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Stephanie von Mackensen (02/04/1894-02/01/1985): Between Confessing Church and the NSdAP

Stephanie von Mackensen, daughter of Ludwig von Renvers, who was President of the Rhine-Province, grew up in Düsseldorf. She strongly felt the anxiety among the Catholics in the years after the 'Kulturkampf' and also the boundaries which separated her from the Protestant children. When marrying the Prussian-Protestant civil-servant Ferdinand von Mackensen, she came in contact with the Protestant church and faith. During the time her husband served in WW1, she first started to read the Bible herself and came „through Paul's Letter to the Romans to the Protestant Faith“ as she recalls herself. After some years in the small towns, Stephanie and her family (she meanwhile had given birth to three children) came to Stettin in 1933. Ferdinand von Mackensen had been promoted to vize-president of the Province Pomerania.

Stephanie von Mackensen joined the NSDAP in 1932. Being very active in youth- and social work, the NSDAP's Program of 1920 seemed to her the solution to all her desires: a Party which gave new hope to the deprived working-class, organized youth camps and meetings and had a national and conservative agenda matched very well Stephanie's convictions. She also was a member of the German Christians and held a mandate in the Pomeranian Synod.

In the course of the events of summer and fall of 1933 she began to question whether the NSDAP really was a 'Christian' Party. She got in touch with the Confessing Church and soon found herself in the Council of Brethren of the Confessing Church of Pomerania. She became it's Administrator – nevertheless, she also was involved in the political and theological discussion and decision-taking. She organized the illegal offerings, supported the illegal Seminary in Finkenwalde and it's Headmaster, Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Together with her husband's old uncle, Generalfeldmarschall August von Mackensen, she helped e.g. Albrecht Schönherr to get a placement. She was in contact with outstanding Confessing-Church-Members such as Ruth von Kleist-Retzow and of course the Chairman of the Pomeranian

Council of Brethren, Reinold von Thadden-Trieglaff.

When in May 1934 the Confessing Church held her first 'Bekennnissynode' in Barmen, Stephanie von Mackensen was the only female delegate to participate in the consultations and the passing of the 'Barmen Declaration'. In several other synods, she took part and was active to promote the interests of the Lay-Members of the Confessing Church.

In 1938, Stephanie, still a member of the Nazi Party, came into open conflict with the NSDAP. In a private letter to the 'Gauleiter', she protested against his tirades against the Church. Gauleiter Schwede-Coburg reacted by appealing to the party court. He wanted Stephanie and her husband to be expelled. He did not succeed, but Ferdinand von Mackensen was dismissed and forced into retirement.

Stephanie never revoked her membership in the NSDAP – and she always was an active member of the confessing church. My thesis tries to understand and interpret this what seems to be a contradiction. It also screens the later years of Stephanie's life, which still are marked by social and political commitment – uncommon for a woman of her Generation. The thesis finds its conclusions in some considerations on the question, why Stephanie von Mackensen is/was almost forgotten by the History of the so called German Church Struggle.

Karin Oehlmann: Stephanie von Mackensen und der Kirchenkampf, Tübingen 2002.

This work is at present available only in German. A pdf-file is available by contacting the author.