

NO. 1647

AMERICAN CONSULATE GENERAL,

Berlin, Germany, October 10, 1933.

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SUBJECT: With reference to the closing of the
Christian Science societies in Thuringia.

STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL.

THE HONORABLE

THE SECRETARY OF STATE,

WASHINGTON.

SIR:

I have the honor to refer to the Department's telegram of September 25, 6 p.m. to the Embassy, to the effect that according to the Washington representative of the Christian Science Monitor, the Thuringian Government at Weimar has dissolved and prohibited the free Christian Scientists Union and has confiscated its property and funds. The Department instructs the Embassy to investigate and submit a telegraphic report.

The Embassy referred to this Consulate General the Department's telegram and I immediately requested Mr. Busser, the Consul at Leipzig, to ask the Thuringian authorities for a report. This report has now been received from him and I am transmitting with the original of this despatch, copies of letters from Mr. Busser dated October 5 and October 6, which are self-explanatory. I have also sent to the Embassy copies of these letters. The Department will note from Consul Busser's letters

that

that the Christian Science societies in Thuringia were closed by an order of the Thuringian Government.

For background and as of interest to the Department, I have to give the following further information. Before I received the Department's telegram of September 25, 6 p.m. from the Embassy, the correspondent in Berlin of the Christian Science Monitor, Mr. Williams, had already been in touch with me to say that he had received information to the effect that the Christian Science establishments in Weimar, Jena, Greiz and Zeulenroda had been closed by the Thuringian authorities and the property and records, including the cash, confiscated. Mr. Williams stated that there were no Americans connected with the establishments and that he was merely giving me the information for my background. I asked him to keep me advised of developments and he stated that he had had word from London that Lord Astor, Mr. Tennant and Mr. Braithwaite would be over from London to look into the situation. On the same day that I received the Department's telegram of September 25 from the Embassy inquiring into the status of the matter, I lunched at their request with Lord Astor and Mr. Tennant. They were greatly exercised over the situation and felt that the closing of the establishments in Thuringia might only be the beginning of general action against the Christian Science establishments in Germany. I assured them that there was considerable reason to believe that their supposition was correct. They asked me whether our Government was taking any official

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action. Lord Astor had been to see the Ambassador that morning, and I told him that so far as our instructions were concerned we would have to confine our action for the present to merely inquiring into the situation. I stated, however, that if I had an opportunity in an entirely unofficial and personal way to speak about the matter to the appropriate German authorities, I would be glad to do so.

It so happened that on the afternoon of September 26 Mr. Geist of the staff of the Consulate General was calling on Staatssecretar Dr. Grauert of the Prussian Ministry of the Interior on another matter. I suggested to Mr. Geist that if he had the opportunity to bring up the question of the Christian Science societies in a personal and entirely unofficial manner, it might be well to do so. As this Consulate General has very close and satisfactory contact with Staatssecretar Dr. Grauert who is one of the most powerful instruments as well as one of the most trusted aides of Minister President Goering, it is frequently possible for us to discuss matters with him in an unofficial and very helpful way. Mr. Geist reported after his interview that he had seen Staatssecretar Dr. Grauert and after completing his business had mentioned the closing of the Christian Science societies in Thuringia in a friendly and unofficial way. Mr. Geist said to Dr. Grauert that the closing of the societies had come to his attention and that he believed that the German authorities had acted without a full knowledge of all the circumstances. Mr.

Geist

Geist stated that the membership of the Christian Science societies in Germany was small and that the membership was composed mostly of people in humble circumstances; but that in the United States and England the societies numbered among their members some of the most influential and intellectual people in the respective countries. Mr. Geist stated that the closing of the Christian Science societies in Thuringia in this summary fashion and the confiscation of their property and funds, would undoubtedly create a very unhappy impression in the United States and probably in other countries and that he was merely mentioning the matter to the Ministry in this personal and unofficial way as it seemed probable that the action in Thuringia had been taken without the knowledge of higher officials of the Government in Berlin who would be more likely to appreciate all the implications.

Dr. Grauert expressed to Mr. Geist his very real appreciation of his friendly attitude in bringing this matter to his attention. He thanked him for a courteous, considerate and helpful act. He immediately called in Dr. Fischer of the Ministry and informed him that he was to send the necessary instructions to Thuringia that the societies should be opened and that they were not to be interfered with in the future. On October 6 Dr. Fischer of the Prussian Ministry of the Interior called the Consulate General on the telephone to state that the societies in Thuringia were again open and allowed to freely continue their activities.

Before

Before Lord Astor and his associates, Mr. Tennant and Mr. Braithwaite left Berlin, they stated that they would like very much to have a conversation with Minister Frick of the Ministry of the Interior of the Reich, in order that they could give him certain background in case troubles should arise in the future. I suggested to them that they make the arrangements for this visit through the British Embassy; but as the time was short and as they had difficulty in making an appointment, I arranged through a contact in the Ministry that they see the Minister at once. There is transmitted herewith as of interest to the Department, the letter which Lord Astor addressed to the Ministry of the Interior on September 28 following his conversation with Minister Frick. As a matter of fact when the conversation with the Minister of the Interior of the Reich took place, the orders had already been issued to Thuringia to open the societies there, by the Ministry of the Interior of Prussia. This is particularly significant and I am mentioning it because it shows the extraordinary situation which prevails here. Technically the Ministry of the Interior of Prussia has nothing whatever to do with Thuringia and any orders affecting Thuringia would ordinarily come from the Ministry of the Interior of the Reich. In practice, however, Minister President Goering of Prussia has at least two direct associates who exercise power directly or indirectly over all of Germany. Through Staatssecretaer Grauert who is the

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practical head of the Prussian Ministry of the Interior, orders are originated which are effective all over Germany. Similarly Dr. Diels is nominally the head of the State Secret Political Police for Prussia alone; but in practice his arm reaches all over Germany. These two men are both highly capable and it is through them that Minister President Goering who represents the physical force of the Party, makes himself felt over the entire country. It is interesting, therefore, that in this particular instance in connection with the Christian Science societies the orders opening the societies in Thuringia came as a result of an informal and friendly conversation in the Prussian Ministry of the Interior which in theory has no jurisdiction.

I am of the opinion that although the Christian Science societies in Thuringia have been allowed to reopen, this is not an indication that there will not be further trouble. The conversations which I have had with high-ranking officers of the Government in various Ministries, lead me to believe that it is the firm intention of the Party and of the Government to coordinate all religious societies in Germany into the German national church known as the "Deutsche Christen". All the important evangelical bodies have already been brought into the Deutsche Christen. The small bodies such as the baptists and Christian scientists are to disappear completely and to be incorporated into the Deutsche Christen. The Catholic church hoped to save

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its position through the conclusion of the concordat; but I have heard the concordat spoken of by high-ranking officers of the Government as a "transitory" measure, that is, it is their firm intention to bring the Catholics in Germany into the Deutsche Christen. This may seem like a fantastic idea, especially to Catholics in other parts of the world; but I had an opportunity recently to discuss this with a man who has had close contact with the Catholic church in Germany for years, and he is of the opinion that already half of the Catholics in Germany are entirely prepared to separate from Rome definitely and to have their church merged into the Deutsche Christen. I know that this statement seems so strange as to be almost unbelievable, and while I cannot assert that the efforts of the leaders of the National Socialist movement to bring the Catholic church into the Deutsche Christen will be successful, I do know that it is their firm intention to endeavor to do so.

Those persons in the United States, therefore, who are interested in the minority churches and religious institutions in Germany, will I think frankly have to face the fact that if the present Government remains in power, it will finally forbid all protestant religious organizations other than the Deutsche Christen. Whether the Catholic church in Germany can be brought into this organization is a more serious question; but when one considers what has been done in other fields, it is not impossible that this also will be brought about.

Heretofore

Heretofore whenever a religious principle clashed with a political, the religious feeling always showed itself strongest in the end or at least could not be destroyed. Under the present system in Germany, there is reason to believe that the political fanaticism of many of the adherents of the National Socialist Party has gone so far as to make them willing to sacrifice their religious beliefs and principles for political ends. The National Socialist idea of the total state and of the complete coordination of all organizations and institution, in any one line, is to be applied also to the church. The conversations with leading members of the Government and of the Party indicate, as they have already openly stated or implied, that the church, just as the press and other institutions, must serve political ends. These ideas must be kept in mind in any consideration which one gives to the question of the smaller religious bodies in Germany.

I am glad to inform the Department, therefore, that through entirely unofficial and personal action of the Consulate General the Christian Science societies in Thuringia have been reopened and through this action it is probable that the societies in other states of Germany will not be molested for some time. There is, however, such a matter of authority and such independent action in various parts of Germany, that it is not unlikely that from time to time the Christian Science societies and other religious organizations not in the Deutsche Christen as yet, will be molested.

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There is transmitted herewith a copy of a memorandum dated September 28, which may be of interest in this connection.

Respectfully yours,

George S. Messersmith,
American Consul General.

Enclosures:

With original of despatch only:

Copy of letter of October 5, 1933;

" " " " 6, 1933;

" " " " Sept. 28 to the Ministry of
the Interior of the Reich

Copy of memorandum of Sept. 22.

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GSM:P

A true copy of
the signed original
[Signature]