

# Reich Conference of German Christians at the Sportpalast in Berlin (November 13, 1933)

## Abstract

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In 1932, the German Christian movement [*Glaubensbewegung Deutsche Christen*] established itself as an important National Socialist splinter group within the Protestant Church. It was organized in strict accordance with the “Führer principle” and promoted the synthesis of racial and ecclesiastical doctrines. Among other things, German Christians demanded racial purity within the church and the “Entjudung” [“de-Judification”] of religion through the abolition of the Old Testament. After Hitler became Chancellor, the movement’s membership greatly increased. It won the church elections for the new, unified German Protestant Church [*Deutsche Evangelische Kirche* (DEK) or *Reich Church*] on July 23, 1933, occupied the new church’s most important ecclesiastical offices, and tried to bring the church into doctrinal and institutional alignment with Nazi ideology [*Gleichschaltung*]. Sermons, for example, were supposed to emphasize the theological foundations of racial theories and the allegedly “Nordic” character of Christ. Churches were decorated with swastikas, and a series of new symbols and rituals aimed to demonstrate the unity between the church and the Nazi state. When the German Christians introduced rules restricting church offices to Aryans, a group of Protestant theologians and clergymen centered around around Pastor Martin Niemöller protested by founding the Pastors’ Emergency League, out of which the “Confessing Church” [*Bekennende Kirche*] developed. This internal protest movement challenged the competence and legitimacy of the Reich Church and the German Christians, and declared itself the only legitimate Protestant Church. Thus, instead of creating uniformity and unity, the German Christians actually divided the church more than ever before and steadily lost influence in the following years. Total state control and “coordination” of the Protestant Church would never be achieved.

The photograph shows a conference of German Christians in the Berlin *Sportpalast* on November 13, 1933. The banner in the background states: “The German Christian reads ‘The Gospel in the Third Reich,’” a reference to the official German Christian newspaper.

## Source

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