

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF RELIGION

GLEICHSCHALTUNG
AND THE CONFESSING CHURCH
DURING THE GERMAN CHURCH STRUGGLE

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Gleichschaltung and the Confessing Church During the German Church Conflict,
By Emily J. Darnell, M.A., Liberty University, 2008, 111 pages.

This thesis analyzes the contributing factors to the actions taken by the churches in Germany during what Karl Barth and others termed the *Kirchenkampf*, or German Church Struggle. The *Kirchenkampf* took place mainly in the 1930s and 1940s. As Hitler rose to power, a new term was coined, *Gleichschaltung*, which described his program for bringing all of Germany and his conquests into line with the worldview of the Third Reich.

The primary sources for research include works by Martin Luther that shaped the mindset of the churchmen, and history texts detailing the Weimar Republic serving as background for the cultural upheaval experienced by all Germans. From the time of the *Kirchenkampf*, sources include church history texts with documents and data pertaining to the 1930s and 1940s, and works by Karl Barth directed at the churches of this era.

Gleichschaltung was successful in most areas of Germany and German occupation. This thesis will analyze whether it was successful inside the German churches. Churches were granted many freedoms in the legal constitution of Germany prior to the Third Reich. In contradiction of their stated position the State controlled much of the church's life including religious education of youth, preaching, finances, attendance, and written publications, to name a few. The Confessing Church arose at this time, not as a separate provincial church, but as an organized opposition to *Gleichschaltung*. They united pastors and faithful believers in Christ in the quest for truth and identity. Both truth and identity were at stake as outside voices were redefining "church" "Christianity" "revelation" and "worship." Other sources of revelation were introduced, and the Old Testament and Paul's writings were banned. Only those of Aryan descent could participate in church activities, and a form of Christianity mixed with Nordic German myths was creeping into the churches as a group called German Christians gained leadership positions. Despite all this, there were Christians who remained faithful to the confessions, to all of Scripture, and to one Lord. Karl Barth attests that this era was used by God to show the Church her need of Him, and to remind Christians that the True Church could never crumble.

List of Terms

NSDAP –The National Socialist German Workers Party, declared the only legal political party by Hitler

Kirchenkampf –The Church Struggle, so called by Christians in Germany, approximately 1933- end of WWII.

Bekennende Kirche —The Confessing Church, an association of pastors swearing allegiance to Christ, but not Hitler.

Glaubensbewegung Deutsche Christen —The German Christian Faith Movement, responsible for mixing “Nordic heathenism” and *Völkische* teachings into Christian Doctrine, removing the Christian doctrines that offended them. They strove to work with Hitler.

Völkische –having to do with the Volk

Volk –sometimes translated “folk” or “people” it implies kindred connected by blood alone.

Gleichschaltung –Hitler’s process of bringing all of German life into line with his worldview.

Reich –Empire, realm.

Barmen Declaration –Document issued by the Confessing Church to counter the German Christian teachings.

Weltanschauung –Worldview.

Herr Reichminister – The position created in 1935 to aid the Reichsbischof when Hitler deemed he was not bringing the churches into line quickly or appropriately enough.

Aryan clause, Aryan paragraph - This government clause stated that only those of Aryan descent could participate fully in work, commerce, education, worship, etc.

Great War – The name given to WWI prior to there being a WWII.

Weimar Republic –the German democracy formed after WWI, short lived.

Länder –country, nation.

Führer –leader.

Landeskirchen - Land churches, territorial churches or regional churches

Kirchentag - A group that would exercise supervisory powers over the *Landeskirchen*, and establish synods.

Reichsbischof – The position first appointed by Hitler to work with German Church in bringing them into line with the Third Reich.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

The churches in Germany at the end of the Great War¹ were mainly Catholic, Lutheran, or Reformed. For many years, all churches were tied to the State, receiving tax money and protection. This tradition goes back even to Luther's day, when he was accused of being a little too cozy with the princes.² During and after the Reformation, this bond ensured that the princes were part of the process of choosing who would be a leader in the church. This tradition greatly impacted the way the Church experienced political changes during the 1930s and 1940s, as Hitler came to power.

In a lecture at Oxford, 1938, Barth described the offer held out to the German churches as one that seemed so promising. This offer made by Hitler's government seemed like an answer from God to the trouble caused by war and declining attendance:

The promise was made to her: if she now took the right attitude, if she now had the courage to grasp and support the spirit of the new time, then the hour had come at which the great masses, that 80 to 90 per cent. of the German people which had hitherto stood aloof from the Church, would return to her... Only one small condition was attached...³

Barth was speaking tongue-in-cheek when he said that condition was small, it was anything but small. Complete allegiance to a worldview contrary to its essence was not a small condition for the church to submit to.

Karl Barth viewed the *Kirchenkampf* as a struggle for truth. There were many influences on the church at that time, many voices wanting to have the allegiance of the German Protestants during the 1930s. Was there an hermeneutic that would allow the

¹ The name given to WWI prior to there being a WWII.

² Lewis Spitz, "The Political Luther" in *Christian History*, Vol. 11 Issue 2, 1992, <http://search.epnet.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&an=9604291032>.

³ Karl Barth, *Trouble and Promise in the Struggle of the Church in Germany*, translated by P.V.M. Benecke, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1938), 5-6.

church to remain orthodox in her faith? This question is best answered by an analysis of these influences and their role in the development of the German Church. This particular analysis will include the life and teachings of Martin Luther, the German Culture following the Great War⁴ in which culture the *völkische*⁵ movement flourished, the heretical teachings of the German Christians who worked with Hitler throughout the German Church Conflict, and Karl Barth's teachings that ran counter to these. Karl Barth noticed the struggle before many theologians in Germany, he fought heresies with his Christo-centric hermeneutic and was answering the questions that many Christians would look back and ask.

One scholar has noted that up until the mid-1970s, almost all books covering this era and the *Kirchenkampf* had political agendas, not one had a German Christian viewpoint, and few dealt with the theological and religious aspects. The Church was not affected solely by theologians and preachers. It is advantageous to study the political, theological and cultural facets of 1930s Germany from a Christian viewpoint because the *Kirchenkampf* was affected by all three.⁶

Martin Luther was heralded as a German hero by many in the 1930s, and his theology shaped the minds of twentieth century German Protestants. Luther wrote many pastoral works, commentaries, letters, etc. which had been read by some Germans for

⁴ These are the years of the Weimar Republic, Germany's first experience with democracy.

⁵ Two terms of primary importance for our discussion are *Gleichschaltung* and *Volk*. These terms do not have exact English translations, and are understood best by a study of their many facets. *Gleichschaltung* was the process of coming into line with the Third Reich, whereby all business, organizations, etc. had to implement the worldview of the National Socialists. In those places where *Gleichschaltung* was a success, the *völkische* movement was likewise strong. The word *Volk* encompasses much more than its rough translation of "people" or "folk" or "kindred." It involves images of blood, of land, and of belonging; one's soul was believed to be connected to the land. The *Volk* idea engendered a racism and suspicion of all who seemed different.

⁶ It is also necessary to study not only the academic writings from this time in history, but also the grassroots writings. Pamphlets, sermons, propaganda, and other non-academic voices were heard and heeded by Germans trying to make sense of their war-torn world.

personal edification. However, many of Luther's works were considered the "last word" on church policy, and were followed almost to the letter. Many thought they were acting justly by following Luther through the *Kirchenkampf*, though some twisted his words to justify their actions.⁷ He also wrote some things too controversial for contemporary acceptance,⁸ but these were influential in the 1930s.

The years after the Great War mark the beginning of the *Kirchenkampf*, and a time of great German cultural change during the Weimer years. The war and its settlement cost Germans their sense of identity and national stability. They were desperate for order, meaning, and dignity, all of which were central to Hitler's program. Christians and non-Christians alike had this struggle, all Germans keenly felt what it meant to lose national identity and financial resources, while having others dictate what changes must take place.⁹ The failing Weimar Democracy paved the way for the NSDAP and mass acceptance of *völkische* teachings.

Also during this time the influence of the *Deutsche Christen*¹⁰ rose. This group was comprised mainly of pastors and parishioners who saw in National Socialism the answer to the questions they had been asking. These were Germans who were eager to be in line with the new programs and ideologies—even if it meant accepting ideas that Scripture would not support. The ideology of the *Deutsche Christen* mixed legend with varied popular beliefs, hence revelation through Scripture was replaced with stories of the *Volk* and German history. Ancient rumors of the Roman Empire as *the* Kingdom of God,

⁷ As will be discussed throughout this thesis, both German Christians and the Confessing Church used some of the same works by Luther to justify their opposing views.

⁸ For example, Luther's writings on the Jews which will be discussed in chapter two of this thesis.

⁹ Through the Versailles Treaty, as discussed in pages 35-39 of this thesis.

¹⁰ German Christians: a group who zealously aligned itself with the Nazi program, asserting that it was the "positive Christianity" that Hitler spoke of. See pages 44 and 64 of this thesis.

having been now placed in the hands of Germans, and various notions of paganism were tainting the religion of Christianity. As members of the *Deutsche Christen* gained leadership roles through church elections, or were appointed by Hitler, they worked toward bringing churches in line with Hitler's program and under the authority of one *Reich* church.

Amidst the struggle came a positive influence on the Church, the Confessing Church, which was birthed from the Pastor's Emergency League. They left behind many writings concerning their development, their activity, and their beliefs. The Confessing Church resisted the new heresies and the state's control of the Church, though largely in non-aggressive ways. Hitler's active opposition toward the Confessing Church will be surveyed, as well as other factors contributing to the successful life of the faithful confessors. The points of theology which the Confessing Church sought to protect were summarized in the Barmen Declaration.¹¹

The last voice to be analyzed will be that of Karl Barth, who wrote, taught, and preached throughout the conflict. He later analyzed the German Church conflict and its relation to the nature of the true church.¹² Barth wrote some works in an effort to strengthen the church to cling to Scripture during this Church conflict. Barth knew that one of the weaknesses in the churches was the tendency toward cultural Protestantism, or church being a thing of societal status and people-pleasing.¹³

Early on, Barth put it this way:

¹¹ It is not a confession of any specific faith, but a confession of eternal truths that addressed the needs of the moment, the very tenets of truth that were attacked by German Christians and National Socialism.

¹² Much of what Barth wrote at this time was written to edify those in the midst of the conflict to remain true to who they were as Christ's Body.

¹³ For more details on Barth's fight against social Protestantism see W.R. Ward, *Theology, Sociology and Politics, The German Protestant Social Conscience 1890-1933*, (Berne, Peter Lang Publishers Ltd.) 1979, 87-133.

We are able to stand amicably side by side with Catholics and Protestants, with the representatives of Protestant culture and with the theologians...and indeed, by whose side can we not stand amicably? ...We can say what they long to hear—‘Thou art right!’. But only upon one condition can we speak these comfortable words: we are bound to add—‘Also, thou art wrong!’¹⁴

Barth readily criticized the actions of the Church that he did not believe were in line with Scripture, and makes many sobering observations. He makes no concessions to include opposing beliefs for the sake of unity, thus he often found himself saying “NO!” or “Thou art wrong!” as he did in the above quote from his commentary on Romans.

Barth argued that in the midst of chaos, godlessness, and a totalitarian state which had destroyed much of what it ruled there was yet a faithful Church, specifically these Confessors who would continue to proclaim Christ as Lord of the Church and of the World. Barth encouraged the churches often, here is but one occasion:

Today it is virtually impossible to deny in faith that whatever may be the state of the confessors, the confession was and is there. And since that is the case, while our faces may be grim as we move in “the sphere of the church”, to which so much reference is made, they cannot in any way be sour and anxious. Wherever one believes...there the church is, and there one has reason to be cheerful.¹⁵

Barth taught that even in the midst of the *Kirchenkampf* the church would not cease to exist. The church could not be swallowed up into a political movement, nor could she morph into something other than the Body of Christ.

¹⁴ Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), 529.

¹⁵ Karl Barth quoted in Klaus Scholder, *The Churches and the Third Reich: Preliminary History and the Time of Illusions: 1918-1934*, Volume One, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 54-55.

CHAPTER TWO

Luther's Theology as a Voice Directed at the Church

Luther's works were widely read by Germans prior to and during the German Church Conflict. "[The] idea lingers that, in the last years of the First World War and in the Weimar Republic, Martin Luther was 'rediscovered.'"¹⁶ Some trace the revived interest in Luther to 1883,¹⁷ though not all agree. James Stayer asserts in his study of Luther's followers that Luther was not rediscovered so much as reinterpreted.¹⁸

In the midst of the *Kirchenkampf*, Luther's words were twisted and his ideas were tied to actions carried out by those espousing the *völkische* traditions. Misuse of Luther's teachings allowed some church members to go astray from their devotion to Christ, and these same writings caused others to be faithful to their Lord Jesus Christ. These reinterpretations of Luther freed the consciences of those who wanted also to reinterpret Scripture to fit the cultural trends.

One clear example of this is the professor and theologian Friedrich Gogarten. He, like Karl Barth, parted ways with his liberal professors. Both men sought to keep modernity from adversely impacting theology. They used their writings to fight those who sought to redefine the Reformation, sin, and the law versus gospel debate. Gogarten

¹⁶ Stayer, xi.

¹⁷ One example of this is found in: Thomas Brady Jr., "The Political Masks of Martin Luther" in *History Today*, November 83, Vol 33 Issue 11, 27. The Luther revival begun in jubilee year of 1883 showered Germany with memorabilia and monuments: massive memorials at the chief sites of the reformer's work—Wittenberg, Erfurt, Worms; illustrated Luther books and pictures suitable for framing; Luther plays, Luther poems and Luther novels; Luther statuettes for the home and Luther statues for the garden. The new Society for Reformation History, founded in 1883, poured out scholarly celebrations of Luther...No wonder that superficial observers drank in the illusion of the new Germany as a Protestant nation that lay behind Luther's mask.

¹⁸ To be sure, Luther wrote far more than can be examined here, thus the discussion will be limited to his teachings on Christians relating to the government authorities, the duty to act responsibly within the realm of the state, the separate spheres of the Two Kingdoms, and also his writings about how Christians ought to relate to Jews.

professed to be Lutheran, and worked against Ernst Troeltsch who pushed a “Lutheran Idealism” that was contrary to Luther’s theological beliefs.¹⁹ While Barth sought to keep Christianity pure of cultural influences that contradict orthodoxy, Gogarten became enthralled with the idea of the *Volk*; he absented himself from the *Kirchenkampf*, and he and Barth parted ways.²⁰

A Fallacious Quietism in the Two Kingdoms

Luther often taught concerning the Christian’s duty in times of conflict, and oftentimes Luther’s teachings were mistaken by many twentieth century German churchmen to be an endorsement of quietism vis-à-vis the state. In particular, when these teachings were misapplied in 1930s Germany, faithful Lutherans fell into a crippling quietism.

Such quietism had its origin in a misinterpretation of Martin Luther’s teaching on the Two Kingdoms. That teaching was mainly a response to the absolute claim of the Catholic Church in Luther’s day. Luther taught that God has two kingdom realms operating distinctly, but together. The first of these is the Kingdom of God, comprised of all true believers in Christ, and the second is the kingdom of this world comprised of all human beings. The Kingdom of God is ruled by God through means of the Word, the sacraments, the Church, and the Holy Spirit. The kingdom of this world is ruled by temporal authorities: men of this world who hold governing power.

¹⁹ James Stayer, *Martin Luther, German Saviour: German Evangelical Theological Factions and the Interpretation of Luther, 1917-1933*, (London: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2000), 66-70.

²⁰ James R. Edwards, “At The Crossroads,” in *Christianity Today*, August 1997, Vol. 41, Issue 9. Also cross reference page 42 of this thesis.

Luther taught that ideally, though not practically, Christians have no need of the temporal authorities because they are to obey God, a higher calling and a stricter one. The temporal government is very needful to this fallen world, however, for not all men are Christians. And, of those who are Christian, too few practice their faith, or faithfully hold to Christ's teachings. Luther's opinion that this world needs temporal authority cannot be doubted after reading his essay on the topic:

If anyone attempted to rule the world by the gospel and to abolish all temporal law and sword on the plea that all are baptized and Christian...pray tell me friend, what would he be doing? He would be loosing the ropes and chains of the savage wild beasts and letting them bite and mangle everyone....²¹

Through his "Two Kingdoms doctrine," Luther makes it clear that the Holy Spirit produces righteous people and inward peace, but that the temporal authority is crucial in order to restrain acts of wickedness and so to "maintain an outward peace" or "external peace."²²

Luther's was a day of war and upheaval, and for that reason he wrote pamphlets and spoke much to instruct his followers on how to respond. One such treatise, Dr. Martin Luther's *Warning to His Dear German People*, addressed Emperor Charles V's denouncement of Luther's teachings, and his declaration to use force to exterminate these teachings. Luther began that treatise by telling his faithful followers about the necessity to render unto the Lord the things that are His and unto Caesar the things that are his. He described Charles' threatened use of power and his overstepping of proper bounds, yet Luther insisted that he would never incite anyone to rebel or to make war. Although

²¹ Martin Luther, "Temporal Authority: To What Extent it Should be Obeyed, 1523" in *Luther's Works* vol. 45, translated by J.J. Schindel, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1962), 56.

²² *Ibid*, 55-56.

Luther did not call for action, or ask Christians to rebel, he wanted to educate Germans about when and how to disobey²³ in ways that would honor God as well.

In the distinct roles of Luther's "Two Kingdoms," the state has the authority to punish with the sword, whereas the Church has the obligation to leave that task to the state. He describes the Christian's responsibility in relation to the temporal authorities:

Thus the word of Christ is now reconciled, I believe, with the passages which establish the sword, and the meaning is thus: No Christian shall wield or invoke the sword for himself and his cause. In behalf of another, however, he may and should wield it and invoke it to restrain wickedness and to defend godliness.²⁴

The sword was not for personal use, nor for the Church's use, though Luther granted the exception of defending another from evil.

Luther noted that it is extremely rare for a human being to wield the sword in fighting evil without the intentions being skewed, selfish, etc. Fighting evil without selfish ambition was a work of God, in which God would strengthen the man and give the man godly desires and motivation. Luther cites a few instances in the Bible where this took place, most notably in the life of Samson. Samson's selfish desires had caused him so much sin previously that the situation in Judges 5:11 is evidence of the Spirit's control over Samson's fight against evil. Such conclusions are balanced with Luther's advice that his parishioners must not avenge the evil against them. Rather, they were instructed to follow the Sermon on the Mount by turning the other cheek.²⁵

Luther's essay *On War Against the Turk* was designed to free Christians in their conscience to fight. In it Luther explained the proper grounds upon which war is to be

²³ Martin Luther, "Luther's Warning to His Dear German People" in *Luther, Selected Political Writings*, Edited by J.M. Porter, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974) 134-139.

²⁴ Luther, "Temporal Authority: To What Extent it Should be Obeyed, 1523," 59.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 59-61.

waged.²⁶ This war with “the Turks” also required that Luther answer the questions of his peers who critiqued his views. Luther began with an admonition not to take his letter out of context. His advice on the war was situational, and was not to be applied to every situation involving war. This warning is good since Luther tended toward exaggeration, and as a result was regularly retorting to his accusers who took his statements to the extreme. Given his context, one must note this specific concern of Luther’s:

But what motivated me most of all was this: They undertook to fight against the Turk in the name of Christ, and taught and incited men to do this as though our people were in an army of Christians against the Turks.²⁷

Luther did not teach a priori rejection of all war, but was teaching against the guise of religious crusades, or wars fought by the Church for so-called holy purposes. The pope had taken a leading role in calling the German people to war. Luther emphasized that the temporal government alone should be the agency for such decisions, which fits the purposes set forth by God for that Kingdom.

Luther then continued in his essay on the Turks by explaining that whatever God calls one to do, one ought to do it. He wanted to make it clear that Christians can serve in the army, or in temporal government jobs. These people could wage war for their secular authorities, but not under the auspices of the Church. Before going to war, each Christian had the responsibility to determine whether this was a just war that he would be fighting. The temporal authority’s primary job according to Luther’s references to Romans 12 and 1 Peter 5 is to punish wickedness, and protect the rights and properties and bodies of its

²⁶ Luther, “On War Against the Turk, 1529” in *Selected Political Writings*, 126-128.

²⁷ *Ibid*, 123.

citizens. Luther contrasted the God-given task of the temporal authorities with how the Turks were actually using their power.²⁸

Luther concludes his teaching on the temporal authority's proper role in calling the Germans to war thusly:

In the first place, if there is to be war against the Turk, it should be fought at the emperor's command, under his banner, and in his name. Then everyone can be sure in his conscience that he is obeying the ordinance of God, since we know that the emperor is our true overlord and head and that whoever obeys him in such a case obeys God also, whereas he who disobeys him also disobeys God. ...The emperor should seek nothing else than simply to perform the work and duty of his office, which is to protect his subjects.²⁹

Secular authorities were designed to protect. Luther knew that to obey secular authorities was part of God's will for mankind; he would never have encouraged citizens to engage in anarchy, unjust rebellion or antinomianism.

Lessons on Obeying Temporal Authority

Luther's "Two Kingdoms" teachings had three main components: it set forth the *raison d'être* of temporal government (viz., to establish good laws and stipulate the consequences for breaking such), it outlined the extent of the temporal rulers' authority,³⁰ and lastly, it gave situation-specific advice for rulers and citizens. Luther explained this doctrine in the context of the wars his parishioners faced.³¹

²⁸ Luther, "On War Against the Turk, 1529" in *Selected Political Writings*, 124-125.

²⁹ *Ibid*, 129.

³⁰ Thus Luther's words were focused on the secular authorities who thought it their place to command men to believe the state's preferred religion, and to command what to read or not to read. These secular directives had been stipulated by the leadership of the Roman Catholic Church. Luther referred to this situation as "one blind man leading another." Luther, "Temporal Authority: To What Extent it Should be Obeyed, 1523," 107.

³¹ In the struggle between Catholic and Lutheran churches, and between the princes who followed either the Pope or Luther, wars broke out with knights raiding and attacking the opposing faith. Luther is making it clear to "the illustrious high born prince and lord, Lord John, Duke of Saxony, Landgrave of

Luther claimed that the two separate kingdoms are ordained by God and are not in competition, but are meant to work in harmony much like God's right and left hands.

Luther states that both kingdoms are used by God to accomplish His purposes, but for each God has assigned different, yet complementary, roles.

The emperor is not the head of Christendom or defender of the gospel or the faith. The church and the faith must have a defender other than emperor and kings. They are usually the worst enemies of Christendom and of the faith, as Psalm 2[:2] says and as the church constantly laments.³²

Thus, the temporal governments exist to protect people, their property and rights. The Church does not actively defend these, but defends and spreads the gospel.

There is grave danger when the Church thinks she does not need the State. At the same time, Luther taught that the Church is not ultimately under the authority of the State. While the Church is under the authority of the Spirit rather than the State, Luther also taught that the Church is thereby also properly subject to the rule of the State. He denounces popes and bishops who see themselves as above rules or punishment. He is critical of the Roman Catholic Church which tried to manipulate the State, and avoid the God-given role of the State vis-à-vis the Church. Luther was convinced that God has given a great role to the State in this world, having the authority to keep wickedness from ruling the land.³³

In an essay to the "Dear Germans," Luther explained when and how obedience to the authority of the State is not required. Any state requirement to disobey God must be

Thuringia Margrave of Meissen" and to his followers that authority over the sword protecting land and people belongs to the prince, not to knights on a religious crusade or to peasants who disregard the authority of the rulers over them.

³² Luther, "Temporal Authority: To What Extent it Should be Obeyed, 1523," 130.

³³ Ibid., 56.

rejected. He argues forcefully that one should not join the emperor's call to arms to a "religious war" or in any attempt to stop the spread of the gospel.³⁴

This much is noncontroversial. But, there is a further teaching from Luther's pen that would be difficult for future generations to interpret:

Here men sin in two ways. First, if they lie to the government, deceive it, and are disloyal, neither obey nor do as it has ordered and commanded, whether with their bodies or their possessions. For even if the government does injustice, as the King of Babylon did to the people of Israel, yet God would have it obeyed, without treachery and deception. Secondly, when men speak evil of the government and curse it, and when a man cannot revenge himself and abuses the government with grumbling and evil words, publicly or secretly. In all this we are to regard that which St. Peter bids us regard, namely, that its power, whether it do right or wrong, cannot harm the soul, but only the body and property; unless indeed it should try openly to compel us to do wrong against God or men; as in former days when the magistrates were not yet Christians, and as the Turk is now said to do. For to suffer wrong destroys no one's soul, nay, it improves the soul, although it inflicts loss upon the body and property; but to do wrong, that destroys the soul, although it should gain all the world's wealth.³⁵

Luther derives this argument from the fourth commandment of the Decalogue. He taught that this commandment to obey one's mother and father includes what he says are spiritual mothers³⁶ and temporal fathers.³⁷ There is no fear in obeying a harmful state because it will only harm one's body, not one's soul, with the exception being a state that commands one to do something contrary to God's will.

While Luther indeed wrote much on the topic of temporal authorities, even asserting that they were usually the most wicked of scoundrels, he also wrote on the Church's authority. Luther believed it necessary to rebel against a pope who errs doctrinally or in ethical practices. The pope had no authority to war against the Turks,

³⁴ Luther, "...dear Germans," 136-139.

³⁵ Martin Luther, *Treatise on Good Works*, <http://www.iclnet.org/pub/resources/text/wittenberg/luther/work-05.txt>

³⁶ The Church

³⁷ The State, country, or government.

and faithful Christians were told to hide from him as one would from a wolf. If a pope or bishop hinders the building of the Body of Christ, his power should be resisted with “life, property, and with all our might and main”; in fact, anytime a pope commands anything contrary to Scripture, or tries to control the conscience of a parishioner, he ought to be resisted.³⁸

While addressing the Catholic practices of indulgences, sacraments, and its dabbling in politics or teaching about purgatory, Luther stated that:

...This must be added: Even though the bishop of Rome had the primacy and superiority by divine right nevertheless obedience would not be due those pontiffs who defend godless services, idolatry, and doctrine conflicting with the Gospel. Nay; such pontiffs and such a government ought to be held accursed, as Paul clearly teaches, Gal. 1, 8: Though an angel from heaven preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. And in Acts 5, 29: We ought to obey God rather than men. Likewise the canons also clearly teach that a heretical Pope is not to be obeyed.³⁹

The heart of Luther’s teachings on the clear distinction of the temporal domain and the spiritual domain was that each was to know and fulfill its God-given role, nothing more and nothing less.

³⁸ Martin Luther, “The Christian Nobility of the German Nation” in *Luther, Selected Political Writings*. Edited by J.M. Porter. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974), 22-32, 48-53.

³⁹ Martin Luther, “Of the Power and Primacy of the Pope, 1537” in *Triglot Concordia: The Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*. (St Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), 503-529. <http://www.iclnet.org/pub/resources/text/wittenberg/concord/web/smc-pope.html>

Martin Luther and Germanic Pagan Myths

Luther took the gospel very seriously; he did not want it tainted by either worldliness or self-righteousness. Some of Luther's writings point to his desire that Germany become a Christian nation "once again." As he is suggesting ways of setting up courts in Germany to settle disputes normally taken to Rome, Luther comments: "All I seek to do is to arouse and set to thinking those who have the ability and inclination to help the German nation to be free and Christian again after the wretched, heathenish, and un-Christian rule of the Pope."⁴⁰

Toward the end of Luther's argument in his address to the *German Nobility*, he brings in the interesting point of how the German empire is the "Holy" Roman Empire. He addresses the lie that the pope handed the empire over to the Germans, asserting that God Himself intended for the Germans to rule the Holy Roman Empire, that it was God who placed a German as emperor.⁴¹ Luther openly accuses the Roman Catholic Church of opposing the emperor. Popes tried to control the emperor, and so gain control over the empire; thus Luther rejects the myth that the Roman Catholic Church gave the empire to the Germans. It is God who controls His kingdoms, even if He should choose to use the pope as His pawn. God's will for the empire is that it be governed as an empire.⁴² This teaching was the starting point for many who would teach a "this-worldly" form of the ultimate Kingdom of God.

In the 1930s many were relating the Holy Roman Empire to the German Reich as the Kingdom of God. Althaus connected his Lutheran Christianity with what he taught

⁴⁰ Luther, *German Nobility*, 49.

⁴¹ Otto I (r. 962-73), from whose reign through 1806 it was almost always a German who sat on the throne.

⁴² Luther, *German Nobility*, 100-102.

about “*Volkstum*” saying that his teachings on the subject “truly [sanctified] a *völkisch* purpose to God’s Kingdom.”⁴³ Adolph von Harnack had taught a view embraced by Kaiser Wilhelm that it was the destiny of Germany to usher in the Kingdom of God on earth. Though this idea of the Kingdom of God was found in pagan myths and not in Luther’s texts, many Christians reconciled them with Scripture via the blood and soil teachings.

Luther’s Anti-Semitism

Luther’s views on the Jewish people changed during the course of his life. His anti-Semitism was contrary to Scripture, but Christians who did not know the contents of Scripture for themselves relied on Luther’s words. Luther’s Two Kingdom’s doctrine allowed Christians who wished to be good citizens of the German Reich to submit to their government’s anti-Semitic laws.

Anti-Semitism was not unique to Luther, and certainly not foreign to the Roman Catholic churches either.⁴⁴ The editor of an English translation of Luther’s most controversial works states, “In fact, the ghettos were established by Papal edict, and the segregation of Christian communities from Jewish...originated in edicts coming out of Rome.”⁴⁵

⁴³ Schouder, 113.

⁴⁴ See Heiko Oberman, *The Roots of Anti-Semitism*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984).

⁴⁵ Anonymous publishers, in Martin Luther’s *The Jews and Their Lies 1543*, (York, South Carolina: Liberty Bell Publications, 2004), 5. The editors of this particular edition of *The Jews and Their Lies* include quotes from Luther’s other works, allowing the modern reader see how often he mistreated the Jews in writing, see page 45.

Luther had been accused by the Roman Catholic Church earlier in his career of denying that Jesus was a Jew. He wrote in response that this was a lie, and detailed his beliefs and their alignment with Scripture. Later on Luther earnestly tried witnessing to the Jews, he believed that Jewish conversion was the harbinger of God's Kingdom. When the Jews did not respond to the gospel, Luther's views were greatly affected. Luther began *The Jews and Their Lies* by stating that he did not "intend to convert the Jews. For that is impossible."⁴⁶ Their damnation and judgment in the wrath of God shadow the entire book. Luther depicted the history of the Jewish people and the fall of their nation as an obvious sign of God's hatred of them.

The primary lie that disgusted Luther was the Jews' blasphemous denial of Jesus' deity. His list of accusations and denunciations is long. One such accusation, and perhaps the most ironic, was that the Jews hold firmly to the belief that they are born of "high, noble blood, birth and descent" whereas all others are not human in comparison, "hardly worthy to be regarded as worms."⁴⁷

Luther accuses them of not accepting their devilish lineage and instead boasting of their "superior" bloodline. Germans in many generations who claimed to follow Luther's teachings had no problem with boasting of their own bloodline, a thought pattern the Germans followed, as we will see, in the 1900's. It is not the boasting of blood that offended Luther, it is that the blood belonged to the murderers of his Lord.⁴⁸

Throughout this work, Luther quoted Hosea 1:9:

Therefore, this wrath leads to the conclusion that the Jews are certainly rejected by God and are not His people anymore, and He also is not their God anymore;

⁴⁶ Anonymous publishers, in Martin Luther's *The Jews and Their Lies 1543*, 5.

⁴⁷ Martin Luther, *The Jews and Their Lies 1543*, (York, South Carolina: Liberty Bell Publications, 2004), 12.

⁴⁸ Anonymous publishers, *The Jews and Their Lies 1543*, 13-15.

according to the passage, Hosea 1:9 “Lo, Ammi: You are not my people, so also am I not your God. Yea, they are in a terrible dilemma. Whatever interpretation they may place on it, we see the thing before our eyes, it does not deceive us.”⁴⁹

Luther used this text to prove that God was truly finished with the Jewish race. Later he used this text and stated that the devil and all his angels have possessed the Jews, and this is the reason for them not keeping the commands of God. Luther explained the hardships of the Jews as God’s punishment, as an encouragement to his German audience not to pity the Jews.

In his treatment of Hosea 1:9 Luther too easily forgot to move on to Hosea 1:10, a verse which begins with the clause “yet.” This is a word that should cause the accusers of the Jewish race to stop and think, and even turn to the New Testament book of Romans where this “yet” is expounded upon especially in Romans 11.⁵⁰ In Hosea 1:10, as God speaks of Israel, the language is reminiscent of earlier promises to the nation. It is here that God says He will make their number like the sand on a seashore. It is also in this passage that God says that those who have not been His, will be called His children.

To counter this incorrect focus of Luther’s, the New Testament teaching in Romans 11 speaks explicitly of God’s plan for Jews. Paul explains that God is not finished with the Jews—though they have been cut off, they are not beyond His blessing and His choosing. Paul makes the greater point that no human is beyond God’s choosing, and that He can “graft in” those who are blessed, whether Jew or Gentile. In Romans 11:25-29 Paul says there is future salvation for Israel that is certain. Peter extends this teaching in his first letter by referencing Hosea 1:9. In 1 Peter 2:10 the point is made that the people of God are such by receiving God’s mercy; God’s actual chosen race is not

⁴⁹ Luther, *The Jews and Their Lies* 1543,10.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 23.

comprised of those with like blood, but comprised of those who have received the same mercy.

Luther's description of Jewish desires was as unforgiving and biased as his suggestions of how to treat Jews. They want to be lazy and live off of the Germans' sweaty brows,

because the word "Hemdath," according to the grammar, really means "Desire and love for," as that which the heathen desire and love. And now the text shall read thus: "After a little while the desire of all the heathen shall come." What is that? What do the heathen desire? Gold, silver, and jewels. You may be inclined to ask why the Jews insert such interpretations here. I will say: Their breath stinks for the gold and silver of the heathen, since no people under the sun always have been, still are, and always will remain more avaricious than they (the Jews) as can be noticed in their cursed usury. They also find comfort with this: "When Messiah comes, He shall take all the gold and silver in the world and distribute it among them (the Jews)." Thus wherever they can direct Scripture to their insatiable avarice (desire for money) they wickedly do so.⁵¹

Luther outlined what he believed to be a respectable course of action. The Jews should not be given jobs, or homes. Christians should avoid all contact with them. Their books needed to be taken away and their education stopped. Protection and use of public areas should be prohibited. Their money should be taken back, since it was stolen from Germans, and if one should convert then a measure of necessities could be given him to start a new life. The best course of action is that they be put to manual labor so as to work and sweat, rather than Germans having to work and sweat. Foreshadowing the language of Nietzsche who believed all misfits and weaklings should perish, Luther proposed that because mercy makes people weak, "therefore, away with them!"⁵²

⁵¹ Luther, *The Jews and Their Lies* 1543, 26.

⁵² *Ibid*, 37-43.

Implications

Adolf Hitler hailed Luther as a German hero in his *Mein Kampf*,⁵³ and many NSDAP members claimed to be carrying out Luther's desires for the Jews in 1930s Germany. Luther had written recommendations that the NSDAP put into action. These words from Luther were unfortunately taken too seriously, words which contradict Luther's teachings on the love and kindness that Christians must exhibit toward one another and to those in either "kingdom." The NSDAP celebrated a national Luther Day in 1933, quoted him often in speeches or writings, and knew how to draw parallels between Luther's writings and their own ideologies.⁵⁴

On the other hand, it was the misunderstanding of Luther's teachings led some Christians to quietism, others to complete naivety concerning social ethics, and others to judgment of non-quietists. One clear 1930s example of this is found in the life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Bonhoeffer sought to assassinate Hitler, and struggled much in his decision, wondering if this was an occasion to turn the other cheek. Bonhoeffer's writings⁵⁵ display the classic Lutheran teaching of not resisting, of not fighting selfishly for one's rights or privileges.⁵⁶ Luther believed that God was sovereign over the temporal authorities and would rather have men pray and display meekness than to act rashly. Bonhoeffer thoroughly agreed. Bonhoeffer's planned actions toward Hitler were viewed as sinful by those who believed Bonhoeffer was fighting for his own dignity or rights

⁵³ Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, Volume 1 Chapter 8, <http://www.crusader.net/texts/mk/mkv1ch08.html>.

⁵⁴ Richard Steigmann-Gall, *The Holy Reich: Nazi Conceptions of Christianity*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003) 134-138.

⁵⁵ *Cost of Discipleship* is the most well known, though this concept is also seen in his essays and sermons.

⁵⁶ Martin Luther was not a pacifist; his teachings on turning the other cheek do not apply to situations of war or protecting a neighbor from evil.

when he should have turned his cheek. Bonhoeffer saw instead a chance to fight evil, which Luther taught is difficult to do in a fallen world.⁵⁷

Luther's doctrine of the Two Kingdoms, being dualistic, may have been cause of many German citizens in the 1930s expecting the government to stand up for certain human rights, including the legality of religion. This doctrine made it easy to assume that God did not want Christian citizens to meddle with state affairs, even though the state was meddling in their Church affairs. "The doctrine of the two kingdoms...[some critics] believe, is the reason why Lutheranism has no real social ethics....," and thus many Christians during the Church Struggle went to one of two extremes.⁵⁸ They failed to resist the government powers that oppressed them, controlled their religious practices, education and communications. Or, they tried to make the *Weltanschauung*⁵⁹ of the NSDAP compatible with Christianity while viewing Hitler as God's leader for Germany's future as a pure and holy empire. Luther can never be accused of promulgating quietism or pacifism, but one can acknowledge the connection between the social ethics of the Church in the 1930's and the renewed interest in Luther's writings.

Luther's teachings on the Holy Roman Empire were reemphasized and reinterpreted during the 1930s in a way that hardened the conscience of those Christians that accepted the Blood and Soil ideologies. Some thought that perhaps God had placed the National Socialists in Germany to rule according to God's will and as an answer to prayer. The NSDAP teachings were not based on Luther's texts, but rather found in ancient myths. However, many Christians reconciled the NSDAP teachings with

⁵⁷ Bonhoeffer was part of a conspiracy to assassinate Hitler, he was imprisoned for this. His *Letters and Papers from Prison* were written during that time.

⁵⁸ Thorsten Prill, "Martin Luther, The Two Kingdoms, and the Church," *Evangel* Vol 23 Issue 1 (Spring 2005), 2.

⁵⁹ World view

Scripture because of an assumed equivalency of the Holy Roman Empire, German blood and soil, and the Kingdom of God.

Not every use of Luther's writings during the *Kirchenkampf* was a misuse. There are many clear examples of the invocation of Luther's teachings during the Church conflict by those who remained faithful to their Christianity. The following letter was sent by Dr. Otto Dibelius as an open letter⁶⁰ to *Herr Reichminister* Kerrl in 1937 in response to a speech Kerrl addressed to the public:

Here is the decisive point. When you demand that the Evangelical Church is not to be a State within the State, every Evangelical would agree. The Church is to be a Church, not a State in the State! Your principles, however, would make of the State a Church by determining sermons and creed by force. This is the root of the whole matter and of the struggle between the State and the Evangelical Church. The struggle will never come to an end until the State has realized its limits. Luther has said that we, loyal to God's Word, must serve the State, as long as it is a State, with body and life. Adolf Hitler's State too, can rely on the readiness of the Evangelical Christians of Germany. It would be unworthy if we were to assure him of that again in all solemnity. But the moment the State wishes to be the Church, and have power over the souls of men and over the preaching of the Church, we are, in accordance with Luther's words, bound to offer resistance in God's name; and we shall most certainly do so.⁶¹

On this occasion, Luther's words were used as he intended them: an encouragement to resist a secular authority who calls citizens to act contrary to Scripture.

Christians living through the *Kirchenkampf* would find it difficult not to believe that God had somehow specially blessed the blood of Germany and given them an empire the size of Otto I's Holy Roman Empire of the German nation. Though Luther never endorsed an empire comprised solely of Germans, his words about the German Empire inspired those who espoused that ideology in the 1900s. Moreover, ambiguity in his Two Kingdoms teaching made it difficult for them to know when a temporal authority should

⁶⁰ A letter published for the public to read.

⁶¹ A.S. Duncan-Jones, *The Struggle for Religious Freedom in Germany*, (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1938), 307-308.

be obeyed, especially when combined with 19th-20th century mythology about God choosing the Germans to be the next Holy Roman Empire, the literal Kingdom of God on earth.⁶² Luther knew from scripture that the Roman Empire was slated to fall according to the prophet Daniel.⁶³ He drew the conclusion that that the earlier fall of Rome allowed *this* German Empire to rise.⁶⁴ Nevertheless, he in no way equated the German empire of his day with the Kingdom of God on earth.

Luther's claims about Jews also could have been in any Lutheran's mind in 1930's Germany, a thought pattern that would make one loathe successful Jews. Luther's accusatory words about Jewish selfishness may have had a negative effect upon many Germans thereafter. During the *Kirchenkampf* of the 1930's, this is evidenced by the fact that only that handful of Lutheran pastors who took part in the Confessing Church verbalized their outrage at the Aryan clause⁶⁵ introduced into the Church during the years of struggle.

Martin Niemöller and Karl Barth were quick to realize when the damage had already been done, that they also should have spoken out much sooner for the Jews, not just the Jews who had converted to Christianity. Here Niemöller revealed his remorse for being too quiet from 1933-1937:

Wir haben es vorgezogen, zu schweigen. Ohne Schuld sind wir gewiss nicht, und ich frage mich immer wieder, was wäre geworden, wenn im Jahre 1933 oder 1934 - es muss ja eine Möglichkeit gewesen sein - 14.000 evangelische Pfarrer und alle evangelischen Gemeinden, die es in Deutschland gab, die Wahrheit bis in den Tod verteidigt hätten? Wenn wir damals gesagt hätten, es ist nicht recht, wenn

⁶² Stayer, 5. Albrecht Ritschl was one of the theologians at this time affirming Germans in the belief that the Kingdom of God is "this worldly" and consists of following ethical and moral principles. Althaus taught of a "this worldly" kingdom, admitting he carried his teaching well beyond the scope of Luther's; this will be discussed in chapters three and four of this thesis.

⁶³ Luther spoke of the fall as an event of the past, prior to Luther's time.

⁶⁴ Luther, *To the Christian Nobility*..., 101.

⁶⁵ This clause stated that only those of Aryan descent could participate fully in work, commerce, education, worship, etc. For the detailed discussion, see pages 47-49 and 73-74 of this thesis.

Hermann Göring 100.000 Kommunisten einfach in die Konzentrationslager steckt, um sie umkommen zu lassen. Ich kann mir denken, dass dann vielleicht 30.000 bis 40.000 evangelische Christen um einen Kopf kürzer gemacht worden wären, kann mir aber auch denken, dass wir dann 30-40.000 Millionen [sic] Menschen das Leben gerettet hätten, denn das kostet es uns jetzt.⁶⁶

Niemöller admits that he and the other 14,000 pastors shared the guilt for remaining quiet. He expressed belief that the course of history would have been different had they begun to speak out in the beginning, when the German Communists were the target of the Nazi regime. Sticking their necks out for the few in the beginning could have saved millions of people in the long run.

In Niemöller's published speeches from the WWII era, one scholar notes that a similar theme rings throughout. He felt remorse for not speaking out, for not caring for the Communists, the sick and elderly, the workers, the Jews, and the other people groups that found themselves enslaved by the Third Reich. Though he never published these speeches, no doubt they were used to shape the famous prose now enshrined in many holocaust museums.⁶⁷

It is plain to see that if Luther, who was so gloriously celebrated anew in the late 1800's and viewed as a German hero, could write such things, then Christians would naturally strive to follow his teachings. When Hitler said "away" with the sick and the elderly, those with opposing views, those with loyalties other than to German "blood," they were sent "away" and many in the Church took no action. When a group of theological professors and laypersons formed for the purpose of ridding Christianity of all

⁶⁶ Martin Niemöller 6 January 1946 speech, in *Die deutsche Schuld, Not und Hoffnung*, Zurich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1946, 5-6. Quoted by Harold Marcuse, UC Santa Barbara, September 12, 2000, <http://www.history.ucsb.edu/faculty/marcuse/niem.htm>

⁶⁷ Harold Marcuse, UC Santa Barbara, September 12, 2000, <http://www.history.ucsb.edu/faculty/marcuse/niem.htm>

its “Jewishness,” they cited themselves as continuing the work of Martin Luther,⁶⁸ and their teachings spread rapidly.

⁶⁸ For information on the formation of this Institution, its work, and the Godesberg Declaration of April 1939, see Susannah Heschel, “Nazifying Christian Theology: Walter Grundmann and the Institute for the Study and Eradication of Jewish Influence on German Church Life,” in *Church History*, Vol. 63, No. 4. (December, 1994), 587-605. See especially pages 590-591.

CHAPTER THREE

The Impact of the Weimar Years

After experiencing the humiliation of having lost the Great War, Germans were further humiliated by foreign countries commanding their future as a nation. For the first time in this land democracy would rule, but this democracy failed within a short amount of time. This humiliation, the economic outcomes of the war, the failed democracy, and the philosophical writings popular at the time pointed people away from the frustrating Weimar Republic towards a form of government, Socialism, that would prove even more disappointing. Most Germans in 1918 considered themselves Christians, and opposed any form of government that was Jewish or Atheist in nature, which included the Weimar Republic. This aversion was tied to their forefather's views, such as Luther who hated the idea of a government without a King and was strongly anti-Semitic, as well as Geothe and Fichte's teachings on nationality and government. It was also tied to the faulty teachings on the Kingdom of God that re-surfaced in the years of Kaiser Wilhelm II.

Many historians writing on Germany's turbulence between the World Wars agree that the culture did not settle, and the Germans did not deal well with all the changes foisted on them by the Versailles Treaty. The Weimar Republic⁶⁹ was a short lived democracy, beginning just after the revolution in 1918 when the Emperor was forcefully ousted at the end of the Great War. Through all the failings and changes, the spirituality of the Germans was drastically affected and impacted the loyalty they would show in 1933 to a government very different from Weimar.

⁶⁹ Weimar was so named for the city that officials met at its inception. Though democracy was not the peoples' choice, democratic elections grew to be popular with Germans, as demonstrated by high voter turnout.

Loss of Dignity as a Nation

Germany was forced to sign the Versailles Peace Treaty accepting all culpability for the Great War. Germans lost their supply of natural resources when they were forced to give up their colonies and other adjoining regions belonging to Germany itself. As a result the economy suffered and the nation fell into depression. The Emperor was forced to resign and almost immediately there was movement toward the formation of a democracy—unheard of in their history. "On November 10, 1918, two days after Kaiser Wilhelm II abdicated and fled to the Netherlands, the Prussian church's ruling council" voiced the cry of the people, "Emperor and empire, dearer to us than all else in our history, are gone...Poverty, misery, hunger, and annihilation await us and our children."⁷⁰

Under the Versailles Peace Treaty the new government was forced to pay war reparations and hand over land and precious resources to France, Russia, Poland, Belgium and Denmark. Germany was to remain occupied for up to fifteen years with all foreign relations controlled or severed. Its military power was decimated,⁷¹ the importation/exportation of goods decreased, the merchant fleet was reduced to only one tenth of its' former size and was barred from Allied markets. In all this suppression and turmoil the leaders had to convince the German citizens that this government could be strong.⁷²

Some doubted the new form of government, and these doubts grew rapidly following the implementation of the Versailles Peace Treaty.

The Allied terms were presented on May 7 [following the formation of Germany's new democracy]. No oral discussion was permitted. All observations

⁷⁰ Brady, 28.

⁷¹ Submarines, tanks etc. were prohibited.

⁷² S. William Halperin, *Germany Tried Democracy*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company Inc, 1946), 138.

had to be made in writing, and for this a maximum period of fifteen days was allowed...this was a dictated peace. That the Allies committed a serious psychological blunder in excluding the Germans from the peace conference until the treaty had been drafted and in denying them the privilege of negotiating orally is now generally admitted. [This became] one of the principal themes of their [Nazi] anti-republican propaganda.⁷³

Halperin expressed the view that this democracy was not successful in part because of the way it was forced on the German people, without the voice of the Germans being heard.

Peter Gay pointed out that “the first four years of the Republic were years of almost uninterrupted crisis, a true time of troubles.”⁷⁴ During these first four years of democracy, the Versailles Peace Treaty was enforced, and there were abundant “political assassinations...the Kapp Putsch [a counter-revolution], ...the French occupation... astronomical inflation,”⁷⁵ all of which fueled tendencies toward anti-Semitism, monarchism, militarism, and socialism.⁷⁶

Halperin suggested that the Germans did not truly miss the use of their resources, or their beloved citizens of those colonies. They were humiliated merely by the loss of what they formerly owned. If they controlled colonies, then they could hold their heads higher; if their trade had not been controlled and even thwarted by the Allies, they could have felt respectable again.⁷⁷

⁷³ Halperin, 138.

⁷⁴ Peter Gay, *Weimar Culture, the Outsider as Insider*, (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1968), 10.

⁷⁵ Gay, 11.

⁷⁶ The sanctions placed on Germany were well monitored at first, but after approximately 4 years it was possible to see that Germany followed instructions in theory only. Germany was permitted to maintain an army of 100,000 soldiers, which it did; however para-military groups were formed, and university students were trained as reservists without the official ranks being assigned. Thus, Germany was able to arm itself undercover during the Weimar years, a tactic that greatly aided Hitler’s plans for the nation. See Rosanna Gatens, “Prelude to *Gleichschaltung*: The University of Heidelberg and the E.J. Gumbel Controversies, 1924 and 1932” in *European History Quarterly*, (London, Vol. 31 (1)), 72-73.

⁷⁷ Halperin, 138.

Aversion to Democracy

Hans Mommsen is among those who hold to the opinion that the fall of the Weimar Republic was inevitable. Mommsen claims that Hugo Preuss, a Jew, was correctly given much of the blame. Preuss had tendencies toward the parliamentary style of government and began drafting the backbone of the new democracy on 15 November 1918. Though the democracy did not let the President operate in the way Preuss had set out in his first draft of the constitution, he was blamed for suggesting a president at all. Peter Gay calls Preuss “a symbol of the revolution... a Jew and a left-wing democrat” who was later banned from the “university establishment for all his merits.”⁷⁸

After the three political groups of the Weimar Coalition⁷⁹ met to discuss the draft which called for the creation of sixteen states within the *Länder*⁸⁰, major portions were found to need revision or rejection. According to Preuss’s draft of the government, the states would not have a voice, but be “reduced to the status of administrative units within an essentially unitary state.”⁸¹ The revision of the constitution was not finished until after the disappointing Versailles Treaty ordeal, August 1919.

In their fear of Communism, and any other philosophy with Jewish heritage, many Germans began the Weimar years with distaste for the rocky democracy. Up to this point in Germany, to be born a German meant to be Christian, to be blessed. Marxism and other Jewish or atheist forms of government had changed the face of politics and culture in many of the surrounding nations. In their personal and political stance, Germans did not want anything they considered overtly unchristian to prevail.

⁷⁸ Gay, 17.

⁷⁹ The Center party, the Social Democrats, and the Democrats.

⁸⁰ Nation, Country.

⁸¹ Hans Mommsen, *The Rise and Fall of Weimar Democracy*, translated by Elborg Forster and Larry Eugene Jones, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 52-54.

The education given to university students only served to deepen this aversion to democracy which included the scholarly writings of academicians like Goethe, Fichte and Nietzsche. Johann Wolfgang Goethe taught about man's meaning in relation to nature, an idea that preceded the NSDAP's blood-soil theory. He also spoke of the *Volk* and of race which in ways were echoed in the generation of the *Kirchenkampf*. Johann Gottlieb Fichte taught about democracy in ways useful to the Third Reich—a severe distrust and rejection of democracy⁸² in place of a more socialistic approach to government. In his *völkische* ideas, he too taught that self-realization occurred within the community, that the good of the *Volk* was higher than any individual's needs. Such ideas, along with Nietzsche's *Übermensch*⁸³ and Richard Wagner's anti-Semitism,⁸⁴ were readily available to the masses in the form of pamphlets which Hitler also read.⁸⁴

Volk, Volkstum, Volkheit

There were elements of German society during these early days of Weimar advocating a return to ancient German paganism. Paul Althaus,⁸⁵ a theologian during the years of the German Church Conflict, approved of this though no theologian in the Confessing Church would. Althaus was one of many Germans who advocated an idea

⁸² Democracy was never practiced in Germany or other German speaking areas of Europe. The way this concept was introduced and in essence forced on Germans added to the German distaste for democracy. See pages 34 and following of this thesis.

⁸³ Super man, or perfect man.

⁸⁴ For more information on Goethe, Fichte, Nietzsche, see Frederick Copleston, S.J. Vol. VI and VII. For information on these pamphlets, read *Gleichschaltung* below. For more information on the anti-Semitism found in Wagner, see Arthur Gobineau, *The Inequality of the Races*, Translated by Adrian Collins, (New York: H. Fertig, 1967), or Wagner's opera *Parcifal*.

⁸⁵ Althaus never became part of the Confessing Church, thus he was able to keep his teaching position all through the conflict.

which has no English equivalent, *Volk*. J.R.C. Wright tries to translate the idea of *Volk* as “national movement,” but the German word espouses much more than either of those two words encapsulates.⁸⁶ Althaus tied teachings of German paganism concerning *Volk* to the will of God making these teachings palatable to Christians:

The church, Althaus argued, had a responsibility to this movement as both had a national mission. The church, however, asserted absolute claims whereas commitment to the *Volk* was secondary. Althaus explained that *Volkheit*, a term coined by Goethe, should be understood as ‘the will of God over a people’; the converse idea that the *Volk* was divine in itself ‘deified unholy *Volkstum*’—it made something earthly and fallible unconditionally binding.⁸⁷

This attitude marked the beginning of church leadership convincing one another’s conscience that the prevailing culture could interpret Scripture, and a clear example of what Karl Barth was fighting as he wrote against “culture” Christianity.⁸⁸

The *völkisch* worldview was marked by ethical dualism, “good and evil, light and darkness, idealism and materialism...”⁸⁹ This element harks back to Luther’s idea of the German empire, namely that “the German *Volk*...had been called to this end and was capable of deciding this battle for the world in favour of the principle of the good.”⁹⁰ Those who accepted these *völkisch* ideas believed that they were the good, and that they would dominate over evil, and that their goodness was somehow organic, “the good [belonging] to the Aryan race and the evil to the Jewish-Semitic race.”⁹¹

Völkisch traditions, especially as propounded by Nietzsche and Hirsch, taught that the *Volk* comes before the individual: “no *Volk* without state and no state without power

⁸⁶ Wright, 74.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 75.

⁸⁸ For more details on Barth’s fight against “culture” Christianity, see W.R. Ward, 89-121.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 75.

⁹⁰ Scholder, 75.

⁹¹ Ibid., 75.

and the will to power.”⁹² The morality of decisions ties the *Volk* to its ancestors and descendants. It was blood that showed to which *Volk* one belonged, thus taking *völkisch* concerns one step beyond mere nationalism. No outsider could become a citizen since citizenship was a matter of blood alone. Anti-Semitism as displayed in these teachings did not begin to wax worse until Hitler was released from jail, at which time he joined as a speaker of the local chapter. The group which later became the NSDAP clung to its position on *Volkstum*, ideas which Hitler engaged as he entered this group in Munich, but which he later dropped due to their emphasis on pagan religion.⁹³

Throughout the nineteenth century the *völkisch* ideas were fermenting. The core ideas had been developed in the writings of both Fichte and Goethe; but were in their height in the 1920s. It was then that a *völkisch* theoretician, Max Gerstenhauer, stated:

Racial dogma, consequently, has become the scientific biological foundation of the nationalist idea, and the results of the latest biological research completely confirm the traditional, familiar views of the nationalists—that the *Volk* is an entity created by blood...⁹⁴

It was this concept of *Volk* that first captivated Hitler during his 1920s days in Munich,⁹⁵ as well as young students of Luther’s heritage with a desire to see the national prestige reestablished.

The popularity and power of the *völkisch* movement is thought to be second only to socialism. Klaus Scholder claims that without the *völkisch* idea, “the spread and rule of the National Socialists is inconceivable.”⁹⁶ Otto Dibelius, church superintendent at the

⁹² Emanuel Hirsch, quoted in Scholder, 103.

⁹³ Scholder, 84-99.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 75.

⁹⁵ These days included his part in the Beer Hall Putsch, his jail time, his joining the group later to be called the NSDAP and becoming their spokesman.

⁹⁶ Wright, 74.

time,⁹⁷ objected early in the *Kirchenkampf* that the church must remain “above parties” and not be too close to a nationalist sect when the church ought to serve the whole nation.⁹⁸

Some theological professors brought the *völkische* teachings into the classroom, such as Friedrich Gogarten with these thoughts:

The contemporary German suffered most deeply from not knowing to whom he belonged, whether God or man, as I wrote in my *Political Ethics*. Now he knows once more that he belongs to his *volk* [sic], and in and through his *volk* [sic] to the state, in which the will of the *volk* [sic] has become sovereign power. When a *volk* [sic] that has lost its order as badly as our *volk* [sic] has, is to be brought back into order, it must first be reduced to uniformity [i.e. *Gleichschaltung*]. Whoever complains that this involves an impoverishment of life fails to grasp that now it is a question of preserving naked existence.⁹⁹

As Germans were searching for meaning after the upheaval of war, theologians like Gogarten emphasized that they belonged not to God but to Germany.¹⁰⁰

The Kingdom of God

The *völkische* teachings on the will of God complimented the pagan ideas of the Kingdom of God that resurfaced in Germany during the reign of Kaiser Wilhelm II. The concentration on Germany as the Kingdom of God carried through to H.S. Chamberlain’s thoughts who wrote that “God builds today upon the Germans alone...This is the knowledge, the certain truth, that has filled my soul for years.”¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ Dibelius was a church superintendant until 1933 when forced to retire upon the German Christians taking power in the Old Prussian Union. He remained a pastor and eventually took the title of bishop in 1945.

⁹⁸ Scholder, 76.

⁹⁹ Gogarten quoted in Stayer, 129.

¹⁰⁰ Footnote on that article about gogarten and gleichschaltung

¹⁰¹ Shirer, 107.

Arthur Stewart Duncan-Jones, the dean of Chichester Cathedral in England during the 1930s, believed that to understand German reactions to the defeat experienced from the Great War and to the introduction of democracy, one must also analyze their way of thinking up to this point.¹⁰² He noted Fichte and Goethe as two of the greatest predecessors of this generation's struggling mindset, and the culture myth of Germany as the great Empire and Kingdom of God as detrimental. The idea that Germans were chosen as the great empire to save the world was rooted in the history of the idea of Germans as inheritors of the Roman Empire,¹⁰³ as well as the faulty ethnocentric teachings on the Kingdom of God.¹⁰⁴ Germany was thus said to be God's chosen nation, and Germans said to be God's chosen people.

Otto Dibelius was able to see the impact that a faulty view of the Kingdom of God was having on his generation, he knew it stemmed from cultural doctrinal changes. For centuries many had equated the Kingdom to earthly rule and power and sought it at the expense of Christianity—or relating to God on His terms. Dibelius knew the turmoil that had swept the nation resulting from the Great War, and the failing Weimar Republic, had created Germans' fears that led them to trust in human power. Dibelius' ideas are succinctly summarized by one historian:

¹⁰² Duncan-Jones was a theologian, church historian and published author living from 1879-1955. His writings on this period include *The Struggle for Religious Freedom in Germany* cited often in this thesis; additional chapters in *From U-Boat to Concentration Camp: the Autobiography of Martin Niemöller*, published in 1939; *The Crooked Cross*, published in 1940 as part of the Macmillan War Pamphlets 4; and *Justice Among the Nations* published in 1944 by the League of Nations. One book review of his *The Struggle for Religious Freedom in Germany* said Duncan-Jones had "extensive and often very intimate knowledge" of his topic and that "as an account of the struggle...fair and very well informed." Nathaniel Micklern, "Review," in *International Affairs* (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1931-1939), vol. 18, no. 1 (Jan-Feb 1939), 125.

¹⁰³ Cross reference page 21 of this thesis.

¹⁰⁴ To read about the views on the Kingdom of God that were being taught and written about in Germany between the two world wars, read W. R. Ward, *Theology, Sociology and Politics, The German Protestant Social Conscience 1890-1933*, (Berne: Peter Lang Publishers LTD., 1979), 122-131.

In that first postwar period, when the term ‘kingdom’ was still a very institutional one, largely used by Europe’s conservative historians without any scriptural comprehension, Dibelius reminded the whole of Europe that the real pledge of the church was not to restore earthly kingdoms but to proclaim the sovereignty of Christ the King. ... Individual belief, emotional as it tends to be, is ever so liable to disregard the things pertaining to the kingdom of God. The kingdom-element of life under God has often been left to the powers that be and has become sadly disjointed. ... The horrible war which lies behind us has certainly not engendered a religious revival. On the contrary, a fear of the future, a sense of uncertainty and utter insecurity have come to fill the hearts of many Europeans.¹⁰⁵

These false ideas of the Kingdom of God to which Dibelius refers were festering even before WWI. Some trace Kaiser Wilhelm II’s ideas of the Kingdom of God to the prominent liberal church historian Adolf von Harnack.

Harnack’s liberal views¹⁰⁶ were challenged by the Prussian church leadership on the eve of his appointment to teach at the University in Berlin. “Harnack was rescued by Kaiser Wilhelm II, who much admired his administrative abilities and scholarly depth. Wilhelm had become emperor in 1888, the same year of Harnack’s¹⁰⁷ eventual appointment at Berlin.”¹⁰⁸

It has been said that Wilhelm was a devout Lutheran. When confronted by the prophecy in Daniel concerning the fall of empires, in comparison with his own plans to be the Caesar of the united empire and told his plans must fail, he shrugged it off saying he did not accept the prophecy. Thus, when the pope addressed Wilhelm on the very topic, he was surprised:

It was of interest to me that the Pope said to me on this occasion that Germany must become the sword of the Catholic Church. I remarked that the old Roman

¹⁰⁵ James E. Wagner, *Day is Dawning: The Story of Bishop Otto Dibelius*, (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: The Christian Education Press, 1956), 40-41.

¹⁰⁶ Especially pertaining to a new debate on the Apostles Creed, and which creeds should be accepted by those seeking appointment as a pastor.

¹⁰⁷ It was this Harnack that eventually taught Karl Barth. When Harnack and others supported the Kaiser in WWI, Barth’s disillusionment with liberal theology caused him to break ties.

¹⁰⁸ Anon, *Adolf von Harnack 1851-1910*, <http://homepages.which.net/~radical.faith/thought/harnack.htm>

Empire of the German nation no longer existed and that conditions had changed. But he stuck to his words.¹⁰⁹

Given the choice between Scripture or German culture and history, Wilhelm chose the latter.

These political traditions concerning the kingdom of God as German paved the path for Hitler's changes in the life of the church. Barth, who had grown weary of "political" theology while pastoring in Safenwil among the working-class "soon realized the folly of identifying socialism with the Kingdom of God as just another historicist heresy."¹¹⁰

Duncan-Jones felt compassion for Christians in Germany and tried to encourage German pastors and churches. He wrote about this changing time following the Great War for the Church thus:

There must be something wonderful, Germans said, in a race that had been able to hold out so long against such frightful odds. When for four years Germans were cut off from the rest of the world, they seemed to themselves to have found in their own mentality rich resources. They must make sure that these were now used to the full. The defeat could only be wiped out by a devotion to Germanism as complete as had been demanded of the soldiers in the war. They had not lost the war because they had been too German, but because they had not been German enough...the German mind turned to apocalyptic conceptions. A shattered world in which all settled and rational order had fallen into ruins could only be rebuilt by heroic faith [in God]. The natural world had failed. Only a will endowed with a supernatural light...was of any avail.¹¹¹

Duncan-Jones observed that the generation of the Weimar Republic already had the mindset of needing to be more German in the future. While noting that the Germans faced severe economic and political outcomes from the Great War, Duncan-Jones writes that it was perhaps the spirituality of the people that was most deeply affected. It was no

¹⁰⁹ Kaiser Wilhelm II, *The Kaiser's Memoirs*, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1922), 211.

¹¹⁰ Stayer, 53-54.

¹¹¹ Duncan-Jones, 16.

longer just a political duty, but also a very spiritual duty to be so devoted to their newfound Germanism. Some used the defeat from the Great War as reason to hate religion even further; others used philosophy, mysticism, ancient paganism, and various religions posing as Christianity to answer life's unnerving questions.

The Volk in the Church

Hans Mommsen stated that the fall of the Weimar Republic was inevitable because of timing, democracy being foreign to this people and dictated by the Allies. Also, the bourgeois elite continued to fight about every detail, from voting procedures, to the colors of the flag, making it clear that the German democracy was not strong enough to last. Many of the compromises that took place were in reaction to “a twofold danger: the disintegration of the national unity and the specter of the “Bolshevization” of Germany.”¹¹²

Though Marx was a Jew by birth, he was an atheist by choice and therefore his worldview was shunned by most Germans. Knowing that the majority of Germans opposed it, the NSDAP fought the atheistic, communistic ideas of Marx and secured the trust of the Protestant churches as the Weimar years closed. The church leadership believed the National Socialists to be the “first to stand up to the danger, suffering bloodshed, scorn, and persecution in the process.”¹¹³ Protestants found themselves willing to trust the only alternative to Democracy.

¹¹² Mommsen, 70.

¹¹³ J.R.C. Wright, *Above Parties: The Political Attitudes of the German Protestant Church Leadership 1918-1933*, (Oxford University Press, 1974), 85.

During the Weimar years the spread and evolution of the *Volk* groups within the churches seemed to soar. Protestant churches were independent of the state for the first time in history, and were governing themselves. By 1926 one group brought many of these together into the *Bund religiöser Sozialisten Deutschland*.¹¹⁴ Individual churches called *Landeskirchen*¹¹⁵ were independent in governing and confessing matters, but tied together by the *Kirchentag*, a group that would exercise supervisory powers, and establish synods. Officially, in the drafted constitution of the *Kirchentag*, the purposes were:

(1) To protect and represent the common interests of the German Evangelical Land churches; (2) to cultivate the common consciousness of German protestantism; and (3) to support the religious-ethical *Weltanschauung* of the German churches of the Reformation—“all this while safeguarding the independence of the confederated churches in respect to their confession, constitution, and administration.”¹¹⁶

The *Kirchentag* did not bring much unity to the Protestant churches though on paper it appeared to.

Some pastors, as in the case of Karl Themel, tied the *völkische* movement to Christianity by reminding his congregation that the *Volk* need the redemption of Christ for the sake of Christianity, and for the future of Germany.¹¹⁷ Others also had no problem making the two seem compatible:

In his monthly *Deutsches Volkstum*, [Wilhelm] Stapel, who was only a little older than Althaus and Hirsch, from 1919 on presented a conscious *völkisch*-nationalist and Christian-Lutheran position. According to his own testimony it was Fichte and Luther who had helped him to attain clarity out of the shock of war and

¹¹⁴ Cochrane, 74-80. Confederation of Religious Socialists of Germany

¹¹⁵ Land churches, territorial churches or regional churches

¹¹⁶ Helmreich, 71. Quote taken from Article One of the constitution, *Kirchliche Jahrbuch für die evangelische Kirche in Deutschland*, 1922, 794.

¹¹⁷ Scholder, 111.

defeat. Thus as in the case of Hirsch, Stapel's concept of *Volk* had marked echoes of Fichte. For him, too, the *Volk* was an original entity created by God...¹¹⁸

From statements like this one, it is clear that Luther was being used by some as encouragement towards positions that Scripture would not support.

There were pastors opposed to the *völkische* teachings, one particular being Otto Baumgarten. He wrote briefly in the *Cross and Swastika*.¹¹⁹ In this pamphlet he explained the movement as one which "mocked every scholarly and civil decency" and continued his assessment, which concluded by stating that the cross and swastika were completely opposed to one another, as described by Scholder:

He saw an explanation for these things...in 'German- *völkisch* fanaticism' and...Baumgarten exposed the historical fabrications of the antisemitists [sic], set the human ethics of the Old Testament over against Germanic mythology, and questioned any possibility of a scientific theory of race.¹²⁰

Baumgarten saw the dangers of *völkisch* teachings, and called this movement what it really was: 'German- *völkisch* fanaticism.' Baumgarten was one of the few who realized the dangers these teachings posed on Scripture.

The impact the *völkische* teachings and the faulty teachings on the Kingdom of God had on the Church can be seen by the Church's inclusion of them, and the way in which the German Protestants voted throughout the years of the Republic. Richard Steigmann-Gall wrote about way different groups in Germany voted. He also looked specifically at the Protestants votes, and noted that their decreased church attendance and their voting for volkish and socialist measures were directly related. He also says of the research he found that:

¹¹⁸ Scholder, 104.

¹¹⁹ The swastika represented the *völkische* movement, not merely the NSDAP, in this book.

¹²⁰ Scholder, 115. See also 114 to read of a man who left his church due to *völkische* teachings within.

Proponents of the claim that German Protestants were more likely than German Catholics to become Nazis have largely failed to explain the reasons for the overwhelming attachment to the Nazi Party among the Protestant population.¹²¹

While Hitler's propaganda led the people astray, it is most plausible that the NSDAP tactics were successful because of the German people's readiness for a voice of "reason and order," a voice they sought during the Weimar years and could not find. National desires filled the minds of citizens in the republic, nationalistic hopes of identity as a nation and as a race, of order and of the future. "The most insistent questions revolved around the need for man's renewal."¹²²

From Weimar Republic to Third Reich

William Shirer wrote a comprehensive history of the Third Reich.¹²³ Shirer traced the historical roots of Nazism from the First Reich, Second Reich, and Weimar as well as the philosophical roots from ancient German pagan myths through the 19th century philosophers and writers. Shirer's account titled *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich: A History of Nazi Germany* covered so much ground that he only dedicated twenty-three of the 1143 pages to the roots of Nazism. He made compelling arguments for seeing Luther, Fichte, Hegel, Treitschke, Nietzsche, and Wagner as greatly influential on Hitler. Shirer's account is filled with personal recollection of firsthand experiences.

¹²¹ Richard Steigmann-Gall. "Apostasy or Religiosity? The Cultural Meanings of the Protestant Vote for Hitler," in *Social History*, (Oct2000, Vol. 25, Issue 3), 4.

¹²² Gay, 7.

¹²³ William Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich: A History of Nazi Germany*, Shirer was an American who lived and worked in Germany from 1925 through the beginning of Hitler's reign

“‘Whoever wants to understand National Socialist Germany must know Wagner,’ Hitler used to say.”¹²⁴ Shirer also detailed H. S. Chamberlain’s role as mentor to Hitler and the strange beliefs that Chamberlain passed on through that relationship.¹²⁵

Chamberlain saw Hitler as the savior of Germany and of the world, as being “sent by God to lead the German people out of the wilderness.”¹²⁶ Shirer wrote briefly about the religious and philosophical ideas of those influential on Hitler, and then surmises:

Yet Adolf Hitler had a mystical sense of his personal mission on earth in those days [of 1924-1927], and even before. “From millions of men...*one* man must step forward,” he wrote in *Mein Kampf* (the italics are his), “who with apodictic force will form granite principles from the wavering idea-world of the broad masses and take up the struggle for their sole correctness, until from the shifting waves of a free thought-world there will arise a brazen cliff of solid unity in faith and will.” He left no doubt in the minds of readers that he already considered himself that *one* man. *Mein Kampf* is sprinkled with little essays on the role of the genius who is picked by Providence to lead a great people, even though they may not at first understand him or recognize his worth, out of their troubles to further greatness.¹²⁷

Hitler was claiming to fulfill the pagan hopes and dreams of the German citizens who thought their desires were Christian desires.

At the close of the Weimar years, in 1933, Adolf Hitler won the election as Chancellor under President Hindenburg, and had already formulated a plan for dissolving anything contrary to the NSDAP and to his own supremacy.¹²⁸ Shortly thereafter Hitler realized his ties to the *völkisch* movement would interrupt much of the support he needed from the Territorial Churches. Yet he also knew that cutting ties with the *völkisch* teachings would negate his support from the masses of nominal Christians, atheists, etc.

¹²⁴ Shirer, 102.

¹²⁵ Chamberlain was an Englishman whose nationalistic ideas were too far fetched for his own countrymen, ideas which Hitler embraced. Chamberlain eventually became a German citizen. Shirer, 104-109.

¹²⁶ Shirer, 103.

¹²⁷ Shirer., 109-110.

¹²⁸ It was upon President Hindenburg’s death that Hitler claimed role of Fuhrer, giving him the powers of both President and Chancellor.

It was at this time that Hitler pointed out to the people that he was a Catholic, that he supported “positive Christianity” without favoring any one confession, and that he supported the *Volk*. From this point on though, politics and religion were kept separate.

The separation of religion and politics would not surprise many, Luther’s Kingdom teachings separated the two realms and scholars in the universities did as well. Rather, this separation drew many in who worked to fulfill Hitler’s program of “Positive Christianity” and German domination of the world. Hitler would later on convince many that faith was inward only, and that the *Weltanschauung* decided your actions. Upon Hitler’s election as Chancellor, Joseph Goebbels wrote in his diary that “It is almost like a dream...a fairy tale...The new Reich has been born. Fourteen years of work have been crowned with victory. The German Revolution has begun!”¹²⁹ This was indeed a hellish fairy tale, and its version of Positive Christianity was a farce.

¹²⁹ Shirer, 5. Joseph Goebbels was one of Hitler’s cronies from the formative years of the NSDAP, and became the Minister of Propaganda in the Third Reich.

CHAPTER FOUR

Deutsche Christen Working with Hitler

The blood and soil religion was not unique to the National Socialists, it was by the 1930s a very German way of thinking and viewing the world. During the Weimar years much of ancient German, or Nordic, paganism resurfaced and similar philosophies were emphasized. The *Deutsche Christen* movement rose at this time and was very similar to the National Socialist movement in what it set out to support or oppose concerning race, and the future of Germany as a nation. This group aligned itself with the National Socialists claiming to promote the same Positive Christianity, though their support was not officially sought by Hitler or the NSDAP. The *völkische* movement was in solidarity with the German Christian focus in these areas, as described by Klaus Scholder:

Here was the keyword by which the *völkisch* movement would thereafter define its relationship to Christianity: German religion. This meant purifying Christianity of all Jewish overlays and corruptions and returning to its original essence: the pure religion of the saviour.¹³⁰

This new concept of “German religion” led many to believe that this was the Christianity they ought to be practicing.

The true Church members¹³¹ in Germany were as deeply affected as everyone else by the loss and turmoil created by the Great War and the revolution in 1918. Thus like many Germans they were quick to support the *Deutsche Christen*, and eventually Hitler. Karl Barth warned that ultimately the two critical issues the Church faced at this juncture were other gods being introduced, and the authority of Scripture being usurped by culture.¹³²

¹³⁰ Scholder, 82.

¹³¹ Those who claim to have faith in Christ, c.f. Preface.

¹³² Barth, *German Church Conflict*, 16.

Formation of the German Christians

In terms of name, the *Deutsche Christen* seemed to claim an alliance to a Protestant church or to the name of Christ; this is a misconception. Regarding its membership, this group included many pastors and church-goers; however their version of Christianity was largely formed by the influence of the *völkische* German culture. Within that worldview one was not born needing a Savior, but born in a blessed state of existence, born a Christian. “A person was literally born into the church—Protestant or Catholic...as a matter of course,”¹³³ the denomination was determined by the city.¹³⁴

The Protestant Church was not ready for this emotional hurricane. Since the Revolution of 1918 its leaders were fully occupied in building their structure on new foundations, now that the State basis, that had been its chief support since the 16th century, was suddenly withdrawn. ...But though the Protestant Church was unready for the emergency that peace brought with it, very quickly new forces of different kinds, under the fostering influence of freedom, began to germinate and grow within it.¹³⁵

Those new forces included the *Deutsche Christen*.

The German Faith Movement¹³⁶ had officially formed, and published its own guiding principles, on 6 June, 1932. “The principles set forth the ‘methods and goals for a new order for the Church.’”¹³⁷ The movement’s main tenets were almost identical to the National Socialist party principles even though the two groups were separate. These tenets included “positive Christianity; the fight against Marxism, the Jews,

¹³³ Helmreich, 37.

¹³⁴ People born in Freiberg were Catholic, whereas in the neighboring town of Hinterzarten one was born Protestant.

¹³⁵ Duncan-Jones, 26-27.

¹³⁶ *Glaubensbewegung Deutsche Christen*, or German Christians. For a brief history of their development see Cochrane; and Susannah Heschel, 587-590.

¹³⁷ Cochrane, 74.

internationalism... preservation of the purity of the race; and defense of the people against degeneration.”¹³⁸

According to census data, as early as 1913 the percentage of those Germans who attended church was only 4.3% in some cities; though at this time only 4.33% of infants were not baptized. Hence the average German would ensure that his child was baptized, but would not participate in regular church life. Helmreich’s view of these and other statistics is that the war brought an upsurge in attendance, but also that prior to the war, Christianity was taken less seriously; it was treated as cultural or social.¹³⁹ It is against this backdrop of non-commitment and misunderstanding what it means to be a Christian that “a new nationalism within the Church...eventually blossomed forth in the movement of the ‘German Christians.’”¹⁴⁰

Duncan-Jones points out that at the same time there was a resurgence of biblical faith among those Christians who left their background of liberal Protestantism behind them. They sought to read the Word of God as more than a text to be critically examined, and wanted to be an active part of the Church. This minority was a stark contrast to those growing in their adherence to German mythology mixed with nationalism, whose organic spirituality, and conception of Germanic paganism impacted their religion more than did divine revelation.¹⁴¹

One can only speculate why so many who professed to be Christians ignored great passages from the Word of God in favor of racial mythology and triumphalist speeches. Low church attendance could indicate that many Christians were letting go of

¹³⁸ Cochrane, 74.

¹³⁹ Helmreich, 39-40.

¹⁴⁰ Cochrane, 50-51.

¹⁴¹ Duncan-Jones, 27.

many of their faith practices, which would include reading Scripture. The beliefs being taught by the German Christians, combined with the lack of participation in the church activities that would educate a person on the beliefs of Christianity, would inhibit the ability to see the differences between “Positive Christianity” and genuine Christianity.

Along those lines Karl Barth scolded pastors in 1933:

Many hundreds of pastors seem to have been so unaware of what they were doing last summer when, at the head of their parishes, they allied themselves to the German-Christians, that they were able as quickly to revoke the barely pledged support for the direction of their “movement” (their “Faith Movement”), so as tomorrow—who knows?—to fall prey to some other “movement.”¹⁴²

Barth rebuked their ignorance which is never an excuse for a pastor to change alliances.

Heretical Doctrines of the German Christians

German Church Conflict is the English title of a collection of essays in which Karl Barth addressed the issues facing the German churches during the *Kirchenkampf*. This excerpt below was warning the true Church members of the doctrinal dangers that the German-Christians posed for them:

Because the doctrine and attitude of the German-Christians is nothing but a particularly vigorous result of the entire neo-protestant development since 1700, our protest is directed against a spreading and existent corruption of the whole evangelical Church....Our protest against the false doctrine of the German-Christians cannot begin only at the “Aryan paragraph”, at the rejection of the Old Testament, at the Aryanism of the German-Christian Christology, at the naturalism and Pelagianism of the German-Christian doctrines of justification and sanctification, at the idolizing of the state in German-Christian ethics. It must be directed fundamentally against the fact (which is the source of all individual errors) that, beside the Holy Scriptures as the unique source of revelation, the German-Christians affirm that German nationhood, its history and its

¹⁴² Barth, *The German Church Conflict*, 24.

contemporary political situation as a second source of revelation, and thereby betray themselves to be believers in “another God.”¹⁴³

Listed out for his readers were what Barth knew to be the most devastating fallacies of the German Christians. He also made it clear that this list is the result of historical errors that were not addressed by church leaders adequately.

The first doctrinal change that the German Christians fought for concerned Scripture. They sought the banning of the Old Testament teachings from the churches. Prior to 1933, some argued against the use of the Old Testament in schools and church services by denying its canonicity. More direct tactics were used thereafter, claiming it was a Jewish book, one that promoted Jewishness, and would therefore be an obstruction to rebuilding Germany. They subsequently banned the use of Paul’s teachings in the New Testament. Paul was viewed as a Jewish rabbi who stirred the waters too much. German Christians tried diligently to prove that their “positive Christianity” had no Jewish flavor in order to get close to the State.

The exclusion of the Old Testament from the churches led inevitably to a focus on a Christ who could be followed by Germans in a purely Aryan Christianity. They sought to use verses that Christ spoke against the Pharisees in order to teach that he was speaking against all Jews.¹⁴⁴ When Christ drove out the money changers he did so because he was fed up with them and wanted the Jews out of the Temple. When Christ called the Pharisees a brood of vipers or said they did the works of their father the devil they claimed that Jesus thus called all Jews sons of the devil.

The second major heresy of the German Christians was insisting that Jesus was not a Jew. Theodore Fritsch, one of the most prominent anti-Semite writers, with his own

¹⁴³ Barth, *German Church Conflict*, 16.

¹⁴⁴ Martin Luther did the same in his work *The Jews and Their Lies*.

publishing house, wrote an influential German mythology. He made the “Galileans Gauls and Gauls Germans and thus demonstrated”¹⁴⁵ how it was holy blood that related Jesus to Hitler. Fritsch wanted his new theory to become the “foundation of knowledge and faith.”¹⁴⁶

Harnack brought Nietzsche’s ideas into his university courses, and taught that a non-Jewish Jesus was the *Übermensch* that Nietzsche had conceived of. Hirsch too aligned his teachings of Jesus’ Jewishness, but with a different angle than other German Christian authors:

He observes, as did Kittel, that Jesus’ teachings were not Jewish. But Hirsch also maintains, on the basis of German theological scholarship, that Jesus stemmed from non-Jewish blood. His presumption is that Galilee was heathen from the fall of the Northern Kingdom in the eighth century B.C.¹⁴⁷

Hirsch explained that Jesus’ Jewish origins were appalling to the early Jewish Christians, hence Matthew created a story of why Jesus had to go to Bethlehem. The difference in Jesus’ two family trees found in the New Testament was alarming, and Hirsch said the fact that they both connect Jesus to David must have been “falsified.” Hirsch attempted to prove that Jesus was Greek, and was the product of an adulterous affair that Mary had prior to marrying Joseph.¹⁴⁸

Gleichschaltung

The *Deutsche Christen* sought to be loyal to the new regime, other Germans had to be persuaded to that level of trust. In a totalitarian regime, such as the Third Reich,

¹⁴⁵ Scholder, 83.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, 83.

¹⁴⁷ Ericksen., 164.

¹⁴⁸ Ericksen, 164.

propaganda was the tool used to enslave and control the people under the government. This was particularly utilized by Hitler to gain for himself a position in the Workers' Party, which later became the NSDAP. Hitler also effectively used propaganda to win the national elections in 1933, and to eventually bring the nation under his complete control. It is noted by most modern historians that it only took eighteen months for Hitler to control not only the votes, but also the lives, of the German people.

To most effectively apply his propaganda tactics, language had to be twisted. This was certainly true concerning Hitler's use of the word, *Gleichschaltung*.

It is a word rarely to be found in older German dictionaries. 'Gleich' means equal, 'Schaltung' means switch, as in an electrical switch; *Gleichschaltung* therefore means switching on to the same track or wavelength, or, to put it in one word, alignment or co-ordination. It became, in 1933, the word for the process by which all organizations and associations existing in society were nazified and some, such as the political parties and the trade unions, were simply suppressed. The word was meant to hide the fact that what was going on was in flagrant breach of all previous notions of freedom, civil rights and self-government.¹⁴⁹

As *Gleichschaltung* spread among the masses, individual rights were gladly given up because of the readiness to abandon liberal education and the failed democratic, materialistic spirit—a rather *völkische* sentiment. Those who cooperated with the changes of Hitler's *Gleichschaltung* likely did so initially not only because Hitler had been voted into power, but also because the people distrusted democracy as they watched the Weimar Republic struggle. They were eager to elect a leader who promised order, an improved economy, and pride amongst nations.

The election of 1933 was fair and honest, though voter turnout was low. Chancellor Hitler did not believe *Reichstag*¹⁵⁰ would adopt his policies. Therefore more

¹⁴⁹ Dr. Edgar Feuchtwanger, "Nazi *Gleichschaltung*," in *New Perspective*, Vol 7 No 2, 2001. http://www.history-ontheweb.co.uk/concepts/concept72_gleichschaltung.htm

¹⁵⁰ The original parliament of the German Empire.

elections followed. In the course of these events, fear and propaganda served to bring the following areas into line with the new Chancellor's scheme: Nazi officials took leadership in local governments in April of 1933, trade unions were disbanded by May, and a law was passed which prohibited the formation of any political party¹⁵¹ in July of 1933. Church elections also took place in July of 1933, and with the aid of Hitler's propaganda the German Christians won thirty-three percent of the positions.¹⁵²

In his *Zwingli-Kalender*, Barth commented on the totality of this regime:

There was at once no sphere of life on which it did not make demands and from which it would not have claimed practical response to its demands pretty quickly. The political parties, commerce, administration and justice, art, the universities, the schools and youth education in its widest sense, the press, public and private welfare, and countless people who had been regarded previously as "characters" have submitted to its demands, because they had to...¹⁵³

Gleichschaltung was described by Barth as being incorporated into all spheres of life. For the *Landeskirchen* this meant that *Reichbischof* Müller would work to bring all the various congregations under the control of the one *Reich* Church. Many pastors simply did not follow his orders, and many of his efforts failed. Those appointed by Hitler to bring the churches into line with his regime oppressed them relentlessly.

Hitler himself, it may be said, had fallen under the spell of propaganda while living as a homeless and hungry artist.¹⁵⁴ Though Hitler had gone to school as a boy in his rural hometown, one scholar notes that it is impossible to know whether Hitler

¹⁵¹ Thus the Nazi Party was to be the only legal party

¹⁵² Susanna Heschel, "Nazifying Christian Theology: Walter Grundmann and the Institute for the Study and Eradication of Jewish Influence on German Church Life" in *Church History*, Vol. 63, No. 4. (Dec., 1994), 588.

¹⁵³ Barth, *The German Church Conflict*, 41.

¹⁵⁴ An artist who had been denied admission to art school.

himself had been reading Goethe, Fichte, Nietzsche or the more recent historians and philosophers espousing the ideas that are usually traced through *Mein Kampf*.¹⁵⁵

The similarities are there, but it is difficult to say whether Hitler knew that he was expressing their notions except in the cases where Hitler would quote Nietzsche and say that Nietzsche didn't carry his idea far enough. Hitler would then finish the idea in his own words. Martin Broszat did not like making any connection between Hitler and who he may have read:

National Socialism emerged in Germany after the First World War during a period of worldwide economic recession and against the background of a general crisis of modernity and civilization...At least [we need to] modify older approaches in the tradition of American intellectual history which attempt to draw a line from Herder or Fichte to Hitler or from Nietzsche to Hitler.¹⁵⁶

The problem with supposing that philosophers had no impact on Hitler as Broszat assumes, is that it assesses some of the roots of the National Socialists without accounting for the culture he lived in, how Germans were educated, or the post World War I crisis all Germans faced. In contrast to this Friedrich Meinecke, a historian who lived through both World Wars, made these connections saying that “the German power-state idea, whose history began with Hegel, was to find in Hitler its worst and most fatal application and extension.”¹⁵⁷

Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke's thesis on the roots of Nazi ideology described evidence for Hitler's being saturated with the influence of *Ostara*, a series of pamphlets written by Lanz von Liebenfels. Goodrick-Clark found many direct quotes in *Mein Kampf* coming from these various pamphlets. These writings presented the idea of good

¹⁵⁵ Goodrick-Clarke, 194.

¹⁵⁶ Martin Broszat, *Hitler and the Collapse of Weimar Germany*, Translated by V.R. Berghahn, (New York: Berg Publishers Limited, 1987), 37.

¹⁵⁷ Friedrich Meinecke, *The German Catastrophe*, translated by Sidney B. Fay, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1950), 15.

versus evil as a battle between light and dark, that is to say blonde versus brunette. The characters of valor were Aryan, and god-like. These pamphlets were a grassroots mixture of the philosophies of Goethe, Fichte, Nietzsche, Wagner, and others. It is interesting to follow the story line, noting that the Aryans win and embark on an “Aryan-German millennial empire” after ridding their empire of the weaklings and misfits, and then to compare that to Hitler’s claim that his rule would last a thousand years and Hitler’s planned actions towards the “weaklings and misfits.”¹⁵⁸ Liebenfels even quotes Scripture, from the Gospel of Matthew and the Gospel of John, “Christianizing” his views.¹⁵⁹

Hitler’s Creed and Revelation

Most Germans would not have gone looking for other sources of revelation in humans or political parties. However, with the questions that filled their minds, many Germans eventually listened to Hitler as though he were another source:

To the desire to surrender to the inscrutable which lies so deep in the German soul the message of Hitler came as balm. Those who accepted it exulted to find themselves carried along by mighty forces that they believed had always been at work in their race...They were warriors in the great struggle with Satan embodied in concrete forces that had always been trying to delude or trample on the Germanic tribes...National Socialism was thus itself a religion of which the essence is a belief that God had chosen the German people to save the world by loyalty to its own soul...¹⁶⁰

Duncan-Jones asserted that the souls of the German people were ready for Hitler’s message, even if they didn’t know they did not set out to bestow on him their worship.

¹⁵⁸ Goodrick-Clarke, 194, 203.

¹⁵⁹ Lanz von Liebenfels, “*Der Weltkrieg als Rossenkampf der Dunklen gegen die Blondenen*” in *Ostara*, Nr. 2 (Wien, 1927), 1. Lanz von Liebenfels, “*Der Weltfriede als Werk und Sieg der Blondenen*” in *Ostara*, Nr. 4 (Wien 1928), 16.

¹⁶⁰ Duncan-Jones, 19.

When combating false doctrines during the *Kirchenkampf*, Pastor Hans Asmussen asserted that the battle was against another so-called or self proclaimed source of revelation. He explained that in 1933 the *Reich*¹⁶¹ government accepted the Church's declaration that there is no other word of God alongside what is revealed through the Word in Scripture; no other event or person beside Christ could be considered revelation by a Christian.¹⁶² This word was not honored by the *Reich* officials nor enforced by church leadership that was dominated by German Christians.

Germans loyal to their faith soon became greatly disillusioned with their new church constitution from 11 July, 1933. This document, signed by Hitler, gave the Reich legal authority over church operations,¹⁶³ but “insisted [that] the Reich Bishop act in close consultation with the provincial churches.”¹⁶⁴ It seemed that the Protestant Church in Germany would have been permitted to govern all spiritual affairs, and would enjoy the protection of the State. Article 1 states that “full powers that the Church needs for its mission are thereby determined.” “Thereby” refers to the gospel as found in Scripture and witnessed to by the confessions of the Reformation.

Article 3 directly stated that the German Evangelical Church “arranges its relationship to the State” and “determines its attitude toward outside religious bodies.” Several articles address legal affairs, synods, and spiritual work done in and through the Church. Article 11 addressed finances, and granted *Landeskirchen* the right to make their own budgets so long as they report to the Reich Church.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶¹ Empire, or realm.

¹⁶² Cochrane, 254.

¹⁶³ i.e. calling for elections, appointing a Reichsbischof, cutting the church budget, ordination of *landeskirchen* ministers.

¹⁶⁴ Matheson, 24.

¹⁶⁵ Cochrane, 224-228.

To many Germans, the constitution outlined what seemed to be the perfect system that Luther wrote about.¹⁶⁶ Thus many did not initially see this government as a threat, and they did not see racism as a threat to God's will. Rather, fighting heresy kept their eyes on the doctrinal battle against the German Christians' ideas.

German Christians taught in their blood and soil religion that their history, their land, and their leader were sources of revelation. Their teachings stemmed from the *völkische* movement concerning a God-given kingdom. From this platform they continued to hone their definition of what the gospel was. To orthodox Protestants prior to the Church struggle, the gospel was found in the Bible. However, now the gospel included the created *Volk*. There was no universal Christianity, but one religion for each *Volk*. Thus a German has no worries about the salvation of another *Volk*, but only for his own and, because they had proven Jesus was an Aryan, Jesus was concerned only with the Aryans.¹⁶⁷

These ideas were not contrived by the lay people but taught by scholars:

I [Karl Barth] have just finished reading Emanuel Hirsch's [theologian/historian] new book: "The present spiritual situation as mirrored in philosophy and theology." No-one should fail to study it. In contrast to almost everything that I have read of the productions of the German-Christian camp, it is a well-considered and also readably and interestingly written book...the best that can be said for the German-Christian cause. We can and must praise it too for the fact that its author, in contrast to many of his fellow-believers, has with what he declared today, remained in line with what he has always meant, intended and maintained. ...This is what makes it so clear and certain that, and why, faced with this book, we must say No, No, and once again No, to this matter....This basic theme consists in the hypothesis that the present spiritual situation is to be

¹⁶⁶ Specifically Luther's writings on the two kingdoms.

¹⁶⁷ Dietrich Bonhoeffer credits Jäger as the one who made "the famous statement about Jesus being only the exponent of a Nordic race." Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "Letters to Bishop George K.A. Bell of Chichester 1933-1934," in *A Testament to Freedom*, edited by Geoffrey B. Kelly, (HarperSanFrancisco, 1995), 400.

“interpreted” as a “meeting with God.” Hirsch wants to build the church on this rock and this rock only....His view of history is centered on this.¹⁶⁸

Barth strongly criticized Hirsch, one of the most well known theologians during the 1930s, for having a profession of the Christian faith and at the same time trying to make his faith agree with changing German politics. Hirsch’s political views and the culture in which he was living impacted his theology rather than Hirsch allowing his view of God from Scripture to impact his social action.¹⁶⁹

Hirsch showed in this new book critiqued by Barth that his God was the God who ordains history, and thus history is to be viewed as revelation. Hirsch enjoyed following the footsteps of his professor Karl Holl “in reinterpreting Luther for the modern era, with a strong thread of German pride and nationalism interwoven.”¹⁷⁰ Hirsch kept his theology in line with Hitler’s agenda. For that reason, like Althaus, he was not removed from his post at Göttingen University.¹⁷¹ Althaus sympathized early on with the German Christians and also blended the *völkische* ideas with his Christianity.

There were other extremists who did not merely supplement biblical revelation but replaced it. Guida Diehl and those associated with a sect of German Christians in Eisenach sought revitalization of German faith, but she states that “race, together with ‘the family, *Volk*, and fatherland,’ [were] the first revelation of God.”¹⁷²

¹⁶⁸ Barth, *The German Church Conflict*, 30.

¹⁶⁹ Ericksen, *Theologians Under Hitler: Gerhard Kittel, Paul Althaus, and Emmanuel Hirsch*, 121, 133-49, 151-157, 166. Social action, thus also his politics and place in culture.

¹⁷⁰ Ericksen, 121.

¹⁷¹ From 1921 to 1945

¹⁷² Doris Bergan, *Twisted Cross: The German Christian Movement in the Third Reich*, (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 27.

A Purely Aryan Church

The presumptive task of the German Christians, which they saw as God-given, was to establish a purely Aryan church to support the Aryan state. The German Christians pushed these views with more vigor when the Aryan paragraph was being forced on the churches.¹⁷³ They also defended this task by pointing to article 24 of the NSDAP, stating that the National Socialists upheld “positive Christianity.” Thus they tried to show the likeness of the two groups. Article 24 reads:

We demand liberty for all religious confessions in the State, in so far as they do not in any way endanger its existence or do not offend the moral sentiment and the customs of the Germanic race. The party as such represents the standpoint of “positive Christianity” without binding itself confessionally to a particular faith. It opposes the Jewish materialistic spirit within and without and is convinced that permanent recovery of our people is possible only from within and on the basis of the principle of: General Welfare Before Individual Welfare¹⁷⁴

The pastors that rejoiced to hear that the NSDAP would “demand liberty” for them, did not see the NSDAP opposition to the Jewish race as a threat to that liberty. In between the lines, Christianity was only free so long as it supported the NSDAP views of the Germanic race and the NSDAP opposition to Jews.

As the Aryan clause was first imposed in April of 1933, some pastors accepted it willingly because they wanted to comply with the State in order to keep their position and so be able to minister to parishioners. Others complied because of the influence of politics on their theology. Other resisted this first attempt yet accepted it later when the

¹⁷³ Cochrane, 75. The Aryan Paragraph was a clause banning Jews from leadership roles, and participation in the church. See also Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “The Church and the Jewish Question April 1933,” in *A Testament to Freedom*, edited by Geoffrey B. Kelly, (HarperSanFrancisco, 1995).

¹⁷⁴ Cochrane, 221.

Brown Synod in September 1933¹⁷⁵ made it official church policy.¹⁷⁶ In the early 1900s laws had been changing to exclude Jews from participating fully in life in social, political and financial realms. However the Aryan paragraph actually banned Jews from any leadership roles in the public square, or private sector, even from social activities like sports clubs, and prohibited Jews from taking part in worship even if these Jews were Protestant or Catholic. It also called for a boycott of Jewish owned businesses.

This influence spread through many theological writings, and took such deep root that by 1939 statements of faith were no longer including an affirmation of Christ as Lord and the believer as indwelt by His Spirit:

...a German Christian confirmation examination asked candidates, “Who is the new temple of the Holy Spirit?” The ritual response placed race squarely in the midst of the articles of faith: “The *Volk* is the temple of the Holy Spirit. Sanctification takes place in the communal life of the *Volk*.”¹⁷⁷

It was no longer the Church who was the temple of the Spirit, but the Aryan race.

Chancellor Hitler’s Church Involvement

When Hitler was first elected he did not immediately tamper with the organization of the church in ways that would alert the unsuspecting. He chose words carefully, reminding the masses of his Catholic heritage and of his position on allowing the church to govern itself. His radio broadcast on 22 July 1933 reflected a decision to influence the upcoming Protestant church elections. He begins by reminding the radio audience that he

¹⁷⁵ By September 1933, the *Reich* had imposed rigged church elections, and German Christians dominated this synod as well as church leadership in many *Landeskirchen*.

¹⁷⁶ Geoffrey B. Kelly, *A Testament to Freedom*, (HarperSanFrancisco, 1995), 127.

¹⁷⁷ Bergan, 27

is the political *Führer*, not acting in matters of the church but solely in the interest of the state. Hitler said that he would lend his support to “those religious groupings which, for their part, can be useful to”¹⁷⁸ the state.

“In the interests of the recovery by the German nation of its former greatness,” Hitler pleads with the radio audience to assist the state, think of the issues and of who would keep those interests in mind while governing the church. He also asked his listeners to look to those who work for unity within the church, for “freedom of religious life,” and who act according to “its solidarity with the national and cultural movement.”¹⁷⁹ He then supports this group by name, “the Protestant population which has set itself firmly on the basis of the national socialist state—the German Christians....”¹⁸⁰ Matheson notes that this was the last time Hitler supported the German Christians publicly, but he was discerning enough to do so in a way and at a time when he most needed the outcome of the elections to support his cause.¹⁸¹

In Althaus’ writings¹⁸² published after WWII he confessed the guilt of the church’s position during the *Kirchenkampf*, but says that due to the teachings of Martin Luther the church was unable to recognize the evil forces acting in the State.¹⁸³ Another

¹⁷⁸ Adolf Hitler, “Radio Broadcast by Hitler on the Church Elections, 22 July 1933,” in *The Third Reich and the Christian Churches*, edited by Peter Matheson, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1981), 28.

¹⁷⁹ Adolf Hitler, “Radio Broadcast by Hitler on the Church Elections, 22 July 1933,” in *The Third Reich and the Christian Churches*, edited by Peter Matheson, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1981), 28.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 28.

¹⁸¹ Matheson, 27-28.

¹⁸² Afterwards, in 1947, he was deemed innocent of Nazi intentions and was not considered dangerous to rebuilding the nation. Robert P. Ericksen, *Theologians Under Hitler: Gerhard Kittel, Paul Althaus, and Emmanuel Hirsch*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 112. Althaus went on to preach about the guilt of Christians, their need to return to God and to cleanse the church of their Nazi ways; read all of chapter three for a complete discuss on Althaus’s positions from 1930s through the end of WWII.

¹⁸³ “It was true, said Althaus, that the concept of nationality did not occur in the New Testament, and ‘there was no doubt that it went beyond any of Luther’s formulations’; [sic] nevertheless it continued his

of the plethora of examples of Luther's two kingdoms doctrine and his German-centeredness being abused, is that it was "deliberately misinterpreted...by members of the Lutheran Church who supported the Nazi dictatorship. They regarded it as an authorization both to establish a system of absolute political power and to suspend any political Christian ethics."¹⁸⁴ Althaus was essentially looking back to say that *Gleichschaltung* was a success and the churches allowed Hitler to rule their beliefs and lifestyle. Guilt belonged to the churches for following someone who paralyzed them with his lies.

The demands placed on the church at this time to exclude non-Germans, to allow other sources of revelation such as history and national leaders, or to preach only a watered-down, impure version of the Gospel crippled the churches. Christians who would follow such a Gospel could not know right from wrong in daily life in Germany. They could have no power to act or to refuse to act as God would have truly desired them to. A Gospel which taught that Jesus was a German who cared only to empower and enrich Germans contradicts Scripture, but only one reading the Word for himself or hearing the full Word of God preached would know that. With Hitler's voice in the background, the German Christian pastors hailing Hitler as God's chosen one, and a watered-down Gospel, the churches could easily justify *Gleichschaltung* as God's will.

line of thought." For, he said, Luther too was 'moved by a lively national feeling'... Karl Kupisch, "The Luther Renaissance" in *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 2, No. 4, Church and Politics, (Oct., 1967), 47.

"Most of the followers of Karl Holl, who pioneered the "Luther Renaissance," became German Christians; Paul Althaus, who succeeded him as president of the Luther Society, did not, but he shared many of their attitudes... Althaus had too much Lutheran suspicion of union churches to want the German Christian nostrum of a single church for the Volk and Reich, but he put a Christian interpretation on Hitler's accession to power and seems to have had few reservations about him until 1937." W. R. Ward, "Review Article" in *Guilt and Innocence: The German Churches in the Twentieth Century*, *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 68, No. 2. (Jun., 1996), 406.

See also Robert P. Ericksen, "The Political Theology of Paul Althaus: Nazi Supporter" in *German Studies Review* Volume 9 (October 1986), 547-567.

¹⁸⁴ Prill, 20.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Confessing Church

The *Kirchenkampf* was stirring during the Weimar years, but was raging by 1933. Hitler's plan to bring all of life into line with his regime worked in all parts of German society, including the Protestant churches. He wanted to make Christians believe that their faith was inward and that true religion was found in devotion to National Socialism. Throughout the 1930s the faith of many became inward, detached from ethics and lifeless as they outwardly followed Hitler's commands and ideals. There was a small opposition movement on the rise, but they too believed that their newly elected Chancellor was not a threat to the church; they fought only the German Christians' influence. Those who joined the opposition published six points declaring their stance. Admittedly they were fighting the "usurpation of the German Christians," and their doctrines that corrupted the church while keeping in mind the "nature and extent of the sickness of the Church."¹⁸⁵

At the outset of the opposition Barth lamented that the efforts of *Gleichschaltung* were aimed at the fundamental nature of the church, a revolution that would redefine what the church was:

And so I will be crude and declare that language like this bears the mark of Catiline, [a Roman politician living in the 1st century BC, well known for the Catiline conspiracy, in which he attempted to overthrow the Roman Republic, and the power of the aristocratic Senate¹⁸⁶] of the really dangerous conspiracy against the very substance of the evangelical church....If we allow ourselves to be constantly addressed in this way, if we fail to protest, if this language is listened to and given credence, then in its inmost being the Church has already ceased to

¹⁸⁵ Barth, *German Church Conflict*, 16-17.

¹⁸⁶ <http://www.bartleby.com/65/ca/Catiline.html>.

live....The evangelical church is already surrounded by a dark cloud of mistrust. Anyone who is not blind sees this. But its leaders are blind and do not see it.¹⁸⁷

The “language” Barth referred to included the *völkische* teachings, the addition to Scripture and inclusion of politics, and changes made to the gospel. The “language” also included the directives given by the NSDAP for how the church may operate. Many pastors joined the German Christian movement and supported the NSDAP.¹⁸⁸ These are the pastors Barth has primarily in mind when he wrote of the blind leaders, these pastors serve as proof that *Gleichschaltung* was present and successful.

In his first year as Chancellor, Hitler appointed a *Reichsbischof* and later a *Reichsminister* to institute changes in the life of and operation of German churches via elections and mandates. Through these means German Christians gained control of many *Landeskirchen* though these German Christian pastors were not Scripturally qualified. Despite these developments, Barth rejoiced that the True Church cannot die.¹⁸⁹ Within this cultural atmosphere that led many pastors astray, the Confessing Church arose.

The Pastor’s Emergency League

On September 27, 1933 at the National Synod at Wittenberg, Ludwig Müller was installed by his fellow German Christians as *Reichsbischof*. This was the catalyst for

¹⁸⁷ Barth, “Quousque Tandem? 1930” in *The Third Reich and the Christian Churches*, edited by Peter Matheson, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company: 1981), 3.

¹⁸⁸ As discussed in chapter four of this thesis.

¹⁸⁹From Karl Barth’s writings, much affirms this line of thinking; his reasons were rooted in the Shepherd of the Church, and His ministry to His Church in sustaining and upholding, and His Word which does not fail. Barth affirms that within the visible church there will be tares, but that does not mean a remnant does not exist. See *Community State and Church*, pg. 158; *The German Church Conflict*, pg. 26, 32-33, 38-41, 55.

many to become active in opposition to political control of the Church. Three months after the election of Hitler as Chancellor in October of 1933, a group of 2000 German patriotic yet disillusioned pastors formed the Pastor's Emergency League.

From the start the Pastor's Emergency League "rallied less against National Socialism than against German Christian domination of institutionalized Protestantism."¹⁹⁰ This League realized by September that the July 11, 1933 Church Constitution was not being upheld as *Reichsbischof* Ludwig Müller earnestly attempted to impose his will upon the churches concerning use of Scripture, acceptable prayers, and even decorations.¹⁹¹

Martin Niemöller led this group, though he himself had initially celebrated the rise of Hitler and supported National Socialism's role in the German church. Dietrich Bonhoeffer and others were very concerned about Niemöller's ability to lead this opposition because of his past support. Niemöller proved himself to be one who would fill many with hope and continually fight to preserve the truth of the Gospel.¹⁹²

Those involved in the League wanted to regain the Church's autonomy for self governing and teaching and preaching of all Scripture. The initial three interests of this

¹⁹⁰ Bergan, 12.

¹⁹¹ Matheson claims that a correct understanding of this document "enabled the later Confessing Church to claim that it alone was true to the new constitution." Matheson, 24.

¹⁹² A letter from Bonhoeffer states: "We would have preferred to pick up the telephone again in order to embrace you in a brotherly way with the full power of our youth to implore you in this decisive moment not to hand over the guidance of the ship to those who will only steer us again indecisively and give the wheel back only when it is too late. Only admirals can carry on now. The direction you took last summer seems to offer us the only hope that the Council of Brethren would advance by means of a radical attack rather than get bogged down in tactics. Perhaps today is the last chance to save the church and, if we let the opportunity pass by, we'll all stand guilty of this within two years... It is indispensable that we attend to the immediate dissolution of the synods and the purging of the whole church of the entire pest—according to the sole viewpoint of the strict proceedings for dogmatic discipline (the schools of Sasse as Lutheran, Barth as Reformed)—and the strictest exclusion from the membership in our circle of all the old and new halfhearted people... Today only the language of Luther and not of Melanchthon helps—especially for those in authority... Please listen to these voices from the wilderness and not only to those from the tame West." Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "Letters to Martin Niemöller 1933" in *A Testament to Freedom*, edited by Geoffrey B. Kelly, (HarperSanFrancisco, 1995), 416.

league were: intercessory prayer for the brethren in distress, upholding the Ten Commandments, and loving one another.¹⁹³ They did not want to resist the State's authority in other realms or question Hitler's governance of Germany.¹⁹⁴ Up until 1933 the NSDAP were believed to be saving Germany from unchristian enemies such as Bolsheviks and Marxists.¹⁹⁵

The heritage of having been a State church impacted the way all members of the this opposition viewed the efforts of becoming a state church again. They approved of receiving funds from the *Reich*,¹⁹⁶ and of their German Evangelical Church Constitution Article 11 which stated that the church budget was to be set by law and collected through the *Landeskirchen* taxes. These pastors also all agreed, however, that the State had too much control over the Church, putting the Church in danger of being forced to break God's first commandment.

Gleichschaltung rapidly encroached upon the church life in late 1933 and early 1934. The Aryan paragraph was forced on the *Landeskirchen* during what became known as the Sports Palace Scandal in 1933;¹⁹⁷ it controlled who could be a part of a church. The Aryan paragraph had been introduced to Germany early that year. It was not until November of 1933 that *Reichsbischof* Müller called another meeting to impose

¹⁹³ Wolfgang Gerlach, *And the Witnesses were Silent: The Confessing Church and the Persecution of the Jews*, translated and edited by Victoria Barnett, (University of Nebraska Press: 2000), 45.

¹⁹⁴ Karl Dietrich Bracher, "Germany, 1933-1934: The Process and Limits of Totalitarian Gleichschaltung in Modern Dictatorships," in *The Barmen Confession-Papers from the Seattle Assembly, Toronto Studies in Theology*, Vol 26, (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1986), 277.

¹⁹⁵ Bergan, 54.

¹⁹⁶ The State imposed a church tax on citizens, which financed the Church budget, pastors living on this rather than on tithes freely given in an offering plate as is customary elsewhere. Citizens who did not attend or desire to participate in a Church still paid the tax.

¹⁹⁷ This name, "Sports Palace Scandal," was due to the location at which the paragraph was introduced to Christians.

the Aryan paragraph. Müller was frustrated at not being able to unite Lutheran *Landeskirchen* and Reformed *Landeskirchen* into one pure, Reich church.

According to the Aryan paragraph only those of Aryan descent could participate in certain aspects of life, which included church activities or leadership. The churches were told to be purely German, *völkische*. The speech that night was delivered by Hossenfelder, a leader among the German Christians.¹⁹⁸ The highlights of this speech, and commentary, are given here by Duncan-Jones:

The burden of his speech was the necessity for making the National Socialist masses at home in the Church. If this was to be done they must get rid of the Old Testament, with its doctrine of rewards and its stories of cowdealers and *souteneurs*....No one would be listened to who tried to combine the old Testament and a racially correct Christianity. "All superstitious passages must be removed from the New Testament, and in particular a radical revision must be made of the whole theology of the Rabbi Paul. The Church must be built on the pure teaching of Jesus, Love your neighbour as yourself." A storm broke that spread all over Germany. Was this the intellectual level of the German Christians? Did [they] not know that the command to love your neighbour as yourself came from the Old Testament?¹⁹⁹

Though many Germans supported the NSDAP's actions, Hossenfelder's speech was quickly denounced. Despite that, some German Christian pastors tried to apply this policy on the Old Testament in their own parishes throughout the years of conflict.

During the *Kirchenkampf*, many documents were written to correct doctrinal issues. Among those documents is the Bethel Confession, co-authored by Bonhoeffer in November 1933. This Confession placed clear emphasis on Jesus' Jewish heritage, and salvation through faith, not blood. It was intended to bring needed clarification on how

¹⁹⁸ Duncan-Jones, 56-57.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 57.

the Pastor's Emergency League ought to respond to the Aryan question, though it was not fully grasped by all the pastors as thoroughly as Bonhoeffer intended.²⁰⁰

Two months later, in January 1934, the Muzzling Decree was sent out. Ludwig Müller tried to be a liaison, a peacemaker between differing Protestant groups, and tried desperately to prove that everyone could have indistinguishable, uniform beliefs:

On January 4, 1934, Reich bishop Müller issued "a decree concerning the restoration of order"... which generally became known as the "Muzzling Order," [forbidding] ministers to introduce into their sermons any subject matter dealing with the Church controversy. ... Any public criticism of the Church government or its measures by Church officials [all controlled by the Reich at this time] would be punished by immediate suspension and cut in salary, leading to eventual dismissal after disciplinary proceedings had been taken.²⁰¹

Bonhoeffer wrote about the toll this Muzzling Order took on various congregations, how it stymied their fellowship and faith.²⁰² According to this order pastors were not permitted to proclaim anything other than the gospel as defined by the German Christians. Churches could no longer pray for those who were in distress due to politics, or mention the names of those who had dropped their church membership.²⁰³ Later that same year the church was prohibited from publishing anything that dealt with the Church in the "daily press, in pamphlets, and in leaflets."²⁰⁴

²⁰⁰ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "The Bethel Confession" in *A Testament to Freedom*, edited by Geoffrey B. Kelley, (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1995), 134-137. In August 1933 Bonhoeffer met with Wilhelm Vischer to draft a portion of the Bethel Confession. Bonhoeffer and Hermann Sasse also co-authored a portion. His portions were handed in, edited and watered down. Bonhoeffer did not approve of the changes and thus did not sign the finished document. He and Martin Niemöller then wrote a declaration stating strongly how the Church must respond to the Aryan clause, and this was adopted as part of the call to form the Pastor's Emergency League together.

²⁰¹ Cochrane, 129.

²⁰² Bonhoeffer, 397-399.

²⁰³ Helmreich, 153-154. See also Matheson, 41-42.

²⁰⁴ Matheson, 52.

At this time the confessors decided they must take a united stand for the true Church. They recognized that the bishops appointed by *Reichsbischof* Müller were infecting both the doctrine and practice of many *Landeskirchen*. The *Kirchenkampf* was finally becoming a battle against all true enemies of the church. This struggle would serve to clarify for the church the need to remain pure in heart not in race, the need to listen only to those leaders who remain true to Scripture. Only with Scripture recognized as the sole written Word of God and higher than any form of natural revelation, coupled with an orthodox hermeneutic, could the church recognize and fight heresy.

The Barmen Declaration

The Pastor's Emergency League grew rapidly and eventually became known as the *Bekennende Kirche*²⁰⁵ around the time that they held a synod at Barmen, in May 1934. Comprised of Lutheran, Reformed, and United churches, the *Bekennende Kirche* was a group primarily of pastors who sought to be faithful to the Word, to their Confession from the Reformation, and to the One Lord. Though not all Lutheran, still Lutheran theology impacted their practices. All of these denominations shared a common history from the Reformation, through the reign of Bismarck, through the Great War, and through the church structure changes brought by the Weimar Republic.

In a review written during the *Kirchenkampf*, Barth states that:

²⁰⁵ Confessing Church

...at the beginning of 1934, the view was suddenly expressed that “Confession” in the evangelical Church must have some meaning beyond the devout repetition of what the godly fathers of the faith had expressed centuries ago in their times of need; that it must far rather mean an answer to contemporary questions which the Church today must utter with the certainty and compulsion of faith.²⁰⁶

Barth notes this as the moment when the Church was awakened, ready to answer those questions, and roused to action. It was at this time that the Church, which had been “weak and degenerate” and which had “a mission and a message which she may dishonour a thousand times but which she cannot ultimately abandon” was rallied around a common confession.

Reich Bishop Müller’s Good Friday message from 1934 was the last straw that called the *Bekennende Kirche* to more serious action:

First to appear on Good Friday was, surprisingly, a ‘Message from the Reich Bishop to the Pastors’...The Good Friday message attempted to justify the policy of the Reich Church as a ‘...passionate concern to bind the *Volk* together’ and to foist the guilt for the whole distress on to ‘...pastoral timidity, suspicion, uncertainty, a vacillating attitude or even hidden accusations...’ by the pastorate. What made the ‘Message’ so intolerable were the constant references to the Crucified One...²⁰⁷

Müller recognized timidity or suspicion in the pastors, from which one can infer that many were indeed apprehensive about handing over control of the church to a group like the German Christians or a government like the NSDAP. After this speech, the Confessing Church began meeting more often in synods not established by Müller. The leaders of the Confessing Church met in May, 1934, at what came to be called the Synod of Barmen. It was comprised of 138 representatives of the confessional churches.²⁰⁸

They addressed the temptations facing the church of their day, not wanting to establish

²⁰⁶ Barth, *The German Church Conflict*, 44.

²⁰⁷ Klaus Scholder, *The Churches and the Third Reich: The Year of Disillusionment: 1934 Barmen and Rome*, Volume Two (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 80.

²⁰⁸ Churches whose pastors sought to be faithful to Scripture and did not swear allegiance to Hitler.

one united Church in Germany, but rather to rally together to oppose their common enemies and to strengthen believers.

The document that was drawn up at Barmen included several articles of faith. Most acknowledged that Barth wrote the majority of the document.²⁰⁹ Most articles include a justification of the item that critically hints at a point the German Christians or the NSDAP had been trying to force onto the *Landeskirchen*.²¹⁰ Thus, the “confession” of the Confessing Church included the “Barmen Declaration,” along with respective confessions of faith passed down from earlier church fathers.

The first section of the Barmen Declaration aimed to establish the gospel of Jesus Christ alone as foundation of the German Evangelical Church, which is found solely in Scripture, and also defined the *Landeskirchen* as independent members of this Confessing Church. In the process, they cleared up distorted interpretations of articles one and two of the 1933 church constitution.²¹¹ Herein Barmen declares Jesus to be the only way of salvation, the Word of God which men must obey, and the assurance of justification and sanctification and freedom from the world.

Barmen includes a definition of the church: “*Die christliche Kirche ist die Gemeinde von Brüdern, in der Jesus Christus in Wort und Sakrament durch den Heiligen*

²⁰⁹ In the Barmen Declaration, the phrases were carefully chosen to reflect the influence of all three denominations present in the Confessing Church. Barth comments humorously that the wordiness was due to the inclusion of one denomination’s word choice, which led to other words being added to balance out the focus. When the word “sacrament” was added, Barth knew he had to add something of the Holy Spirit so it would not be a humanist document. See Cochrane, 240-241, notes 4 and 5. Because of Brunner’s work on natural revelation, and the popularity of that doctrine among other denominations rising (which Barth thought was to the detriment of the doctrine of revelation) Barth felt it important to emphasize that it is the Spirit who works, whether through Word or Sacrament. There were many that viewed the sacraments as a human means to please God and win His favor. Barth did not want that to be inferred from the Barmen Declaration.

²¹⁰ Cochrane, 237-267.

²¹¹ Concerning who has authority over the Church, and how laws and ordination come about in the Church.

Geist als der Herr gegenwärtig handelt.”²¹² The authors said “in Word” referring to Scripture, the Bible. This Church is community, or *Gemeinde*, in the favorite wording of Barth. This is the Church in which ministry through the Spirit takes place, because her Lord is alive. The signatories rejected the idea of preaching anything apart from the Word, in order to serve the church’s own “pleasure, or [cater] to changes in prevailing ideological and political changes.”²¹³ The confession then addressed the issue of authority by claiming that true Church leaders are endowed with authority from God. The Church is not to have its task carried out by the State, nor can the Church become “an organ of the State.”²¹⁴

Barmen’s fourth and fifth articles concern the legal status of the German Evangelical Church and the practical work of the Church. Only those who are “called and who desire to hold fast to the Holy Scripture” may speak on behalf of the Church.²¹⁵ Due to the Church conflict, the Confession claimed that unity must be centered on the Word. Unity cannot be created by appealing to “a worldly *Führerprinzip* foreign to the Church,”²¹⁶ or in other words—Hitler cannot help the Church, and the church must stop running to him for direction.²¹⁷

Therein rests the fortitude of the Barmen Synod. Some would observe that “therein is also its weakness”: the pastors “were so intent on keeping their church free

²¹² See Appendix

²¹³ “The Declaration, Resolutions, and Motions Adopted by the Synod of Barmen, May 29-31, 1934,” in *The Church’s Confession Under Hitler*, edited by Arthur Cochrane, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962), 241.

²¹⁴ Cochrane, 241.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 242.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 243.

²¹⁷ For more information, see Cochrane, 90-105, 129-131, in which the author explains the squabbles between the Lutheran and Reformed churches that were a thorn in the side of the government. The government had tried to intervene, and theologians were aiding in the process. Finally, when in power, Hitler called a meeting of over 40 church leaders to try to settle ongoing confessional issues.

from...pressure that they failed to see the necessity of a more explicit political response.”²¹⁸ This may be what Barth was thinking when he said “We can and must therefore call her Confession very unsatisfying.”²¹⁹ Looking back one year later, remembering the synod and the role he played, Barth says:

When I wrote about it a year ago, I did not conceal how much basic unclarity continued to burden the Confessing Church despite all its good intentions; and I can now admit that my thoughts on the subject were far more painful than I liked to say in public. We did not even know for sure whether we were wanting to make our own confession to the Gospel and leave everything else to the Gospel itself or to save the Church by means of supposedly clever adaptations and concessions. More than one of its announcements was practically indistinguishable from those of the German-Christians.²²⁰

There is much that Barmen did not say, but this was indeed a good start for the opposition. Although Barth knew that several points could be mistaken for German-Christian ideas, yet there were many points that were remarkably different.

Seventy years later it might be tempting to measure Barmen's legacy as much by what it did not say as by what it said, or to judge the Confessing Church both for what it did not do as well as what it did accomplish. Upon reading the Barmen Declaration one hears not only the church's voice in 1934 but also its silence—at Barmen and throughout the Third Reich—about the Jews and others who in May 1934 were already the victims of Nazi persecution.

The Barmen Declaration did not prevent Confessing pastors from fighting in Hitler's army²²¹ from 1939 to 1945. It did not lead the church to condemn the persecution of the Jews. It did not push the church to the forefront of the resistance to Nazism. The

²¹⁸ Victoria Barnett, “Transcending Barmen: Confessing in Word and Deed,” in *Christian Century*, (May 1994, Vol. 111, Issue 16), 495.

²¹⁹ Barth, *The German Church Conflict*, 46.

²²⁰ Barth, *The German Church Conflict*, 48.

²²¹ The branch of the SS called *Waffen SS*, separate from the German Armed Forces such as army, navy, etc.

declaration did establish the Church's position against the German Christians' ideologies and organizations and against the notion of there being any voice of God outside the orthodox view of revelation. These were very important and indeed the most important foundational steps. The Confessing Church would have soon had no ground to stand on if they had not established the importance of the Word of God which so many parishioners and German Christians were not heeding.

The Confessors After Barmen

The Confessing Church sought independence from the Reich Church, in preaching and in leadership. In churches from the Old Prussian Union²²² there was a provisional leadership structure, and the other churches in Germany held their own Synods in 1934, 1935, and 1936. When the press was silenced, and no Confessing Church papers could be distributed, creative methods were found to keep writing and dispersing the written encouragement that the churches needed.

Bonhoeffer played a key role in the Confessing Church seminary at Finkenwalde during these years. He wrote, drafted confessions, taught, and took part in Confessing Church Synods. Many churches, and certainly the seminary, eventually had to go "underground." In one of his seminary lectures in the winter of 1935-36, Bonhoeffer focused on the New Testament Church. His aim was to relate the current German Church struggle to the tumultuous beginnings of the church, and thus to make his students aware of the two dangers always facing a church: "It could become an incorporeal concept; it

²²² The Church of the Old Prussian Union had roughly eighteen million members.

could become secularized. Nazism [or *Gleichschaltung*] seems to have accomplished both.”²²³

At the time of the Confessing Church’s third Synod, there was much pressure to conform, to give control to the Reich Church. One of Bonhoeffer’s students remembered that Bonhoeffer had brought some personal notes with him to one of the Confessing synods. In those notes, though not included in the confession drawn up, this comment is made:

A third Synod [Oeynhausen] must now provide protection against the subversion of the church by the world which, in the shape of the National Socialist State, is intervening through its finance departments, legislative authority, and committees, and is now splitting into groups the church of those who uphold the ‘Confession.’ Here we cannot and must not yield for one moment.²²⁴

Bonhoeffer intentionally participated in the Confessing Church synods believing it would be for the church’s good and protection. To continue his ministry among the Confessing Church pastors Bonhoeffer frequently sent circular letters, even after he was in prison, and sent the ministry students in the Finkenwalde seminary out to visit confessing pastors as encouragers.²²⁵

Meanwhile, the Confessors throughout Germany sought to benefit from the State controlled church elections. In most areas where a pastorate was opening, a candidate would preach, and be voted on by the congregation. In some parishes, the elections were then opened up to anyone claiming to be a Christian over the age of 21, rather than those who were active members in the territorial church. While German Christians were very

²²³ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “The Visible Church in the New Testament” in *A Testament to Freedom*, edited by Geoffrey B. Kelley, (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1995), 153.

²²⁴ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “The Question of the Boundaries of the Church and Church Union” in *A Testament to Freedom*, edited by Geoffrey B. Kelley, (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1995), 158.

²²⁵ Some of these letters can be found in *A Testament to Freedom*, edited by Geoffrey B. Kelley, (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1995).

polished at distributing their propaganda, Confessors were equally as capable of organizing the faithful to vote against the German Christian candidate.

One example of Confessors making the most of church elections can be seen in the community of Nauen, just outside of Berlin, which had twenty-eight parishes. Kyle Jantzen studied the church records from these parishes, local documents, as well as interviews of parishioners, and thereby put together an interesting study of Nauen church life. Being close to Berlin, the church members were aware of the cultural and political changes, “well informed about Hitler, National Socialist rule, and the church struggle.”²²⁶ Prior to 1935, this town had welcomed Hitler and the NSDAP as their heroes against the enemies of Christianity, and as a “catalyst for Protestant revival.”²²⁷ As the church struggle grew, most parishioners realized that the Third Reich had not been honest with the churches, and that *Gleichschaltung* would be enforced.

In Nauen, the staunchest opposition to the “nazification” of the churches appeared in the organization of campaigns to block the appointment of German Christian clergymen to vacant pastorates. The infrequency of legal or political consequences for these campaigns suggest that—whether or not direct opposition to the National Socialist regime was possible—Protestants in the Nauen district were relatively free to determine the course of their own religious lives during the National Socialist era.²²⁸

Like so many other Christians in Germany, these Nauen church members had been excited about the political changes of 1933 which would hopefully bring about a “moral renewal of the German *Volk*.”²²⁹ They managed to protect their church life from the German Christian influence once they realized the need to do so.

²²⁶ Kyle T. Jantzen, “National Socialism as a Force for Renewal?” in *Christian Responses to the Holocaust*. Edited by Donald J. Dietrich. (Syracuse University Press, 2003), 54.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, 55.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, 55.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, 56.

Martin Niemöller's church, located in another suburb of Berlin called Dahlem, was also well informed; they too chose not to follow the laws passed by the Reich Church Ministry. Unfortunately for Niemöller's congregation, when he was imprisoned like-minded persons, including Otto Dibelius, were kept from taking the pastorate on threat from the Gestapo. Unlike Niemöller many other pastors saw their duty to their congregation to be that of keeping their pastoral post. To accomplish that they took the path of non-resistance to *Gleichschaltung* and the changing policies that contradicted their theology. Jantzen notes the differing opinions on the stance of churches:

in 1959, Friedrich Baumgärtel seriously undermined that interpretation with an analysis of church leaders' positive reception of National Socialism. More recently, religious historians have described the behavior of the churches in more nuanced terms, such as "partial co-operation," "functional resistance," "non-conformity," and "dissent."²³⁰

Whether an historian sees a "positive reception" or a "partial co-operation" in the history of a church, it was a situation where *Gleichschaltung* was successful. To the extent that the faithfulness to the Word had been pushed aside Hitler's aspirations for the churches were thus coming into fruition.

After having been deported for his anti-Nazi activity in 1935, Barth returned to his home in Basel Switzerland where he discovered that reports of the German Church conflict were not reaching this neighboring country, nor were Swiss churches aware of the seriousness of the situation. When asked, a Swiss pastor admitted he did not think the Swiss churches were praying for the Evangelical Church in Germany. His dismay at this news prompted Barth to publish an article in the *Neue Züricher Zeitung*, February 2, 1937, containing this view of what had happened to the German churches:

²³⁰ Jantzen, 55.

In what follows I am describing quite literally how that is being done: First the Church has, by a continual cutting of the cords which have so far bound her to the life of the nation, to be banished into an allegedly freely bestowed inner room of private devotion and ceremony. Then the resulting vacuum has to be filled up with all kinds of eccentric substitutes. The next step is to point out emphatically the meaninglessness of these private concerns. Then the officials and party members have to have it sufficiently impressed upon them that this private concern could hardly be their business, and that neutrality towards it would be a good thing, withdrawal from the Church perhaps the best thing. Every voice which wants to draw attention to what is going on has to be rendered suspect of scandalous trouble-making and silenced.²³¹

Barth pointed out that Hitler's tactic was to make the church an entity whose "faith" was only inward, subjective, without outward response and seen by the masses as meaningless, even if it took a little noise to make this happen. Hitler found the Catholic Church as an organization hard to fight, whereas the Protestant Church, with its internal fighting over confessional issues, needed only to be silenced. Then the people would "know" little by little that the new religion²³² would meet their needs.

Hitler Seen As Threat

Hitler's smooth language and waxing control kept most Christians from seeing him or his government as a threat to Christianity. Late in 1934 the Confessing Church was waking to see his place in the demise of German churches. This was first clearly seen in the *Schutzstaffel*, or SS²³³ which claimed to be in support of a Christian Germany

²³¹ Barth, *The German Church Conflict*, 56-57.

²³² Positive Christianity as taught by German Christians, with *völkische* tendencies and a focus on being one *Volk* church

²³³ <http://www.reference.com/search?q=Schutzstaffel#all>. SS is the abbreviation for Schutzstaffel, meaning "protective squadron." Throughout the 1930s and 1940s many branches of the SS became specialized, some more militaristic than others. In the beginning, they were the elite group with the task of protecting Adolf Hitler. "The SS was distinguished from the German military, Nazi party, and German state officials by its own SS rank structure, SS unit insignia, and SS uniforms."

without denominational preference. The *Schutzstaffel* ideology increasingly sounded like German Christian and *völkisch* teachings. For example, Heinrich Himmler²³⁴ strictly forbade that Christ be denounced as a Jew; he explained that the assumption of Christ's Jewishness was historically erroneous.²³⁵ Himmler relied on contrived texts to support the idea that Jesus was not a Jew, Hirsch and Fritsch were two of the authors.²³⁶

By October of 1934, the order was given by Himmler that any clergymen in the SS would have to drop their church membership; there would no longer be any dual enrollment. He also made it policy that no member of the SS could have a leadership role in the Confessing Church, or any other confessing organization.²³⁷ There were some who handed in their SS membership book and pin, like Bishop Ernst Dietrich and Archbishop Conrad Gröber. Yet statistics show that such decisions do not reflect the majority of those SS members who had been faithful members of their churches. For example in 1937 over 11,000 Protestants withdrew from their churches to remain in the SS. By 1939 Himmler had changed his policy to include any church employee or any theological student. The wearing of an SS uniform in church services was also forbidden.

While the number of those withdrawing their church membership should have had detrimental affects on the German Church, this was offset by the fact that at the end of WWI church participation had risen significantly. Some numbers can be deceiving, like the number of theological students that tripled from the year 1911 to 1931. However,

²³⁴ Himmler was with Hitler from the time of the Beer Hall Putsch in Munich that landed Hitler in jail. Himmler served in various capacities, but most notably as the Reichsführer of the SS, head of the Gestapo and the Waffen SS.

²³⁵ Helmreich, 216-219

²³⁶ More information on this found in the section of this thesis titled "Heretical Doctrines of the German Christians."

²³⁷ Confessing organizations were primarily the only Protestants who did not accept the German Christian and/or National Socialist *Weltanschauung*.

jobs were scarce, and a church position was seen by some to be a steady source of income.

The number of youth involved in church was rising as well; the break from theological liberalism and end of the war are speculated to have been contributing factors of the increased participation in youth groups between the two World Wars.²³⁸

Membership remained strong in the youth organizations during the beginning of the church conflict. But in December of 1934 *Reichsbischof* Müller had these groups formally joined to the HJ, or *Hitler Jugend*.²³⁹

When it became clear to Hitler that Reich Bishop Müller was not controlling the church forcefully enough a new office was formed. Hanns Kerrl was appointed as the head of the Reich Ministry of Church Affairs in October of 1935. Kerrl's first act was to establish regional and national church committees to handle all matters of finance, church law, ordination, organization, etc. He also set a law in place stating that no *Landeskirchen* could take on a task that Kerrl had appointed a committee to do. Kerrl also controlled the publishing habits of the Confessing Church, whose pastors had previously published in journals or newspapers. They could only publish papers that supported the committees.²⁴⁰

An appeal from the *Reichs* Church Committee caused even more murmuring from the confessors. That appeal is commented on here:

It began well by founding itself on the declaration of Faith made in the first article of the church Constitution of July 1933, which was the basis to which the Confessionals always appealed. But a confusing element was introduced in the

²³⁸ The first youth groups in Germany were founded in 1901. By the postwar era, these groups included Bible study and religious education as well as sports and activities, theater, chorales, dancing, and other social activities.

²³⁹ Hitler Youth. Helmreich, 83-85.

²⁴⁰ Matheson, 56-57. Duncan-Jones, 109-121.

very next paragraph, which, on this basis of belief, appealed to the parishes for loyalty and obedience to People, Reich, and *Führer*. So far so good. It was the next sentences that introduced the complication. “We affirm the National Socialist development of the people on the basis of Race, Blood and Soil. We affirm the will to freedom, national worth, and socialist readiness for sacrifice, even to the offering of life for the community of the people. We recognize therein the reality given us by God for our German people.” Only, the Appeal continued, by recognizing these facts would it be possible to preach the Gospel of the Crucified and Risen Saviour to the German People and restore the broken unity of the Church.²⁴¹

Duncan-Jones confirmed in his summary of the appeal that the committees did not govern the church in accordance with Scripture. The appeal blatantly mixed some ideas from Christianity with the pagan *völkische* teachings.

In less than one month, November 28, 1935, after meeting with Hitler, Kerrl took further action; he began by having the Confessing Church funds seized. On November 31, the Confessing Church was notified that all its writings would be censored. Kerrl also banned the use of the word *Irrlehre*, or heresy, as a means to keep peace.²⁴²

Kerrl’s plans only waxed worse when two days later he declared that Confessional organizations were illegal and he forbade them from any activity in the life of the churches.²⁴³ Within a fortnight:

...on the morning of December 14, the secret police of Elberfeld, unannounced, without the authorization of a written order and without any higher power giving its reasons, [disturbed] the theological school of that town in the middle of its lectures and then [sealed] up its doors as a sign that it is “closed” and “dissolved” and that its teachers and pupils are dispersed.²⁴⁴

After such a move, the Confessors who were not as outspoken as Barth clearly saw the threat of Hitler. Many thought the only “true” enemy was the German Christian

²⁴¹ Duncan-Jones, 115.

²⁴² Bergen, 47

²⁴³ Duncan-Jones, 120. Bergen, 47.

²⁴⁴ Barth, *The German Church Conflict*, 58.

movement. In truth, this movement had presented itself as a pawn to Hitler, making *Gleichschaltung* so much easier to spread through their influence in the *landeskirchen*.

To fight this true enemy, the provisional leadership of the Confessing Church sent an appeal to Hitler on June 4, 1936. They had previously trusted Hitler because of Hitler's victory over Bolshevism, but they later claimed that "never since 1918 has the attack on the Christian church been so effectively and energetically waged as now...."²⁴⁵ In this appeal they explicitly asked Hitler if it were his policy to "dechristianise" Germany. They proceeded to enumerate all the misinterpretations of Christianity that had been promulgated in the name of "positive Christianity" by those in NSDAP leadership, in the church, and especially among the German Christians. After that the letter contains a list of twelve specific things the NSDAP had done to hinder or control the Church and a description of the general things done throughout. Toward the end of the appeal, the Confessing Church leaders asserted that Hitler has in practice claimed the role of mediator, and a role that comes to close to being a worshipped one.²⁴⁶ For some Christians who lacked social ethics, appealing to Hitler may have seemed to be their only option; for some confessing pastors however, Hitler's response to this appeal gave clarity to the struggle and was a catalyst for further action.

This appeal only made the struggle more difficult, as over 800 pastors and laymen in the Confessing Church were arrested through 1937, and hundreds more in the years leading up to WWII.²⁴⁷ Dr. Kerrl met with a group of pastors at the outset of 1937 to clear up whatever misunderstandings they had about church and state relations:

²⁴⁵ Matheson, 58.

²⁴⁶ Cochrane, 268-279.

²⁴⁷ Martin Niemöller was arrested in June 1937, and went to trial in January 1938. The Judge ruled that he had served his time while waiting for trial in prison, Niemöller was released only to be picked

The party stands on the basis of Positive Christianity, and Positive Christianity is National Socialism...National Socialism is the doing of God's will...God's will reveals itself in German blood...[some pastors] have tried to make clear to me that Christianity consists in faith in Christ as the Son of God. That makes me laugh...No...True Christianity is represented by the party, and the German people are not called by the party and especially by the Fuehrer to a real Christianity...The Fuehrer is the herald of a new revelation.²⁴⁸

Hitler knew that those in the confessing church were the minority. Speeches such as this one given by Kerrl persuaded those stagnant in their faith to follow Hitler.

It was "on the occasion of the Austrian *Anschluss*, [that] bishops...mustered their pastors to take an oath of loyalty to Hitler."²⁴⁹ The *Anschluss*, or connection, took place on March 12, 1938. This oath was expected of any civil servant, and to keep one's job it could not be refused. Under Dr. Hanns Kerrl²⁵⁰ there was great pressure to force pastors to take the oath, which he considered a suitable birthday present for the *Führer*. Later, bishops over other *Landeskirchen* tried to add the following: "I swear to be loyal and obedient to the leader of the German Reich and people, Adolf Hitler, to respect the laws and to carry out my official duties, so help me God."²⁵¹ According to Duncan-Jones:

This oath seemed to many of the pastors to be quite inadmissible, if impaired by an authority that claimed to speak in the name of the church. As the State is committed to a *Weltanschauung* that desires to eradicate Christianity, the oath entrenched upon theology.²⁵²

Faithful clergymen were alarmed by the heresy of the oath, as demonstrated by their protest in May 1936. While many took the oath to save their role as pastor, many braved the punishment that resulted from the refusal.

up again by the Gestapo which was "bound by no law and justice, and sent [Niemöller] without charge or sentence to a concentration camp." Barth, *The German Church Conflict*, 66.

²⁴⁸ Kerrl, quoted in Shirer, 239.

²⁴⁹ Bonhoeffer, 461.

²⁵⁰ The *Reichsminister* of Ecclesiastical Affairs, appointed by Hitler in 1935, whose task it was to carry out *Gleichschaltung* among the *Landeskirchen* once Hitler deemed that *Reichsbischof* Müller was not doing so.

²⁵¹ Duncan-Jones, 147. See also Barth, *The German Church Struggle*, 48-49.

²⁵² Duncan-Jones, 147.

The first time the oath was introduced, German citizens were able to decline without suffering consequences. This time the oath was required, thus in 1936 an announcement was made that because of the nature of a true oath churchmen could take the oath by simply giving lip service. In 1938, the Confessing Synod of the Old Prussian Union “advised the pastors to take the oath.”²⁵³ Read alongside various confessing pastors’ writings, this was a curious move, one that certainly contradicted their other teachings.

Despite whether or not one took or refused to take the oath, it was on a daily basis that the greeting *Heil Hitler!* would resound in the city streets and homes and meeting places in Germany. People were imprisoned for not returning this greeting, and though many decided it harmless, they were in essence proclaiming “salvation through Hitler.”²⁵⁴

Karl Barth was the only professor of theology who continued to start his lecture with a prayer instead of with “Heil Hitler.” He was also not willing to swear an oath to Hitler...But Barth was left alone by the “Confession Church,” [*sic*] which told the Nazi state that it would not be a problem to swear an oath to Hitler. Only then was the Nazi state ready to dismiss Barth!²⁵⁵

Though the Confessing Church pastors had realized that Hitler was an enemy to the church, they were still in 1936 wavering in their loyalty and unable to stand for either obedience to their faith or obedience to something contrary. The oath and the various laws being passed by the Nazi government were clearly contrary to the teachings of Scripture, yet here we see “lip service” recommended. This is evidence of the inward-decline of faith.

²⁵³ Helmreich, 228.

²⁵⁴ Thomas Shirmacher, “National Socialism as Religion,” *Chalcedon Report* 1992, 1.

²⁵⁵ Shirmacher, 2. By “Confession Church” the author was no doubt referring to the Confessing Church.

The Church is not a Volkskirche

In a letter to one of his students from Finkenwalde who later pastored a confessing church, Dietrich Bonhoeffer echoes Barth's notion that God has a purpose for having the tares among the wheat, signifying that the German Christians are tares. Bonhoeffer instructed this young pastor that it was not his role to sift the tares from the wheat; the Holy Spirit will do that. It is difficult to have a body of believers with so many false believers, but no pastor can sift them all out, or create a pure program. His church must remain true to the Word, and carry out the business of preaching and sacraments. They should not push a person away, unless that one be the Antichrist himself. They are a free community, not a *Volkskirche*. Thus they must not imitate the programs or the qualifications of acceptance of the German Christians.²⁵⁶

Though Barth and others look back wishing they had done more for the Jewish Christians and for the Jews, it must be kept in mind that for centuries Germans had been taught to hate Jews. This was not an entirely new thing that Hitler was attempting by creating a fear and hatred of the Jewish race. To create a church and a nation free from any race save their own Aryan race was new.

Minimally in lectures and letters, the *Bekennende Kirche* made an ethical attempt to resist anti-Semitic attitudes:

There would be too little law if any group of subjects were deprived of their rights, too much where the state intervened in the character of the church and its proclamation, e.g., in the forced exclusion of baptized Jews from our Christian congregations or in the prohibition of our mission to the Jews. Here the Christian church would find itself *in status confessionis* and here the state would be in the

²⁵⁶ Dietrich Bonhoeffer letter, in *So ist es gewesen, Brief im Kirchenkampf 1933-1942*, (Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1995), pg 290-291.

act of negating itself. A state which includes within itself a terrorized church has lost its most faithful servant.²⁵⁷

Bonhoeffer's thoughts show that there were Christians who still felt they had a "mission to the Jews." These thoughts also have a hint of partiality in speaking up for Jewish believers rather than the Jewish citizens at large.

Hitler's opposition to the church was an attempt to create a silent group who held their faith inwardly. Inward faith of that kind does not come out in action, but stays a sentiment, a weak and cowardly sentiment. One with only inward faith would not be able to make choices and allegiances regardless of any conflicts with their faith.

Pastors that were struggling against the German Christian's pagan ideology were also running to Hitler for help, they did not see his two-faced approach, his hypocrisy, or his evil intent for Germany. Shirer claimed that nearly every family in Germany during the 1930s owned a copy of *Mein Kampf*, it was customary to give it out as a gift, or to keep in plain view of visitors, it was the topic of many conversations.²⁵⁸ One can then assume that some of those pastors who ran to Hitler for help had read some of its pages and blinded themselves with nationalistic hopes. The Word was losing its voice in the church, and the faith of the parishioners was indeed all too inward and so without effect. Duncan-Jones noted how ready people were for biblical faith after the Great War, but then on the brink of WWII, their hunger for faith had been sated by the Aryan myth, nationalism and other völkische teachings.

²⁵⁷ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "The Church and the Jewish Question April 1933," in *A Testament to Freedom*, edited by Geoffrey B. Kelly, (HarperSanFrancisco, 1995), 132-133.

²⁵⁸ Shirer, 81.

Barth's discussion of that first year for the *Bekennende Kirche* also highlighted the glory of God being seen through their struggle. These confessors, being human made many errors. Yet they strove to cling to the Word and to teach it anew to the Church.

And because those who did speak out were ultimately neither cleverer nor braver than other people, we may and must say that Christian faith performed a miracle in the confession which was suddenly heard here despite the repeated stupidity and weakness of its confessors.²⁵⁹

Barth believed that though mankind is weak, the Lord of the Church would strengthen his people to stand in the midst of struggles. The Barmen Synod was an initial part of that strengthening process, and the unrelenting writing and teaching efforts of Barth²⁶⁰ and other confessing pastors were aimed at continuing that process.

²⁵⁹ Shirer, 60.

²⁶⁰ Barth was forced to leave Germany in 1935, this and his efforts will be discussed thoroughly in the next chapter.

CHAPTER SIX

The “Word” and Karl Barth’s Words to the Church

Duncan-Jones referred to Karl Barth as “a prophet [who] challenged the subjectivism into which Protestantism had fallen.”²⁶¹

It is not what we think about God that matters, but what He thinks about us. Man is made to serve God and not God to serve man. This, [Barth] said, was what Luther and Calvin had taught; and, because he spoke truly, he found a hearing in German Protestantism that the others did not. He recalled the German people—so far as they were Protestant—to the hole from which they were digged.²⁶²

Barth was not interested in pleasing the masses, but sought to serve them the truth about God’s love and His expectations for His people. In this way he faithfully served the German church during the years of the *Kirchenkampf*, while living in Germany and after he was deported back to Switzerland. Barth challenged the ideas infiltrating the church directly in journals, magazines, and verbally among his Confessing church cohorts. He also devoted much of his writing to the ideas under attack, publishing many volumes on topics including ethics, preaching, theology, Christology, church life, and church and state relations. Much of his writing called Christians to continued faith in Christ, loyalty to Scripture above other words, and faith that would not remain merely inward.

Barth’s Early Years

Barth was a native of Switzerland, but in the course of his university studies, he studied theology in Berne, Switzerland, as well as the German cities of Berlin, Tübingen and Marburg. His professors stood variously within the Ritchlian liberal, critical school

²⁶¹ Duncan-Jones, 29.

²⁶² *Ibid.*, 29.

of theology. In this ideological-theology, he was taught to value personal religious experience above all else.

After his university years, he took a pastorate in Safenwil, and one of his best friends took a pastorate just a few miles over the mountains. Much can be learned about Barth's generation from reading Barth's formal works²⁶³ as well as the informal letters he and Eduard Thurneysen exchanged throughout the years. During Barth's first several years as pastor, he concluded that his liberal education offered nothing to real people, to working people. He lamented that his educational background did not prepare him for a pastoral role.

As early as 1915 Barth joined the Social Democratic Party. He hoped that now his members would listen to his criticisms of current political situations. Meanwhile, Barth criticized his fellow churchmen for the vacillating role they tended to play in politics.

But the eternal "looking into things" after their manner really leaves everything the same as before. So far as tactics are concerned there is perhaps nothing more to be done. Tactics are just tactics and not principles. They will always oscillate between restraint and co-operation, open criticism, and silent non-interference, the adoption on our part of a special position and harmless brotherly association.²⁶⁴

These ideas foreshadow a Barth that would take an active role in speaking out against the situations after the war.

After having moved to Germany and taken a professorate at Gottingen, in the spring of 1922, Barth told Thurneysen about what he saw as the prelude to the conflict of the 1930's:

²⁶³ Barth wrote extensively on theology, philosophy, and history; in so doing he also addressed the problems that were current to his generation.

²⁶⁴ Karl Barth, *Revolutionary Theology in the Making: Barth-Thurneysen Correspondence, 1914-1925*, Translated by James D. Smart, (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1964), 29.

I begin to catch a whiff of the foul air of German church conditions and will perhaps experience something in the future when I one day come within shooting distance of these powers and authorities....Also the Christological problem in the narrower sense [i.e. the quest for the historical Jesus] begins again to raise itself. It is not impossible that the semester may yet end in a riot. For the present indeed there is no sign of it. The German S.C.M for which I held an “absorbing” Bible class let their objections be overborne with remarkable ease. The Nationalists with few exceptions keep out of my way. The historical-critical people for the present cannot make much of me because I myself am now letting the “sources” speak, so that it is quite delightful....²⁶⁵

Throughout 1922²⁶⁶ Barth’s concern remained with the ministers who patterned their views according to academia,²⁶⁷ and offered the people “homemade bread”²⁶⁸ rather than the Bread of Life.²⁶⁹

The questions Barth posed to Thurneysen in December of 1923 reflect his alertness to cultural developments, and his recognition of the dangers that extremely unorthodox teachings would pose to the church’s future:

It is curious that modern Protestantism has let itself be influenced by him [Schleiermacher] so little at just that point. I have really asked myself at times whether or not it was the will of Providence that Christianity should have followed the course it did in the nineteenth century, right into this amiable lagoon of pietism, crossed with the faith in the progress of culture, again crossed with naturalistic romanticism, and once more crossed with a pinch of idealism. Did the dear God really want that to happen? Is there any other positive “concern” in it all than that for once a monument of apostasy had to be erected...²⁷⁰

Though Barth knew it was not his sole responsibility to purify the church, he knew he could not ignore the impurities or adopt them as other pastors had done. At least four major ideologies had crept into Christian theology, all of which Barth saw as threatening forms of apostasy.

²⁶⁵ Barth, *Revolutionary Theology in the Making: Barth-Thurneysen Correspondence, 1914-1925*, 103-105.

²⁶⁶ In 1922 Barth was teaching in Göttingen.

²⁶⁷ Liberal and critical in that time.

²⁶⁸ Doctrine based on personal experience, and Scripture as interpreted through culture.

²⁶⁹ Barth, *Revolutionary Theology in the Making: Barth-Thurneysen Correspondence, 1914-1925*, 106-107.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 159.

By the time he published his commentary on Romans,²⁷¹ Barth had made a break with liberalism. He knew liberalism was of no help to his parishioners²⁷² and he was appalled “with liberal theology as a result of the support of his liberal theological teachers for Kaiser Wilhelm II’s imperialist war-policy of 1914.”²⁷³

Early in 1925, Barth’s focus shifted from fighting his usual enemy of pietism, or liberalism. He wrote to Thurneysen about the direction he was taking in the *Christian Dogmatics*. While referring to creation, Providence, and other topics, Barth said that naturally, “the leaven of ‘world views’ had...to be purged out with thoroughness.”²⁷⁴ He sounded cautious, letting Thurneysen know that printing such things was dangerous, and that he is glad the two of them have not printed much that they had intended to, for such things could bring the end of their ministry and influence among churches.

Barth wanted to help pastors stay faithful to the Word of God: “If only they will become in some degree better pastors on this nourishment,” which he referred to as “the milk of the art of religious thinking.”²⁷⁵ “This nourishment,” found in his *Dogmatics*, Barth intended for pastors.

Dogmatics is consideration of the Word of God as revelation, Holy Scripture, and Christian preaching. Thus the primary object is not biblical theology, not church doctrine, not faith, not religious consciousness, but Christian preaching that is actually preached, which on the one hand is to be recognized as the Word of God by reference to Scripture and revelation and on the other hand is to be defined critically by the Word of God.²⁷⁶

²⁷¹ First edition of Romans was published in 1919, second edition was published in 1921.

²⁷² As a pastor, Barth discovered that liberalism did not meet their needs, or show them love

²⁷³ John McDowell, *ST2B Dogmatic Theology Lecture*, (Spring Term 2003), http://www.geocities.com/johnnymcdowell/Course_ST2B_Lecture-Eschatology1.html

²⁷⁴ Barth, *Revolutionary Theology in the Making: Barth-Thurneysen Correspondence, 1914-1925*, 202-203.

²⁷⁵ Barth, *Revolutionary Theology in the Making: Barth-Thurneysen Correspondence, 1914-1925*, 183.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 182.

Barth later wrote the *Church Dogmatics*, having realized just after publishing the *Christian Dogmatics* how to “do” theology, with the help of Anselm.²⁷⁷ Barth took another risky political move by joining the Socialists in Germany²⁷⁸ in May 1, 1931; by 1933 he was told to drop his membership in the SBD or lose his professorship at the university of Bonn. According to one Barth historian, Günther von Norden, his outward reply was to drop his membership and to state that he did “not resist the National Socialist order of state and society, but resisted a theology that was seeking refuge” therein.²⁷⁹

Theology that Resisted Safety

In 1933 Barth wrote extensively on the substance of the German Christian movement in contrast to the true substance of the Church. Though standing in the Reformed Theological tradition he sings Luther’s praises as well:

As truly as she can hear today what the Church is, and as truly as she is the Church of Luther! Considering the German-Christians, she could finally be terrified at what has become of her, and, reflecting on Luther’s Church, she could know herself to be called to what she has nevertheless not ceased to be. She could arise and turn round in her spiritual centre: from the ideologies to the simple, hard, glad truth of which she was born. She could once again become a holy Church, to the salvation of the German people...[she] would have to be freed from Saul’s armour, from the continually too historical, philosophical, political, tactical and ostensibly practical thinking, in which they have grown all too similar to the German-Christians and have failed to become their real enemy.²⁸⁰

²⁷⁷ After Barth re-read Anselm, he had the clarity to speak about God in ways he had not before.

²⁷⁸ A group counter to and very different from the National Socialists.

²⁷⁹ According to Günther von Norden, *Die Weltverantwortung der Christen neu begreifen. Karl Barth als homo politicus* (Gütersloh: Kaiser, 1997), p. 53. Quoted in Frank Jehle, *Ever Against the Stream*, translated by Richard and Martha Burnett, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), 48.

²⁸⁰ Barth, *The German Church Conflict*, 22.

Barth emphasized everything important to Christians in Germany at that critical time that would serve to differentiate them from the German Christians. The key was to know what the Church really was, so as to strive to be true to that identity. The only source correctly defining Church and showing the Church her purpose is the Word of God.

Barth was often taken out of context by others, even by some in the Confessing Church struggling with him. Emil Brunner complained that Barth's idea of doing "theology as if nothing had happened" was politically nonchalant, to which Barth responds:

It is a legend without foundation that in 1933 I recommended a 'passive unconcern' to the German people when I urged that preaching should go on 'as if nothing had happened,' i.e. in face of the so called revelation in Adolf Hitler. Had that advice been thoroughly pursued then, National Socialism would have come up against political opposition of the first order.²⁸¹

The real emphasis of Barth's advice to continue "as if nothing had happened" should have driven the church to be active in both word and deed without altering her actions to match the NSDAP. It was a call to Christian obedience and decisive action, rather than indecisive or passive allegiance given to Hitler.

In October of 1933 Barth challenged his fellow Christians in Germany with words that display his caution and concern:

What happened this summer in Germany? Did it happen with justice or injustice? This kind of seizure of power? This removal of all other parties?²⁸² This confiscation of property? Can Germany, can the German Church account for this host of suicides? Is the Church not guilty as well because she remained silent? I am just asking questions. Whoever has to proclaim the Word of God must say whatever God's Word says about such events.²⁸³

²⁸¹ Karl Barth quoted by Dr. John C. McDowell, *Critical Conversations in Our World: Barth and Socialist Politics*. http://www.geocities.com/johnnymcdowell/Barth_Course_Seminar9_Lecture9.html

²⁸² At this time in Germany National Socialism was declared the only legal political party.

²⁸³ Barth quoted in Jehle, 53.

Throughout the next two years, Barth spoke, wrote, published, and challenged others with a call to loyalty to the Word, and indeed addressed “such events.” He was not afraid of stepping on toes, and was so bold on one occasion to send a copy of his *Theologische Existenz Heute* to Hitler. Consequently in 1934 all remaining copies were confiscated.²⁸⁴ Later that year, as noted in chapter five, Barth played a leading role in scripting the Barmen Declaration.

Barth encouraged his Protestant friends while living and working in Germany to reconsider their situation pertaining to preaching, teaching and church structure rather than sitting back comfortably allowing others to take authority:

The questions before which the evangelical Church was placed, as it were overnight, in the spring of 1933 were these: Whether it was possible to adopt, as it were, into the Christian faith the ideas of National Socialism (blood, race, nationality, the soil, leadership, etc.) which had suddenly won the day and were being proclaimed in all the streets with the most popular persuasiveness and at the same time with the highest authority, and therefore to let these ideas become authoritative also for the preaching, teaching and organization of the Church. Whether the event of the National Socialist revolution was to be regarded and honoured as a kind of second revelation alongside the Gospel of Christ or even as its continuation and contemporary form. Is there really an “eternal Germany” which is equal to God and which is the valid expression of His will for us today? Is the voice of the Aryan blood, i.e. the command of Adolf Hitler, equal to the commandment of God, or contained in it? Should the Church too be ruled authoritatively and militarily by “bishops”, like little “Führers”? Is it really the province of the state to make a “total” claim on the life of men, and the Church’s business only the right and duty to repeat and glorify this claim as divine and to reconcile and entrust men to it? Whoever is surprised at these questions may well consider how little the evangelical Church in the last centuries has understood how to stand on her own feet, to repel alien spirits of the age, to set her light on a lamp-standard instead of under some bushel or other.²⁸⁵

Churches in Germany were actually debating whether to add National Socialist ideas to their teaching, preaching, and sources of revelation. They were giving other ideas and a different world view the same status as God without question. They were listening to the

²⁸⁴ Jehle, 47.

²⁸⁵ Barth, *The German Church Conflict*, 41-42.

NSDAP authorities who claimed that Hitler's voice was a revelation from God. This is characteristic of a church that is following after a leader who is not reading Scripture enough to know that this was contrary to Christianity, a pastor engulfed in German Christian teachings in place of the Word of God. However bold it was for Barth to pose such questions, these were not taken seriously by many *landeskirchen*. Barth accused the church of not being able to "repel alien spirits of the age" or being able to know when some idea or leader was contrary to the ideas foundational to Christianity. Barth first recognized this in the 1920s, and he continued to address this problem within the church throughout the *Kirchenkampf*.

Barth was expelled from Germany in 1935 for not taking the oath of loyalty to Hitler,²⁸⁶ but continued to play an active role in awakening the outside world to the conflict, calling Europe to action in war, and encouraging the Confessing Church from afar.²⁸⁷ Though he would view politics as a source of revelation or allow it to shape his view of God, Barth felt it was his duty to address the political situation and he continued to criticize the Christian community for staying too quiet, or silent rather.²⁸⁸ Having returned to Basel, Switzerland, Barth frequently had visits from Bonhoeffer, who was able to visit Switzerland on business.²⁸⁹ This was stopped by the Gestapo, who was concerned about what Bonhoeffer had published without permission. Barth and Bonhoeffer also wrote letters as well.²⁹⁰

²⁸⁶ Paul Tillich also refused, eventually choosing to emigrate to America.

²⁸⁷ Jehle, 57-68.

²⁸⁸ Barth was forbidden to speak politically in the public arena again until 1944 after Normandy.

²⁸⁹ Bonhoeffer had joined the *Abwehr*—a defensive military intelligence agency—and was able to travel back and forth at least four times.

²⁹⁰ It was Barth who convinced Bonhoeffer that unless he return to Germany in the heat of the conflict and war, the German Church would have no reason to listen to him when all was over and it needed his guidance.

Three years after Barth's return to Basel, his language was just as direct, perhaps even stronger. In his Gifford Lectures, for example, he makes light of all Nazi and German Christian claims to be manly, and tells his audience that the world "is in need of men and it would be sad if Christians, of all people, did not want to be men."²⁹¹

One can readily see that to which Barth drew attention in his writings: the Church was at first unable to fight its enemy because of lack of unity, for the Lutheran and Reformed churches were fighting one another. In his *Theology and Church*, Barth compares doctrines, showing how similar Luther and Calvin are on the major points, the points of theology by which Christians should be drawn together. Yet the minor points drew them apart. They did not rejoice in their common Scriptural heritage.²⁹²

Addressing Doctrinal Issues

Barth saw his role in the latter 1930s to be a theologian in the struggle against Hitler, given that a theologian is what God had called him to be regardless of the presence of conflict or peace. Many of the topics he covered were those that had been abused or redefined improperly prior to or during the *Kirchenkampf*. In his theological writings of that time Barth sought to define the Kingdom of God,²⁹³ church, the role of Church in relation to the government and revelation.²⁹⁴ Some of this was to counter the influence of the NSDAP *weltanschauung* and the One Reich Church. He also sought to

²⁹¹ Karl Barth, *The Knowledge of God and the Service of God According to the Teaching of the Reformation*, (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1949), 216.

²⁹² Karl Barth, *Theology and Church*, translated by Louise Pettibone Smith (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1962), 273-277.

²⁹³ Which had been misinterpreted by most Germans to refer to their Kaiser's rule, and later the *Reich*.

²⁹⁴ Which was mistakenly connected to blood, soil, history, and the voice of Hitler

encourage pastors and scholars to get their theology from the Word of God rather than natural theology²⁹⁵ or cultural experience.²⁹⁶

The Kingdom

The Kingdom of God had been misunderstood for hundreds of years to be a nation here on earth. Thus in many ways Barth's kingdom teachings differ from Luther's, and many other presiding notions. Whereas Luther envisioned two separate earthly kingdoms, Barth taught that the kingdoms overlap; yet:

The church is not the kingdom of God. This means...that the church is not an order of creation. ...At the beginning and at the end there is no church. As a sign of the mediated fellowship between God and man the church belongs to the middle, to the time between the times, to history. As an order of reconciliation the church...is one, legitimate, free from error, and binding on everyone.²⁹⁷

Barth used concentric circles to represent the two spheres within the present Kingdom which is being used by God to usher in the future, not merely earthly, Kingdom of God.

There is one large circle, the outer circle, which represents the State. This is not any particular state, but civil community in general. Every human being is a citizen of the State, a member of this circle. Within this circle, is another, an inner circle, the Church. The inner circle surrounds Christ, as a mediating community between Christ and State. While every human is in the State, not everyone is in the Church. However, every member of the Church is a member of the State.²⁹⁸

The State is founded upon power and not knowledge, it does not know of its relation to the Kingdom. The members of the Church have a responsibility to the State because of their knowledge of the Kingdom. Thus no state or nation can be mistaken for

²⁹⁵ At that time represented in the ideology of the NSDAP and the German Christians

²⁹⁶ As taught by the liberal theologians

²⁹⁷ Karl Barth, *Ethics*, (NY: Seabury Press, 1981), 442.

²⁹⁸ Karl Barth, *Community, State and Church*, (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1960), 114-118

the Kingdom of God. As the outer circle, the State governs mankind but is not a separate kingdom. This is the main deviation from Luther's "Two Kingdoms" which were both ruled by God, but very separate from one another. Barth admits his parable of The Circles has its weaknesses, but it does serve to illustrate the State's place within the Kingdom, and the relation of the Church to the State.²⁹⁹

In addition to the above, Barth wrote that in the view of the New Testament, in no circumstances can this demonic State finally achieve what it desires. With gnashing of teeth it will have to serve where it wants to dominate; it will have to build where it wishes to destroy; it will have to testify to God's justice where it wishes to display the injustice of men.³⁰⁰

The State has the tendency to become demonic with its "renunciation of its true substance...and purpose."³⁰¹ Though the world and all it contains is fallen, it is not so evil as to exclude God from working in and through it. He is present, and has worked to raise the question of law, of right and wrong, in the minds of the world. Presently the Body of Christ and the kingdom of this world are being used to build the Kingdom of God. As a member of the Church, a man has greater responsibility to the State, knowing that God has ordained and is sustaining this order for mankind's justice.³⁰² The powers given to Pontius Pilate were given to him from above, thus the power the State has is not evil. The way in which one wields this power may prove to be for evil, for inasmuch as

²⁹⁹ Barth, *Community, State, and Church*, 114-118.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 118.

³⁰² *Ibid.*, 105.

human nature is corrupt so will the use of power be.³⁰³ On this point Luther would concur.

Barth wanted his students to know that the Kingdom could not be controlled by any nation, nor could any earthly power usurp God's role the Kingdom. The church has a role in the present, but looks to a future glorious Kingdom as opposed to a glorious all-encompassing Germany.

The Church

Barth addressed this topic often because many Germans were losing sight of who Christ is and what He said about His Church. The Church is people called together, gathered in one place, because of "their knowledge of and belief in Jesus Christ...in one Spirit...in obedience to the Word."³⁰⁴ To properly understand itself, the church must never lose sight of its Christological foundations.

Barth prefers the word *Gemeinde* to the word *Kirche*, because of the image that comes to mind upon hearing either word. With *Gemeinde*, or community, comes the idea of togetherness. The word *Kirche* could carry with it ideas of institution or federation which in the days of the *Kirchenkampf* could draw one's mind to unity around worldly ideas, the German Christian or NSDAP *Weltanschauung*, or under the *Führer* as head of the One Reich *Kirche*.³⁰⁵ To this end Barth taught that:

... whenever the Church is mentioned we all tend to think first of the image and semblance. We so rarely believe what we say when we use the word. It is well to realize then that what the word brings to mind is not the real Church at all. The opportunity to think of the real Church is given to us only through the mercy of God. He acknowledges the image and the semblance and therefore ourselves, and

³⁰³ Barth, *Community, State, and Church*, 110-113.

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 104, 150.

³⁰⁵ Karl Barth, *The Church and the Churches*, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1936), 60.

He makes us, by believing in Him, believe in the real Church and see the real Church.³⁰⁶

When Barth portrayed the church as a community this included both a divine institution and a human fellowship. The true church is in existence as a result of the Holy Spirit's working in individual people, and it continues by His power as well.

The true church has the Spirit at work, whereas many organizations can pose as 'church,' and thus we are fooled when we look upon the exterior. Barth once summed that:

The church is the sign, set up by God's revelation, of the concrete and visible order of life by and in which people are summoned to repentance before God on the basis of accomplished reconciliation...divine institution...gathering of sinners saved by grace...³⁰⁷

"The true church is an event" in which Christ acts through a group, through His body; this group acts as His "representation"³⁰⁸ to spread His truth and grace to other people. Barth wanted Christians to remember that the church's purpose for gathering and the church's role in community is different from that of the state's. The two can never be fused into one, the state can never swallow up the church or else the church would cease to exist. If each fulfilled its role, those roles would be complimentary and harmonious; such was not the case in the Third Reich.

Revelation

The importance of reconciliation and revelation in the definition of church come out in Barth's *Ethics*, and challenged the role that the NSDAP was taking in the church.

³⁰⁶ Karl Barth, *Against the Stream*, (New York: Philosophical Library, 1954), 64.

³⁰⁷ Barth, *Ethics*, 442.

³⁰⁸ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* Volume IV, Part II, *The Doctrine of Reconciliation*. Translated by G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance. Edinburgh: T.&T. Clark, 1961-62, 617-623.

With this emphasis, Barth established the fact that the church must be constantly tied to Christ³⁰⁹ as the only supreme authority, the only one who speaks an absolute word to the Church. Revelation according to Barth continually takes place as God reveals himself in the incarnate Word, and thus the true church is not in ownership of revelation, but is a constant recipient.³¹⁰ Barth's definition of revelation is in contradistinction to his liberal professors, and those who clung tightly to history and nature, both of which impacted the life of the Confessing Church.

Reichsbischof Müller's Good Friday message of 1934 that upset many *landeskirchen* also warranted a response from Barth. That very day he typed up what would be the forward to *Theologische Existenz Heute h. 9*. The urgency in his writing can be inferred throughout as he talks about the essence of the church, Scripture, and revelation. In response Barth urges the readers to remember what faith and obedience are, and that Scripture and the events of history are not up to private interpretation. With sarcasm Barth chides those who think they are God's "Privy Counsellors and co-regents who could with their venturing, grasping and interpreting announce and decree where, what and how His reality and His will are here and now."³¹¹

Barth spoke against the German Christians, Müller, and liberal theologians. He also addressed pastors who were riding the fence in their vacillating stance, not sure whether to speak against the church's enemies or to speak "peace, peace" to the parishioners to pacify them. One pastor in particular that Barth addressed was Friedrich von Bodelschwingh, who published some letters in February of 1934. He asked whether

³⁰⁹ Union with Christ as explained in Romans 6:5)

³¹⁰ Barth, *Ethics*, 442.

³¹¹ Barth, *The German Church Conflict*, 32.

Bodelschwingh was fully aware of the *Kirchenkampf*, or of what was truly at stake.

Barth posed many other questions, mostly rhetorical as:

Would the devotional message of Good Friday not have won over the hearts ready at any moment not to be over-particular, for whom therefore that German-Christian dogma presents no decisive question? I am only asking. But truly: this question must be asked today because of the way countless people still think and feel.³¹²

The answer to Barth's question is that the people's hearts were eager only for an answer to their frustrations, their hearts were eager to grasp whatever they heard. Therefore the German Christian teachings did not raise questions of veracity in the hearts of most Germans, nor did they question whether the German Christian *weltanschauung* was from God or another source. Pastors like Bodelschwingh who were not willing to speak without ambiguity left the parishioners to these wolves in sheep clothing. Barth finishes his treatment of Bodelschwingh by asking if he were not alarmed or forced to question German Christian dogma, did he not realize that the average German was not ready to accept as revelation "Scriptures and the 'German hour'" as spoken of by German Christians.³¹³

Before the *Kirchenkampf* was widespread, Barth recognized what was happening to Christian's view of Scripture, of Revelation, and of how to hear from God. This was one of the most central issues of the *Kirchenkampf*, as well as one of the most central themes of Barth's writings from these years. This theme is found not only in the Barmen Declaration, penned mostly by Barth, but also in Barth's *Dogmatics*, *Ethics*, his journal articles, and countless essays and smaller volumes. The choice in the 1930s was between

³¹² Barth, *The German Church Conflict*, 35.

³¹³ *Ibid.*, 36.

believing Scripture, or believing the German Christians and Hitler who contradicted Scripture.

Answering Questions

The *Kirchenkampf* did not cease as WWII was on the horizon. By 1937 Barth's writings emphasized that the struggle had become more serious. Leadership in the Confessing Church was shifting and changing, thus the ability to stand firm was being questioned. The number of confessors arrested in 1937 and 1938 was substantially less than previous years, but other means of destroying the church were still being used.

The optimist in Barth reassured Christians in 1937 that "the Church in Germany was allowed this year to feed privately and yet also quiet openly on the bread which satisfies all hunger" referring to the preaching of Scripture.³¹⁴ Barth also made the claim that the faithful will remain "praying and giving thanks that we are engaged in what is taking place in the Confessing Church in Germany, whatever form this may take."³¹⁵ The yearly review written for 1938-1939 also ended on a positive note. Barth spoke of the sifting of the church and of evidence of bravery in the name of Christ. He called Christians to pray while believing that God hears:

We would hear from the Word of God that He knows this people, that His congregations suffer and are oppressed and even deny themselves and Him and yet cannot completely die out. Then we have real reason and occasion to turn to Him who hears our prayers: Lord remember these thy congregations! and to know for sure that He will do so in one way or another.³¹⁶

³¹⁴ Barth, *The German Church Conflict*, 70.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 70.

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 76.

This word of encouragement and edification comes after a long description of a hellish year for the churches in Germany. Barth knew his role as theologian was not merely to call people to obedience and to clarify the important doctrines, but also to edify Christians for the battle at hand that they would not grow weary in their obedience.

The church was threatened by Hitler to become an inward reality, as Barth saw while still living and working Germany. Barth confirmed that by 1938-1939 this was actually taking place, and Christians were justifying it. Christians had begun to believe that all that matters is your soul, so your body and all else did not have to show evidence of your beliefs. This eased the conscience of those who acted in accordance to *Gleichschaltung*, they thought their heart could belong to God while they fully obeyed the government concerning ethical or even religious matters.³¹⁷

Barth's description of the means that achieved this end include changing the meaning of the Gospel, destroying church organization, depriving "the Church of the possibility of ruling herself," placing superiors over the clergy "who have no conception of the Church and Gospel" and who "treat Christian truth and the most evil pagan heresies as" equal. There was widespread suppression of Confessing pastors and theological schools after already closing seminaries, while "examinations, ordinations, collections, publications" were forbidden. Those associated with the Confessing Church had "their post, their telephones, their meetings and announcements" cut off. The youth were encouraged to act against the church while being incorporated into the HJ. Other actions taken include "suspensions, depositions, prohibitions of speech, imprisonments,

³¹⁷ Barth, *The German Church Conflict*, 71-72.

In a post-WWII lecture aimed at rousing slumbering Christians who might listen, Barth said:³²²

God did not give us time and did not let us participate in the events of the day in order that we would act as if all this were none of our concern. Whoever here refuses to look upon humanity—as if he himself were not also human!—would certainly miss the divine as well... Better that the Christian congregation stand up for the weak three times too often than one time too less, better to raise its voice unpleasantly loud where justice and freedom are endangered than to be pleasantly silent!³²³

He sought to remind them of the privileges and responsibilities resting upon Christians: that inward and silent faith is not a real option. Barth believed God had a purpose for those who live through such tumultuous times, that purpose did not involve choosing naivety or passivity. From the beginning of the *Kirchenkampf* until the end of WWII Barth's concern remained the same as he called Christians to shift away "from the ideologies to the simple, hard, glad truth of which she was born. [Then] she could once again become a holy Church, to the salvation of the German people." If only Christians would hear and listen to the message of Scripture, then they could serve their neighbors, helping them as they face physical enemies as when the Jews and others faced extermination at the hand of the Nazis.

³²² Barth, *Against the Stream*, 80-81.

³²³ *Ibid.*, 81.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Conclusion

Hitler's knowledge of the Protestant churches came out mockingly in conversation: "You can do anything you want with them...They will submit...they are insignificant little people, submissive as dogs, and they sweat with embarrassment when you talk to them."³²⁴ When Hitler came to power, he knew the Protestant church well enough to attack at its weak points. He was largely successful in his program to assimilate the church into his *Reich* because of this knowledge.

The churches were not wrong to follow Luther's footsteps and teachings, but learning to discern which of his teachings are based on truth and which teachings were merely opinion was a neglected albeit necessary action. This is something the German church did not learn soon enough, though many looked back and wished they had learned it. The Protestant views on government, mixed with the lack of social ethics, led the German churches to hate democracy pre-maturely. This fear democracy and love of monarchy blinded many to the ways the new ruler, Hitler, was abusing his power until the abuses too were widespread.

The Weimar Republic did have issues, but before it started many had decided that Christianity dictated the need for a King or Kaiser, one ruler—with the people not having a voice. By the time the Weimar Republic was in place, and German Christians were rising in their influence—not only on culture but also on religion and politics. Many Christians were disheartened by the trying times of a war lost, a financial depression, the

³²⁴ Hitler quoted in Shirar, 238.

inability to colonize or expand as an empire, and a loss of dignity. These experiences and desires led the Christians in Germany to eagerly support a ruler who terrorized the people he ruled over.

In their despondency German Protestants let go of the Word that Luther had fought so fiercely to put in their hands and they fought one another about non-essential theological ideas. The Word was not read or preached thoroughly after the German Christians and Hitler's *Reich* church staff outlawed the reading of the Old Testament and any New Testament portions written by Paul, claimed that Jesus was not a Jew, and confirmed other voices of revelation and means of salvation. Thus Nordic pagan myths rose in theology, in text books used in schools, and in politics. *Gleichschaltung* spread quickly under these auspices, and soon the worship and preaching found in churches was controlled by the government, watered down, confined to take place within church walls, and in many ways silenced.

German churches ought to have been outraged by Hitler's plans for the *Reich* church. This plan had thirty-one points, calling for the Bible to be replaced by *Mein Kampf*, the cross to be replaced by the swastika, and pastors to be replaced by "National Reich orators."³²⁵ Hitler wanted to cleanse Christianity from all the influences that were imported "in the ill-omened year 800"³²⁶ and many believed this was a positive move for Germany's future. There was no immediate outrage from German Protestants, but a few voices rose above these threats to the church as in the case of Bonhoeffer.

³²⁵ Shirar, 240.

³²⁶ Ibid.

In a sermon preached the week after the bloody “Rohm Putsch”³²⁷ in 1934 Bonhoeffer chose the text of Luke 13:1-5. In this text, people ask Jesus why a particularly tragic death occurred, assuming it must be God’s disfavor shown towards those who died. Jesus says no and stops the people from judging those involved in the event. He then tells them to repent or they shall likewise perish. Bonhoeffer used this text to address those who try “not to see the somber, dark sides of life, [and] close [their] eyes to the catastrophes of this world.”³²⁸ To do so is to “cheat oneself out of the truth...out of God’s truth.”³²⁹ Bonhoeffer then reiterated Jesus’ words, and stated that those who look at the reports of the *Kirchenkampf* must have a repentant, non-judging, compassionate attitude. Bonhoeffer’s main instruction to his congregation was to observe and learn, rather than seeing and criticizing.

Barth viewed the *Kirchenkampf* as God’s tool to teach the church “to stand so much more firmly and to know the truth completely afresh.”³³⁰ Barth implied that the desire for many lords, or to have Christ and Hitler, is fought by the Church “reflect[ing] on what [she] properly is.”³³¹ Instead of this reflecting, the German Protestants were fighting one another.

Shirar’s estimation of the health of the churches in the 1930s was grim. Church members treated their faith the way they treated every other facet of their life, giving it up in humble obedience to Hitler’s programs:

³²⁷ James Steakley, “Homosexuals and the Third Reich” in *The Body Politic*, Issue 11, January/February 1974, <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/pwh/steakley-nazis.html>. June 30, 1934 when the SA had been planning to use martial law in Munich, Hitler purged the SA of all suspected homosexuals and others who threatened his regime, killing many, and arresting the leader of the SA, Ernst Rohm, whom he had shot after questioning.

³²⁸ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “The Way that Leads to Renewal, July 8, 1934” in *A Testament to Freedom*, edited by Geoffrey B. Kelly, (HarperSanFrancisco, 1995), 230.

³²⁹ *Ibid.*, 230-231.

³³⁰ Barth, *The German Church Conflict*, 39.

³³¹ *Ibid.*, 50.

It would be misleading to give the impression that the persecution of the Protestants and Catholics by the Nazi State tore the German people asunder or even greatly aroused the vast majority of them. It did not. A people who had so lightly given up their political and cultural and economic freedoms were not, except for a relatively few, going to die or even risk imprisonment to preserve freedom of worship. What really aroused the Germans in the Thirties were the glittering successes of Hitler in providing jobs, creating prosperity, restoring Germany's military might, and moving from one triumph to another in his foreign policy.³³²

Despite the masses who passively gave their allegiance to Hitler, there was a group of Christians that attempted to oppose both the German Christians and eventually Hitler. This opposition was the Confessing Church, and they called the church back to the Word of God found in Scripture. They went against the *Reich* officials who cut out portions of the Bible considered Jewish, and against the attempts of Hitler to make Christianity seem like an inward personal aspect of life.

The Confessing Church's first unified effort at emphasizing the importance of the Word was the Barmen Confession written in May 1934. This Word was believed by the Confessors to be the one true measure of who the church is, how she ought to function in the world, and what she ought to believe about God, mankind, and any others trying to influence her. Did the Church stay in line with Scripture in order to serve her Lord, or did she come into line with the programs and ideologies of Hitler and the other influences? The answer is twofold: yes the majority of German Protestants came into line with Hitler's programs, and no the minority did not but rather they opposed in word and sometimes in action. The German Christians redefined the Gospel, changed Scripture, and added *völkische* teachings to the churches. Hitler used his government to control the church, and to teach Protestants that faith is inward, and quickly "Germanism" replaced Christianity in the hearts of many. The minority who chose to

³³² Shirar, 239-240.

believe Scripture in defiance of these other voices did not participate in Hitler's programs.

Barth's notes from a university class he taught early in his career are published as *The Faith of the Church*.³³³ Before the *Kirchenkampf* was clearly recognized by others, Barth was answering those questions that Christians would look back and ask. Barth taught that the Church precedes the individual because faith places the individual into the Body of Christ. This went against the notions of socialism and the "general good" taught by *völkische* teachers. Notions of service are part of what it means to be "the church," as its members seek to serve one another and their neighbors.

Barth also taught in that class that the Church is not to be mistaken for the Kingdom of God, but "the Church announces the Kingdom of God"³³⁴ and all that Jesus has accomplished. When Jesus returns and is "revealed in glory and in public"³³⁵ then there shall be no more Church, and indeed no more godless churches, only the Kingdom of God. Barth warned of those who snatch at the Kingdom, trying to bring it to pass in their way. This warning fell on deaf ears throughout Germany, as many citizens hoped the Führer's message about being the Kingdom of God would come to fruition. This message made sense to those who remembered their beloved Kaiser's concern with the Kingdom of God, and the pagan myths that the German Christians brought to the forefront again. The true church need not be alarmed by this because she knows the truth, and she knows her relation to the State and to the future.³³⁶

³³³ Early in his teaching career, Barth was privileged to teach whatever classes he wanted to, and would do so from a reformed position. The university would title the course so that people would be turned off by Barth's use of Calvin's writings, and his bent towards reformed theology. Much to their chagrin Barth's classes were still among the most popular offered.

³³⁴ Karl Barth, *Faith of the Church*, (New York: Meridian Books, 1958), 135.

³³⁵ *Ibid.*

³³⁶ *Ibid.*, 132-150.

In 1936 Barth published what the Swiss churches ought to learn from the reports they were hearing about the German *Kirchenkampf*:

It cannot be very easy for the Swiss to understand these events. Yet the opinions and the system of obscurity from which the Confessing Church has once more turned aside are pretty much the opinions and system of our Swiss established Church. What else do we see than that the Church now consists of “groups” [of political factions, and committees] and that it can therefore neither venture now to have a confession? What else do we see than that one may give honour in the Church just as much to Christ alone as to Christ and other Lords? The one difference is that we have no Kerrl to force the matter on us, but hitherto we have wanted to have it so ourselves. Many of us may easily feel the behavior of the German Confessing Church somewhat unruly and abrupt, whereas previously we were not unsympathetic. Yet we should not fail to reflect on what the Church properly is, and whether a Church can exist and behave any differently from what the German Confessing Church has done this year.³³⁷

Barth emphasized that churches must always fight the notion of “Christ and,” one cannot have more than one Lord. Barth points out the difference between the Swiss churches looking at the *Kirchenkampf*, namely that German churches had physical enemies forcing ideas and changes, whereas Barth accuses the Swiss of walking into those problems on their own accord.

In the midst of the *Kirchenkampf* Barth’s message to pastors and churches was to wake up to the situation, confess and “be ashamed of ourselves before God and the angels, that such a thing could happen” in the Evangelical Church, and then to cling boldly to the Word of God.³³⁸ In such conflict, the Christian’s role is not to “[wish] on [those you are in conflict with] too eagerly their long deserved downfall.”³³⁹ Barth’s belief in 1934 was that God was using this *Kirchenkampf* to teach the church about her

³³⁷ Barth, *The German Church Conflict*, 50.

³³⁸ Barth, *German Church Conflict*, 24. These words were penned in Bonn, on December 11, 1933.

³³⁹ *Ibid.*, 38.

need of God, and the importance of “Scripture, confession, community, divine service, preaching, theology.”³⁴⁰

A letter written in 1941 to aid the British churches in understanding the *Kirchenkampf* reflected back on the early 1930s and the reasons for war and for Germans accepting National Socialism. Barth speaks of:

...the attempt of Adolf Hitler to force his “New Order”...[which] is the assertion of the sovereignty of the German race and State...to be achieved by the whole might of Germany’s military power, which is impelled by the force of a heathenish religion of blood, despotism and war. This enterprise was met by toleration and yet more toleration in a desire to atone for past mistakes. It was perhaps through blindness to the true nature and power of this enterprise...from a bad conscience about the past...[having] neglected their duty to arm themselves for war [WWI]...³⁴¹

Barth asserted that Christians must say “Yes” to this war, and “postpone our objection to war as such to some future date, when it may once again have some reality.”³⁴² This was not a time for toleration, but for justice.

Barth also gave a sobering reminder that the will of God will prevail, and that for doing nothing Christians will suffer that will, and receive their reward “through the Revolution of Nihilism.”³⁴³ Hitler and those who served him as German Christian pastors tried to redefine the will of God. Nonetheless, a Christian will always be responsible for knowing God’s will through the Word of God and not the propaganda of man. Either a Christian is for Hitler, or against Hitler, but Barth asserts that no one can be neutral. By not taking an “against Hitler” position, Germany had “fallen prey to

³⁴⁰ Barth, *German Church Conflict*, 38.

³⁴¹ Karl Barth, *A Letter to Great Britain From Switzerland*, (London: The Sheldon Press, 1941), 6-7.

³⁴² *Ibid.*, 8.

³⁴³ *Ibid.*, 8.

Hitler's movement" and was worthy only of suffering for that.³⁴⁴ Non-action led the German nation to become Hitler's accomplice, allowing him to achieve his purpose. Barth then claimed that "it is the clear will of God that we should recognize the true nature and power of the movement, in order to combat it with all our strength."³⁴⁵

Did Barth's recognition affect his own actions? Did he play a part in the *Kirchenkampf* in accordance with "the clear will of God?" His letters exchanged with Thurneyson show his concern, as do his publications in *Zwischen den Zeiten*, *Leben und Glauben*, and *Theologische Existenz Heute!* among others. His writings, the reports of those around him, and his own refusal to open class with "Heil Hitler" are testimony of Barth's conviction to stay true to Christ, and of his choice not to be stagnant in action. Was there a minority within the churches that recognized "the true nature and power" and of NSDAP and German Christian movements? Yes, the Confessing Church arose, encouraged Christians with the truth, and opposed the church's enemies. Their opposition was not perfect, but this minority proved that *Gleichschaltung* was not complete.

³⁴⁴ Barth, *A Letter to Great Britain From Switzerland*, 8-9.

³⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

APPENDIX

Barmer Theologische Erklärung

Die theologische Erklärung der Bekenntnissynode von Barmen vom 29. bis 31. Mai 1934

Alle Kirchen sehen in der Barmer Theologischen Erklärung ein wichtiges theologisches Dokument aus der Zeit des Kirchenkampfes. Ganz überwiegend betrachten sie die Barmer Theologische Erklärung als wegweisendes Lehr- und Glaubenszeugnis der Kirche im 20. Jahrhundert. Nicht wenige messen ihr darüber hinaus verpflichtende Bedeutung bei, einige rechnen sie zu ihren Bekenntnisgrundlagen (Evangelisch-reformierte Kirche, Evangelische Kirche der Union).

THESEN

1. Jesus Christus spricht: Ich bin der Weg und die Wahrheit und das Leben; niemand kommt zum Vater denn durch mich. (Joh. 14, 6)

Wahrlich, wahrlich, ich sage euch: Wer nicht zur Tür hineingeht in den Schafstall, sondern steigt anderswo hinein, der ist ein Dieb und Räuber. Ich bin die Tür; wenn jemand durch mich hineingeht, wird er selig werden. (Joh 10,1.9)

Jesus Christus, wie er uns in der Heiligen Schrift bezeugt wird, ist das eine Wort Gottes, das wir zu hören, dem wir im Leben und im Sterben zu vertrauen und zu gehorchen haben.

Wir verwerfen die falsche Lehre, als könne und müsse die Kirche als Quelle ihrer Verkündigung außer und neben diesem einen Worte Gottes auch noch andere Ereignisse und Mächte, Gestalten und Wahrheiten als Gottes Offenbarung anerkennen.

2. Durch Gott seid ihr in Christus Jesus, der uns von Gott gemacht ist zur Weisheit und zur Gerechtigkeit und zur Heiligung und zur Erlösung. (1. Kor 1,30)

Wie Jesus Christus Gottes Zuspruch der Vergebung aller unserer Sünden ist, so und mit gleichem Ernst ist er auch Gottes kräftiger Anspruch auf unser ganzes Leben; durch ihn widerfährt uns frohe Befreiung aus den gottlosen Bindungen dieser Welt zu freiem, dankbarem Dienst an seinen Geschöpfen.

Wir verwerfen die falsche Lehre, als gebe es Bereiche unseres Lebens, in denen wir nicht Jesus Christus, sondern anderen Herren zu eigen wären, Bereiche, in denen wir nicht der Rechtfertigung und Heiligung durch ihn bedürften.

3. Laßt uns aber wahrhaftig sein in der Liebe und wachsen in allen Stücken zu dem hin, der das Haupt ist, Christus, von dem aus der ganze Leib zusammengefügt ist. (Eph 4, 15. 16)

Die christliche Kirche ist die Gemeinde von Brüdern, in der Jesus Christus in Wort und Sakrament durch den Heiligen Geist als der Herr gegenwärtig handelt. Sie hat mit ihrem Glauben wie mit ihrem Gehorsam, mit ihrer Botschaft wie mit ihrer Ordnung mitten in

der Welt der Sünde als die Kirche der begnadigten Sünder zu bezeugen, daß sie allein sein Eigentum ist, allein von seinem Trost und von seiner Weisung in Erwartung seiner Erscheinung lebt und leben möchte.

Wir verwerfen die falsche Lehre, als dürfe die Kirche die Gestalt ihrer Botschaft und ihrer Ordnung ihrem Belieben oder dem Wechsel der jeweils herrschenden weltanschaulichen und politischen Überzeugungen überlassen.

4. Jesus Christus spricht: Ihr wißt, daß die Herrscher ihre Völker niederhalten und die Mächtigen ihnen Gewalt antun. So soll es nicht sein unter euch; sondern wer unter euch groß sein will, der sei euer Diener. (Mt 20, 25.26)

Die verschiedenen Ämter in der Kirche begründen keine Herrschaft der einen über die anderen, sondern die Ausübung des der ganzen Gemeinde anvertrauten und befohlenen Dienstes.

Wir verwerfen die falsche Lehre, als könne und dürfe sich die Kirche abseits von diesem Dienst besondere, mit Herrschaftsbefugnissen ausgestattete Führer geben und geben lassen.

5. Fürchtet Gott, ehrt den König. (1. Petr 2,17)

Die Schrift sagt uns, daß der Staat nach göttlicher Anordnung die Aufgabe hat in der noch nicht erlösten Welt, in der auch die Kirche steht, nach dem Maß menschlicher Einsicht und menschlichen Vermögens unter Androhung und Ausübung von Gewalt für Recht und Frieden zu sorgen. Die Kirche erkennt in Dank und Ehrfurcht gegen Gott die Wohltat dieser seiner Anordnung an. Sie erinnert an Gottes Reich, an Gottes Gebot und Gerechtigkeit und damit an die Verantwortung der Regierenden und Regierten. Sie vertraut und gehorcht der Kraft des Wortes, durch das Gott alle Dinge trägt.

Wir verwerfen die falsche Lehre, als solle und könne der Staat über seinen besonderen Auftrag hinaus die einzige und totale Ordnung menschlichen Lebens werden und also auch die Bestimmung der Kirche erfüllen. Wir verwerfen die falsche Lehre, als solle und könne sich die Kirche über ihren besonderen Auftrag hinaus staatliche Art, staatliche Aufgaben und staatliche Würde aneignen und damit selbst zu einem Organ des Staates werden.

6. Jesus Christus spricht: Siehe, ich bin bei euch alle Tage bis an der Welt Ende. (Mt 28,20)

Gottes Wort ist nicht gebunden. (2. Tim 2,9)

Der Auftrag der Kirche, in welchem ihre Freiheit gründet, besteht darin, an Christi Statt und also im Dienst seines eigenen Wortes und Werkes durch Predigt und Sakrament die Botschaft von der freien Gnade Gottes auszurichten an alles Volk.

Wir verwerfen die falsche Lehre, als könne die Kirche in menschlicher Selbstherrlichkeit das Wort und Werk des Herrn in den Dienst irgendwelcher eigenmächtig gewählter Wünsche, Zwecke und Pläne stellen.

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