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## Theology in Germany To-day.

BY THE REVEREND A. E. GARVIE, M.A., D.D., D.Th., LONDON.

THIS article is not intended to be a review of the still abundant theological literature, which, despite economic pressure and ecclesiastical strife, is now appearing in Germany; but a brief and simple survey of the questions which are even to-day most under discussion. Old Testament scholarship holds on its way; but the only problem which arises for it from the circumstances of the day is to defend, against anti-Semitism, the Old Testament as not only a Jewish book, which the Christian Church can now discard, but as still valuable and significant for the Christian Church as the literature of the revelation of God to a nation preparatory to the revelation in the Person of Christ, which is the immediate object of Christian faith. As regards the New Testament, what is commanding most interest is the new method of the criticism of the Gospels known as *Formgeschichte*. Instead of examining the Gospels as finished literature, this new method seeks to get behind the written record to the oral traditions of which the contents are composed, the forms assumed by these traditions, and the motives of these forms, the faith in Jesus which led to the forming thus of the current oral tradition. The conclusions regarding the historicity of the records prove more or less radical in different exponents, showing that 'the personal equation' has not been eliminated and cannot be eliminated in what claims to be an objective treatment. I am myself convinced that this meticulous criticism needs the restraining guidance of the wider historical apprehension and appreciation of the whole history of Christianity, which alone can bear the adequate witness to what Christ means for mankind.

A striking contrast to such research in the records is the school of Barth, which probably was more dominant in Germany some years ago than it is to-day. In his later writings Barth himself has been modifying some of the extreme dogmatic positions which are generally regarded as his characteristic contribution to theology. It would be rash to attempt a short statement of the Barthian theology. It may be described as Neo-Calvinism. It insists on 'the otherness of God from man,' the sole sufficiency and efficacy for man's salvation of the Word, the revelation of God in Christ and His Cross, the helpless and hopeless condition of man as fallen apart from the grace of God. It

rejects Christian apologetics, the attempt to relate the revelation of God to religion in man; and here Barth has parted company with one of the most lucid and persuasive exponents of his theology—Brunner, who takes a wider view of the light God imparts to men. Probably Barth has come into greater prominence than in his theology in the vehement polemic which he, though a Swiss, has waged against the policy of the 'German Christians' to Nazify the Evangelical Protestant Church. This polemic has cost him deposition from his theological chair in Bonn, and his enforced return to his native land. It has also estranged from him some of his disciples, who have been drawn into the 'German Christian' party. This Barthian tendency has reached us in Great Britain, and has a great fascination for some minds among us.

Of this religious controversy, which has attracted far more attention than is usually given to any such movement, the necessary limits and the special purpose of this article forbid any detailed treatment. To put the issue as briefly as possible, the idea of the totalitarian State, which has become a fanatical obsession with a great many of even the ministers of the Protestant Churches, probably less to-day than before, demands a conformity (*Gleichschaltung*) of Church and State. The State has not demanded the direct control of the Church, the independence of which it professes to respect, but it has sought to conform the Church through a party in the Church to the structure, the methods, and the policy of the State—indeed, to use the Church as a tool for its own purposes. The 'German Christian' party has been tolerant of laxity of doctrine, and is suspected of even paganizing tendencies which seek a religious basis in the assumed ancient German faith for the extreme nationalism or racialism which is the support of the totalitarian State, and which justify a rejection of Christianity because of its relation to Judaism and the Old Testament. Three motives of this paganizing tendency may be detected. Besides the two just mentioned, there is an aversion to the Christian ethics of goodwill for all mankind, and an attraction to the supposed virile, heroic, and even ruthless morals of the German ancestors. It need hardly be said that in view of the facts as known to science, this paganism is a myth, a projection into the dim and distant past of ideas, wishes, and aims of the

present mood of those who have welcomed and seek justification for the purpose and the methods of the National Socialist rule. This common paganizing tendency is broken up into a number of distinct and competing movements. It is the dread of this paganizing which is the negative aspect of the motive of the opposition to the 'German Christian' dominance; but the positive aspect is concern about the gospel and the Protestant Confessions held as the authoritative interpretations of the gospel. Accustomed as the German churches were, until the Revolution of 1918, to control by the State, brief as has been the period of their emancipation, the main concern has not been about the independence of the Church, but the defence of the Confessions. Hence the opposition calls itself the Confessional Church. The assurances given by the present authority in the officially recognized Church that there will be no interference with theology seems to be suspected by some of the leaders of the opposition, who are convinced that they can sustain their evangelical witness only by maintaining independence.

So much about the actual situation it has been necessary to state as the background to the literary activity which has been evoked. Although the Lutheran (Evangelical) and the Reformed (Calvinistic) Churches are opposed to the same danger, and are engaged in the common conflict, there has been a distinct revival of the differences which divide these two types of Protestantism, and one cannot in Germany, if anywhere, speak of 'happy divisions.' Concern about the Confession means a special concern for the Lutheran or the Reformed Confessions; and there has been a reaction, especially among the Lutherans. It is Luther who is being constantly cited as the final authority on the truth of the Gospels. The Confessions of the Reformation are sometimes referred to as infallible, inspired interpretations of the gospel; they do not express the thought of one age for that age, but as reproducing 'the pure milk of the Word' and wholesome nourishment for every age. The ideas of Luther, therefore, are held to be the sure and safe guides amid all the present perplexities. One consequence of this is that Luther cannot be appealed to in support of the independence of the Church on the State, and it is probably due to his influence that this issue is not more firmly faced. In his conception of the Church the emphasis did not fall on the subjective aspect, the believing membership, but on the objective side, the true preaching of the gospel and the right administration of the Sacraments, the spontaneous activity

of God's grace, not the responsive activity of man's faith. The last thought in his mind was that he was making a fresh start, founding a new church. He was bringing the Church back to the high road of historical unity and continuity from the bypath into which the Roman hierarchy had led it. At one time he thought that the Christian people might be trusted to preserve a ministry, which would truly preach the gospel and administer the Sacraments duly. But the fanaticism of some of the popular movements of Reform frightened him, and still more was he driven back to a conservative position by the Peasants' War, the repression of which, with ruthless severity, he advocated with passionate vehemence. Some of the German princes were his supporters and friends, and thus he turned to them as guardians of the new cause of reform in the Church. He was not thinking of a subjection of the Church to the State; it was not as princes merely, but as godly princes that he put his trust in these. The historical consequence has been, however, the subjection of the Church to the State, and Luther's ideas are widely represented in current literature. Some of the leaders of the Church welcomed the change in 1918 as an emancipation bringing the churches an opportunity to be the Church of Christ, and not a department of the State; others have not been at home in the new order.

There emerges in the polemical literature a conception which it is not easy for English Free Churchmen, and probably not even for many Scottish Presbyterians, to understand. It is that of *Volkskirche*. The use of the epithet *National* by the Church of Scotland at least points in the direction of this conception, but certainly does not go all the way. In the Scottish use of the term it means that the Church recognizes a responsibility for the whole nation, for the evangelization of the lapsed masses. The term *People's Church* (although that is an inadequate rendering of *Volkskirche*) means that the Church does not address itself primarily to individuals, but to the nation, and assumes as its members, having a claim on all its ordinances, all citizens except those who have expressly excluded themselves. The idea of a Free Church, the membership of which is voluntary and implies a confession of personal Christian faith, is foreign to most Germans, and such Free Churches (Baptist, Methodist, etc.) as there are are regarded with some disfavour as preferring a religious community of their own choice to that provided by the nation, which claims their allegiance. Probably *Nationalism* is a more dominant motive in Germany

even in the Church than it is in Great Britain. The Confessional Church does not desire to be a free church in our sense, although it desires independence in the present circumstances for the preservation of the gospel. It no less desires to be a *Volkskirche*, only its method is different from that of the 'German Christians.' It believes in evangelization, making the nominal real Christians. Recently a proposal was made that in each congregation the real Christians should form, not a separate church, but a living nucleus around the pastor, from which life might be spread to the great dead mass of the indifferent. One hears with gladness that all over the country the people are rallying around their pastors; and there is reason for hoping that the motive is not an evanescent interest in the controversy merely, but an enduring influence of the gospel, which is being preached with greater fidelity and fervour, and that an abiding good may come out of a passing evil. The 'German Christians' hold that to win the people the Church must conform to the world around it. On the doubtful assumption that the whole nation has gone Nazi, and favours the policy of the Government, it is argued that the Church should use its influence in support of that policy, and even use the force commanded by the State to compel conformity. How far this party is prepared to go in this compromise may be seen from one instance. The 'Aryan' policy of excluding all who are of Jewish descent, or married to those of Jewish descent, whether professing the Jewish religion or not, from public office should, it is urged, often with very sophisticated reasoning, be applied to the ministry of the Church on the ground that in its organization as a human society the Church should adapt itself to its environ-

ment, and adopt as its own the practice of the State. No wonder that the Confessional Church is suspicious of the paganizing tendency of the 'German Christians,' despite all their recent assurances to the contrary.

There is an abundant literature advocating many varied types of paganism, varying from extreme hostility to Christianity, mainly on account of its association with Judaism, to a moderate tolerance. So ephemeral in value is this literature that it does not merit closer scrutiny. The churches are not failing in their duty to provide the antidote to this poison. The 'mythical' character of this German faith is being exposed, and the historical character of Christianity is being vindicated, especially as a creative factor in the history of Germany itself—how little it owes to its assumed pagan German ancestry, and how much to the religion of Christ, which these movements are assailing. To sum up briefly the content of the current theological literature, there is a recognition of the danger of an open paganism; there is a reaction to the distinctive types of the Reformation, Lutheran and Calvinistic; there is a greater interest in the conception of the Church, and there is a closer scrutiny of the relation of Church and State. These ideas have a more vital, crucial bearing on the future of Christianity in Germany than had the scholarly researches and expositions of former days.

This article is not based specially on any book or books, but is a general impression formed in reading not only some books, but numerous pamphlets and articles. The churches in Germany, with their theology, are out on a very stormy sea, and all Christians should pray and hope that the Pilot will steer His bark into the desired haven.

## In the Study.

### *Virginibus Puerisque.*

#### King's Messengers.

BY THE REVEREND C. M. HEPBURN, B.D.,  
MOULIN, PITLOCHRY.

'So the posts went with the letters from the king.'—  
2 Ch 30<sup>6</sup>.

IN Bible days of long ago the posts to begin with were the King's messengers, and the only letters carried were the King's. But in time the King let them carry other letters, and the earliest to

allow them to do so was, I believe, King Cyrus of Persia. At first they were foot-runners, but later on they rode on horseback and passed on their letters to the next horseman in the relay.

In our country likewise the earliest posts were King's messengers and only bore the King's letters. But in 1635, three hundred years ago last year, King Charles I. signed a decree permitting them to carry other correspondence, though they are strictly still the King's messengers and wear his badge. We still call the Postal Vans the Royal Mail. In