desired to keep the Church independent from the State and especially from National Socialism. The position of the ticket "Gospel and Church" was from the start very difficult, as everything that in any way smacks of opposition to National Socialism is nowadays looked upon with suspicion. In many sections of the country the pressure was so strong that the ticket "Gospel and Church" was swallowed up by

the "German Christians" and a so-called "United ticket" was formed which made a vote unnecessary. The press was completely at the disposal of the "German Christians" and in the press campaign which preceded the elections Hitler's representatives, Chaplain Müller and Jäger, the former Prussian Commissioners, violently attacked those opposed to the "German Christians". On June 16, the former Commissioner Jäger published a proclamation in the press in which he declared:

"The National Socialist State could not suffer that large sections of German spiritual life be hostile or even neutral toward the National Socialist State. The National Socialist State must be a "Total State" that is all things whether spiritual or material must be subordinated to the National Socialist idea. This does not mean that the National Socialist State wishes to rule religious life by its laws but it desires that the Church wholly affirms the existence and necessity of this State. While respecting the right of spiritual groups to have their own laws all spiritual groups must unite within the State as a higher unit."

Army Corps Chaplain Müller expressed himself similarly and even more sharply:

"One should not let oneself be deceived, reactionary forces are at work. Many signs prove that representatives of a churchdom that is strange to the German people believe the time has come to stop the marvellous spirit which has advanced the work of Church reform in these last days for what these reactionaries call their "conscience sake".

Conservative leaders of the Protestant Church have been attacked in the press. For instance in the National Socialist organ the "Voelkische Beobachter" of July 17th the high ranking and greatly esteemed Protestant Prelate Rev. Doctor Dibelius was denounced as a man who, when he spoke of the Church meant his own job and Church bureaucracy. The article quoted a recent sermon of Rev. Dibelius

in which he is supposed to have said that the leaders of the present Government are immature in their thinking and that the Governmen wanted to rob Christ of his godliness and make of him a nordic superman, etc. Dr. Dibelius furthermore is supposed to have declared that the Church did not know the idea "nation", the Church exists for all peoples. Under Government pressure the Church goes patiently along its way of suffering but the battle against its oppressors goes on. "Fight" is the watchword. Whosoever is for godly Jesus Christ should give the Government on election day the right answer..

In commenting on the sermon the "Voelkische Beobachter" said that

"Luther was a man untouched by the disease of cosmopolitanism. He was German to the last. Luther must be understood as a man of his time; to-day he would speak differently. Men like Dr. Dibelius had lost the right to identify themselves with Dr. Martin Luther. The great idea of the reformation suffered an interruption with the death of Luther".

This violent press campaign was accompanied by a distribution of street pamphlets and "chorus-speaking" in the courts in which it was advocated to "kick the Jews out of the Protestant Church". The National Socialists ordered their Protestant party members to vote en masse. Several educated people who had voted for the German Christians reported that they did not know what the whole election was about, they had merely been told to do so.

GERMAN CHRISTIANS WIN ELECTION.

As was to be expected under the circumstances the German Christians piled up a tremendous vote and now hold a two-thirds majority in the Churches in nearly all parts of Germany. The participation was many times greater than

that of former Church elections. Many highly respected old Church leaders (also Dr. Dibelius) have already resigned. Many of those who had voted had not seen the inside of a Church since the day of their confirmation. (This fact was reported confidentially from a very reliable source).

OUTLOOK

The elections have given the National Socialists full power over the German Protestant Church and they will certainly try to throw off the bonds which the new Church constitution has imposed upon them. When the power of the National Socialists is more consolidated it is fairly certain that action against baptized Jews will be taken. Many baptized Jews in Berlin have received by mail from unknown persons the printed forms which are used to give notice of withdrawal from a Church community. That discrimination between so-called Aryans and Non-Aryans is bound to cause a conflict of conscience in the heart of many an upright Protestant Minister can well be imagined. Only under coercion will the majority of the clergy teach the fanatical racial doctrines of the National Socialists. The fear of losing ^{their} means of livelihood, which under the present economic condition in German is the most dreaded thing that can happen to an individual, is forcing man a Protestant minister to act directly contrary to his conscience.

The coordination of the Church with the idea of National Socialism will cause many conflicts. In the agricultural sections of Germany, especially Pommerania and Slesvig-Holstein the Protestant Church is indissolvably connected with the members of the former (conservative) German National Party. The suppression of this party has roused much

opposition

opposition among the Protestant clergy of these districts; and the pastors have not been afraid of attacking the Government from the pulpit. In the big Berlin Protestant Parishes (Steglitz, Friedenau, Charlottenburg) the pastors have up to this day denounced the radical policy of the Government from the pulpit and National Socialist storm-troops have disturbed the Church services.

Why the clergy is combatting the "National Socialization" of the Churches with such vigour is in part explained if it be remembered that the Reformation was the commencement of political and spiritual liberalism. The fear is therefore great that the Government, by destroying liberalism in all its forms, will in the end also destroy the Protestant Church. National Socialism which in itself is a kind of religion will try to supplant all real religion. According to the "Basel National Zeitung" of July 18, the danger that Protestantism will be degraded to which is at best a pan-nordic mysticism is very great. The same paper points out that one need not look far to find evidence that the National Socialists contemplate such a religion. The official program of the National Socialists (written by the present Secretary of State in the Ministry of Economics, Gottfried Feder) contains as one of its chief points the demand that:

"the German people should have a form of perceiving and experiencing God that their nordic blood demands".

It finally should not be forgotten that certain National Socialist circles still entertain the plan of welding the Catholic and Protestant religion together into a single German belief and thus to unite religions just as they did political parties.