

German Protestant Churches Subordinated to the State

BY appointing himself spokesman of heaven and keeper of the public conscience in matters of religious faith, Chancellor Hitler has challenged a power the stronger because it does not depend on physical force. No soldiers surround the sanctuary; its only protection is the Cross. But Hitler may find that a company of martyrs is mightier than an army with banners.

The German kaleidoscope reveals him as overriding the personal appeal of President Hindenburg to restore peace in the Evangelical Church, as barring all persons not of "Aryan" descent from holding office in the Reich, States or municipalities, and as dissolving all Catholic organizations save those of a purely ecclesiastical nature.

From his rustic retreat in Neudeck, President Hindenburg wrote to the Chancellor, asking him to still the conflict in the Evangelical churches in Prussia brought on by the "German Christians," the Nazi group. Hitler modified an order requiring all Protestant pastors on a recent Sunday to display the Nazi banners from their church spires as a token of rejoicing, a violation of which he had previously threatened would result in severe disciplinary action. The church authorities had appointed the day as one of penitence and supplication, rather than of national rejoicing over the Nazi triumph. "As Christians," said Dr. von Bodelschwingh, who had been elected Reichsbishop by the united Evangelical groups, "we owe the State service and obedience. But we must not sacrifice the truth and freedom of the word of God nor our conscience."

Nevertheless, Dr. Bodelschwingh was forced out of the Reichsbishopric, and is supplanted by Dr. Ludwig Mueller, loud-spoken Nazi and Hitler's confidant in religious matters. The rumor, spread by Dr. Mueller, that Hitler was considering going over to the nationalized Protestant church was promptly squelched, but it is said that he has shown only a wavering faith as a Catholic.

Hitler's Primacy

At the Nazi service in the Berlin Cathedral Dr. Mueller declared that every one felt that "the mighty events of our day are not merely the work of men but rather the will of God," and proclaimed that Adolf Hitler "has been sent by God to save the fatherland." At the same time Dr. Joachim Hoessenfelder, founder of the "German Christians," presided at a service in the fashionable Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church, where he announced that "until the great hour when the Evangelical Church of the Reich receives its new constitution, all acts against the well-meant intentions of the State remain acts of disobedience, from whatever source they may come."

Thus, it seems, does Hitler assume spiritual primacy over the German people to enforce his nationalistic program.

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The regimentation of the churches is done under the plea that they had failed to halt the godless movement which was sweeping through Germany and had failed to keep step with Nazi reform. Under the direction of Chancellor Hitler the Nazis are to settle all the affairs of the Protestant churches. "For if any one has the right to appeal to a divine mandate," said Bernhard Rust,



European

NAZI CHURCH HEAD

Dr. Ludwig Mueller, whom Hitler has placed in control of German Protestant churches

Prussian Minister of Education and Culture, "it is the man who started with seven workers to rebuild the nation."

The Nazis have also suppressed the German branch of the International Bible Students' Society as a "subversive organization," outlawed the Boy Scouts, and, to make their program the more effective, given a Nazi cast to the Lord's Prayer.

A bolder step is Hitler's outlawing of the Christian (Catholic) Labor unions, his breaking up of the Catholic Young Workingmen's Congress at Munich, his suppression of the Catholic Bavarian People's party and his confiscation of Catholic societies' property in numerous towns in Bavaria.

For whereas the German Protestant groups have no world organization behind them, the Catholics are supported by the spiritual might of the Vatican, whose domain knows no boundaries and whose occupant knows no earthly superior.

These invasions of the freedom of conscience are announced as part of a domestic policy necessary for the restoration of Germany. But, in suppressing the rights of conscience, Hitler has trespassed on territory on which others as mighty as he have fallen, and he has alienated most of the sympathy the world would have had for the political and economic resurgence of a people who had collapsed under the blunders and mistakes of their rulers.

The issue, then, is broader than the Reich. Jews, Protestants and Catholics the world over have seen another scrap of paper torn up in Hitler's repudiation of his pledge on taking office that the Nazi régime would respect the freedom and legal rights of Ger-

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man churches.

"I always have been willing and ready to appeal to the people of my nation. If I should call for a national plebiscite to-day, everybody knows I would win 75 to 80 per cent. of the entire vote cast," said the Chancellor in a copyrighted interview with Karl A. Bickel, president of the United Press Association. But the same press association and others and independent correspondents have recorded, in effect, that Hitler's popularity increases in direct proportion to the number of arrests of his opponents. Those who don't vote for Hitler don't vote. Now, it seems, Hitler would shut the gates of heaven to German Christians who fail to recite the Nazi prayer and send by another route those not born of Teuton blood.

Manifesto to Protestants

In a manifesto to Protestants, the German Christians, the Nazi groups, said: "Our true leader, Chancellor Hitler, has expelled your seducers. He, a most devout Christian at heart, would have you find your way back to the Church and to cooperation with it. But this church must not remain a church of paragraphs; it must not be a church of the clergy, but must become a true people's church. Fight with us and against church reaction for German Christianity."

As if to put this into effect, Dr. Mueller surprised his congregation by reciting the Lord's Prayer and the benediction in modern, every-day language for the first time in history, in a service in the Schloss-Kirche, Koenigsburg, the ancient East Prussian church in which Frederick I of Prussia was crowned in 1701 and William I in 1861. The deviation was from the form inaugurated by Martin Luther. The hymns were sung to the martial blaring of bugles and trumpets of storm troop brass bands.

Many Catholic church authorities have been outspoken in their hostility to the Hitler program. Perhaps the most authoritative definition of the Catholic Church's attitude is found in the following paragraph in the *Osservatore Romano* in support of a statement in 1930 by the church authorities at Mainz that no registered Hitlerite could be admitted to the sacraments:

"The symbol of German National Socialism, the swastika, is a pagan symbol which stands in sharpest opposition to Christianity. Paragraph 24 of the National Socialist program is pagan in its presumption and consequences. It leads, logically, through the destruction of the Christian world order and its substitution through a racial world order to the ancient pagan cult of Wotan. Membership in the National Socialist party is incompatible with the Catholic conscience." (Text from *The Ecclesiastical Review*, April, 1933.)