

Election Propaganda on the Church Steps – the Church Elections in Berlin (July 1933)

Abstract

As in all other areas of life, the Nazi regime sought to establish totalitarian control in the realm of the church and religion. Although Hitler asserted that he would preserve the rights and integrity of the churches, he actually sought to “align” them with the regime [*Gleichschaltung*] and, presumably, to abolish them entirely in the end. Out of fear for popular resistance, however, he wanted to avoid proceeding in a manner that was too quick and too aggressive. Nazi religious policy was thus largely characterized by contradictions and incoherence. Initially, the Nazi regime tried to make the Protestant Church (to which more than 60% of Germans belonged) into a tool for creating religious unity and uniformity. The church was actually well-suited to this role in some respects: it had, for instance, a long tradition of nationalism, militarism, and anti-Marxism, and many pastors and theologians supported those aspects of the NSDAP platform. One segment of the Protestant Church – namely, the German Christian movement [*Glaubensbewegung Deutsche Christen*] – even sought a merger of ecclesiastical and racial doctrines.

In 1933, with Hitler’s support, members of this movement, so-called German Christians, took the lead in bringing the Protestant Church into line with Nazi ideology. The German Christians successfully agitated for the abolition of the church’s federal organizational structure and for the founding of a new, centralized German Protestant Church [*Deutsche Evangelische Kirche* (DEK) or Reich Church]. The constitution of the new DEK was approved by representatives of the regional churches [*Landeskirchen*] on July 11, 1933, and officially recognized by the Reich on July 14. Upon granting its recognition of the new church constitution, the government announced that the church elections – originally scheduled for September 27, 1933 – would be moved ahead to July 23, 1933. The elections featured candidates from the pro-Nazi German Christian movement, under the leadership of Ludwig Müller, and the Gospel and Church group, led by Martin Niemöller, among others. On July 14, the NSDAP propaganda ministry emphasized that Hitler wanted all *Gauleiters* to provide the German Christians with any and all support needed in the upcoming church elections. Additionally, on July 22, the day before the elections, Hitler kept his promise to Ludwig Müller and went on the radio to voice his support for the German Christians (he did this immediately after the end of a Bayreuth performance of Richard Wagner’s *Parsifal*, an opera infused with Christian themes). Hitler’s public endorsement of the German Christians, together with the assistance furnished by the party in the areas of organization and propaganda, meant that the elections were practically decided.

This photograph shows a representative of the German Christian movement (left) with a sign that reads: “Vote for the German Christian list.” On the right, a representative of the Gospel and Church group holds a sign that reads: “Church must remain church. Vote for the Gospel and Church list.”

Source



Source: Church election in Berlin – election propaganda at the church door. Unknown photographer. bpk-Bildagentur, image number 30013716. For rights inquiries, please contact Art Resource at requests@artres.com (North America) or bpk-Bildagentur at kontakt@bpk-bildagentur.de (for all other countries).

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