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Preaching to Nazi Germany:
The Confessing Church on National Socialism, the Jews, and the Question of Opposition

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Doctor of
Philosophy

in

History

by

William Stewart Skiles

Committee in charge:

Professor Frank Biess, Co-Chair
Professor Deborah Hertz, Co-Chair
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Professor Patrick Patterson
Professor Cynthia Truant

2016

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Co-Chair

Co-Chair

University of California, San Diego

2016

DEDICATION

Dedicated to
Giesela Kriebel Hale,
whose enigmatic story
captivated me as a boy
and still inspires me today

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sources of Confessing Church pastors. I am immeasurably grateful for their patience and assistance. Likewise, Dr. Jens Murkens at Landeskirchliches Archiv der Evangelischen Kirche von Westfalen in Bielefeld was immensely helpful in finding Confessing Church sermons, especially those of Hans Ehrenberg.

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and the importance of perseverance and determination. My twin brother George and his wife Dena have been a steady source of support and encouragement. My wife Renee and I have spent countless hours conversing over bottomless cups of coffee about the ideas and arguments in this dissertation. Her insights and criticisms have been invaluable from start to finish. And her patience and understanding are saint-like, as she has time and again granted me the time and space to write. And my children, little William, Marie, and Theodore – all born as I was writing this dissertation – have been an inspiration and an impetus to write and to finish.

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Preaching to Nazi Germany: The Confessing Church on National Socialism, the Jews,
and the Question of Opposition

by

William Stewart Skiles

Doctor of Philosophy in History

University of California, 2016

Professor Frank Biess, Co-Chair
Professor Deborah Hertz, Co-Chair

This dissertation examines sermons delivered by Confessing Church pastors in the Nazi dictatorship. The approach of most historians has focused on the history of the Christian institutions, its leaders, and its persecution by the Nazi regime, leaving the most elemental task of the pastor – that is, preaching – largely unexamined. The question left unaddressed is how well did Confessing pastors fare in articulating their views of the Nazi regime and the persecution of the Jews through their sermons? To answer this

question, I analyzed 910 sermons by Confessing Church pastors, all delivered or disseminated between 1933 and the end of World War II in Europe.

I argue that new trends in preaching popular among Confessing Church pastors discouraged deviation from the biblical text in sermons, and thus one result was few criticisms concerning German politics and society. Nevertheless, a minority of pastors criticized the Nazi regime and its leaders for their racial ideology and claims of “Aryan” superiority, and also for unjust persecutions against Christians. They condemned Nazism as a morally corrupt ideology in contradiction to Christianity. Further, I argue that these sermons provide mixed messages about Jews and Judaism. While on the one hand, the sermons express admiration for Judaism as a foundation for Christianity and Jews as spiritual cousins; on the other hand, the sermons express religious prejudice in the form of anti-Judaic tropes that corroborated the Nazi ideology that portrayed Jews and Judaism as inferior. In the final section of the dissertation I explore the ministries of German pastors of Jewish descent and argue that they not only experienced persecution from the Nazi state, but also from their own congregations. Nevertheless, the themes of their sermons are consistent with those found in those of their colleagues.

My research demonstrates that the German churches were in fact places to offer criticism of the Nazi regime, which was often veiled through biblical imagery and metaphor. Yet the messages reveal criticism from a position of obedience and subservience to the state, and at the same time the expose a confused ambiguity about the Jews and Judaism and their relation to Christians in Nazi Germany.

CHAPTER ONE

A Word of Opposition: An Introduction to Confessing Church Sermons

We have no more thought of using our own powers to escape the arm of the authorities than had the apostles of old. But we are no more ready than they were to keep silence at man's behest when God commands us to speak. For it is and must remain the case that we must obey God rather than man.

—Pastor Martin Niemöller, 27 June 1937¹

The last sermon Martin Niemöller preached as a free man in Nazi Germany was on 27 June 1937. He based his discussion on the New Testament text, Acts 5:34-42, the story of an “upright and pious” Pharisee named Gamaliel who, after the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth, advised his community to wait and to observe the work of the early Christian leaders before pronouncing judgement, to see if God's hand is at work in their activities.² Niemöller looked out into German society under Nazi rule and asked his congregation in the middle-class suburb of Berlin-Dahlem, not to wait and observe, but to make a decision, to judge the Nazi regime's unjust persecution of Confessing Church pastors. From the pulpit, before his congregation, Niemöller condemns the secret police arrest of eight church leaders, just the Wednesday prior; and he condemns the arrest in

¹ Martin Niemöller, *Here Stand I*, translated by Jane Lymburn (New York: Willett, Clark & Company, 1937), 222.

² Niemöller, *Here Stand I*, 222. The New Testament is a collection of primary sources written in the mid-late first century through the early second century C.E., and together with the Hebrew Bible they comprise the Christian Bible. The New Testament includes various genres of literature, including letters, apocalyptic literature, and gospels. The term “gospel” is used to indicate the genre of literature (for example, the Gospel of Matthew) as well as the message, literally the “good news” (Old English: *godspel*) of Jesus' death and resurrection. The context will make it clear whether I or my sources mean to refer to the gospel text or the message.

Saarbrücken of six women and a man just the day before who circulated Confessing Church election leaflets; and further, he condemns the three Gestapo agents who crashed his communion service the Friday prior “to inform upon the activities of the community of Jesus.”³ And he names a few other persecutions besides! “Make a decision of faith,” he advises his congregation. And echoing Jesus’ words, he marks a clear contrast, “He who is not with me is against me.”⁴

It may not be surprising given the boldness of this sermon that two Gestapo men paid a visit to the Niemöller residence just two days later, 1 July 1937, a Tuesday morning at 8:30 am. He had been arrested before, two years earlier in 1935, because of his bold preaching, and he continued to expect arrest ever since. In fact, a contact informed him in the spring of 1937 that the Public Prosecutor was preparing charges against him.⁵ And so on that Tuesday morning Niemöller left with the two agents and made their way towards the police headquarters at Alexanderplatz, where he waited for hours until he was taken again, this time to the remand prison in the neighborhood of Moabit. But in the meantime, nine Gestapo agents returned to Niemöller’s house, conducted a thorough search and arrested visiting Confessing Church pastors who happened to visit expecting a standing meeting with Niemöller.⁶ Niemöller would remain in prison and later in a concentration camp until his liberation at the end of World War II.

³ Niemöller, *Here Stand I*, 226.

⁴ Niemöller, *Here Stand I*, 222.

⁵ Dietmar Schmidt, *Martin Niemöller: Eine Biographie* (Stuttgart: Radius-Verl, 1983), 101.

⁶ Dietmar Schmidt, *Martin Niemöller*, 103.

While Niemöller may have been the most vocal and bold opponent of the Nazis from behind a pulpit, he was not alone among Confessing Church pastors. As we will see, pastors at times criticized Nazi infringements in the affairs of the German churches, Nazi attempts to undermine Christian theology and practice, and they even criticized Nazi leaders, such as Alfred Rosenberg and Adolf Hitler. Pastors also expressed views in support of Jews as persecuted religious cousins, whose religion is the foundation of Christianity; and yet they also expressed views antagonistic to Jews, revealing age-old anti-Judaism that could only have contributed to conditions in Nazi Germany that made the Holocaust possible.⁷ The sermons of these pastors reveal that the German churches were indeed places where public opposition to the Nazi regime was possible, though not utilized nearly enough.⁸

The Voices of the Confessing Church

In 1970 the University of Hamburg theological student Wolfgang Gerlach provocatively argued in his dissertation, *Als die Zeugen schwiegen (And the Witnesses were Silent)*, that the German Confessing Church leaders failed to bear witness in word

⁷ Throughout the dissertation I will use the designation “Christianity” to refer generally to the various Christian churches, and in this context, specifically in Germany. This includes the Lutheran, Reformed, and United churches, as well as the Roman Catholic Church, and all their adherents. When a primary source refers specifically to a particular denomination, or to Protestantism or Catholicism specifically, I will use the designation given in the source.

⁸ As I will elaborate in much more detail on pages 13-19, I follow Ian Kershaw’s helpful distinctions between the terms dissent, opposition, and resistance. While dissent refers to the “passivity of ‘oppositional’ feeling,” meaning the verbal expression of negative attitudes towards the Nazi regime, “opposition” refers to any action, including acts of resistance that at least partially aimed at challenging the dominance of the Nazi state. Lastly, “resistance” refers to active participation in an organized attempt to undermine the regime or plan for its termination. See Ian Kershaw, *The Nazi Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives, Third edition* (New York: Arnold, 1993), 170-171.

and deed about the persecution and extermination of Jews and “non-Aryan” Christians in the Nazi dictatorship. They remained silent, he argued. Gerlach’s critics at the time severely critiqued his account as unfair and ungrateful for the courage that these men showed in confronting the Nazi threat to the German churches and nation, and his work remained unpublished until the historiographical tides changed in his favor in the late 1980s.⁹ Today Gerlach’s arguments predominate in the historiography of the German churches in Nazi Germany, and they have been corroborated and supplemented by historians for nearly three decades.¹⁰

We will delve into the specifics of this historiographical debate in the next chapter, but at the start I wish to point out that historians have maintained this widely accepted argument without thoroughly investigating one of the most important primary sources the German churches have to offer, that is, sermons, the manuscripts of the

⁹ In his own introduction Gerlach writes, “My critics accused me of attacking those who had witnessed courageously on behalf of the Christian confessions and principles of faith. Apparently, some time had to pass before a new generation could reexamine the accepted history of the *Kirchenkampf*.” Wolfgang Gerlach, *And the Witnesses Were Silent: The Confessing church and the Persecution of the Jews*, translated and edited by Victoria J. Barnett (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 2000), vii. See also Robert Ericksen and Susannah Heschel, “The German Churches Face Hitler,” *Tel Aviver Jahrbuch für deutsche Geschichte* 23 (1994), 450-451.

¹⁰ Gerlach, *And the Witnesses Were Silent*, vii-ix. One of the pioneers in this sea change in the historiography of the Church Struggle was the American Franklin Hamlin Littell, whose *The Crucifixion of the Jews*, originally published in 1962, argued that Christians must accept responsibility for centuries of anti-Judaism and that Nazi crimes must be understood in the context of this history. In 1970s, Littell partnered with another esteemed American historian, Hubert Locke, and organized an influential “Scholar’s Conference” on Christians and Jews at Wayne State University, a conference that was repeated annually for decades. See Franklin Hamlin Littell, *The Crucifixion of the Jews* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975); and Littell, Franklin Hamlin and Hubert Locke, eds. *The German Church Struggle and the Holocaust* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1974).

At the vanguard in Germany was the clergyman and scholar Eberhard Bethge, the biographer and best friend of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. In the late 1960s, after much inter-religious dialogue with students and Jewish scholars, such as Emil Fachenheim and Eva Fleischner, he came to reconsider his own views of anti-Judaism in the Christian tradition. See for example, “Nichts scheint mehr in Ordnung,” in *Ethik im Ernstfall: Dietrich Bonhoeffers Stellung zu den Juden und ihre Aktualität*, edited by Wolfgang Huber and Ilse Tödt (Munich, 1982). See also Ericksen and Heschel, “The German Churches Face Hitler,” 450.

pastors' messages to their communities of faith. Pastors preach every Sunday and on holidays throughout the year, and most often, at least in Germany in the early- and mid-twentieth century, their sermons were written down and even published. Hundreds of Confessing Church sermons exist in archives and in rare book stores across Germany, and so it is remarkable that despite the multitude of books on the German churches in the Nazi dictatorship, no historian has thus far explored and analyzed these sermons, and thus contributed further to the debate Gerlach instigated 45 years ago. In my judgment, it is impossible to answer the question of silence without first exploring the historical record of their speech.

Consider the significance of the sermon in Christianity, particularly in the Protestant tradition. Martin Luther once wrote that “To preach Christ means to feed the soul, to make it righteous, set it free, and save it, provided it believes the preaching.”¹¹ The question for historians of the Nazi period is how well did German pastors actually fare – in the midst of political upheaval, a devastating world war, and an unprecedented genocide against the Jewish people – in articulating their views of the Nazi regime and the persecution of the Jews through their sermons? The research has not yet been done.

And at the same time, in the Christian tradition, preaching is supposed to encourage and edify; so it is also a word of judgment against the powers that enslave and oppress. The sermon is a “spiritual weapon” in the tradition of Jesus, St. Paul, Luther, and in our recent history, Martin Luther King, Jr. It is time that we ask how, if at all,

¹¹ Martin Luther, *Three Treatises* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), 280.

German pastors, through the genre of the sermon, challenged the Nazi regime, its racist and militarist ideologies, and exterminationist policies.

A conspicuous lacuna exists in the historiography of the German churches and, in particular, the Confessing Church. We simply cannot yet confirm Gerlach's thesis without scouring the archives and examining these sermons. In fact, historians have long called for a thorough analysis of Nazi era to see how and to what degree German pastors spoke truth to power, defended the oppressed, and demonstrated love to their neighbors in need.¹² My dissertation is a long overdue contribution to this debate.

In this dissertation I will take the novel approach of examining the content and context of sermons delivered by Confessing Church pastors in the Nazi dictatorship, to analyze the messages proclaimed from the pulpits, published and disseminated, and broadcast over the airwaves. The Confessing Church, *die Bekennende Kirche*, was an association of Protestant pastors approximately 7,000 strong, established in May 1934 in protest against National Socialist infringements on the German Protestant Church's administration, liturgical practice, theology, and institutional integrity.¹³ Though they may have protested Nazi infringements in ecclesiastical affairs, they ultimately failed to offer unified or substantive resistance against the National Socialist state.¹⁴

¹² See Arthur Cochrane, *The Church's Confession Under Hitler* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962); Walter Zvi Bacharach, *Anti-Jewish Prejudices in German-Catholic Sermons*, translated by Chaya Galai (Lewiston: Edwin Mellon Press, 1993); and Robert Ericksen and Susannah Heschel, "The German Churches Face Hitler," *Tel Aviver Jahrbuch für deutsche Geschichte* 23 (1994).

¹³ Helmreich, *German Churches under Hitler*, 156; Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 63. See also Gerlach, who reports that 6,000 joined by the end of 1933. Gerlach, *And the Witnesses Were Silent*, 33.

¹⁴ See my discussion of the differences between dissent, opposition, and resistance in the Nazi regime on pages 17-23; see Ian Kershaw, *The Nazi Dictatorship*, 170-171. See also Shelley Baranowski, "Consent and Dissent: The Confessing Church and Conservative Opposition to National Socialism," *Journal of Modern History* 59 (March 1987): 53-78; Shelley Baranowski, *The Confessing Church, Conservative Elites, and the Nazi State, Texts and Studies in Religion* 28 (New York: Edwin Mellen, 1986); Victoria

One of the overarching questions of this dissertation is how and to what extent German Protestantism provided a platform for pastors to challenge the corruption of National Socialism and the injustice of the Nazi regime's policies against the Jews. As many have observed, Nazism became a popular ideology in a nation of Christians, and that many Germans did not see the two as mutually exclusive at all, but rather compatible.¹⁵ The fact is that the Nazi regime was placed in power by a population that was 97% Christian; further, the Holocaust was perpetrated by members of this same Christian population.¹⁶ My analysis follows the arguments of Ericksen, Walser Smith, and Confino, among others, who have posited that the Christianity of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century in Germany had become tied to the concept of nation, and in this way, had become susceptible to racial antisemitism that excluded Jews from German life.¹⁷ Most recently, Confino has examined "a Christian culture in German society that

Barnett, *For the Soul of the People: Protestant Protest against Hitler* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); Gerlach, *And the Witnesses Were Silent*; Andreas Kersting, *Kirchenordnung und Widerstand: Der Kampf um den Aufbau der Bekennenden Kirche der altpreußischen Union aufgrund des Dahlemer Notrechts von 1934 bis 1937*, Heidelberger Untersuchungen zu Widerstand, Judenverfolgung und Kirchenkampf im Dritten Reich 4 (Gütersloh: Christian Kaiser, 1994); Hans Prolingheuer, "Der ungekämpfte Kirchenkampf 1933-1945 – das politische Versagen der Bekennenden Kirche," *Neue Stimme Sonderheft* 6 (1983): 3-34.

¹⁵ See for example, Alon Confino, who argues for "an intimate link between Nazism and Christianity beyond what current scholarship proposes: being a (certain) good Nazi and being a (certain) good Christian went hand in hand in the Third Reich, as racial and Christian anti-Jewish ideas complimented one another in many respects." See Alon Confino, *A World without Jews: The Nazi Imagination from Persecution to Genocide* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014), 7. See also Robert Ericksen, *Theologians under Hitler: Gerhard Kittel, Paul Althaus and Emmanuel Hirsch* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985); Shelley Baranowski, *The Confessing Church, Conservative Elites, and the Nazi State* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellon, 1986); Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*; Gerlach, *And the Witnesses Were Silent*; and Richard Steigmann-Gall, *The Holy Reich: Nazi Conceptions of Christianity, 1919-1945* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

¹⁶ Helmreich, *German Churches under Hitler*, 93.

¹⁷ See Helmut Walser Smith, *German Nationalism and Religious Conflict: Culture, Ideology, Politics, 1870-1914* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995); Ericksen, *Theologians under Hitler*; Confino, *A World without Jews*; Wolfgang Altgeld, "Religion, Denomination and Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century Germany," in *Protestants, Catholics, and Jews in Germany, 1800-1914*, edited by Helmut Walser Smith (New York: Oxford, 2001); and Günter Brakelmann, "Nationalprotestantismus und Nationalsozialismus,"

identified German nationhood with Christianity and which lent legitimacy that derived from anti-Semitic tradition to Nazi anti-Jewish practices.”¹⁸ In short, it is fair to conclude that in some ways German Protestantism by the Nazi era was a compromised Christianity, weakened by ethnic and racial considerations that were alien to the religion, yet meant to unify and give meaning to the German nation. To recall one of Jesus of Nazareth’s great commands, a German in Nazi Germany – and even a pastor in the oppositional Confessing Church – had trouble actually identifying his “neighbors,” let alone loving them as himself.¹⁹ This situation in Germany produced a crisis in the Protestant churches that too few pastors were equipped to navigate. And so the question bears repeating, did religion matter at all in helping Christians oppose the Nazi regime and its ideology?

My dissertation takes this question seriously, and contributes to the historiography by demonstrating how, for a minority of Confessing Church pastors, Christianity provided a platform to oppose the Nazi worldview, its policies, its leaders, its persecution of the German churches, and also to a limited extent, the persecution of the Jews. My research reveals that there were some in the Confessing Church who were willing to speak out publicly from the pulpit to challenge Nazism and its pernicious policies, and to use the principles of Christianity to oppose Nazi measures and policies of exclusion.

in *Von der Aufgabe der Freiheit: Politische Verantwortung und bürgerliche Gesellschaft im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Berlin, 1995), 337-350.

¹⁸ Confino, *A World without Jews*, 8.

¹⁹ The reference is to Mark 12:28-34, when a scribe asks Jesus, “Which commandment is the first of all?” And Jesus answers, “The first is ‘Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”

This research demonstrates that at least in the Confessing Church there were pastors who considered Nazism to be diametrically opposed to Christianity, as another belief system that provided a new code of ethics, that swapped one savior for another, and that defined the bounds of the church based on racial requirements.

Now let us turn to a brief narrative of the German church conflicts and introduce our pastors and the Confessing Church. The origins of the Confessing Church begin in the first months of the rise of National Socialism in 1933. As Hitler began the suppression of all political opposition and dissent, eliminating opposing political parties such as the *Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands* (German Communist Party) and *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (German Social Democratic Party), among others, he also initiated a process called *Gleichschaltung*, or “coordination”, aligning social and professional institutions and organizations to Nazism.²⁰ Even in the late 1920s, Hitler understood that any attempt of meddling with the German Protestant churches could be fraught with conflict, considering the preexisting differences between the German confessions (Catholic, Lutheran, Reformed, and United) and the complexity of church affairs in Germany’s 28 *Landeskirchen* (or state churches).²¹ And as we will see throughout our examination of sermons, many Confessing Church pastors increasingly viewed Nazism as a competing ideology to Christianity.²² Yet even before

²⁰ See Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 30-38; Richard Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich* (New York: Penguin, 2003), 381-390; Tim Kirk, *Nazi Germany* (New York: Palgrave, 2007), 108; and Detlev Peukert, *Inside Nazi Germany: Conformity, Opposition and Racism in Everyday Life*, translated by Richard Deveson (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987), 97-103.

²¹ Kirk, *Nazi Germany*, 108.

²² This was a widespread view in the Confessing Church that we’ll see expressed often in sermons. For more on this conflict, see Frank Hamlin Littell, *The German Phoenix: How the German Churches’ Resistance to Hitler Gave Birth to the Massive Lay Movements of the Kirchentag and the Academies* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1960), 3; John S. Conway, “The German Church Struggle: Its Making and

1933, Hitler intended to keep the Nazi Party focused on political, and not religious, objectives; religious controversy could divide the nation like nothing else.²³

Nevertheless, in the late 1920s pro-Nazi Christians within Protestantism began to form organizations that attempted to align Christianity to Nazi ideology, and thus broaden the appeal of Christianity to the masses; the most influential of which was the *Glaubensbewegung Deutsche Christen* (German Christian movement).²⁴ With the rise of National Socialism in 1933, the popularity of the German-Christian faction increased tremendously, emboldening Hitler to become directly involved in church affairs. In the summer of 1933, Hitler took a risk and established a unified Protestant Church in Germany – for the first time in Germany’s history. This newly constituted *Deutsche evangelische Kirche* (German Evangelical Church) became known as the *Reichskirche*, and included the 28 Lutheran, Reformed, and United state churches in Germany.²⁵ Subsequent church elections in July of 1933 catapulted the German Christian movement to the leadership of German Protestantism, gaining two-thirds of the votes throughout

Meaning,” in *The Church Confronts the Nazis: Barmen Then and Now*, edited by Hubert Locke (New York: The Edwin Mellon Press, 1984), 135; and Siegfried Hermle, “Predigt an der Front: Zur Tätigkeit der Kriegspfarrer im Zweiten Weltkrieg,” in *Blätter für württembergische Kirchengeschichte* (Verlag Chr. Schleufele in Stuttgart, 2002), 145, 155. Doris Bergen notes that even most “hard core Nazis leaders” – including Martin Bormann, Heinrich Himmler, and Adolf Hitler – were also convinced of a fundamental opposition between Christianity and National Socialism. See Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 1.

²³ See John Conway, *Nazi Persecution of the Churches, 1933-1945* (Vancouver: Regen College Publishing, 1968), 4-8, 13; and Ernst Christian Helmreich, *German Churches under Hitler: Background, Struggle, and Epilogue* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1980), 79.

²⁴ See Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 25-27; Helmreich, *German Churches under Hitler*, 121-128; Kirk, *Nazi Germany*, 109. See Albert S. Lindemann and Richard S. Levy, eds., *Antisemitism: A History* (New York: Oxford, 2010), Kindle edition, location 4454. To avoid any confusion or ambiguity, I will refer to this movement as the German Christian movement or faction, and to its members as German-Christians.

²⁵ Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 33-35; Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 5-7, 15; Lowell Green, *Lutherans against Hitler: The Untold Story* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2007), 370.

Germany, demonstrating widespread popularity of the new *Reichskirche*, and thus lending it legitimacy.²⁶ Hitler even appointed a Reich bishop to oversee the unification of German Protestantism, a former navy chaplain and German-Christian leader by the name of Ludwig Müller. By the end of July 1933, it seemed to many that the German Protestant churches were in the process of becoming “coordinated” to the National Socialist regime.²⁷

Yet the rise of German-Christian leadership and subsequent changes in church policy, all in favor of the German Christian movement, instigated a firestorm of controversy among many Protestant pastors. Led by the charismatic pastor Martin Niemöller of Dahlem, Protestant pastors formed the *Pfarrernotbund* (Pastors’ Emergency League) in September 1933 that became the Confessing Church in May 1934 at the Barmen Synod.²⁸ In the first year of its existence, the movement swelled to 7,000 pastors, or one-third of Germany’s total 18,000 pastors.²⁹ This movement is significant because it claimed to be the true representative of German Protestantism, unsullied by Nazi ideology. The pastors based their opposition to the *Reichskirche* on its very own constitution, drawn up at its founding in July 1933, which stated in its first article, “The impregnable foundation of the German Evangelical Church is the Gospel of Jesus Christ, as it is revealed in Holy Scripture and came again to the light in the creeds of the

²⁶ See Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 34; Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 5; Kirk, *Nazi Germany*, 109.

²⁷ See Conway, *Nazi Persecution of the Churches*, 42-44; Helmreich, *German Churches under Hitler*, 169-175; and Kirk, *Nazi Germany*, 109.

²⁸ A synod refers to a meeting of a governing council of a church, usually called to make a decision regarding doctrine or administration.

²⁹ Helmreich, *German Churches under Hitler*, 156; Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 63. See also Gerlach, who reports that 6,000 joined by the end of 1933. Gerlach, *And the Witnesses Were Silent*, 33.

Reformation. In this way the authorities, which the church needs for her mission, are defined and limited.”³⁰ In short, Confessing Church pastors believed that the *Reichskirche* had abandoned this article, and instead opened the doors of Christian theology and practice to National Socialist racial and ideological elements.³¹ Because the *Reichskirche* violated its first article, which defined its identity, the Confessing Church leadership proclaimed that it now was the true representative of Protestantism in Germany. The Confessing Church set itself apart from the Nazi-supported German Christian movement and the *Reichskirche*, and thus it broke with the traditional Lutheran concept of the church’s subservience to the state. Previous research indicates that Confessing Church pastors only gradually realized the political implications of their religious protests for institutional autonomy.³²

By 1935, the Nazi attempt of coordinating all the German Protestant churches in a *Reichskirche* was abandoned in favor of a new approach, the establishment of a Reich Ministry of Church Affairs to determine state policies for the German churches. Instead of a unified *Reichskirche* to coordinate the churches, now the job was tasked to a state ministry. Under the authority of the politician Hanns Kerrl, the new ministry had a simple ill-defined responsibility, “to be an instrument for the external control of the separate factions of the Evangelical Church and for ensuring that the Catholic Church

³⁰ “Constitution of the German Evangelical Church, 11 July 1933,” in *The Third Reich and the German Churches: A Documentary Account of Christian Resistance and Complicity During the Nazi Era*, edited and translated by Peter Matheson (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1981), 24; see also E.H. Robertson, *Christians against Hitler* (London: SCM Press, 1962), 48.

³¹ See Robertson, *Christians against Hitler*, 48-50; and Matheson, *Third Reich and the German Churches*, 24.

³² Victoria Barnett, *For the Soul of the People* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

fulfilled its obligations to the Nazi State.”³³ In short, the ministry was tasked with quelling the inter-church rebellion by reconciling the German Protestant churches, rooting out factionalism, and administering the secular functions of the *Reichskirche*.³⁴ By the mid-1930s, the Confessing Church was divided among members who wanted to cooperate with the new ministry, and others, like the more radical Dahlemites under the leadership of Martin Niemöller from the Berlin suburb of Dahlem, who desired no conciliation with the new Reich Ministry of Church Affairs or the Nazi regime, and advocated the complete autonomy of the German churches. As we will see, the Confessing Church’s public protests increased as pastors and leaders demanded a stop to Nazi infringements in the affairs of the German churches and its doctrines and practices. It was in this period that the conflict between the Confessing Church and the Nazi state reached its height as conflicts resulted in mass arrests of pastors, confiscation of church lands, bans on public speaking, the closure of seminaries, among other persecutions designed to silence the Confessing Church.

By the late 1930s, the internal divisions of the Confessing Church and Nazi persecutions rendered it ineffectual as an organization, and by the outbreak of World War II, tensions eased between it and the Nazi State, whose concern was primarily to mobilize and unify the nation.

In sum, despite a promising start to opposing the Nazi state’s infringements in church affairs and theology, the Confessing Church could not resolve internal disputes between the Lutherans and Reformed pastors within the movement, as well as between

³³ Conway, *Nazi Persecutions of the Churches*, 130.

³⁴ Conway, *Nazi Persecutions of the Churches*, 130.

the more radical Dahlemites, concerning how to approach the Nazi regime. Thus, it failed to provide staunch and unified opposition, particularly in the late 1930s and throughout the Second World War.³⁵

We will get to know a selection of these Confessing Church pastors in much detail as the chapters progress, but for now let us take a quick look at them. The following 95 pastors were selected for inclusion in this study because: one, I could confirm their membership in the Confessing Church through archival sources; and two, I have found their existing sermons (or at least a portion of them) in archives, libraries, or used book stores. As you can see in the list below, the 95 individuals come from all over Germany, from Bonn to Berlin to Munich. A few even originate outside Germany but found employment there, such as the Swiss scholar Karl Barth. In the Protestant church hierarchy, their positions range from the assistant role of a vicar, to the pastor (including *Pfarrer* and *Pastor*) as head of the faith community, to finally to the superintendent as district overseer (in the German Protestant churches the superintendent was the equivalent of a Catholic bishop). But we also see professors of theology, directors of religious charitable institutions, or provosts of theological programs preach in a pastoral role to their communities of faith as well. I have noted members of the Barmen Synod – a gathering of delegates in May 1934 that issued the Barmen Declaration and established the Confessing Church – with an asterisk (*) to highlight early, leading members of the Confessing Church movement. A few of these men are easily recognizable to an American audience, such as the pastor and conspirator Dietrich Bonhoeffer or the

³⁵ Kirk, *Nazi Germany*, 109.

outspoken pastor Martin Niemöller. But most of them are unknown in the United States, such as the Kolberg pastor Paul Hinz or the Münster University preacher Wilhelm Stählin. I have indicated as much information as their sermons provide, their names and, if available, their titles and locales. These sermons have much to reveal about how the “ordinary” Confessing Church pastor preached to Nazi Germany. My analysis of their sermons promises to shed light on the sometimes blurred relationship between the religious and political dimensions of their protests. Furthermore, I will explore their demonstrations of uncommon courage and also failures to speak truth to power and to morally guide their congregations.

TABLE 1 – List of Confessing Church Members

No.	Name	Title	Location
1.	Martin Albertz*	Superintendent Lic.	Spandau
2.	Hans Asmussen	Pastor	Altona
3.	Karl Barth*	Professor	Bonn
4.	Friedrich von Bodelschwingh*	Pastor D. Dr.	Bethel
5.	Dietrich Bonhoeffer	Pastor	Berlin
6.	Theodore Brandt		
7.	Thomas Breit*	Member of High Consistory	Munich
8.	Borrmann	Superintendent Lic.	Angermünde
9.	Peter Brunner		
10.	Wilhelm Busch		
11.	Delius	Pastor	Berlin
12.	Hermann Diem	Pastor	Württemberg
13.	Friedrich Delekat*	Professor	Dresden
14.	Otto Dibelius	General Superintendent	Berlin
15.	Bruno Döhring	Pastor	Berlin
16.	Gerhard Ebeling	Pastor	Berlin
17.	Rudolf Eberhard	Pastor	Spremberg
18.	Johannes Eger	General Superintendent	Magdeburg
19.	Hans Ehrenberg	Pastor	Bochum
20.	Eichstädt	Pastor	Berlin
21.	Engelke	Pastor, Rauhes Haus	Hamburg
22.	Fahrenhorst	Bundesdirector D.	
23.	Leonhard Fendt	Theologian	Berlin
24.	Friedrich Forell	Pastor	Breslau
25.	Friedrich Frick		
26.	Robert Frick	Dozent Lic.	Bethel
27.	Helmut Gollwitzer	Pastor	Berlin-Dahlem
28.	Heinrich Grüber	Pastor	Berlin
29.	Günther Harder	Pastor, Dr.	Fehrbellin
30.	Heidenreich	Pastor	Berlin-Templehof
31.	Henden	Pastor	Berlin-Zehlendorf
32.	Bernhard Heppe		
33.	Heinrich Hermann	Pastor	Dresden
34.	Willem-Eike den Hertog		
35.	Hans Wilhelm Hertzberg	Professor	Caldern
36.	Franz Hildebrandt	Pastor	Berlin
37.	Paulus Hinz*	Pastor	Kolberg
38.	Paul Humberg	Präses	Wuppertal-Barmen
39.	Karl Immer*	Pastor	Barmen
40.	Hans Iwand	Pastor, Professor	Dortmund

TABLE 1 – List of Confessing Church Members, Continued

No.	Name	Title	Location
41.	Gerhard Jacobi*	Pastor	Berlin
42.	Julius von Jan	Pastor	Oberlenningen
43.	Karl Kampffmeyer		
44.	Kebler	Pastor	Dresden
45.	Erich Klapproth	Pastor	Karlsruhe
46.	Heinz Kloppenburg*	Pastor	Wilhelmshaven
47.	Karl Koch*	Präses	Bad-Oeynhausen
48.	Köster		
49.	Walter Künneth	Privatdozent	Berlin-Spandau
50.	Hanns Lilje	Pastor	Hannover
51.	Lohman	General Superintendent D.	Magdeburg
52.	Waldemar Macholz	Professor D.	Jena
53.	August Marahrens	Bishop	Hannover
54.	Marquardt	Pastor	Berlin-Friedenau
55.	Hans Meiser	Bishop	Munich
56.	Wolfgang Metzger	Pastor	Bronnweiler
57.	Mix	Pastor	Guben
58.	Moldaenke	Pastor Lic.	Steglitz
59.	Friedrich Müller*	Pastor	Berlin-Dahlem
60.	Martin Müller	Pastor Lic.	Dessau
61.	Martin Niemöller*	Pastor	Berlin-Dahlem
62.	Wilhelm Niemöller*	Pastor	Bielefeld
63.	Ernst Otto*	Pastor	Eisenach
64.	Perwitz	Pastor	Schönberg
65.	Heinz Pflugk	Pastor	Dreveskirchen
66.	Heinrich Poms		
67.	Priebe	Preacher	Berlin-Grunewald
68.	Puttkammer	Pastor	Teltow
69.	Alfred de Quervain	Theologian	
70.	Otto Riethmüller	Pastor and Director	Dahlem
71.	Eberhard Röhricht*	Pastor	Berlin-Dahlem
72.	J. Rüling	Pastor (retired)	Leipzig
73.	Julius Sammetreuther	Pastor	Munich
74.	Saran	Pastor	Neukölln
75.	Hermann Sasse*	Professor	Erlangen
76.	Schaack	Pastor	Konstanz
77.	Kurt Scharf*	Pastor	Sachsenhausen
78.	Edmund Schlink	Pastor	Bielefeld
79.	Hans Schnieber	Pastor	Leipzig

TABLE 1 – List of Confessing Church Members, Continued

No.	Name	Title	Location
80.	Georg Schulz*	Pastor	Wuppertal-Barmen
81.	Julius Schneider*	Director, Lutheran Seminary	Nuremberg
82.	Paul Schneider	Pastor	Berlin
83.	Schütz	Army Pastor Lic.	Berlin
84.	Karl von Schwartz	Provost	Braunschweig
85.	Hans von Soden*	Professor	Marburg
86.	Wilhelm Stählin	Preacher and Professor	Münster
87.	Karl Themel	Pastor	Berlin
88.	Eduard Thurneysen	Pastor and Theologian	Basel
89.	Reinhold von Thadden-Trieglaff	Präses	Pomerania
90.	Willem Visser't Hooft	General Secretary, WSF	Geneva
91.	Heinrich Vogel*	Pastor	Dobrikow
92.	Hermann Weber	Pastor	Freiburg
93.	Eduard Wörmann	Pastor	Bethel
94.	Wetzel	Pastor	Strausberg-Berlin
95.	Theophil Wurm*	Bishop	Württemberg

This research is an original contribution to the historiography because for the first time we will have an in-depth analysis of a variety of messages delivered by Confessing Church pastors in their sermons to their communities of faith. This will give us greater insight into the nature and the degree of dissent, opposition, and resistance in the everyday ministry of the church, and also provide some insight about public opinion expressed from the pulpit from week to week, whether explicitly or cryptically.³⁶ In addition, I will examine primary sources that give an indication about how these sermons were received by audiences sympathetic and antagonistic to the Confessing Church. Lastly, this dissertation will further our understanding of the social world of Germans in the Nazi dictatorship, particularly the values and priorities of their communities of faith, and how sermons may have informed political, social, and theological perspectives. In the end, we may better be able to answer whether or to what degree the witnesses were really silent.

Analytical Framework

To understand the significance of Confessing Church sermons, we must clarify a few key analytical concepts. First, let us consider the meaning of opposition in reference to the range of critical responses of the German people to the Nazi regime. Though a majority of Germans supported the Nazis by the start of the Second World War, including the leading members of the German churches, the sermons of this period demonstrate explicit and implicit criticisms of Hitler, the Nazis, and National Socialism.³⁷

³⁶ Again, for definitions and a fuller discussion of these three terms, see pages 17-23.

³⁷ See Robert Gellately, *Backing Hitler: Consent and Coersion in Nazi Germany* (New York: Oxford

Thus, it is necessary to differentiate a variety of critical responses. How might we distinguish the opposition of an officer involved in the 20 July 1944 conspiracy to assassinate Hitler from that of the middle class woman in a Berlin café making a joke to her friends at the expense of Hitler? Ian Kershaw's *The Nazi Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives of Interpretation*, carefully distinguishes the responses of dissent, opposition, and resistance under the Nazi regime, which I will use throughout this dissertation.³⁸ "Resistance" (*Widerstand*) refers to the active participation in an organized attempt to undermine the regime or plan for its termination.³⁹ This term connotes a fundamental rejection of the Nazi regime, a desire to replace it, and an organized approach to achieve its demise.

Very few Germans resisted in this fashion. Among them was Georg Elser, a nonconformist loner with communist sympathies who attempted to assassinate Hitler in the Bürgerbräukeller on the anniversary of the Beer Hall putsch on November 8, 1939.⁴⁰

University Press, 2001), Kindle Edition, location 223-535; and Ian Kershaw, *The Hitler Myth*, 256-263. To give an example of the widespread popularity of Hitler and the Nazi regime, the Reichstag elections of 29 March 1936 demonstrate a 99.9 per cent vote for the Nazis – though the elections were certainly manipulated by the Nazi regime. And likewise, the 10 April 1938 plebiscite on the "reunification" of Austria with Germany reveal the same results. Gallately argues that "we are used to ignoring the subsequent elections and plebiscites under Hitler's dictatorship, but they tend to show that a pro-Nazi consensus formed and grew." See Gallately, *Backing Hitler*, Kindle Edition, location 511.

³⁸ Kershaw, *The Nazi Dictatorship*.

³⁹ Kershaw, *The Nazi Dictatorship*, 170. On this point Kershaw is in general agreement with Peter Hoffmann and his argument that resistance entails "ideological commitment, clandestine networks, and armed action." See Peter Hoffmann classic work on the subject, *The History of the German Resistance, 1933-1945, Third Edition* (Ithaca: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996). See also John M. Cox, *Circles of Resistance: Jewish, Leftist, and Youth Dissidence in Nazi Germany* (New York: Peter Lang, 2009); Joachim Fest, *Plotting Hitler's Death: The Story of the German Resistance*, translated by Bruce Little (New York: Metropolitan, 1996); Michael Ceyer and John W. Boyer, eds., *Resistance against the Third Reich, 1933-1990* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); Hans Mommsen, *Germans Against Hitler: The Stauffenberg Plot and Resistance under the Third Reich*, translated by Angus McGeoch (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2009); Roger Moorhouse, *Killing Hitler, The Plots, the Assassins, and the Dictator Who Cheated Death* (New York: Bantam, 2006); Louis Eltscher, *Traitors or Patriots? A Story of the German Anti-Nazi Resistance* (Bloomington, IN: iUniverse, 2013).

⁴⁰ Moorhouse, *Killing Hitler*, Kindle edition, location 1003; see also Eltscher, *Traitors or Patriots?* Kindle

He took the painstaking time, months in fact, to steal into the Bürgerbräukeller at night and carve out a niche in a stone pillar in which to place his homemade bomb. Elser's plan might have worked had Hitler not pushed up the start time of the event. Hitler gave his speech and absconded early to catch a train back to Berlin. Then the bomb detonated as scheduled at 9:20 p.m., obliterating the stone pillar and sending the ceiling down right where Hitler stood moments before, killing eight and wounding 62.⁴¹ Elser came up with a sophisticated plan based on simple motivations – a fierce hatred of Hitler and the conviction that he would ruin Germany – and he worked completely alone, “unaided and undetected.”⁴² Elser's story demonstrates that a lone man with quiet determination in a totalitarian regime could nearly topple a dictator.

Perhaps the most well-known assassination attempt was the bomb plot conspiracy of 20 July 1944 by members of the German military leadership.⁴³ Even by late 1937, several upper-echelon officers in the German military, specifically the Wehrmacht, began to question their allegiance to Adolf Hitler due to what they perceived to be his reckless and aggressive foreign policy that could only lead to disaster for Germany.⁴⁴ By early

edition, location 114.

⁴¹ Moorhouse, *Killing Hitler*, Kindle edition, location 1135; see also Eltscher, *Traitors or Patriots?* Kindle edition, location 135.

⁴² Moorhouse, *Killing Hitler*, Kindle edition, location 1307; see also Hoffmann, *History of the German Resistance*, 253.

⁴³ See Philip Freiherr von Boeselager and Florence and Jerome Fehrenbach, *Valkyrie: The Story of the Plot to Kill Hitler, by Its Last Member* (New York: Vintage, 2011); Hans Bernd Gisevius, *To the Bitter End: An Insider's Account of the Plot to Kill Hitler, 1933-1944*, translated by Richard and Clara Winston (New York: Da Capo Press, 1998); Pierre Galante, *Operation Valkyrie: The German General's Plot Against Hitler* (Cooper Square, 2012); Peter Hoffmann, *Stauffenberg: A Family History, 1905-1944* (Ithaca: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2008); and Nigel Jones, *Countdown to Valkyrie: The July Plot to Assassinate Hitler* (Pen and Sword, 2013).

⁴⁴ Fest, *Plotting Hitler's Death*, 57-58.

1938, high ranking officers General Ludwig Beck, General Franz Halder, Field Marshal Erwin von Witzleben, and Colonel Hans Oster of the Abwehr began to plan for a coup d'état. Were it not for British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain's appeasement policy, this group of resisters may have attempted to overthrow Hitler in 1938 or 1939, before he and the Nazi regime could begin the conquest of Europe. Hitler's success at the Munich Conference, in which the powers of Europe caved to his demands for the Sudetenland in Czechoslovakia, raised his stock among the German people, as well as his subsequent invasions of Poland, France and the Low Lands.⁴⁵ The resisters became convinced that they could not possibly gain popular support for a successful coup d'état.⁴⁶

But when Germany's military fortunes changed drastically for the worse after their defeat at Battle of Stalingrad in early 1943, the military resistance gained new strength and resolve.⁴⁷ The resisters wanted to prevent a catastrophic military defeat of the German nation and also the continuation of the massacres in the east.⁴⁸ Furthermore, many felt a profound responsibility to the German people who placed great faith and trust in the army and the officer corps to protect the nation. Honor compelled the officers to live up to this trust to protect Germany, even if that meant appearing treasonous.⁴⁹ Another important motivation is that of a moral witness, to prove to the world that Germans did resist the Nazi dictatorship.⁵⁰ Led by Colonel Claus Schenk von

⁴⁵ Fest, *Plotting Hitler's Death*, 96-99; 134.

⁴⁶ Fest, *Plotting Hitler's Death*, 96-99; 134.

⁴⁷ Moorhouse, *Killing Hitler*, 233.

⁴⁸ Fest, *Plotting Hitler's Death*, 197-199, 202, 326-327; and Moorhouse, *Killing Hitler*, 233.

⁴⁹ Moorhouse, *Killing Hitler*, 275.

⁵⁰ See for example, Henning von Treschow's response to Stauffenberg about an assassination attempt regardless of the outcome: "The assassination must be attempted, *coûte que coûte*. Even if it fails, we

Stauffenberg, the resisters put in place a sophisticated bomb plot codenamed Operation Valkyrie. Operation Valkyrie called for Stauffenberg, who had access to Hitler, to plant a bomb and assassinate Hitler at a military meeting held at the Wolfsschanze headquarters in East Prussia. At the appointed time, Stauffenberg detonated the bomb, but for variety of reasons, Hitler survived the attempt on his life and the Nazis put down the coup d'état, executing Stauffenberg and other conspirators that night. Hitler and the Nazis were relentless and draconian in their pursuit of conspirators, arresting nearly 5,000 people. And according to Richard Evans, around 1,000 people were killed or committed suicide following this failed coup attempt.⁵¹

Acts of resistance were high-risk and predominantly politically motivated, though religious motivations also often played a role.⁵² In the late 1940s and into the 1950s, historical debates about resistance to the Nazi dictatorship focused on these high-risk and politically motivated attempts by individuals or organized groups to undermine or overthrow the government.⁵³ In these sermons by Confessing Church pastors, we do not find any that qualify as resistance under this definition. As far as I have been able to uncover, no pastor in the Nazi dictatorship ever ascended the pulpit and advocated for an

must take action in Berlin. For the practical purpose no longer matters; what matters now is that the German resistance movement must take the plunge before the eyes of the world and of history. Compared to that, nothing else matters." Quoted in Fest, *Plotting Hitler's Death*, 236.

⁵¹ Evans, *Third Reich at War*, 642.

⁵² The political motivations of resisters are nearly always recounted in the historiography, but not so often the religious motivations. For more on the religious motivations, see especially Nechama Tec, *Resistance: Jews and Christians Who Defied the Nazi Terror* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*; Annette Dumbach and Jud Newborn, *Sophie Scholl and the White Rose* (Oxford: One World, 2006); David Gushee, *Righteous Gentiles of the Holocaust: Genocide and Moral Obligation, Second Edition* (St. Paul, MN: Paragon House, 2003).

⁵³ Kershaw, *Nazi Dictatorship*, 153-156.

organized attempt to overthrow Adolf Hitler or the National Socialist regime, or for that matter, encouraged Christians to hide and support persecuted Jews. Their oppositional efforts were far more subtle.

It was not until the 1960s and 1970s that a new generation of historians emphasized the myriad of modest “everyday” actions of ordinary Germans that were critical of Hitler and the Nazis.⁵⁴ The debate moved from an assumption that only a very few isolated groups or individuals resisted the Nazis without the support of the German people, to the view that acts of “opposition” can be found in all segments of society, though there may not have existed popular resistance.⁵⁵ Thus, the second term, “opposition,” is used to refer to any action, including acts of resistance that at least partially aimed at challenging the dominance of the Nazi state.⁵⁶ One could have been or actually be a supporter of the Nazis or some of their policies and have still acted in opposition.⁵⁷ Opposition is a much larger category and it includes a wide range of actions that challenge an aspect of the Nazi system, including workplace sabotage of factories and farms, delivering sermons with implicit subversive content, ignoring bans on race relations, as well as other “small[er] principled acts of defiance,” such as refusing to give the Hitler salute.⁵⁸ Acts of opposition were by nature temporary, limited in effect,

⁵⁴ Kershaw, *Nazi Dictatorship*, 156-157.

⁵⁵ Immediately after the war we can see how the topic of resistance took on political significance: in the GDR historians emphasized the consistent and unwavering resistance of the Communist Party in Germany, the KPD; and in the West, historians focused predominantly on conservative resistance from elite, bourgeois, and military groups. It really was not until the 1960s and 70s that a new generation of historians emerged to challenge our understanding of the motives of resisters, the everyday possibilities of expressing opposition, and the very nature of resistance itself. See Kershaw, *Nazi Dictatorship*, 151-156.

⁵⁶ Kershaw, *Nazi Dictatorship*, 170.

⁵⁷ Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 71-72; see also Kershaw, *Nazi Dictatorship*, 170.

⁵⁸ Kirk, *Third Reich*, 149.

and in direct response to specific Nazi policies. As motivation is always difficult to determine, the focus is on examining the act itself and the manner in which it blocked or limited Nazi domination of German society. To participate in acts of opposition, one need not fundamentally reject the Nazi regime, but only to disagree with certain Nazi policies.

It is in this sense that Confessing Church pastors most often opposed the Nazi regime in their sermons. The evidence clearly indicates that the Confessing Church was most critical about the spread of “false beliefs, or “ideology,” or “worldview,” and that National Socialism promotes the worship of “false idols,” such as race, blood, and nation. National Socialism is often condemned as a “false proclamation,” as corrupt or contrary to the gospel. It is also often condemned as “neo-paganism.” Thus, the sermons of the Confessing Church most often oppose National Socialism as a competing ideology or system of beliefs, while also at times criticizing the leaders who espouse this ideology as redemptive in German history.⁵⁹ Only rarely do we find critical expressions of the Nazi regime’s governing policies or military aggression, except as they relate to the German churches. Ian Kershaw’s observation holds true, the German churches’ considerable efforts and energies consumed in opposing Nazi interference with traditional practices and attempts to ride roughshod over Christian doctrine and values were not matched by equally vigorous denunciation of Nazi inhumanity and barbarism.”⁶⁰

⁵⁹ See in Chapter 2, my in-depth discussion of the widespread perception among Confessing Church pastors that National Socialism is a false ideology or “political religion” in competition with Christianity.

⁶⁰ Kershaw, *Nazi Dictatorship*, 174. See also Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 71-72.

And lastly, the third type of response that Kershaw outlines is “dissent,” an even broader category than opposition and it refers to the “passivity of ‘oppositional’ feeling,” meaning the verbal expression of negative attitudes towards the Nazi regime.⁶¹ Dissent is not meant to undermine the Nazi regime, to work towards its downfall, or to limit its dominance in any way, but merely to express discontent. It may be a spontaneous critical comment or an entertaining joke, but it essentially reflects criticism of the Nazi dictatorship.⁶² Of course, it is virtually impossible to tell exactly how often Germans participated in dissent in this sense against the Nazi regime, but through my research we will gain a much more detailed and nuanced understanding of how Germans expressed, and been subject to, dissent and opposition in the pulpits and pews. While we also see dissent, in this sense, in the sermons of the Confessing Church, it is less common than specific criticisms of National Socialism. Confessing Church pastors most often had a clear purpose in criticizing Nazi ideology, and generally did not make spontaneous comments or jokes critical of the Nazi regime.

This analytical framework provides clarity and nuance in describing various forms of critical expression. Admittedly, it may be difficult to determine where dissent ends and opposition begins, or where opposition ends and resistance begins – this is a theme I will explore on a case by case basis, in consideration of action, context, and if possible, any response to the action. In trying to understand the relationship between

⁶¹ Kershaw, *Nazi Dictatorship*, 170-171.

⁶² John Cox does well to warn against “rigid, static definitions” of various categories of resistance. From the perspective of the Nazis, a citizen who “relayed an antigovernment joke or surreptitiously listened to foreign radio on occasion became...a political opponent.” We should therefore consider between conscious and unconscious distinctions. See Cox, *Circles of Resistance*, 6.

these three categories, Kershaw suggests it may be helpful to visualize three concentric circles of different sizes blurring into each other – the larger representing the size of the German population engaging in the activity: at the outer edge is dissent, followed by a smaller circle of opposition, and finally a tiny circle representing resistance.

Moving now to our second important analytical concept, the nature of anti-Jewish prejudice. It is crucial in our study of Confessing Church sermons, many of which express views of Jews and Judaism, to maintain a distinction between a centuries-old religious anti-Judaism and modern racial antisemitism.⁶³ As I will show throughout the dissertation, any interactions that German pastors had with their increasingly persecuted Jewish neighbors resulted not simply from sympathy or sense of human connection, but also from the troubled history of Christian anti-Judaism. Anti-Judaism has roots in the early Christian movements of the first century, as Jews and Christians, who were predominantly of Jewish origin, clashed over the interpretation of the identity and meaning of Jesus of Nazareth and the emerging Christian theology (or theologies). In time, this animosity increased as the Christian faith spread throughout the Roman Empire and the number of non-Jewish Christians began to outnumber Jewish Christians. The religious-based animosity against the Jewish people became more firmly ingrained in the theology of the early Christian churches – and in the course of time, in parts of the Christian biblical texts, that is, the New Testament. Various charges against the Jews became popular and ingrained in Christian theology for the next two millennia.

⁶³ See James Carroll, *Constantine's Sword: The Church and the Jews* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2001), 22-3; and Daniel Goldhagen, *A Moral Reckoning: the Role of the Catholic Church in the Holocaust and its Unfulfilled Duty of Repair* (New York: Knopf, 2002), 78-87.

Traditional religious anti-Judaism posits that the Jews are guilty of rejecting and killing Christ, and have been subsequently punished under the curse of God. Further, as the argument goes, the Jews will one day realize the “folly” of their sins, and will eventually be converted, signifying the end of their “rebellion” against God. Inherent in this argument is the belief that the Christian biblical texts supersede the Jewish; that is, that God’s covenant with the Jews transferred to the Christians.⁶⁴ Anti-Judaism is based on an interpretation of the New Testament; it is a belief guided by faith, and as such, it has been preached from the pulpits throughout the history of the Church.⁶⁵ Because of this anti-Judaic prejudice, Christians in the middle ages even accused the Jews of the blood libel, that the Jews kidnapped and killed Gentile children to use their blood in the preparation and cooking of their Passover and Sabbath meals.⁶⁶ Anti-Judaism, or as some call it, religious antisemitism, has existed throughout the centuries and continues even to the present day.

But we must be careful to distinguish anti-Judaism from modern racial antisemitism, which argues the racial inferiority or perniciousness of the Jewish people, often advanced through pseudo-sciences such as eugenics and race theory.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ See Carroll, *Constantine’s Sword*; Daniel Goldhagen, *A Moral Reckoning*; Léon Poliakov, *The History of Anti-Semitism, Vol. 1, From the Time of Christ to the Court of the Jews*, translated by Richard Howard (New York: Vanguard, 1965); Dan Cohn-Sherbok, *The Crucified Jew: Twenty Centuries of Christian Anti-Semitism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997).

⁶⁵ I have compiled these characteristics based on the following texts that treat the history of anti-Judaism and antisemitism: Carroll, *Constantine’s Sword*; Goldhagen, *A Moral Reckoning*; Poliakov, *The History of Anti-Semitism, Vol. 1*; and Cohn-Sherbok, *The Crucified Jew*.

⁶⁶ Robert Michael, *Holy Hatred, Christianity, Antisemitism, and the Holocaust* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 82-84; and Lindemann and Levy, *Antisemitism*, Kindle location 1640 ff.

⁶⁷ See Michael Burleigh and Wolfgang Ippermann, *The Racial State: Germany 1933-1945* (Cambridge University Press, 1991); and John Weiss, *Ideology of Death: Why the Holocaust Happened in Germany* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1996).

Antisemitism also includes cultural, social, and economic strains as well, and is used to exclude Jews from public and national life. Antisemitism posits that Jews are fundamentally different in race and blood, and therefore, they cannot be “converted” to become contributing members of society.

In fact, the term “antisemitism” itself was coined as recently as the 1870s by Wilhelm Marr, a German journalist who wished to distinguish a traditional religious prejudice with a supposedly more modern and scientific bias against the Jews.⁶⁸

Antisemitism can mean simply hatred towards the Jews as a distinct race or people group. The term itself is highly problematic because the word “Semitic” is an adjective that refers to a language group including Hebrew, Arabic, and Phoenician, and the peoples that speak these languages; thus, “antisemitism” should refer to a hatred of all these peoples, but in fact, it has only ever referred to a hatred of the Jews.⁶⁹

The ambivalence of many German pastors toward the Jews in the Nazi dictatorship must be understood in the context of a long history of anti-Judaic and antisemitic prejudice against the Jews in Europe. By the late nineteenth century, various strands of anti-Jewish prejudice can be distinguished – in addition to the religious form we also find social, economic, and political prejudice. It is important at the start to acknowledge that although all prejudice is destructive and dangerous, it can take shape and manifest in a variety of ways. As such, in our discussion of Confessing Church pastors we must be careful not to assume that all held the same prejudices.

⁶⁸ Michael, *Holy Hatred*, 140-141; Albert Lindemann and Richard Levy, *Antisemitism: A History* (New York: Oxford, 2010), 8-9; Carroll, *Constantine's Sword*, 447.

⁶⁹ Doris Bergen, *War and Genocide: A Concise History of the Holocaust* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 4.

As the Enlightenment gained influence in Europe and the culture became increasingly secularized, the religious prejudice gave way towards social and economic prejudices.⁷⁰ Many Europeans viewed the Jews contemptuously as peddlers, robbers, and shirkers, but we also see Jews overrepresented in professions with high visibility such as journalism, medicine, and the law (and they were under-represented in others).⁷¹ Europeans viewed apparent divisions in society with suspicion and resented Jews for their level of achievement and influence in “their” society. This social or economic prejudice is perhaps best understood as a form of class conflict, when a German peasant would resent his landlord for what he perceives as high rents, the landlord would happen to be Jewish, and the peasant would then connect all Jews to exploitation.⁷²

Political antisemitism emerged in the later nineteenth century, and it is opportunist in nature, often used as a propaganda tool by politicians to stir up anger against the Jews in the hopes of unifying an electoral base.⁷³ Two very important figures in the German-speaking lands were Adolf Stoecker, a leader in the Christian Social Party in the 1870s, and Karl Lueger, the mayor of Vienna (1844-1910) at the end of the 1890s and into the early 20th century. Political antisemitism targeted the Jews as the alien “other” and associated them with all the negative qualities in one’s society, whether that is capitalist exploitation, socialism or communism, modernity, or atheism. The historian

⁷⁰ Bergen, *War and Genocide*, 6.

⁷¹ Bergen, *War and Genocide*, 6.

⁷² See for example, Albert Lindemann and Richard Levy, *Antisemitism: A History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 8, 94-98; and Hillel Levine, *Economic Origins of Antisemitism: Poland and Its Jews in the Early Modern Period* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991), 5-10.

⁷³ Peter Pulzer, *The Rise of Political Anti-Semitism in Germany and Austria, Revised Edition* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 25.

Peter Pulzer argues that in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries in Germany and Austria, political organizations adopted antisemitic ideologies simply because it appealed to the broad masses of the people; antisemitism made sense of the problems and challenges that they faced in the emerging liberal European society.⁷⁴ Many Germans and Austrians, particularly the middle classes, felt threatened by liberalism, the ideas of emancipation, liberty, democracy, and equality in social and economic opportunities. In the opening of the gates of a free and equal society, Germans and Austrians felt their world changing too fast and too drastically, and so they turned on the one people that seemed to benefit the most from liberalism, the Jews. Politicians singled out this group, blamed all evils on them, and in this way consolidated political support. One-dimensional antisemitic political parties and organizations declined in Germany after 1900, and yet antisemitism as an ideology became more respectable and ended up being absorbed into many political organizations as one element among many on their platforms.⁷⁵

The most virulent and uncompromising of the various types is racial antisemitism. This ideology emerged in the latter nineteenth century, and became increasingly popular as Europeans applied social Darwinist theories to the human race and society.⁷⁶ Perhaps the most influential figure advancing a racial strain of antisemitism is the Frenchman, Comte de Gobineau (1816-1882), whose major work, *Essay on the Inequality of the Human Races* (1852), advocated a cultural pessimism due to the mixing of the races. We

⁷⁴ Pulzer, *The Rise of Political Anti-Semitism*, xxiii, 185, 290-291.

⁷⁵ Pulzer, *The Rise of Political Anti-Semitism*, ix.

⁷⁶ George Mosse, *Toward the Final Solution: A History of European Racism* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1985), 72-73.

should take note of a few key ideas here: humanity can be divided into more than one race; the races can be distinguished according to biological features; and that races can be hierarchized according to superiority.⁷⁷

European racism originated in the eighteenth century when prejudice transitioned from a religious to a racial basis. By the nineteenth century, racism was quite widespread in Europe, spreading through the influence of philosophy, pseudo-science, eugenics, and even art criticism. As the eminent historian George Mosse has argued, “Racism was not really the product of one particular national or Christian development, but a worldview which represented a synthesis of the old and the new - a secular religion attempting to annex all that mankind desired.”⁷⁸ Racial thinkers in this period rank the races in terms of aesthetics, on how a people’s features correspond to a given ideal, the Greek, Roman, or Germanic. Thus, racism is a “visually centered ideology.”⁷⁹ For the German, the blond-haired, blue-eyed, tall man is superior to the dark-haired, brown-eyed African, because he corresponds to an ideal type. This development made racism completely subjective, whatever its scientific pretensions, and incoherent, given that members of a single “race” exhibit various physical features.

Racial antisemitism allows no outs for the oppressed: one cannot convert out, or change economic classes, or adhere to a specific party platform: race is definitive. Hitler and the Nazis exploited racial antisemitism to define for the German people its reason for catastrophe in the years after the First World War. Hitler argued that the Jews were a

⁷⁷ See Mosse, *Toward the Final Solution*, 50-60.

⁷⁸ Mosse, *Toward the Final Solution*, xvi.

⁷⁹ George Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality: Respectability and Abnormal Sexuality in Modern Europe* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1985), 134.

race and a boundary-less state, and as such they were a potent threat against the dominance of the “Aryan” race.⁸⁰ European anti-Semites as early as the 1880s and 90s demanded various “solutions”: immigration, the abolishment of Jewish emancipation, the expulsion of Jews, and even extermination.⁸¹

It almost goes without saying that this conception of race is exceptionally incoherent: there is no monolithic people “the Jews”; the Jewish people have lived in many lands, speak many languages, have different physical characteristics, and belong to different ethnicities, such as the Ashkenazim and Sephardic.⁸² Racial anti-Semites and the Nazis in particular created an essentialized, simplified villain, “the Jews.”

One last strand of antisemitism is what we might refer to as “redemptive antisemitism,” a term coined by Saul Friedländer to refer specifically to Hitler’s racist ideology.⁸³ Hitler understood this racial struggle as a crusade to rid the world of evil—for in his worldview, the Jews were the source of evil. Victory, then, meant the redemption of the world from the clutches of evil. For Hitler, the eradication of the Jews meant the victory of the Aryan spirit, nation, and the fulfillment of Germany’s destiny.⁸⁴ Thus, when we read *Mein Kampf* or listen to Hitler’s speeches, we see religious language

⁸⁰ Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, translated by Ralph Manheim (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1971), 232, 302.

⁸¹ See Weiss, *Ideology of Death*, 112-127.

⁸² See Bergen, *War and Genocide*, 7-8.

⁸³ Saul Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews: Volume I, Years of Persecution, 1933-1939* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997), 3; and Bergen, “Antisemitism in the Nazi Era,” in Lindemann and Levy, *Antisemitism*, Kindle edition, location 4369.

⁸⁴ David Redles treats this subject at length in his book, *Hitler’s Millennial Reich: Apocalyptic Belief and the Search for Salvation* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 46-76.

of redemption and apocalypse used to stir up the zeal of the German people, the “righteous” indignation at Jewish misdeeds.⁸⁵

To sum up this discussion, the French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre convincingly argues that European society has sought to place blame on the Jewish people for misfortunes that have nothing in fact to do with them, thus reflecting that society’s own inadequacies, irrationality, passions, and failures.⁸⁶ It is a type of Manicheanism, a system of good versus evil, in which a constant battle between light and darkness rages. But with antisemitism, the anti-Semite does evil, that is, persecutes, accuses, slanders, and commits violence, for what he believes is a good and just cause. The anti-Semite acts with the conviction that he himself is part of a greater whole, the nation, the people, and in this conviction he feels much better about his own status and station in life. Sartre believes Christian European society has created the concept of “the Jews” and thus prevented their assimilation and full participation.

After analyzing 910 sermons of the Confessing Church, I have found that virtually all expressions of anti-Jewish prejudice can be categorized as anti-Judaic, that is, having a basis in religious prejudice. This is not particularly surprising given that the context of a sermon is primarily religious in nature. But at this point it is imperative to note that religious prejudice is intricately connected to other forms of prejudice, particularly racial antisemitism. As several scholars of the history of antisemitism have noted, religious anti-Judaism forms the basis of racial antisemitism.⁸⁷ Robert Michael

⁸⁵Redles, *Hitler’s Millennial Reich*, 45

⁸⁶ Jean Paul Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew*, translated by George J. Becker (New York: Schocken Books, 1948), 13.

⁸⁷ For example, see Robert Michael, *Holy Hatred: Christianity, Antisemitism, and the Holocaust* (New

argues that “the anti-Jewish aspects of Christian thought and theology, the anti-Jewish Christian mindset and attitudes, and the anti-Jewish precedents provided by the churches’ historical relationship to Jews significantly conditioned, and may have determined, the plan, establishment, and prosecution of the Holocaust.”⁸⁸ The line between antisemitism and anti-Judaism can easily become blurred when one believes the Jewish people, as a people, killed Jesus, and have been under the punishing curse of God throughout history. This view implies a moral or spiritual degeneracy that is passed down genetically from generation to generation; a faith-based anti-Judaism can then easily become a racially-based antisemitism.⁸⁹ For these reasons, some historians prefer to call a religiously-based prejudice against the Jews “antisemitism.”

At the same time, it is important to point out that anti-Judaism and antisemitism may overlap given the context. A sermon with anti-Judaic content delivered in Nazi Germany in 1938 will ring much differently if it was given in California in 2015. As we examine sermons with anti-Judaic content, we must keep in mind the pervasive antisemitic environment that could potentially inform the reception of this content. Thus, while the content of anti-Judaic and antisemitic expressions may be different, the effect can still be the same: the exclusion and persecution of the Jewish people. I will pay particular attention to this issue in Chapter 5.

York: Palgrave, 2006), 5; Carol, *Constantine’s Sword*, 382; and Goldhagen, *A Moral Reckoning*, 78-79.

⁸⁸ Michael, *Holy Hatred*, 5.

⁸⁹ Goldhagen argues against making a distinction between the terms anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism because it masks the hatred implicit in anti-Judaism (*A Moral Reckoning*, 78-9). Carroll insightfully observes that in the end, “[this] distinction becomes meaningless before the core truth of this history: Because of the hatred of the Jews had been made holy [in the biblical texts], it became lethal” (*Constantine’s Sword*, 22).

Having said all this, for the purposes of this dissertation I will use the term anti-Judaism and antisemitism in their traditional sense to preserve their respective religious and secular distinctions. The term “anti-Judaic” is more efficient and less ambiguous – “antisemitism” in common usage refers to racial prejudice. But more importantly, the term “anti-Judaic” emphasizes the religious roots of the problem going back through the history of Christianity, through the middle ages and the early Christian movements, and ultimately in the New Testament.⁹⁰ The term “anti-Judaic” reflects the early Christians’ increasingly antagonistic stance toward their former co-religionists, as revealed in Christian condescension towards Jews as the “forsaken” people of God, in accusations of deicide and waywardness, and ultimately, in arguments for the supersession of Christianity over Judaism – all deplorable responses rooted in religious, not racial,

⁹⁰ This discussion raises the question whether anti-Judaism is inherent in Christian theology or whether it is simply an aberration or error that cropped into the Christian churches later. This is obviously a controversial and complex question, and I do not want to get lost in the weeds here, but essentially one’s answer to this question rests upon when one believes Christianity actually began. If one concludes that Christianity begins with the teachings of Jesus, then the biblical evidence suggests that anti-Judaism is an error that contradicts Jesus’ ethics. We should remember that all the early followers of Jesus were in fact Jews, and so to argue for the existence of anti-Judaism at this early period would be nonsensical. In this case, anti-Judaism must be considered an aberration from the teachings of Jesus. However, if one contends that Christianity began later with missionary activity across the Mediterranean and the theological writings of the Apostle Paul – as more and more Gentiles entered what was the Jesus movement and became the Christian Church – then one could reasonably contend that anti-Judaism is inherent in Christianity, as evidenced in select passages of the New Testament (e.g. Matthew 27:25; John 8:37-39, 44-47; and I Thessalonians 2:14-16). For my purposes in this dissertation, I will argue that anti-Judaism is an aberration in the Christian tradition, albeit a very early one. In this way we can make more sense of confessing pastors’ reliance on the person and teachings of Jesus as a basis to combat racial prejudice against Jews in Nazi Germany. We should also keep in mind what I have said earlier, that Christian anti-Judaism may have made Christians more open to Nazi racial ideology than they otherwise would have been. See *Jews and Christians: The Parting of the Ways, A.D. 70 to 135*, edited by James D.G. Dunn (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999); Paula Fredriksen, *From Jesus to Christ: The Origins of the New Testament Images of Jesus*, Kindle Edition (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008); and Geza Vermes, *Christian Beginnings: From Nazareth to Nicea* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014).

prejudice.⁹¹ I will proceed throughout the dissertation using the term anti-Judaism in acknowledgment of its close relationship to antisemitism.

As I work through the analysis of Confessing Church sermons I will ask whether pastors express anti-Judaic or antisemitic views. How common are such expressions, and when do they occur? Do we find anti-Judaic theology expressed in the context of the exegesis of the biblical text – such as in reflections on the Easter season – in calls to missionary activity, or even in defending Jews from Nazi persecutions? And do we find such expressions when, at the same time, a pastor voices support for Jews suffering in Nazi persecutions? My task will be to reveal these expressions, to distinguish between anti-Judaism and antisemitism, and to discover how prevalent they are in the historical record.

Methodology

I have gathered a wide variety of sources in the course of my research. In scouring the German archives I have found 910 Confessing Church sermons. Essentially, I used any sermon I could confirm was written and delivered by a Confessing Church preacher by cross-checking the individual with the archival lists of Confessing Church membership, located at the *Evangelisches Zentralarchiv* in Berlin.⁹² This centralized archive for the German Protestant churches proved to be essential as a source of these sermons, as well as the *Landeskirchliches Archiv der Evangelischen Kirche von Westfalen* in Bielefeld. But I have also utilized online databases to locate sermons in rare

⁹¹ Michael, *Holy Hatred*, 47; and Lindemann and Levy, *Antisemitism*, Kindle location 227 and 4759.

⁹² The Confessing Church membership lists are available at EZA Bestand 50-50/707.

bookshops all over Germany, as well as in archives in Scotland and Iowa – the scattered sermons of exiles were particularly difficult to track down. Of all the sermons, 726 were found in book collections published either during or shortly after the Nazi dictatorship. The remaining 184 were unpublished sermons found in archives. All of the sermons were delivered by men in church leadership and in the rank and file; unfortunately, I have been unable to find any sermons written by women whom I could confirm were members of the Confessing Church. I should also point out that I have used sermons delivered in 1933 and early 1934, before the formal establishment of the Confessing Church, because these sermons demonstrate the growing divide and disunity among the German churches and also the increasing dissatisfaction with the Nazi regime's treatment of the churches.

I have also identified 117 German pastors of Jewish descent, whose sermons and personal stories will provide a nuanced perspective of the Church's response to Nazi persecution. Furthermore, supplemental primary sources such as memoirs, autobiographies, social commentary, prayer books, and popular theology will provide context and depth to this history. This abundance of primary sources allows for a well-rounded, thorough, and illuminating examination of the messages proclaimed by the Confessing Church.

A quick review of the 95 individuals at the beginning of this chapter reveals that not all of them bear the job title of "Pastor." Most in fact do bear that title, but others are superintendents (akin to the office of bishop in the Catholic tradition), professors, directors of social or religious institutions, provosts, and lecturers. The sermons of the Confessing Church were delivered by individuals of a variety of professional backgrounds, but all of them were spiritual leaders of their faith communities, which is

why their congregations commissioned them to preach. Thus, when I speak of Confessing Church pastors, I refer to a broad definition in the Christian tradition of one called by a congregation to lead in instruction and worship. I do not mean that every individual who delivered a sermon was a licensed pastor in the German Protestant Church, though most, of course, were.

It is difficult to specify with certainty the membership status of each particular member of the Confessing Church – whether and to what degree they were active members, or even if they left the movement. As we will discuss in Chapter 3, the Confessing Church was a loose organization, a movement that opposed Nazi infringement in the affairs of the German Protestant Church.⁹³ Members joined and stayed loyal to its position throughout the Nazi dictatorship, but others joined only to be disillusioned by the movement's seeming ineffectiveness and infighting, and then left the movement altogether. When possible, I have located members' names in rosters of new Confessing Church members. I have also included pastors who said themselves in sermons or letters that they were members, and I have included those they named as colleagues as well. In addition, I have included some individuals who were active in the Pastor's Emergency League activities (the movement that became the Confessing Church), such as Karl Barth, who wrote the *Barmen Declaration*, but who was forced out of Germany before the establishment of the organization itself. Thus, some early sympathizers and supporters are included as well.

⁹³ See Helmreich, *German Churches under Hitler*, 161-163; and Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 12.

If you review the hundreds of source materials in the bibliography you will find a great variety of sources that were delivered in church services on Sunday, such as a traditional sermon (*Predigten*); addresses given at weddings or funerals (*Reden*); and meditations preached to a small gathering of students or religious professionals (*Meditation* or *Nachdenken*). We will discuss in much more detail in Chapter 3 the meaning and purpose of these sermons, but suffice it now to say that each of these documents begins with a biblical text, then proceeds to elucidate the meaning of these verse, for the purpose of relating that meaning in the context of life in Nazi Germany, for the edification of the Christian community. All these forms are considered sermons in the traditional sense that they preach the gospel of Jesus of Nazareth.

It might also be helpful to point out the differences in perspectives between that of an ordinary church-goer in Nazi Germany and a historian reading these sermons. The ordinary congregant would have varying degrees of attention to any particular sermon. The pious man might pay close attention, hanging on every word, or he might be distracted by his work assignments for the upcoming week. While a congregant may have heard the sermon, he or she may not have carefully listened. A mother and father of five might be distracted trying to keep their brood well-behaved in the pew. Perhaps a few friends would reflect and talk about the sermon over lunch afterwards, or perhaps not. The historian on the other hand would read attentively, seeking patterns and meaning, which are sometimes difficult to discern. In other words, as we critically examine these sermons it is important to remember that the experiences of the congregants may have been very different. Of course, there is no way for us to tell just how attentively congregants listened to their pastors' sermons. Thus, this study tells us

more about the views and actions of Confessing pastors than it does about how Christians internalized the meaning of their sermons.

Having said this, 175 (or 19%) of the sermons examined came from published sermons, either in pamphlet or book form, *before* the fall of the Nazi regime.⁹⁴ The mere fact that they were published indicates a demand for the sermons, an appetite for the methods used and messages expressed in the sermons. Of these, we can also surmise that the reader would attentively read the sermon – after all, it cost him or her money to purchase. Furthermore, it would not be surprising if sermons were read by more than the one person who purchased it – for example, colleagues in a parish, or family members, or even friends swapping books. But again, we cannot tell just how many people read the sermons – we have no publication data or figures for how many pamphlets or books were printed, or how many individuals read a single printing. Yet the fact of the publications of the sermons indicates a demand for Confessing Church sermons.

Analyzing sermons as primary sources has its advantages and disadvantages. Chief among the advantages is the access to the rich theological language of a particular faith community located in a specific time and place, which used this language to convey its most sacred hopes, persistent fears, and sense of unity. This dissertation is an opportunity to engage with and understand this language of faith, filled with metaphor,

⁹⁴ Of the sermons published during the Nazi dictatorship, most were published between 1933 and 1935, and none were published after 1941. In fact, the numbers decline considerable after 1939. Among the most prolific of these publishers were the Christian Kaiser Verlag in Munich (later known as the Evangelischer Verlag Albert Lempp in Munich), Im Furche Verlag in Berlin, C. Bertelsmann Verlag in Gütersloh, and the Helingsche Verlangsanstalt in Leipzig. I have been able to confirm that the Christian Kaiser Verlag was shut down by the Nazi regime in 1943. According to the Historical Dictionary of Bavaria, the regime closed the publishing house because of its publications of Confessing Church materials. See Friedrich Wilhelm Graf and Andreas Waschbüsch, Christian Kaiser Verlag, in: *Historical Dictionary of Bavaria*, URL: http://www.historisches-lexikon-bayerns.de/artikel/artikel_44853, 03 January 2011, Web. 05 September 2015.

hyperbole, imagery, and illustrations, which can only be understood within the context of the Church. As we would expect the language permeating the university hall, the beer hall, or the officer's canteen to display a character distinctive to its milieu, so we would expect the same of speech in the sanctuary. The historian has the opportunity to explore this unique means of expression.

Foremost among the disadvantages is that a sermon is meant to be spoken to a faith community, and not read by an historian in the quiet of an archive. The historian cannot recreate the preacher's tone, inflection, volume, or for that matter the echo of his words in the sanctuary. The best the historian can hope for is to imagine these words preached – as a meaningful language of faith – to an audience with rapt and respectful attention; to imagine which words might evoke a biblical image or sacred memory, inspire a tear or chuckle, or hit a sensitive nerve. It is up to the historian to interpret these words as a spoken address.

A second disadvantage is that the historian cannot state with certainty that the preacher read the manuscript as it is, without extemporaneous insertions, correction, or deductions. A preacher, like any other public speaker, may feel the inspiration to digress, elaborate, or play to the crowd. He may not even have the time to finish reading his manuscript. These are all possibilities that the historian must keep in mind as he reads the historical record. Having said this, it is important to keep in mind Karl Barth's admonition to his students to write down their sermons in manuscript form so as to carefully weigh the meaning and clarity of each word, and then to read the text as

prepared.⁹⁵ As Chapter 3 will discuss in detail, German homileticians in the 1930s argued that the biblical texts demand such rigor.⁹⁶ The renewed focus on the biblical texts as the sole source of revelation – and preaching as a predominant means of delivering it – meant a more disciplined preparation and delivery, and as such, we would expect preachers to have read what they had carefully prepared without much extemporaneous emendation.

Another point that needs mention is that sermons are by definition occasional, delivered to a specific congregation, in a particular situation unique to that community of faith. A sermon is as unique as the preacher who delivers it and the audience who receives it. Thus, any claims to generalize based on one sermon or even hundreds of sermons would be unwarranted. This research offers a window, as it were, into the places of worship in which these sermons were delivered, so that we can understand how particular groups expressed their spirituality under the Nazi dictatorship. This dissertation claims to present what occurred in some Confessing Churches, but not all.

As I previously mentioned, this dissertation will examine these sermons following three over-arching themes: the nature and purpose of the Confessing Church clergy's responses to the Nazi dictatorship; the variety of calls to action in response to Nazi persecution; and lastly, the perspectives of the Jewish people and Judaism – in particular the relationship between traditional Christian anti-Judaism and modern antisemitism.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Barth, *Homiletics*, 119.

⁹⁶ Homiletics is the art or craft of preaching, and a homiletician is one who explores and examines this art of preaching. Typically, a homiletician is a theologian at a seminary who teaches seminarians how to compose and deliver effective sermons. It is often the case, though not always, that homileticians are or have been themselves practicing clergymen.

⁹⁷ As we will see, Confessing Church pastors did not articulate the difference between Christian anti-

In addition, special attention will be paid to the reception of these sermons in German society through an analysis of the reports of the Social Democratic Party in exile (SOPADE) and the Gestapo, as well as anecdotal evidence contained in memoirs, political and religious speeches, and other relevant primary sources. My aim is to uncover how Confessing Church clergy, as pastors in positions of religious authority, served as agents of moral persuasion in a time of spiritual and political crisis and to gauge how Germans may have received their message.

I will analyze the messages contained in each sermon as they pertain to these three over-arching themes. Each message will be tracked, counted, and represented in a series of charts designed to illustrate the frequency and type of key words or phrases used by Confessing Church pastors. For example, in the fourth chapter which addresses perceptions of the Nazi dictatorship, I will examine any implicit or explicit references to Hitler, such as *der Führer* (leader) or *der Retter* (savior); to National Socialism, such as “*ein anderes Evangelium*” (another gospel); and to the Third Reich, such as *tausendjährige Reich* (thousand-year Reich). Careful attention will also be paid to the biblical texts used in the sermons as they may provide insight into the purpose of the pastor’s invocation of these words and phrases. Likewise, in the fifth chapter on the pastors’ perspectives of Jews and Judaism, I will document any references made about the Jews and their religious practices in the Hebrew Bible as well as in the Nazi period. How many of these references connote sympathy, a sense of religious continuity, or as it may be, an expression of anti-Judaism or antisemitism? These responses will be

Judaism and antisemitism.

documented, analyzed, and quantified. Following the analytical framework set out by Kershaw, I will examine sermons for expressions of resistance, opposition or dissent. This analysis will provide us with a new perspective to understand just how often and to what degree Confessing Church pastors publicly expressed their views about the Nazi regime and the Jewish people.

My research will contribute to the historiography of Nazi Germany and the Church Struggle by providing a new perspective on the broad spectrum of Christian (specifically Confessing Church) responses to the Nazi regime, its ideology, and its persecutions, ranging from acceptance, to acquiescence, passive dissent, active opposition, and politically motivated resistance. I will examine the “everyday” messages preached by Confessing Church pastors to congregations large and small, urban and rural, in parishes, at weddings and funerals and concentration camps. These sermons promise a unique view of Christian practice and religious expression on ordinary Sundays and holy days, which, however, took place in the context of an extraordinary time. Equally important, this research will further illumine the nature of Christians’ perspectives of and attitudes towards Jews and Judaism, and allow us to gain a new perspective on how religious anti-Judaism relates to modern antisemitism in Nazi Germany. In sum, I aim to contribute to our understanding of the social world of the German people during the Nazi dictatorship, particularly the nature of their communities of faith, and how sermons informed and shaped their political, cultural, and theological perspectives.

The use of sermons as primary sources offers a rich and hitherto untapped source base in exploring the religious milieu of Protestant Germany in the Third Reich. Sermons as primary sources promise the historian greater insight into the nature and the

degree of dissent, opposition, and resistance in the everyday ministry of the church. Furthermore, they provide insight about the public opinion expressed from the pulpits from week to week, whether in explicit, bold language, or in cryptic terms. An in-depth analysis of sermons offers us a unique opportunity to see how communities of faith expressed what was most important to them in a time of considerable conflict and uncertainty.

Organization

My dissertation is divided into chapters by theme. In Chapter 2, I will provide a brief introduction to the historiography of the Church Struggle, and situate my research among the vast body of work compiled on the German churches in the Nazi dictatorship. Specifically, we will explore the various phases of the historiography, moving from postwar concerns for rebuilding the German churches to more recent emphases on understanding the varying convictions and experiences of members of the Confessing Church. We will also consider the recent debates about whether National Socialism is a political religion in opposition to Christianity.

In Chapter 3 I will introduce the tradition of preaching in the Christian church, and examine the history of modern German homiletics and also the institutionalization of the Confessing Church under the Nazi dictatorship. I will argue that the Confessing Church refused to acknowledge any form of revelation apart from the Hebrew and Christian biblical texts, and that this commitment marked a distinctive turning point away from the natural theology promulgated by the tradition of German liberal theology that was used by the Nazi-supported German Christian movement. Thus, delivering a sermon

on the gospel of Jesus of Nazareth became a critical point of contention between German Protestant churches and the Nazi dictatorship.

Chapter 4 will address Confessing Church pastors' responses to Hitler and the Nazi regime. I will examine National Socialism as a perceived political religion that advances views of Hitler as a messiah or savior of Germany and of the Third Reich as a millennial kingdom. After establishing the religious ideas of this "new gospel," I will explore how Luther's "two kingdoms theology" presented unforeseen complications for pastors dedicated to serving their congregations and communities. The chapter will then focus attention on the pastors' explicit and most often implicit messages about Hitler, the Nazi dictatorship, and their persecutions of the church. Confessing Church pastors expressed criticisms of the Nazi regime and its ideology in two principal ways: in condemning Nazi or pro-Nazi supporters' persecution of the German churches and Christians, and also in condemning National Socialism and other volkish "false beliefs" that support the worship or undue reverence of false idols. I argue that the pastors often responded to the Nazi message by countering with the traditional gospel message, one that categorically and unequivocally denied Hitler as the messiah of the German nation, the future of the Nazi millennial kingdom, and the Jews as racially other. Lastly, we will explore the nature, meaning, and significance of the opposition to the regime, as evidenced in the sermons.

In Chapter 5, I will analyze Confessing Church pastors' messages about Jews, Judaism, and their persecution at the hands of the Nazi state. Hitler and the Nazi state utilized propaganda to advance their racist perception of Jews as diabolical, power-grabbing, and a cancer at the heart of the German nation. The Confessing Church

response was complicated by a long tradition of anti-Judaic theology that portrayed Jews as corrupted by their denial of Jesus as Christ, and thus punished by God for the past two thousand years and cursed to wander. Given this theology, it may be surprising that pastors did at times speak out in defense of Jews, for example, by affirming their status as the chosen people of God and having a secure place in God's sacred history. They also emphasized Judaism and the Hebrew Bible as foundational for the Christian religion and the New Testament, and that the German churches could not, must not, "de Judaize" Christianity or the New Testament without losing its very identity and purpose. But at the same time, Confessing Church pastors also expressed views of traditional anti-Judaism that, in the context of Nazi Germany, may have contributed to anti-Semitic persecution or at least to creating an environment in which persecution became possible. Unfortunately, we find the typical anti-Judaic tropes that have been preached throughout the history of the Church, including the notion of the "waywardness" of Jews; that the Jews are guilty of deicide; that the Jews have ceased to be the people of God; and that God has punished the Jews throughout history (as we will see, this was a particularly horrendous belief at a time when Jews faced unparalleled persecution). My argument is that the sermons reveal ambivalence about the Jewish people and Judaism: on the one hand reflecting an anti-Judaic theology, and on the other responding to Nazi persecution with an insistence on the status of Jews as blessed and deserving of rights and respect. This ambivalence led in most cases to an appalling paralysis of spiritual guidance and moral accountability.

Chapter 6 takes a close look at the complications and ministries of German pastors of Jewish descent under the Nazi dictatorship. I have contributed an updated and

informative listing of German pastors of Jewish decent, which includes information, when available, about their membership in the Confessing Church, whether and where they emigrated, and their Nazi categorization. Having been labeled as “Jewish” by the Nazi regime, they often faced unique hardships and dilemmas as they struggled to minister to their congregants, some of whom rejected their leadership and challenged their legitimacy in the German churches. They often experienced persecution by church officials, a lack of cooperation with pro-Nazi members of their parishes, and even insufficient support among their Confessing Church colleagues. This chapter will provide a window into the lives and ministries of a small, but important segment of the Confessing Church pastorate.

And lastly, Chapter 7 explores the lives, ministries, and sermons of three Jewish Christian pastors, each of whom the Nazis forced out of Germany: Hans Ehrenberg, Franz Hildebrandt, and Friedrich Forell. As Protestant pastors of Jewish descent exiled by an oppressive regime, their unique perspectives will provide nuance and counterpoint to the sermons analyzed in this dissertation, particularly on the issues the Jews, Judaism, and antisemitism. In their own ways, and in diverse locations, Ehrenberg, Hildebrandt, and Forell struggled to help their fellow citizens who had either suffered at the hands of the Nazi state, or who had fallen away from the traditional Christian faith to follow a destructive ideology. They criticize Hitler, not as a politician, but as the leader of a “strange doctrine” – National Socialism – a disastrous worldview based on exclusion and the debasing of human dignity, and which has sowed seeds of conflict and confusion in the German churches. At the same time, each affirmed Judaism as an indispensable foundation of Christianity, and combated pro-Nazi Christians who sought to “Aryanize”

Christianity. Yet we also find anti-Judaic prejudice expressed in their sermons, such as the need to convert Jews to Christianity because Judaism is in one way or another insufficient or that the Jews have lost their “chosen” status. This ambivalence about the Jews and Judaism is consonant with the views of their Confessing Church colleagues.

While Confessing Church pastors certainly expressed their personal opinions about the Nazi state and the Jewish people – informed by the Christian tradition – we must remember that in the pulpit they were first and foremost, pastors, the “shepherds” of the flock, clergymen commissioned with the care of the community of faith. Throughout the dissertation, I will examine the manner in which they encouraged, challenged, and advised Christians under the Nazi dictatorship. In voicing concern about Hitler’s anti-Christian or antisemitic policies, how did the pastors give their congregations comfort or compel them to act? As we will see, their responses run the gamut from simple encouragements to trust in the peace of God, to assurances of God’s coming judgment against the German Christian movement or the Nazi regime; from warnings to consider the nature of the times, to admonitions to act on the behalf of the persecuted. While the Confessing Church did not often express a clear, unequivocal call to resist or oppose the Nazi dictatorship, pastors often voiced messages of encouragement or advice that represented a distinct challenge to the Nazi *Weltanschauung* (world view).

Throughout the dissertation, but especially in Chapters 4 and 5, I will also include an exploration of the reception of these sermons by the German people and the Nazi regime. I will rely on several sources to provide as well-rounded an approach as possible. The reports of the Social Democratic Party in exile provide insights from a political perspective about dissent, opposition, and resistance from inside the church.

Reports from Gestapo spies and informants who sat in the pews and documented subversive preaching will provide a distinctly critical perspective to these sermons. And lastly, I will incorporate anecdotal evidence from the letters, memoirs, and sermons and addresses of other pastors and lay people to show how fellow Protestants perceived the sermons delivered by Confessing Church pastors. These sources will give us good indications about how the German people received the sermons – as traditional, inspiring, foreboding, confrontational, or subversive.

But before we delve into the Confessing Church sermons themselves, it is first necessary to provide a theological and historical background of the sermon as a vital mode of religious expression in the Christian tradition, and also to explore the context of the early twentieth-century German churches. What is a “sermon” and what is its role in the Christian tradition, particularly in early twentieth century Germany? To what extent did the political and, more to the point, spiritual crises after the First World War influence German theology and the theory of preaching? Why did the Confessing Church break from the German Protestant churches under the Nazi dictatorship, and why was preaching so important in this dispute? We turn to these critical questions in the second chapter.

CHAPTER TWO

A Historiography of the German Church Struggle

The little boat of the church of Christ is traveling on stormy seas.

—Pastor Paul Schneider, 28 January 1934⁹⁸

Scholars have extensively studied the history of the German churches in the Nazi dictatorship, and this chapter will place my research in the context of the historiography.⁹⁹ Given the range of this historiography, I will limit the following discussion to the three themes most directly related to my analysis of Confessing Church sermons: first, the historiography of the German churches' oppositional stance toward the Nazi regime; second, the recent debates concerning the nature of National Socialism as a

⁹⁸ Dean Stroud, ed., *Preaching in Hitler's Shadow* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013), Kindle Edition.

⁹⁹ See John Conway, *The Nazi Persecutions of the Churches, 1933-1945* (Vancouver: Regent College, 1968); Karl-Wilhelm Dahm, "German Protestantism and Politics, 1918-1939," *Journal of Contemporary History* 3, no. 1 (Jan. 1968), 29-49; Robert Ericksen and Susannah Heschel, *Betrayal: German Churches and the Holocaust* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999); Franz Feige, *The Varieties of Protestantism in Nazi Germany: Five Theopolitical Positions, Toronto Studies in Theology* 50 (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellon Press, 1990); Rebekka Habermas, "Piety, Power, and Powerlessness: Religion and Religious Groups in Germany, 1870-1945," *Oxford Handbook of Modern German History*, edited by Helmut Walser Smith (New York: Oxford, 2011); Ernst Christian Helmreich, *The German Churches under Hitler: Background, Struggle, and Epilogue* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1979); Joachim-Christoph Kaiser, "Kirchengeschichte des 20. Jahrhunderts, Teil A: Der Protestantismus von 1918 bis 1989," in: *Ökumenische Kirchengeschichte*, Bd. 3, Hubert Wolf, ed. (Darmstadt 2007), 181-270; Otto Dov Kulka and Paul R. Mendes-Flohr, eds. *Judaism and Christianity under the Impact of National Socialism* (Jerusalem: The Historical Society of Israel and the Zalman Shazar Center for Jewish History, 1987); Günter Lewy, *The Catholic Church and Nazi Germany* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1964); Franklin Littell and Hubert Locke, eds. *The German Church Struggle and the Holocaust* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1974); Kurt Meier, *Kirche und Judentum: die Haltung der evangelischen Kirche zur Judenpolitik des Dritten Reiches* (Halle [Saale]: Veb Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1968); Klaus Scholder, *The Churches and the Third Reich. Volume 1: Preliminary History and the Time of Illusions, 1918-1934. Volume 2: The Year of Disillusionment: 1934. Barmen and Rome*, translated by John Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987-88); Uriel Tal, "Lutheran Theology and the Third Reich," in Paul Opsahl and Marc Tannenbaum, eds., *Speaking of God Today* (Philadelphia, 1974), 87-96; and Hans Tiefel, "The German Lutheran Church and the Rise of National Socialism," *Church History* 41, no. 3 (Sept. 1972).

political religion in contrast to traditional Christianity; and third, the extent to which the Confessing Church confronted Nazi persecution of the Jewish people.

The historiography of the *Kirchenkampf* (Church Struggle) has focused predominantly on the German churches' institutions, the leading figures, and the churches' public responses to the Nazi regime. We know much about the heroic and the timid responses of select high-profile members of the church leadership, and also about the failure and meager successes of the German churches as institutions that had the capability to galvanize opposition and resistance against Hitler and the Nazis and in support of the Jews. But there has yet to be a history based on the wealth of information contained in the weekly sermons of Confessing Church pastors – of influence great and small – throughout Germany.

From the end of the World War II to the early 1960s, the historiography of the Confessing Church predominantly argued in support of its staunch and consistent resistance against the Nazi dictatorship and factions sympathetic to Nazism within the Protestant churches, such as the German Christian movement.¹⁰⁰ For example, in 1948 the pastor and historian Wilhelm Niemöller, the younger brother of Martin Niemöller, published the earliest history of the Confessing Church, the ground-breaking and sympathetic account, *Kampf und Zeugnis der Bekennenden Kirche*.¹⁰¹ In the 1950s and 1960s a number of biographies and critical studies were published commemorating

¹⁰⁰ Two excellent though now outdated historiographical introductions to the German churches under the Nazi dictatorship are Ericksen and Heschel, "The German Churches Face Hitler"; and John Conway, "The Historiography of the German Church Struggle," *Journal of Bible and Religion* 32, no. 3 (July 1964), 221-230.

¹⁰¹ Wilhelm Niemöller, *Kampf und Zeugnis der Bekennenden Kirche* (Bielefeld: L. Bechauf, 1948).

church heroes, men and women who took extraordinary and courageous action in the context of a totalitarian society, and became champions of the Church Struggle against the Nazi dictatorship.

An example is the historiography on the Confessing pastor and theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer.¹⁰² Bonhoeffer was a unique individual because from the earliest days of the Nazi regime, he recognized like very few others the “nihilism that was at the core of Nazism and its beliefs.”¹⁰³ He realized that a conflict between the church and the state was inevitable.¹⁰⁴ Even in 1933 he believed that if the state did not honor its God-given duty to protect and serve the people, then society had the right to resist.¹⁰⁵ The church must decide on a course of action, whether that be to question the legitimacy of the state or to serve the victims of the state. But Bonhoeffer mentioned a third course of action, one that he would actively engage in, and one that he mentioned as early as April 1933 in an essay entitled, “The Church and the Jewish Question.” A necessary course of action might be “not just to bind up the wounds of the victims beneath the wheel, but to seize the wheel itself. Such an action would be direct political action on the part of the church. This is only possible and called for if the church sees the state to be failing in its

¹⁰² The historiography on Dietrich Bonhoeffer is vast. For some of the major works on his life and career, see Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography, Revised Edition* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000); Mary Bosanquet, *The Life and Death of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968); Sabine Damm, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Resistance*, translated by Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2009); Eric Metaxas, *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2010); Wolf-Dieter Zimmermann and Ronald G. Smith, eds., *I Knew Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, translated by Käthe Gregor Smith (New York: Harper & Row, 1966); and Ferdinand Schlingensiepen, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer 1906-1945, Martyr, Thinker, Man of Resistance* (New York: T&T Clark, 2010).

¹⁰³ Eltscher, *Traitors or Patriots?* Kindle location 185.

¹⁰⁴ Eltscher, *Traitors or Patriots?* Kindle location 1660.

¹⁰⁵ See for example his radio talk on March 30, 1933, “The Führer Principle.”

function of creating law and order.”¹⁰⁶ After drawing the attention of the Nazis with his critical comments, he took an appointment in London in October 1933 to serve as pastor to a German congregation. Nevertheless, he returned to Nazi Germany and took a more active part in the resistance to Hitler. Through his close friend and brother-in-law Hans von Dohnanyi, he joined with members of the Abwehr (the German Military Intelligence Office) who sought to assassinate Hitler. He became a “confidential agent” of the Abwehr, and began gaining support for his cause among his foreign contacts as a clergyman.¹⁰⁷ In April 1943 he was arrested with his co-conspirators, imprisoned at Tegel prison, and in April 1945 he was quickly tried and executed.

The historiography of Dietrich Bonhoeffer reflects that of the Church Struggle in Nazi Germany. In the late 1940 and into the 1950s, historians emphasized resistance activities within the German churches, often using Bonhoeffer or other prominent figures such as Martin Niemöller, as examples of churchmen willing to risk it all to defeat Hitler and the Nazi regime.¹⁰⁸ Yet the early historiography created the impression that much more resistance took place than actually occurred.¹⁰⁹ Aside from his resistance activities, interest in Bonhoeffer’s life and work increased considerably starting in the 1960s, just as

¹⁰⁶ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “The Church and the Jewish Question,” in *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Witness to Jesus Christ, The Making of Modern Theology*, edited by John de Gruchy (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1991), 127.

¹⁰⁷ Eltscher, *Traitor or Patriot?* Kindle location 194.

¹⁰⁸ See for example, Wilhelm Niemöller, *Kampf und Zeugnis der Bekennenden Kirche* (Bielefeld: L. Bechtauf, 1948); Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison* (London: Macmillan, 1953); Dietmar Schmidt, *Martin Niemöller* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1959). See also Samantha Gavin, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Christian Resistance and Ethics in Nazi Germany: What is the Significance of Bonhoeffer?* Unpublished Dissertation (University of Canterbury, 2014), 9.

¹⁰⁹ Robert Ericksen. “A Radical Minority: Resistance in the German Protestant Church,” in *Germans Against Nazism: Nonconformity, Opposition and Resistance in the Third Reich: Essays in Honour of Peter Hoffmann*, edited by Francis R. Nicosia and Lawrence D. Stokes (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1990), 116.

historians delved deeper in the history of the Nazi persecution of the Jews and the perpetration of the Holocaust.¹¹⁰ Now Bonhoeffer became not just a resister to the Nazi regime, but also a pro-Jewish advocate who challenged Nazi racist policies even in 1933, and yet who also voiced anti-Judaic views in his discussions of the “Jewish Question.”¹¹¹ It was in 1967 that Bonhoeffer’s close friend, colleague, and later executor and editor, published the definitive and yet-to-be-surpassed biography of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, which explored in depth his views of the Jews and his actions on their behalf.¹¹² Ever since, historians and theologians have sifted through Bonhoeffer’s life and writings, and have presented him through a wide variety of lenses: as a radical, liberal, conservative, evangelical, pacifist, prophet, martyr, and saint.¹¹³ In this dissertation, I will add to the historiography of Bonhoeffer by not only exploring how he criticized the Nazi regime in the context of his sermons, but also how he expressed support for Jews as well as made anti-Judaic statements from the pulpit.

From the end of World War II to the early 1960s, historians of the German churches sought to examine the lives of men and women who risked it all to resist the Nazi regime, like Bonhoeffer. One effect of these studies that were sympathetic to the

¹¹⁰ Stephen Haynes, *The Bonhoeffer Legacy*, (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2006), 1.

¹¹¹ See Mary Bosanquet, *The Life and Death of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968); Edwin H. Robertson, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (Richmond, VA: John Knox, 1967); and William Kuhns, *In Pursuit of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (Dayton, OH: Pflaum, 1967). See also Stephen Haynes, *The Bonhoeffer Legacy*, and also his article, “Who Needs Enemies? Jews and Judaism in Anti-Nazi Religious Discourse,” in *Church History*, 71:2 (June 2002), 341-367.

¹¹² Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography, Revised Edition* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000). The work has gone through nine editions from 1967 through 2000, and in each Bethge has added new materials.

¹¹³ Stephen Haynes, *The Bonhoeffer Phenomenon* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2004), Kindle Edition, location 9-33.

Confessing Church was that it kept the failures of its pastors and the shortcomings of its theology at arm's length, away from careful scrutiny. For example, a closer examination of Confessing Church sermons, as we will see throughout the dissertation, reveals a much more ambivalent perception of the Jews than the historiography in this period suggests.

We can discern a few motivations in this early phase of the historiography. First and foremost, these histories were sincere attempts to come to terms with the Nazi past. Most of these texts were written by Germans who were at the same time Protestants, and they felt a sincere need to understand how the German churches responded to Hitler and the Nazi state.¹¹⁴ But these authors also sought to bear witness to the lives and actions of those who either gave their freedom or their lives in the struggle against the Nazi dictatorship; many of the authors were either relations of those persecuted or fellow Confessing Church members or sympathizers. The historiography of this early period cast the Confessing Church as a heroic movement in direct contrast to the German Christian movement as “sell outs” to Hitler and the Nazis.¹¹⁵

The historian John Conway writes on this period in the historiography:

These studies were motivated as much by the desire to justify the actions of the small but highly significant group who steadfastly opposed the Nazi tyranny, namely the ‘Bekennende Kirche,’ as by an historian’s interest in recent events...They were at pains therefore to point out the significance of policies and attitudes of this group within the Evangelical Church, and in particular to dissociate themselves from the views both of the Nazi state and of their opponents within the Evangelical Church who more or less openly had shown their sympathy with the Nazis, and who were chiefly to be found within the rival movement of the ‘Deutsche Christen.’¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ Conway, “Historiography of the German Church Struggle,” 222-25.

¹¹⁵ Ericksen and Heschel, “The German Churches Face Hitler,” 433.

¹¹⁶ Conway, “Historiography of the German Church Struggle,” 223. This same approach is true of the historiography of the Catholic Church; see Nathaniel Micklem, *National Socialism and the Roman Catholic*

The historians in this early phase of the historiography demonstrated that not all Germans accepted Hitler as their *Führer* or his National Socialist message.

At the same time, another important motivation of post-war historians and church leaders was to guide the Protestant churches into a thriving future, and they believed that this could best be achieved by adhering to the Reformed theology of the Swiss theologian Karl Barth.¹¹⁷ Barth was a founder of the Confessing Church who taught at the University of Bonn before being run out of Germany in 1935 for refusing to swear the oath of allegiance to Hitler, which was required of university professors. He was the theological driving force behind the Confessing Church and the Barmen Declaration, a confession of faith composed at Barmen in May 1934 that vehemently opposed the pro-Nazi German Christian movement.¹¹⁸ The Barmen Declaration empowered Christians to identify with the Church and the gospel over against Hitler and Nazi ideology.¹¹⁹ This oppositional stance enabled them to withstand interference from the Nazi dictatorship in Church affairs. And so many historians in this early period in the historiography of the German churches used the history of the Church Struggle as “a vehicle for proving the validity of their theological viewpoints.”¹²⁰ Thus, the motivations were not simply

Church: Being an Account of the Conflict between the National Socialist Government of Germany and the Roman Catholic Church, 1933-1938 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1939); and Johann Neuhausler, *Kreuz und Hakenkreuz: Der Kampf des Nationalsozialismus gegen die katholische Kirche und der Kirchliche Widerstand* (München: Katholische Kirche Bayerns, 1946).

¹¹⁷ Conway, “Historiography of the German Church Struggle,” 224.

¹¹⁸ Arthur Cochrane, *The Church's Confession under Hitler* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962), 14.

¹¹⁹ In the usage of the Christian Bible, the term “gospel” means “good news,” in reference to Jesus of Nazareth’s message of the coming of the kingdom of God.

¹²⁰ Conway, “Historiography of the German Church Struggle,” 224. See also John Conway, “The Present State of Research and Writing on the Church Struggle,” in *The German Church Struggle and the*

concerned with casting their own past in a favorable light, but also shaping the future to align according to their own theological beliefs.

The late 1950s and early 1960s mark the beginning of a second stage in the historiography of the German Church Struggle. A concern for historical accuracy motivated historians to challenge the presentation of the German churches as untainted bastions of resistance to the Nazi dictatorship.¹²¹ One of the earliest was Friedrich Bäumgärtel, who published *Wider der Kirchenkampf-Legenden* in 1959 and pointed out that various Confessing Church pastors had not always been staunch opponents of the Nazis; for example, Wilhelm Niemöller supported the Nazi S.A. before 1933, and his brother Martin Niemöller applauded Hitler's move to exit Germany from the League of Nations.¹²² At the same time, a younger generation of historians demonstrated that while Confessing Church members might have voiced support for Christians of Jewish descent, they very rarely supported Jews in their own communities.¹²³ As Ericksen and Heschel have pointed out, the Confessing Church and the German Christian movement may have "more similarities than differences" in how they responded to Nazi antisemitism.¹²⁴

In this second phrase of the historiography, the Catholic Church also received closer scrutiny. Historians challenged the prevailing view that the Catholic Church was from the beginning of 1933 opposed to the Nazi regime, demonstrating widespread

Holocaust, edited by Franklin Littell and Hubert Locke (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1974), 31-32.

¹²¹ Conway, "Historiography of the German Church Struggle," 225.

¹²² Conway, "Historiography of the German Church Struggle," 226; see also Conway, "Research and Writing," 32-33.

¹²³ Ericksen and Heschel, "German Churches Face Hitler," 433.

¹²⁴ Ericksen and Heschel, "German Churches Face Hitler," 433.

Catholic support for the Enabling Law of March 1933, the Concordat of July 1933, and the start of war in 1939.¹²⁵ By the late 1960s, historians posed new and challenging questions meant to revise the prevailing view of the German churches and their resistance to the Nazis. Historians began to ask probing questions about the churches' support and criticism of the Nazi regime and also the outbreak of war. And they asked hard questions about the churches' responses to the persecution of the Jews, political dissidents, and the mentally and physically disabled. What emerged from the historiography in this period was a far more nuanced view of the German churches, which no longer appeared as bastions of resistance and opposition, but rather as institutions replete with leaders who were in equal measure fearful, faithful, acquiescent, and yes, even at times courageous, all the while struggling to decide the best course of action.

A seminal work in this revisionist phase is John Conway's *The Nazi Persecution of the Churches* (1968), an incisive history of the Nazi regime's approach to the institutions of Christianity, its churches, administrations, and schools.¹²⁶ He argued that Hitler and the Nazi regime dealt with the Catholic and Protestant churches in a variety of ways: in signing a Concordat with the Catholic Church, and in attempting the subversion and coordination (*Gleichschaltung*) of the German Protestant churches. Unlike histories of the immediate post-war era, Conway's work examines moments of acquiescence and even collaboration among the German churches to the Nazi dictatorship, along with

¹²⁵ Conway, "Historiography of the German Church Struggle," 226; see Hans Müller, *Katholische Kirche und Nationalsozialismus* (Munich: Nymphenburger Verlagshandlung, 1963); and Gordon Zahn, *German Catholics and Hitler's Wars* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1962). Conway argues that this challenge to the Catholic Church was in part motivated by the fear of a recurrence of "political Catholicism" in West Germany.

¹²⁶ Ericksen and Heschel, "German Churches Face Hitler," 434.

examples of opposition and resistance. Conway's comprehensive study treats the Catholic as well as Protestant Church, and carefully demonstrates how these were not monolithic institutions, but that even within them tensions mounted about how to deal the Nazi persecutions: to go along to get along, to stay neutral, or to resist and risk dissolution.¹²⁷ He concludes that church leaders were deeply concerned to preserve their own institutions, and that this goal undermined their willingness to challenge the Nazi regime and its ideology more forcefully.¹²⁸

As a result of the work of historians in the late 1950s and 1960s, the term *Kirchenkampf* (Church Struggle) came under closer scrutiny.¹²⁹ Bäumgärtel argued that naïve notions of the Confessing Church being a staunchly oppositional movement to the Nazi regime were “myths of the church struggle.”¹³⁰ In the immediate post-war historiography the phrase was used to signify the German churches' struggle against Nazi interference in ecclesiastical matters as well as more severe forms of persecution, such as the harassment and imprisonment of religious men and women. But by the 1960s, this definition became increasingly problematic because it implied a unified stand among the churches—both Protestant and Catholic—against Nazi aggression. It implied a unity that did not exist – not only among Protestants and Catholics, but even between Protestants themselves. Historians redefined this phrase to highlight the rival factions within the German churches over the problem of how to deal with the Nazi regime: the Catholic

¹²⁷ See Ericksen and Heschel, “The German Churches Face Hitler,” 434.

¹²⁸ Conway, *Nazi Persecution of the Churches*, 331.

¹²⁹ See Conway, *Nazi Persecution of the Churches*, xxv-xxvi; Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 47-49; and Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 11-14.

¹³⁰ Friedrich Bäumgärtel, *Wider die Kirchenkampf-Legenden* (Neudettelsau: Freimund, 1959); see also Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 12.

Church signed a Concordat Hitler's regime; the German Christian movement wished to align Christianity with Nazi ideology; the Confessing Church protested the Nazi regime's infringements on church governance and anti-Christian theology and practice; but most Protestant churches remained neutral and reluctantly acquiesced to the demands of the Nazis, hoping to preserve the rights, ministries, and traditions of the Church.¹³¹ As Doris Bergen writes, "The so-called church struggle was less an expression of political opposition to Nazism than a competition for control within the Protestant church."¹³²

In this dissertation, I will follow Conway's example and use the term "Church Struggle" in both senses, to signify not only the German churches' stance towards the Nazi regime, but also to reference the conflicts within the German churches themselves.¹³³ Throughout the dissertation I will emphasize how the Confessing Church sermons reveal a confrontation between, on the one hand, Christianity and National Socialism as competing belief systems and, on the other hand, Christians within the churches who vehemently disagreed about the influence of the Nazi regime and Nazism in shaping church doctrine and practice.

Ultimately, the result of the disunity among the German churches, and among the Confessing Church itself, is that Christians throughout Germany failed to stand united against the National Socialist state and confront its persecution of the Jewish people and others deemed "undesirable." As previously mentioned, Gerlach's monograph, *And the Witnesses were Silent*, argues that the pastors of the Confessing Church failed to provide

¹³¹ Conway, *Nazi Persecution of the Churches*, 331.

¹³² Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 12.

¹³³ Conway, *Nazi Persecution of the Churches*, xxviii-xxx.

a unified front against the Nazis and, most damning, and did not oppose the ghettoization, deportation, and extermination of the Jews. The reality was that Christians in Germany did not change their views of the Jews when the Nazis came to power; even prior to the Nazi rise to power. In fact, “most Germans saw the Jews as objects of either damnation or evangelization.”¹³⁴ In other words, they failed to understand Jews as Jews in their own terms. Gerlach criticizes the German churches for failing to act decisively, in unity, and with theological insight at a time when it should have provided greater moral guidance. As convincing as his arguments are, his analysis largely ignores sermons as a source base. Just how much opposition, resistance, or dissent can we find in the weekly sermons of Confessing Church pastors?

Continuing with our discussion of the history of the historiography of the German churches, a third shift occurred in the 1990s when historians shied away from a comprehensive analysis of the German churches, and instead emphasized the diversity of its members, their actions, and their motivations. Historians stressed that the Confessing Church cannot be understood as a monolithic movement, and began to narrow their focus to specific groups and their impact on the Church Struggle. The best of these approaches is Victoria Barnett’s superb work, *For the Soul of the People*, essentially a people’s history of the Confessing Church, an examination of the diversity of its members and those sympathetic to the movement.¹³⁵ She makes excellent use of oral histories, demonstrating not only the moral courage of many pastors and church leaders in

¹³⁴ Wolfgang Gerlach, *And the Witnesses were Silent: The Confessing church and the Persecution of the Jews*, translated and edited by Victoria Barnett (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000).

¹³⁵ See also Theodore Thomas’ *Women against Hitler: Christian Resistance in the Third Reich* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1995).

opposing the Nazi dictatorship, but also the complexity of Confessing Church responses, including simultaneous membership in the Nazi Party.¹³⁶ “The only thing all Confessing Christians had in common,” Barnett argues, “was their opposition to the absolute demands of Nazi ideology on their religious faith.”¹³⁷ Barnett highlights the problems that pastors had in trying to remain steadfast in their commitment to their churches and the gospel, but also to give due loyalty to the state.

Most relevant to this dissertation is Barnett’s argument that pastors’ religiously-motivated protests against Nazi infringements in church affairs often had considerable political implications – they could be persecuted as disloyal to the state, even if they considered themselves unequivocally loyal.¹³⁸ Throughout my analysis of Confessing Church sermons I will explore the profound political implications of a pastor’s religious language spoken in the context of a totalitarian regime. For example, we might expect a pastor’s comment that the Jews are the people of God to undermine the Nazi’s campaign of antisemitism, and that such a comment would land the pastor in trouble with the authorities – regardless of his politics.

The historiography of the Church Struggle coincides with broader trends in the historiography of the Nazi dictatorship. From the end of World War II and into the 1950s, historians in West Germany such as Friedrich Meinecke and Gerhard Ritter took a defensive posture in regard to the Nazi era, arguing that Nazism was an aberration in an otherwise healthy development of the German state.¹³⁹ The crimes of Nazi Germany

¹³⁶ Ericksen and Heschel, “The German Churches Face Hitler: Assessment of the Historiography,” 447.

¹³⁷ Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 5.

¹³⁸ Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 92.

¹³⁹ Kershaw, *Nazi Dictatorship*, 6. See for example, Friedrich Meinecke, *Die deutsche Katastrophe*

were attributed largely to the “demonic” figure of Adolf Hitler, whose desire for war, conquest, and the extermination of the Jews led to catastrophic defeat.¹⁴⁰ The historiography of the Nazi dictatorship entered a new phase in the early 1960s with the publication of Fritz Fischer’s *Griff nach der Weltmacht*, published in 1961, which argued that the belligerent and imperialist war aims of Germany’s elites were evident in the First World War, well before the aggressions of Adolf Hitler.¹⁴¹ The “Fischer Controversy” marked a shift in methodology by a younger generation of German historians, from a reliance upon traditional historicism to social science, and signaled a more critical response to the Nazi era.¹⁴² As Richard Evans points out, “The Third Reich appeared not as the negation of German nationalist historical traditions but as their culmination.”¹⁴³ This trend continued into the 1970s with developments in the “new social history,” or “historical-social science” approach, which sought to integrate structural history concepts and to prioritize the history of society and its institutions above the history of politics.¹⁴⁴ For example, the work of historian Hans-Ulrich Wehler emphasized the continuity of social structures in Imperial Germany to the Nazi dictatorship, again demonstrating that Nazism was no aberration or accident.¹⁴⁵ This emphasis on social history opened new

(Weisbaden, 1946); and Gerhard Ritter, *Europa und die deutsche Frage. Betrachtungen über die geschichtliche Eigenart des deutschen Staatsdenkens* (Munich: Münchener Verlag, 1948).

¹⁴⁰ Richard Evans, *In Hitler’s Shadow: West German Historians and the Attempt to Escape from the Nazi Past* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1989), 11-12.

¹⁴¹ Kershaw, *Nazi Dictatorship*, 7. See Fritz Fischer, *Griff nach der Weltmacht* (Düsseldorf, 1961).

¹⁴² Evans, *In Hitler’s Shadow*, 113-114.

¹⁴³ Evans, *In Hitler’s Shadow*, 113-114.

¹⁴⁴ Kershaw, *Nazi Dictatorship*, 7.

¹⁴⁵ Evans, *In Hitler’s Shadow*, 115; Kershaw, *Nazi Dictatorship*, 8. See for example, Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Das deutsche Kaiserreich, 1871-1918* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1973).

avenues to explore the activities, memberships, and structures of societal institutions such as the German churches.¹⁴⁶ The latest phase in the historiography began in the early 1990s, coinciding with the unearthing of new archival sources in Soviet-bloc nations, and which focused on examining the persecution of Jews and others deemed “undesirable” by the Nazi dictatorship, as well as exploring the nature and pervasiveness of antisemitism (and anti-Judaism) in German society.¹⁴⁷ In short, as might be expected, the broader historiography of the Third Reich corresponds to similar trends in the historiography of the German churches: we have seen defensive responses challenged by critical approaches; a turn to social history and the “everyday” experiences and responses of Germans living under the Nazi dictatorship; and also a desire to understand the ubiquity of prejudice that made the Holocaust possible.

National Socialism as a Political Religion

Now that we have traced the contours of the historiography of the German churches’ approaches toward the Nazi regime, let us move on to discuss the relationship between Christianity and National Socialism as a religious ideology or a political religion.¹⁴⁸ The Nazi regime’s approach to Christianity in the Third Reich has been a

¹⁴⁶ See Ernst Christian Helmreich, *The German Churches under Hitler: Background, Struggle, and Epilogue* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1979); Klaus Scholder, *Die Kirchen und das Dritte Reich. Band I. Vorgeschichte und Zeit der Illusionen, 1918-1934* (Frankfurt am Main: Ullstein, 1977); Kurt Meier, *Der Evangelische Kirchenkampf* (Halle (Saale): Max Niemeyer, 1976).

¹⁴⁷ Richard Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich* (New York: Penguin, 2003), xxix. Among the many works that can be cited in this period, a few stand out: Michael Burleigh and Wolfgang Wippermann, *The Racial State: Germany 1933-1945* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Peter Longerich, *Politik der Vernichtung: Eine Gesamtdarstellung der nationalsozialistischen Judenverfolgung* (Munich: Piper, 1998); and Hans Mommsen, *Alternative zu Hitler: Studien zur Geschichte des deutschen Widerstandes* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2000).

¹⁴⁸ See Robert Pois, *National Socialism and the Religion of Nature* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1986);

subject of much controversy spanning each of the three phases of the historiography. Recent research has challenged the prevailing view that the Nazi regime sought the eventual eradication of Christianity, demonstrating instead that the regime's creation of a unified Reich Church would have preserved an institution worth "coordinating," and to be used as an instrument in unifying the German Reich.¹⁴⁹ Yet a common point of agreement is that the Nazi regime presented in many ways a competing ideology and value system inimical to the traditions of the German churches. Nazism was an ideology that, according to its proponents, demanded the same allegiance as Christianity.¹⁵⁰ Churches are institutions that preserve and spread Christianity, which is a religion that demands the allegiance of one's whole self—body, soul and mind. As we will see in the following chapters, many Confessing Church members were convinced that the two belief systems necessarily conflicted. Hitler and the Nazi officials despised Christianity because it was a competitive belief system "that spanned the centuries and embraced all

Friedrich Heer, *Der Glaube des Adolf Hitler: Anatomie einer politischen Religiosität* (Munich: Bechtle, 1968); J.P. Stern, *Hitler: The Führer and the People* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975); Manfred Ach and Clemens Pentrop, *Hitlers "Religion"* (Munich: Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Religions- und Weltanschauungsfragen, 1977); George Mosse, *The Nationalization of the Masses: Political Symbolism and Mass Movements in Germany from the Napoleonic Wars through the Third Reich* (New York: H. Fertig, 1975); Hans-Jochen Gamm, *Der braune Kult: das Dritte Reich und seine Ersatzreligion* (Hamburg: Rütten und Loening, 1962); Klaus Vondung, *Magie und Manipulation: ideologischer Kult und politische Religion des Nationalsozialismus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1971); Sabine Behrenbeck, *Der Kult um die toten Helden: Nationalsozialistische Mythen, Riten und Symbole* (Vierow: SH-Verlag, 1996).

¹⁴⁹ Steigmann-Gall, *Holy Reich*, 188-89.

¹⁵⁰ See Littell, *German Phoenix*, 3; and John S. Conway, "The German Church Struggle: Its Making and Meaning," in *The Church Confronts the Nazis: Barmen Then and Now*, ed. by Hubert Locke (New York: The Edwin Mellon Press, 1984), 135; Michael Burleigh, *The Third Reich: A New History* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000), 253-255; and Siegfried Hermle, "Predigt an der Front: Zur Tätigkeit der Kriegspfarren im Zweiten Weltkrieg," in *Blätter für württembergische Kirchengeschichte* (Verlag Chr. Schleufole in Stuttgart, 2002), 145, 155. Helmut von Moltke, the leader of the Christian oppositional group, the Kreisau Circle, wrote in his last letter to his wife before execution that the "decisive pronouncement" at his trial was: "Count Moltke, Christianity and we National Socialists have one thing in common, and one thing only: we claim the whole man"; quoted in Robertson, *Christians against Hitler*, 118.

men under a doctrine of equality before God.”¹⁵¹ The Nazi intention, therefore, was to manipulate the churches as social and cultural institutions to serve Nazi ideology. As expected, Confessing sermons contain evidence of this battle of ideologies as pastors sought to dissuade their congregants of Nazi ideology and values.

As we will see in the following chapters, Confessing Church pastors often attacked National Socialism as a political religion and also at other times as neo-paganist. On the one hand, they would condemn the Nazis for worshiping another savior or seeking redemption through service to the Third Reich, and yet on the other hand, they would also warn their congregants of the Nazis’ emphasis on Nordic mysticism and the idolization of blood, race and nation.¹⁵² This evidence confirms Steigmann-Gall’s claim that the Nazi movement advanced two often competing ideological strands: first, “positive Christianity,” a vague, watered-down Christianity that was consistent and compatible with Nazism; and second, paganism, or neo-paganism, a pure Germanic religion capable of directly connecting the individual to God, without interfering priests or churches. These two strands shaped the religious sentiment of the Nazi movement and appealed to a broad swath of the German public. In this dissertation, I will demonstrate how Confessing pastors responded to the religious claims by Hitler and the Nazis as if they were antagonistic and incompatible with Christianity, and further, a threat to the German Protestant churches.

¹⁵¹ Conway, *Nazi Persecution of the Churches*, 328.

¹⁵² In the Christian tradition, the term “redemption” means simply “deliverance from some evil by payment of a price,” and this “price” has commonly been understood as the death of Christ on the cross. See J.D. Douglas, ed., et. al., *New Bible Dictionary, Second edition* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 1982), 1013.

This historiography is extensive, and so in the following discussion I will focus attention specifically on works concerning the Nazi appropriation of Christian religious language in an effort to appeal to the German masses, to inspire them to back Hitler and his policies, to support the war effort, and even to eliminate Jews from the German nation.¹⁵³

Before the beginning of the Second World War and the start of the mass murder of Jews and other “undesirables” throughout Europe, the keen observer of human behavior and language, Victor Klemperer, noticed the religious tone of political discourse in the Third Reich. In his work, *The Language of the Third Reich*, first published in 1947, he reflects on the unique qualities of language under the Nazi dictatorship, and argues that Hitler and the Nazi propaganda machine utilized “a language of faith because

¹⁵³ See Emilio Gentile, “The Sacralization of Politics: Definitions, Interpretations and Reflections on the Question of Secular Religion and Totalitarianism,” translated by Robert Mallett, *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 1, no. 1 (2000), 18-55; *Totalitarismus und Politische Religionen: Konzepte des Diktaturvergleichs*, edited by Hans Maier and Michael Schäfer, 3 vols (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1996, 1997, 2003); Philippe Burrin, “Political Religion: The Relevance of a Concept,” *History and Memory* 9, no. 1 (1997), 321-349; Michael Burleigh, “National Socialism as a Political Religion,” *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 1, no. 2, (2000), 1-26; Richard Steigmann-Gall, “Nazism and the Revival of Political Religion Theory,” *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 5, no. 3, (2004), 376-396; Emilio Gentile, “Political Religion: A Concept and its Critics – A Critical Survey,” translated by Natalia Belozertseva, in *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 6, no. 1 (June 2005), 19-32; Klaus Vondung, “National Socialism as a Political Religion: Potentials and Limits of an Analytical Concept,” in *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religion* 6, no. 1 (June 2005), 87-95; Milan Babik, “Nazism as a Secular Religion,” in *History and Theory* 45, no. 3 (Oct. 2006), 375-396; Emilio Gentile, “Fascism, Totalitarianism and Political Religion: Definitions and Critical Reflections on Criticism and Interpretation,” translated by Natalia Belozertseva, in *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 5, no. 3 (Winter 2004), 326-375; Hans Maier, “Political Religions and their Images: Soviet Communism, Italian Fascism and German National Socialism,” in *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 7, no. 3 (September 2006), 267-281; Richard J. Evans, “Nazism, Christianity and Political Religion: A Debate,” in the *Journal of Contemporary History* 42, no. 1 (January 2007), 5-7; Stanelly Stowers, “The Concepts of ‘Religion,’ ‘Political Religion’ and the Study of Nazism” in the *Journal of Contemporary History* 42, no. 1 (Jan. 2007), 9-24; Hans Maier, “Political Religion: a Concept and its Limitations,” in *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 8, no. 1 (March 2007), 5-16; Richard Steigmann-Gall, “Christianity and the Nazi Movement: A Response,” in the *Journal of Contemporary History* 42, no. 2 (April 2007), 185-211; Richard Steigmann-Gall, “The Nazis’ ‘Positive Christianity’: a Variety of ‘Clerical Fascism?’” in *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religion* 8, no. 2 (June 2007), 315-327.

its objective was fanaticism,” despite the Nazi persecution of the German churches.¹⁵⁴ He found it strange that Germans of “average intelligence” or better, both intellectuals and the working man, “believed in” Hitler as the savior of the German nation, that is, they trusted in him to deliver the German nation from the throes of defeat in World War I and the economic chaos of the 1920s to inaugurate an age of triumph.¹⁵⁵ The Nazis appropriated the Christian concepts of martyrdom, rebirth (or resurrection), the eternal, savior, redeemer, divine sonship, mission, Providence, and millennial kingdom. In the following chapters I will examine the Christian and Nazi meanings of these concepts, but for now suffice it to say that this language was prevalent and a key ingredient to Nazi propaganda. Klemperer goes so far as to write that “Nazism was accepted by millions as gospel because it appropriated the language of the gospel.”¹⁵⁶

Klemperer hits on a common theme that the Confessing Church pastors express in their sermons, that the Nazis’ and German-Christians’ use of this religious language is a smoke-screen for an anti-Christian religious ideology. Confessing Church pastors challenged the religious claims of Nazi ideology in their sermons, and in doing so, directly opposed the regime itself; in other words, the pastors re-oriented their congregations to understand Nazi claims as contrary to Christian tradition. Klemperer is correct to assert that that religious language and concepts matter and can carry profound importance, particularly in a context of ideological struggle. Words form and fashion the individual, and they have a power of their own. As he writes, “[Nazism] permeated the

¹⁵⁴ Victor Klemperer, *The Language of the Third Reich: A Philologist's Notebook*, translated by Martin Brady (New York: Continuum, 2008), 103.

¹⁵⁵ Klemperer, *The Language of the Third Reich*, 99-102.

¹⁵⁶ Klemperer, *The Language of the Third Reich*, 110.

flesh and blood of the people through single words, idioms and sentence structures which were imposed on them in a million repetitions and taken on board mechanically and unconsciously.”¹⁵⁷

Let us step back for a moment and consider why the Nazi appropriation of Christian religious language occurred. As Christianity had been in decline in the later-nineteenth century and through the end of the First World War, many Europeans experienced a dramatic loss of meaning.¹⁵⁸ As one historian writes, “One of the most momentous and durable legacies of the Great War was that it disrupted and disorganized the prevailing web of meaning through which Western societies made sense of their world.”¹⁵⁹ To fill the vacuum and thus appeal to the masses, totalitarian movements of the 1920s – such as Benito Mussolini’s National Fascist Party and Hitler’s National Socialist movement – created new rituals, symbols, ideologies, and even deities.¹⁶⁰ As Milan Babik writes, “Often non-Christian or anti-Christian in their ideological content, totalitarian movements nonetheless furnished new objects of worship by elevating worldly, political entities (state, nation, race, class) to the level formerly occupied by the transcendent idols of Christianity.”¹⁶¹ Thus, National Socialism replaces spiritual redemption with racial redemption; the Christian gospel with a Nazi gospel; and Jesus

¹⁵⁷ Klemperer, *The Language of the Third Reich*, 14.

¹⁵⁸ See Frank Furedi, *First World War: Still No End in Sight* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014); Benjamin Lazier, *God Interrupted: Heresy and the European Imagination between the World Wars* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008) xi, 3-5; George Mosse, *Masses and Man: Nationalist and Fascist Perceptions of Reality* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1987), 172-174.

¹⁵⁹ Furedi, *First World War*, 14-15.

¹⁶⁰ Babik, “Nazism as a Secular Religion,” 375-396.

¹⁶¹ Babik, “Nazism as a Secular Religion,” 378.

with Hitler as the savior of the German people. We should keep in mind, however, that just because a political organization utilizes religious metaphors and rituals to achieve utilitarian goals, this does not signify a “true” religion legitimated by sincere belief.¹⁶² The proponents of this religious language could be utilizing it simply to manipulate the masses.

And so amid the political and economic troubles of the post-First World War years, Hitler and the Old Guard Nazis utilized dramatic religious language – that of a coming apocalypse, a glorious millennial kingdom, and the “purifying” Germany of Jews – to coincide with the populace’s need for social harmony: these were promises for a better future.¹⁶³ As David Redles argues, “Nazi millennialism was a pervasive aspect of the movement and...it was rooted in the very real social changes that occurred in Weimar Germany, change that affected not only the Nazi elite but also the population at large.”¹⁶⁴ This resulted in an “apocalyptic complex”: Hitler believed the “Evil Other,” the Jews, had led Germany into chaos, and that by the time of the Weimar period, Germany had reached the proverbial fork in the road: one way led to eternal salvation and the other led to eternal damnation.¹⁶⁵ Thus, “the apocalyptic complex constructs a sense of order in differing ways, and one way is to bring meaning to chaos, by explaining it either as the vengeance of a righteous god or as the evil machinations of a satanic antigod and its

¹⁶² Gentile, “Political Religion: A Concept and its Critics – A Critical Survey,” 19-32.

¹⁶³ Redles, *Hitler’s Millennial Reich*, 45.

¹⁶⁴ Redles, *Hitler’s Millennial Reich*, 12.

¹⁶⁵ Redles, *Hitler’s Millennial Reich*, 45. The term “salvation” simply means “rescue.” This is an example of the Nazis appropriating Christian theological terms for propagandistic uses. In the context of the New Testament, this term refers to rescue from death. See J.D. Douglas ed., et al, *New Bible Dictionary, Second Edition* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 1982), 1057.

earthly dominions...For Hitler and the Nazis, the fear of apocalypse was interpreted in racial terms.”¹⁶⁶ According to National Socialist ideology, the world needed to be redeemed from the domination of the Jews – the source of evil – and thus Hitler and the Nazis, in “murderous rage” set out to eradicate this evil, leading to the extermination of the Jews.¹⁶⁷ Only in this way could Germans be free. This is what Saul Friedländer refers to as “redemptive anti-Semitism.”¹⁶⁸ The Nazis then utilized millennial language to express their own self-understanding, prejudices, and vision for the future; religiously-infused words, such as messiah (or savior), Reich, destiny, faith, annihilation, and salvation, were commonly used to express the apocalyptic complex.¹⁶⁹ Some may rightly question the sincerity or extent of Hitler’s and the Nazis’ millennial and apocalyptic beliefs.¹⁷⁰ After all, one may argue that they used millennial language in a utilitarian, manipulative sense, appealing to the German masses. Nevertheless, they did use this language and the German people took them seriously, prompting the critical response of Confessing Church members.

The followers of the National Socialist movement, morally unmoored by the catastrophe of the First World War and economic instability of the Weimar period, and still searching for meaning, adopted a new faith with tenets that seemed familiar. Thus,

¹⁶⁶ Redles, *Hitler’s Millennial Reich*, 45.

¹⁶⁷ Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews: Vol. 1*, 3.

¹⁶⁸ Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews: Vol. 1*, 3.

¹⁶⁹ Redles, *Hitler’s Millennial Reich*, 5.

¹⁷⁰ The main problem with Redles’ argument is the reliance on evidence that historians dispute as questionable or unreliable, such as August Kubizek’s *The Young Hitler I Knew* and Hermann Rauschnigg’s *Hitler Speaks*.¹⁷⁰ Redles admits that this evidence cannot be relied upon for “traditional objective history,” but contends that it is essential to understanding “the subjective world of Nazi millennial myth” and how Hitler communicated his ideas.

they swapped Christ for “the farcical figure of Hitler.”¹⁷¹ The Nazis redefined the sacred, adjusting values and morality accordingly, knowing that the German people needed to believe in something and, considering the decline of faith among Christians, developed their own sacred history and “theology” to fill the faith gap. Michael Burleigh argues, “While Nazism claimed scientific authority for its ideological mélange, it is essential to grasp that the allegedly scientific facts of blood, race and the reharmonisation of mankind with nature were literally sanctified.”¹⁷² The Nazis developed a new belief system designed to compete for the faith and loyalty of the German people. As Burleigh concludes, they successfully “pitch[ed] politics to a still religious audience.”¹⁷³

Yet it is important to point out that the religious language that Hitler and the Nazis used to express their vision for Germany was accepted by the German people because it was based on a Christian frame of reference.¹⁷⁴ Nazi speeches on salvation, redemption, apocalypse, and millennial reign reverberated in Germany because this language is steeped in the Christian tradition. Many Christians did not necessarily believe that National Socialism was atheistic or pagan, but that it actually shared some values with the German traditions of Christianity, notably nationalism and anti-Judaism.¹⁷⁵ The “positive Christianity” of National Socialists was a vague, diluted Christianity that was consistent and compatible with Nazi ideology.¹⁷⁶ Key Nazi leaders

¹⁷¹ Michael Burleigh, *The Third Reich: A New History* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000), 3.

¹⁷² Burleigh, *The Third Reich*, 253.

¹⁷³ Burleigh, *The Third Reich*, 255.

¹⁷⁴ Steigmann-Gall, *Holy Reich*, 3.

¹⁷⁵ Steigmann-Gall, *Holy Reich*, 3-6.

¹⁷⁶ Steigmann-Gall, *Holy Reich*, 262.

such as Joseph Goebbels, Dietrich Klagges, Walter Buch, and even Hitler himself, expressed admiration for facets of Christianity and even “appropriated Christ, not just as a socialist or antisemite, but as the original socialist and antisemite.”¹⁷⁷ The Nazi leadership was not concerned with church dogma, but in ending sectarianism by emphasizing Christian principles that Germans – both Catholics and Protestants – could accept.¹⁷⁸ For this reason they established the unified Reich Church led not by pagans, but Christians. In a nation that was 97% Christian, the Nazi Party could not afford to alienate Christians, and instead attempted to negotiate a common ground based on German religious traditions.

My research will demonstrate that Confessing Church pastors saw beneath the veneer of Nazi religious language, and argued that the National Socialist belief system was deeply antagonistic, even contradictory, to Christianity. While Nazi leaders may have appreciated certain aspects of Christianity, the Confessing Church pastors perceived them and their German-Christian supporters as anti-Christian and as enemies of the German churches. This debate strikes right at the heart of the disputed nature of Christian identity in Nazi Germany. In the sermons of the Confessing Church we sit in the front row seat of a heated debate on the question of Christian identity amid confrontations with the pro-Nazi German Christian movement.

¹⁷⁷ Steigmann-Gall, *Holy Reich*, 50; see also Susannah Heschel’s most recent work, *The Aryan Jesus: Christian Theologians and the Bible in Nazi Germany* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), in which she examines in depth the Institute for the Study and Eradication of Jewish Influence on German Religious Life, a government-sponsored and church-supported institute dedicated to eradicating Jewish influence from Christianity.

¹⁷⁸ Steigmann-Gall, *Holy Reich*, 51.

Confessing Church pastors perceived the German Christian movement's "nazification" of Christianity as a heretical syncretism, or a blending of religious or ideological belief systems. The German Christian movement attempted to reform traditional Christianity for a new age by adapting it to the National Socialist ideology. In this sense, I agree with the Italian scholar Emilio Gentile, a leading historian on totalitarian movements and political religions, and his argument that

Modern political movements are transformed into secular religions when they: (a) define the meaning of life and ultimate ends of human existence; (b) formalize the commandments of a public ethic to which all members of these movements must adhere; and (c) give utter importance to a mythical and symbolic dramatization in their interpretation of history and reality, thus creating their own 'sacred history,' embodied in the nation, the state or the party, and tied to the existence of a 'chosen people,' which were glorified as the generating force of all mankind.¹⁷⁹

As the National Socialist Party gained influence and power in the 1920s and early 1930s, a minority of Christians became increasingly aware that its totalitarian claims, the claims on the whole person, conflicted with those of Christianity, which demands total and uncompromising loyalty. As I will demonstrate, the Confessing Church argued with varying degrees of conviction and intensity for the incompatibility between the two worldviews. Because National Socialism demanded the same allegiance as Christianity, one either had to combat one or the other as a competitive ideology, or demonstrate their compatibility.

In response to the historiography briefly reviewed here, I will demonstrate in the following chapters that Confessing Church pastors responded to the religious and

¹⁷⁹ Gentile, "Political Religion: A Concept and its Critics – A Critical Survey," 19-32.

irrational claims by Hitler and the Nazis as if it were indeed a political religion, and thus, a competing belief system to Christianity. Confessing Church pastors did not debate whether or not National Socialism was a political religion, but took seriously Nazi claims that contradicted or undermined Christian theology and practice. For example, pastors heard Nazi propaganda proclaiming Hitler as a savior and the Third Reich as a pure and glorious thousand year millennial kingdom—whether Nazis believed it or not—and responded with their own counter-claim of Christ as savior and the coming and present reality of the kingdom of God. Therefore, this dissertation will advance the argument for National Socialism as a political religion only insofar as at least one segment of the German population, the Confessing Church clergy, responded to it as a competing system of faith (that is, trust *in* Hitler and his Third Reich).

In trying to understand this oppositional or dissenting aspect of these sermons, we need to accomplish several tasks in this analysis. First, significant religious concepts must be identified in the texts and differentiated to determine the frequency and form of expression. Second, evidence in the sermon may indicate that the pastor is responding, on some level, to the political and social (and not just the religious) context of the time by preaching Christian concepts over and against National Socialist or German Christian concepts—such as the nature of Christian love, the identity of a savior, or the possibility of redemption. Third, the tone and frequency of expression may indicate the intensity of ideological or religious conflict, and thus one should expect periods of high and low intensity to coincide with events of religious or political importance, such as the establishment of a unified Reich Church or the debate on the Aryan Paragraph in 1933.

In a sense, the Confessing Church sermons reveal a battle of words, of concepts, and this discloses the nature and purpose of the Confessing Church.

Response of the Confessing Church to Jewish Persecution

The third historiographical theme, in addition to the nature of the German churches' opposition to the Nazi regime and the conception of National Socialism as a political religion, is the debate about the responses of the Confessing Church to the Nazi persecution of the Jews. How did the pastors' beliefs about and perceptions of the Jews and Judaism affect their approach in combating National Socialist intrusion in ecclesiastical affairs, and also their confrontation with Nazism as a political religion that advanced an understanding of the Jews as inferior? In the late 1940s and through the 1950s, as previously discussed, historians such as Wilhelm Niemöller emphasized the Confessing Church as a resistance movement, and as part of this resistance, participated in protests against Nazi persecution of the Jews.¹⁸⁰ Bonhoeffer and Martin Niemöller were held up as heroes in this regard. But as historians such as Conway revealed the complexity of responses to the Nazi state, so also they began to take a new look at how the Confessing Church helped or ignored their Jewish neighbors. Church historians began to look to Christian theology to explain this lack of action, even the lack of words in opposition. A leading figure, Frank Littell of Temple University, writes in *The Crucifixion of the Jews* (1975) that Christians in Nazi Germany by and large were influenced by a traditional anti-Judaic Christian theology that impaired their ability to

¹⁸⁰ Wilhelm Niemöller, *Kampf und Zeugnis der Bekennenden Kirche* (Bielefeld: Bechauf, 1948).

help their neighbors in need. He writes, “The record of most theologians and churchmen, in England and America, as well as in the Third Reich, was confused and weak where not outright wicked. The conduct of the masses of baptized Christians covered the scale from enthusiastic apostasy to accommodation.”¹⁸¹ This argument has found wide agreement since. In 1990 the historian Marjike Smid studied the responses of German Protestants to Nazi racial policy and found that they hardly ever protested against Nazi persecution of the Jews, Bonhoeffer being the only exception.¹⁸² Christian anti-Judaic theology “numbed” Christians to Jewish suffering, and became a hindrance for them to stand up and protest the Nazi dictatorship, to act on behalf of their Jewish neighbors.

Despite all these arguments, the debate has focused on institutional responses, such as the publication of open letters, ecclesiastical pronouncements or, indeed, a confession of faith, as occurred at Barmen in 1934. And the debate has focused on the protests of some remarkable, but in no sense representative figures, such as Bonhoeffer, whose resistance meant execution, or Martin Niemöller, a pastor and the co-founder of the Pastors’ Emergency League, later to become the Confessing Church. He did not join a conspiracy to assassinate Hitler or seek to overthrow the Nazi regime; instead, as we will see in Chapter 3, he used his talents as a preacher to criticize the Nazi persecutions of Christians from the pulpit, as well as expose the German Christian movement and Nazism itself as anti-Christian. As a result he was arrested on 1 July 1937, tried before a

¹⁸¹ Franklin Hamlin Littell, *The Crucifixion of the Jews* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), 45; see also R.T.C. Gutteridge, *The German Evangelical Church and the Jews, 1879-1958* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976).

¹⁸² Marjike Smid, *Deutscher Protestantismus und Judentum 1932/1933* (Munich: 1990). See also Ericksen and Heschel, *The German Churches Face Hitler*, 452.

“Special Court” in March 1938, which fined but freed him. Nevertheless, immediately upon release the Gestapo re-arrested him as a personal prisoner of Hitler and he was sent to the concentration camps at Sachsenhausen and later Dachau, where he survived the war. As we will see, his story reveals just how much a pastor can stir up controversy from the pulpit and disturb Nazi officials.

The historiography to date has focused attention almost exclusively on leaders like Niemöller and Bonhoeffer and the institutions they served. The concentration has been on German church leaders’ actions of public opposition against the Nazi dictatorship: resisting the Nazi “coordination” of the German churches and the ensuing church struggle of 1933; efforts to stop the euthanasia program; protests against the 9/10 November 1938 pogrom; and the consistent persecution of Jews, and particularly Protestants of Jewish descent, in Nazi Germany.

This attention on extraordinary individual acts of opposition is deserved, but I wish to take a novel approach and show how rank and file pastors at times challenged the domination of the Nazi dictatorship in the routine service and worship of the German churches. Historians have neglected sermons as a source base in trying to understand how pastors of churches large and small, famous or obscure, presented the Jews and Judaism to their congregations, as well as how they addressed the Nazi persecution. This dissertation will demonstrate that Confessing Church pastors responded in a variety of ways from their pulpits, including opposition to Nazi racial policy and the persecution of the Jews, though they certainly did not consistently protest with the passion or conviction that might have led to a groundswell of opposition to the Nazi dictatorship. In this study

we will see how pastors used the language of the Christian tradition to present a unique form of opposition to the Nazis.

Preaching in Nazi Germany

The historiography of preaching in the Nazi dictatorship is exceedingly sparse. In my view there are several reasons for this lack of attention on sermons in this period. First, when investigating the response of the church to the difficult problems of its age, historians generally tend to focus on the leaders of the church – its popes, bishops, and theologians – and their pronouncements and activities, or on the institution of the church in relation to the state and other social institutions. In such cases, the sermons of a parish priest do not carry the import and influence as, for example, the encyclicals of a pope. Second, as the clergy is scattered over the entire nation, so also are their sermons; the time and energy required to locate and gather the sermons makes it impractical and costly to use them as the predominant source in an historical study. Third, the bombardment and subsequent invasion of Nazi Germany by the Allies resulted in the loss of sermon manuscripts. As I was to learn, this meant that sermons of leading figures, like Gerhard Jacobi of the Gedenkniskirche in Berlin, may have been lost from the historical record. Fourth, reading sermons as historical texts is an interdisciplinary approach that requires a unique skill set, one that combines historical analysis with theological study; simply put, few are prepared or willing to undertake the challenge. Fifth, sermons are difficult to categorize, and thus difficult to approach methodologically. Sermons are works of literature that tell stories and relate sacred history, and that include literary devices such as metaphor and hyperbole. But they are also occasional speeches that encourage, advise,

challenge and inspire. I think historians often have a difficult time figuring out just what to do with these sources and wherein their historical value lies. And lastly, the study of sermons is very often complicated by the absence of responses from the congregation and society at large. While we have the sermons, we do not often find the responses of men and women sitting in the pews; and this sense, sermon analysis is akin to listening in to one side of a telephone conversation. These are a few reasons why historians have been unable or reluctant to utilize this source base.

Having said this, outstanding examples do exist that demonstrate just how valuable sermons can be as a primary source. The Israeli scholar Walter Zvi Bacharach's *Anti-Jewish Prejudices in German-Catholic Sermons* (2000) offers a short, yet provocative exploration of the role of nineteenth century German-Catholic sermons in the development of the mindset that made the Holocaust possible. He examines themes such as how Catholic clergy, through their sermons, portray Jews in the Bible and in contemporary times; the relationship between Judaism and Christianity; and the recurring theme of the "inhuman Jew: the antichrist, the eternal Jew, the Pharisee." Sermons are delivered in every town, at least every Sunday of every week, and to rural and city folk alike. If one wants to learn what messages the Catholic Church delivered to its congregations, sermons are the most useful, prevalent, and illuminating source base. Bacharach concludes that though we cannot say that the Catholic Church sanctioned or agreed with the National Socialist program of genocide, we may argue that Catholic theology as expressed and disseminated in sermons throughout Germany a hundred years prior, greatly contributed to the prevailing view that Jews were inferior, criminal,

spiritually corrupt, and thus deserving of divine punishment.¹⁸³ Bacharach contends that by the time the Hitler and the Nazis came on the scene, German Catholics were already in a sense prepared for the expulsion of Jews from German life.

A more recent example, and one that actually treats sermons from the Nazi period, is Siegfried Hermle's 2002 superb article "Predigt an der Front: Zur Tätigkeit der Kriegspfarrer im Zweiten Weltkrieg," published in *Blätter für württembergische Kirchengeschichte* (2002). He insightfully describes the roles, activities, and battlefield ministries of the German chaplain –both Catholic and Protestant alike – and the conditions in which they served in the Second World War. Hermle notes that chaplains conducted services wherever they could, in churches, when available, but most often in the field, in abandoned houses, bunkers, parks, and cinemas. But most interesting for the purposes of this dissertation is Hermle's treatment of battlefield sermons, taking a close look at Württemberg chaplains and their surviving sermons, nearly 210 in all. He explores the variety of themes they preached, including the person and work of Christ, the benefits of prayer, endurance in a time of war, and models of faith, such as St. Francis of Assisi. Oftentimes, he asserts, chaplains had to toe a fine line in preaching the deity of Christ and his total claims upon humanity and at the same time servicing to a totalitarian state that demanded complete loyalty.¹⁸⁴ Hermle does not quantify the frequency of these themes, but he opens the debate about the content and the nature of sermons delivered under the Nazi dictatorship.

¹⁸³ Bacharach, *Anti-Jewish Prejudices in German-Catholic Sermons*, 130-133.

¹⁸⁴ Siegfried Hermle, "Predigt an der Front: Zur Tätigkeit der Kriegspfarrer im Zweiten Weltkrieg," published in *Blätter für württembergische Kirchengeschichte* (Verlag Chr. Schleufele in Stuttgart, 2002), 145, 155.

While Bacharach and Hermle both present convincing arguments on the whole, their analysis of sermons generally neglects several key features, specifically the identity and background of the priest or pastor, and also an examination of the biblical texts used as a basis for the sermons. Though it would be difficult or impossible at times to investigate the background of an obscure parish priest, some attempt should be made to understand his social and religious commitments, and perhaps, the political activities of clergy. Likewise, the historian may notice signs of intimacy, informality, or even agenda if the location of the sermon is revealed to be a small rural parish as opposed to a city cathedral. The context in which these sermons were delivered can shed light on the content of sermon, providing insight that might otherwise be lost. But a more perplexing omission in their treatment is any discussion of the biblical text as the basis for the sermon. By evaluating which source texts and themes are most common, we may gain insights into the values that Confessing Church pastors sought to affirm in their sermons. The sermon is an attempt to speak to a contemporary audience on the basis of the biblical texts, and in this sense, it is important for the historian to pay careful attention to how the two relate.

Lastly, the authors give no indication about how often key terms or phrases appeared in the sermons. For example, how many sermons contained antisemitic (or anti-Catholic or anti-Protestant) remarks? And just how prevalent are some of these key terms in the sermons of the period? Are the sermons focused on only a small geographical area or scattered throughout the nation? In this dissertation I will examine not only the sermon itself, but try to provide the theological and, if possible, the historical and social context as well.

But before we delve into the Confessing Church sermons themselves, it is first necessary to provide a theological and historical background of the sermon as a vital mode of religious expression. What is a “sermon” and what is its role in the Christian tradition, particularly in early twentieth century Germany? To what extent did the political and, more to the point, spiritual crises after the First World War influence German theology and the theory of preaching (homiletics)? Why did the Confessing Church break from the German Evangelical Church under the Nazi dictatorship, and why was preaching so important in this dispute? We turn to these critical questions in the third chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

“The Church Must Remain the Church”: The Historical and Theological Background of the Confessing Church

As a witness to Christ, the sermon is a struggle with demons.
Every sermon must overcome Satan. Every sermon fights a battle.

—Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Finkenwalde Seminary, 1937¹⁸⁵

In April 1935, after two years serving as a pastor of a German congregation in London – and making important ecumenical contacts that would prove invaluable during World War II – Dietrich Bonhoeffer decided to return to Germany and accept the directorship of a new Confessing Church preacher’s seminary in the village of Zingst (which later moved to Finkenwalde). Due to the rise to dominance of German-Christian theologians at the older and highly regarded seminaries at Loccum, Wittenberg, and the Cathedral Seminary of Berlin, the Confessing Church leadership established new seminaries to prepare candidates for ordination.¹⁸⁶ The 29-year old Lutheran pastor guided the academic and spiritual formation of 23 seminarians this first year, teaching the young men theology, the fundamentals of ministry, and the art of preaching, among other subjects. And in their worship services together, Bonhoeffer would often preach, as he did on 24 November 1935, the Sunday of the Dead (*Totensonntag*), the last Sunday before Advent when the Church remembers the Christian departed.

¹⁸⁵ Clyde Fant, *Bonhoeffer: Worldly Preaching, With Bonhoeffer’s Finkenwalde Lectures on Homiletics* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1975), 133.

¹⁸⁶ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 420.

Bonhoeffer preached from the New Testament *Book of Revelation*, a warning to his students in the seminary at Finkenwalde to beware of the infamous persecutors of the church, the beast and Babylon:

Babylon, the Anti-Christ, who defies the crucified Lord by his own power, who destroys the people with blasphemous and seductive words, as the harlot who makes her victim drunk with strong wine, so as to bemuse and confuse and seduce him with all kinds of devilries and godless splendors. Babylon, whom the people idolize, love, all unaware that they are walking unconsciously into the net. Babylon, who longs for nothing but subservience, sex, and drunkenness, which take away their senses and lead men to wild passions. Who would venture to say of this Babylon, that it will not last, but will fall! With what nervousness must the Christian community, who will not be citizens of this state, who must live and suffer outside of it, look upon that city from the outside! With what prayers must they earnestly pray for it, pray for its downfall! Who is Babylon? Was it Rome? Who is it today? We are not prepared to risk an answer to that question yet? Not because we are afraid of men! But the church does not yet know. And yet it sees frightful things beginning to unfold. And now, the voice from heaven, the message of joy, for the community of believers, is heard: 'Fallen! Fallen! Is Babylon the Great!'¹⁸⁷

To the seminarian aware of Nazi persecutions of the German churches and clergy, Bonhoeffer offers a new perspective to alleviate any anxiety and fear. According to an interpretation of the events recounted in *Revelation*, the beast and Babylon may run amok for a time, but the end of history is already written and they will certainly fall. Thus, Bonhoeffer's message is ultimately one of hope and courage to the Christians living under the National Socialist state: trust in the sure judgment and deliverance of God.

Conspicuously absent from Bonhoeffer's homily is any explicit mention of Adolf Hitler, the National Socialist state, or Nazi persecutions of the German churches. Just

¹⁸⁷ Edwin Robertson, ed., *Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Christmas Sermons*, translated by Edwin Robertson (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan), 113.

months prior the regime arrested 700 pastors of the Confessing Church for reading at the pulpit a denunciation of the Nazi ideologue Alfred Rosenberg's book *Myth of the Twentieth Century*, a text to be taught in classrooms.¹⁸⁸ But Bonhoeffer's students could not have failed to make the connection between the persecuted Christians of ancient Rome and themselves under the Nazi dictatorship, or for that matter, between the "beasts" of these two empires, Nero and Hitler. Yet Bonhoeffer was careful not to make too bold an identification; he simply posed the questions. His protest was not predominantly motivated by a political disagreement over Nazi ideology, but rather by Nazi persecution against Christians who wished to remain true to their faith. Particularly noteworthy is the absence of any mention of Jewish persecution. Bonhoeffer did not stir his congregation to resistance, but roused them to conscientious reflection about the spiritual nature of Germany's leader and government. Just two years later, in 1937, the Nazi regime banned Confessing Church seminaries, including Finkenwalde, driving them underground, and prohibited the organization from giving theological exams to seminarians.¹⁸⁹ Now officially engaging in criminal activity as director and theologian of an underground seminary, Bonhoeffer would continue to serve at Finkenwalde until the outbreak of World War II, when military mobilizations emptied the halls and transformed seminarians into soldiers.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁸ Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 80; and Gerlach, *And the Witnesses Were Silent*, 80.

¹⁸⁹ This law was officially known as the Himmler Decree of August 1937. See Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 87.

¹⁹⁰ Edwin Robinson, editor and translator, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Christmas Sermons* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 126. In fact, it was at Finkenwalde in 1938 when Bonhoeffer began his involvement with the resistance. See my discussion in Chapter 4 on his resistance activities.

Bonhoeffer's Sunday of the Dead sermon is a striking example of a characteristic theme of homiletics, the poignant connections between the sacred past, the uncertain present, and the eschatological hope of a better future.¹⁹¹ He encourages his congregation, challenges them, inspires and perhaps frightens them. Bonhoeffer, or any other pastor for that matter, would not speak this way to a passerby on the street, or a student in the classroom or a neighbor in the city square, but he chooses to do this in the context of the church, from the height of the pulpit, and in the form of a sermon. The sermon is a sacred art form in the Christian tradition, displaying richness in language, symbols, and images, drawing on the ancient biblical texts to speak to the present for the purposes of moral instruction, edification, and admonition of the community of faith.

In the context of Nazi Germany, the sermon for the Confessing Church became a means – though sadly under-utilized – of opposition and as a tool to assert its identity as the true German Protestant Church, that is the Church that remained faithful to the Christian scriptures and the Reformation confessions.¹⁹² As I will demonstrate in this chapter, the institutionalization of the Confessing Church in the context of Nazi Germany marks a distinctive turning away from the natural theology upheld in the tradition of liberal theology, the dominant theological tradition in Protestant Germany at the time.¹⁹³

This stance was in clear opposition to the pro-Nazi German Christian movement that

¹⁹¹ Homiletics refers to the art or craft of preaching, and a homiletician is one who explores and examines this art of preaching. Eschatology refers to the “study of the end times” in Christian theology.

¹⁹² See “Constitution of the German Evangelical Church, 11 July 1933,” in *The Third Reich and the German Churches: A Documentary Account of Christian Resistance and Complicity During the Nazi Era*, edited by Peter Matheson (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1981), 24; and Robertson, *Christians against Hitler*, 48-50.

¹⁹³ Natural theology is an approach to understanding the nature of God through rational and empirical evidence, rather than simply through the Christian scripture. See Sinclair Ferguson and David Wright, eds., *New Dictionary of Theology* (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 452-454.

wished to unite National Socialism and its pseudo-scientific and racist worldview with traditional Christianity – a religion that explicitly denies the significance of race.¹⁹⁴

Unlike the German Christian movement, the Confessing Church held fast to the Hebrew biblical texts as an integral part of the Christian biblical texts and they unequivocally rejected any form of revelation in contradiction to them, including racial theory, religious feeling, experience, or a providential interpretation of history. In other words, for Confessing Church pastors one must judge natural theology against the standard of biblical texts; if they contradict, one must always affirm the biblical text over against the natural theology. And this gave Confessing Church pastors a foothold, if they wished to exploit it, to criticize the German Christian movement and Nazi ideology.

Given this focus on the biblical texts as the single most important source of revelation, Confessing Church pastors took preaching seriously as a fundamental means by which revelation is shared in Protestant Christianity and as the primary means for the church to influence German society under the rule of the Nazi dictatorship. In this context the practice of preaching became the basis for public acts of dissent and religious opposition.

In this chapter I will underscore the importance of the developments in homiletics in the early- to mid-twentieth century, which had a profound effect on the pastors of the Confessing Church and their sermons. The church historian Hughes Oliphant Old has argued that Confessing Church pastors “recast Protestant preaching in the course of their

¹⁹⁴ A well-known biblical text is from the Apostle Paul’s letter to the Galatians 3:28: “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.” Unless otherwise indicated, all biblical quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version.

resistance,” and that “[this] was probably the most important event in the history of twentieth-century preaching.”¹⁹⁵ But even before 1933, the theologian Karl Barth recognized a shift in Protestant homiletical theory away from the dominant liberal theology of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and towards neo-orthodoxy, that is, as we will discuss later in more detail, a move “that rejected the notion that historical investigation could provide absolute certainty as to the events recorded in scripture, upon which scholars had hoped to build secure theology...[and] it renounced the attempt to make man’s experience of God a starting-place for theology.”¹⁹⁶ I will examine the precise nature of these changes in homiletics that enabled the Confessing Church to utilize the sermon as a “weapon,” or at least a tool of dissent, opposition, or political resistance.¹⁹⁷

The thesis of this chapter is that in the Nazi period Confessing Church pastors and theologians re-evaluated the demands of the gospel in this time of great social and political upheaval, and developed a homiletics that emphasized three significant points. The first point is an adherence to the biblical texts as the sole authority of the church, as opposed to the centrality of the pastor as mediator between the people and the biblical texts. Second, preaching is an instrument of sanctification in the world, or even a

¹⁹⁵ Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church, volume 6, the Modern Age* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 759.

¹⁹⁶ Ferguson, et. al., *New Dictionary of Theology*, 456; see also Karl Barth, *Homiletics*, 42-43. Peter Berger’s concise definition of “neo-orthodoxy” is useful: “Neo-orthodoxy is the reaffirmation of the objective authority of a religious tradition after a period during which that authority had been relativized and weakened.” See Peter Berger, *The Heretical Imperative: Contemporary Possibilities of Religious Affirmation* (New York: Anchor Press, 1979), 79. Also, as a matter of clarification, the meaning of “scripture” in this context and throughout this dissertation refers to the Christian scripture, which includes the Old (or First) Testament and the New (or Second) Testament.

¹⁹⁷ Peter Berger argues that “Insofar as there was resistance to Nazism in German Protestantism, neo-orthodox...was the ideology of that resistance.” See Berger, *The Heretical Imperative*, 73.

“weapon” to fight the spiritual battles of the time. And third, the Church must affirm the use and value of the Hebrew Bible in Christian preaching.

This chapter will lay a necessary groundwork for an in-depth analysis of sermons under the Nazi dictatorship. Thus, we will begin with a brief discussion of the history and character of preaching as a distinctive practice of Christians dating since the Second Temple period in ancient Palestine. Then we will explore the developments of German homiletics, beginning with the father of German liberal Protestantism Friedrich Schleiermacher and his emphasis on feeling and religious experience, and proceed to the critiques of the great twentieth century Swiss Reformed theologian and pastor Karl Barth, and also the German theologians Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Wolfgang Trillhaas. Lastly, we will examine the founding of the Confessing Church as a movement in opposition to the German Christian movement and aspects of Nazi ideology, highlighting the significance of preaching to the identity and purpose of the Church itself.

A Short Theology of Preaching

As Luther reminds us, the foundational objectives of preaching are “to feed the soul, make it righteous, set it free, and save it.”¹⁹⁸ Sermons provide the spiritual nourishment that conveys righteousness, liberation, and salvation. In the centuries since the rise of Christianity as an imperial religion in the age of Constantine, Christians have

¹⁹⁸ Martin Luther, “The Freedom of a Christian,” in *Three Treatises*, translated by W. A. Lambert and revised by Harold Grimm (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), 280. My aim here is to paint a picture of the theological world of the preacher in the Nazi period, to highlight some of the key theological terms, concepts, and movements that have critical importance for the Confessing Church. It is important to note that Christianity has a wide variety of expressions and emphases, and that this presentation is meant as a general introduction to the period, not as a conclusive statement of Christianity.

often focused on the spiritual benefits of hearing and heeding the gospel: a cleansed conscience, a sense of belonging to the family of God, and the experience of rebirth. But while spiritual burdens may be lifted, it leaves unchallenged the political, social, and religious powers that dehumanize people and legitimize oppression. In the history of the Church preachers have employed the sermon to liberate and save the soul from a variety of oppressive systems. On the one hand, the sermon has the potential to serve an inward, or spiritual, purpose, and on the other hand, to also serve an external, social and political purpose as well.

The Christian practice of preaching has its roots in the tradition of the Second Temple synagogue. The Gospel of Luke tells the story of Jesus' inauguration into ministry. Immediately after Jesus' baptism and his spiritual testing during forty days in the wilderness of Judea, he returned north to Galilee and began to teach in the synagogues, and even in his hometown of Nazareth. It is here in the context of Jewish worship that we find the earliest account of preaching in the New Testament:

When [Jesus] came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found his place where it was written:

'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.'

And he rolled up the scroll, and gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, 'Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing' (Luke 4:16-21).

According to Luke, Jesus preached in Nazareth to his family, friends, and neighbors with divine authority and with the purpose of permanently changing the lives of others for the better.¹⁹⁹ As exemplar, Jesus' sermon set the standard of liturgical, exegetical, and prophetic preaching that continues in Christian communities of faith.

This episode clarifies a few elemental characteristics of a Christian sermon. First, the sermon is a spoken form of address.²⁰⁰ If it is true, as Luther claims, that preaching is about the liberation and salvation of the soul, it is most helpful to convey this message in person, face to face, and to allow the freedom of expression to enhance the sermon's persuasiveness. The sermon relies upon tone, pace, inflection, and emphasis, elements that are unique to verbal communication as opposed to written or non-verbal communication. The great nineteenth century German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, though a harsh critic of Christianity, singled out for praise the quality and eloquence of the preached word in his day: "In Germany the preacher alone knew what a syllable weighs, or a word, and how a sentence strikes, leaps, plunges, runs, runs out; he alone had a conscience in his ears..."²⁰¹ Nietzsche underscores the distinctiveness and artistry of preaching as a verbal form of persuasive address.

Second, the sermon always occurs in a religious context, whether this is within a community of faith or is delivered to others for the purpose of including them in the

¹⁹⁹ Yngve Brilioth, *A Brief History of Preaching*, translated by Karl Mattson (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1965), 10.

²⁰⁰ See for example, David Buttrick, *Homiletic: Moves and Structures* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 23-25; Paul Scott Wilson, *Concise History of Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992), 17-19; and Thomas Oden, *Pastoral Theology: Essentials of Ministry* (New York: Harper Collins, 1983), 127-129.

²⁰¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: A Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, translated by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 1984.

community of faith (i.e. conversion).²⁰² Preaching can take place anywhere, at any time, and can be delivered to anyone. Jesus preached to his fellow Jews in a synagogue, claiming that the prophecies of Israel's prophets had been fulfilled in his coming.²⁰³ The Apostle Paul preached the gospel to the Greeks on Mars Hill. The anonymous author of the Letter to the Hebrews composed his sermon to be read aloud to Christian communities scattered throughout the Mediterranean. The key point here is that the content of preaching is the revelation understood to be contained in the biblical texts, and this makes the form of speech predominantly religious in nature, though it may indeed have political, social, and economic significance.

Third, the sermon is based upon the biblical texts, the sacred texts of the Jews and Christians.²⁰⁴ The preacher interprets the biblical texts as divine revelation, as God's own self-disclosure in history. The preacher endeavors to show how the biblical texts might be relevant and meaningful for the present day. Jesus, in the synagogue in Nazareth, interpreted the book of the Prophet Isaiah in the context of his own ministry and proclamation of God's salvation. While the preacher may include in his or her sermon other means of knowing God, such as personal experience, religious feeling, or a providential reading of history, the reliance upon the biblical texts as a basis of proclamation remains definitional for preaching.

²⁰² See Buttrick, *Homiletic*, 23-25; Wilson, *Concise History of Preaching*, 17-19; and Oden, *Pastoral Theology*, 127-129.

²⁰³ See for example, Matthew 4:14-30.

²⁰⁴ See Buttrick, *Homiletic*, 23-25; Wilson, *Concise History of Preaching*, 17-19; and Oden, *Pastoral Theology*, 127-129.

At this point we should say more about the content of preaching, the “gospel” itself. In the New Testament the “gospel” refers to the proclamation that the kingdom of God has come, that liberation and salvation are available to the captives of any affliction, as demonstrated in the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus.²⁰⁵ In the context of Imperial Roman domination of Palestine this message of a small Jewish sect was indeed, literally, “good news” because it signified God’s grace and deliverance of the whole person. For the Christian, the gospel message has the power to undermine all forms and systems of oppression. The captive may be liberated not only from spiritual oppression, but political, social, and economic oppression as well. At the heart of the gospel message, and of critical importance, particularly in the context of political oppression, is the phrase “kingdom of God” (also referred to as the “kingdom of Heaven”), a concept that derived from the Jewish apocalyptic tradition. As the theologian Chrys Caragounis argues, in the New Testament this phrase refers to “God’s sovereign, dynamic and eschatological rule” that was “imminent and potentially present in [Jesus] rather than a vague future hope, being inextricably connected with his own person and mission.”²⁰⁶ According to the Gospel of Mark, Jesus’ first act of public ministry was to proclaim the good news that the kingdom of God has come: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe in the good news” (1:15). Jesus proclaimed that one must turn from competing allegiances or systems and align oneself with God’s

²⁰⁵ Craig Broyles, “Gospel (Good News),” in the *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, edited by Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, and I. Howard Marshall (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 282.

²⁰⁶ Chrys Caragounis, “Kingdom of God/Kingdom of Heaven,” in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, 417. The phrase “kingdom of Heaven” is unique to the Gospel of Matthew, a text directed at Jewish Christians.

kingdom rule and values. This message has continued throughout the history of the Church.

The central message of Jesus necessarily meant a turning away from the kingdom of Caesar and towards the kingdom of God. Understood in the historical context of imperial Rome, the gospel is a revolutionary message that has profound political, social, economic, as well as personal spiritual implications. It was a message to join in the work of bringing God's justice and equality to reform the political and socio-economic injustice in this world. As Jesus taught his followers to pray: "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10, KJV). The gospel means that Caesar loses his popular epithets, "lord," "son of God," "savior," "king of kings," and "lord of lords," and the bringer of peace; the early Christians transferred all these designations to Jesus of Nazareth.²⁰⁷ The Gospel of Luke tells of the angel proclaiming the good news to the shepherds upon Jesus' birth: "Do not be afraid; for see – I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord" (2:10-11). Jesus proclaimed that the coming of God's kingdom demanded repentance, a turning from the unjust and inequitable political and socio-economic power structures of Rome, and towards a reorientation of values and allegiance to God.

When reading sermons from the past or present, including those of the Nazi era, one frequently comes across the phrase "Word of God," and thus this phrase is in some need of clarification. This phrase has two specific references. First, it refers to the

²⁰⁷ Marcus Borg, *The Heart of Christianity: Rediscovering a Life of Faith* (New York: HarperOne, 2003), 136.

“Word of God” transmitted, preserved, and passed down in the Jewish and Christian canons.²⁰⁸ These are the words, for example, that God spoke to Moses, the prophets, Jesus, and the apostles. The preacher’s task is to explore how these words might speak to the relevant issues of the day. Second, the “Word of God” refers to the person of Jesus of Nazareth. For example, the prologue of the Gospel of John identifies Jesus as the Word, the second person of the Trinity: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being” (1:1-3). The Christian tradition has identified Jesus with the Wisdom of God which can be seen in the events and words recorded in the books of the Hebrew and Christian biblical texts. The preacher proclaims the “Word of God” in the sense that he or she preaches Christ’s ministry, death, and resurrection in correspondence with the biblical texts.

In Protestant Christianity the preacher has great freedom to express the gospel as he or she believes will be most effective, besides the parameters just mentioned. No single standard of sermon organization or presentation exists.²⁰⁹ One need only witness the preaching of a Lutheran pastor on one Sunday morning and a Pentecostal pastor on the next to realize the wide range of styles and forms of delivery of sermons within the Christian tradition. Throughout the history of the Church, preachers have preached their sermons in a variety of ways, from reading manuscripts, referring to notes, or delivering them extemporaneously. The sermon may be located anywhere in the liturgy of a worship service, depending on the ecclesiastical tradition, and it may or may not be

²⁰⁸ Buttrick, *Homiletic*, 115.

²⁰⁹ See Buttrick, *Homiletic*, 319.

accompanied by communion. However, the sermon is invariably preceded and followed, at some point, by prayers of thanks and petition regarding the particular circumstances of a given faith community.

The Theological Roots of the Intra-Church Conflict

A critical moment came for the history of the churches in Germany when Adolf Hitler and the National Socialist German Workers' Party came to power in January 1933. This is not simply because they faced a regime inimical to Christianity; Christians through the centuries have learned to grow and even thrive under unfavorable political and social circumstances – the ancient Church under the Roman Empire is an excellent example. Instead, the problem for the churches in Nazi Germany was that Christians themselves could not agree about the compatibility between National Socialism and Christianity, and subsequently, about how the German churches should engage with the Nazi regime and its ideology. As I discussed in the previous chapter, the great “Church Struggle” in this period is perhaps best understood as that between Christians themselves, not simply between the German churches and the Nazi regime.

The Christians most enthusiastic about National Socialism belonged to the German Christian movement. Three main currents contributed to the growth of this movement.²¹⁰ In the late 1920s, two Thüringen pastors and Nazi party members, Siegfried Leffler and Julius Leutheuser, preached a combination of nationalism and religious renewal, and they named themselves “German Christians.” Another group

²¹⁰ Doris Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 5.

sprouted up in Berlin in the summer of 1932, headed by the Nazi Gauleiter of Brandenburg, Wilhelm Kube. Consisting mainly of pastors, politicians, and a concerned laity, they hoped to revitalize the German Protestant churches by harnessing the popularity of Nazi ideology. They too called themselves “German Christians.” Lastly, a variety of small and disconnected Protestant associations throughout Germany emerged in the 1920s that appealed to German culture in an effort to revive the Protestant churches. These three groups found common cause under Nazi support and joined together to transform German Protestant Christianity from within.

A newly amalgamated “Faith Movement of the ‘German Christians’” published its “Guiding Principles” on 6 June 1932, a “living Confession” designed to inspire sincere “believing Germans” to achieve a thorough reformation of the Church consistent with Nazi ideology.²¹¹ This document is a call to a unified Protestant State Church “that will express all the spiritual forces of our people.”²¹² This is to be a national Church, in service of a “national mission” to battle against Marxism, Freemasonry, the Jews, and any interfering international powers.²¹³ It calls members of the German Christian movement to a “heroic piety” like that of Luther, and to make the Church once again a “vital force” in rebuilding the German nation: “We want our Church to be in the forefront of the crucial battle for the existence of our people.”²¹⁴ In a succinct statement that highlights the German Christian movement’s close association with National

²¹¹ “The Guiding Principles of the Faith Movement of the ‘German Christians’,” translated by Cochrane in *The Church’s Confession under Hitler*, 222-23; 82.

²¹² Cochrane, *Church’s Confession under Hitler*, 222.

²¹³ Cochrane, *Church’s Confession under Hitler*, 222.

²¹⁴ “Guiding Principles,” in Cochrane, *Church’s Confession under Hitler*, 222.

Socialism, the “Guiding Principles” states: “We see in race, folk, and nation, orders of existence granted and entrusted to us by God. God’s law for us is that we look to the preservation of these orders.”²¹⁵ The document does not make any apparent attempt to support these aims with scriptural evidence, to reconcile them with contradictions in Christian theology, or even to gain their formal approval by the German Protestant Church – all necessary tasks if this were in fact a true confession of the Church in the historical sense.

Nevertheless, the German Christian movement emerged as the prominent church faction among Protestants when the Nazis came to power in 1933, and solidified its position in the Protestant church elections in July. Hitler and the Nazi leadership encouraged Protestants to vote for representatives of the German Christian movement on the ballot, no doubt planning the “coordination” of the Protestant churches; in a landslide, German-Christians won two-thirds of the vote in July 1933.²¹⁶ As Bergen concludes, “Affirmed by the biggest voter turnout ever in a Protestant church election and soon ensconced in the bishops’ seats of all but three of Germany’s Protestant regional churches, in mid-1933 the movement seemed unstoppable.”²¹⁷ Given the success of the movement, Hitler took the opportunity to attempt the unification of the German Protestant Churches under one umbrella, the *Reichskirche*, and he selected Ludwig Müller, a German Christian pastor, as candidate for the office of the first Reich Bishop.

²¹⁵ “Guiding Principles,” in Cochrane, *Church’s Confession under Hitler*, 222-223.

²¹⁶ See Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 5; Michael, *Holy Hatred*, 173; Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 34; and Kirk, *Nazi Germany*, 109.

²¹⁷ Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 5.

We will pick up the story of the controversy over the July 1933 elections shortly, but for now suffice it to say that the German Christian movement became more influential than ever before. The best figures we have for membership in the movement total approximately 600,000 by the mid-1930s.²¹⁸ Laypeople greatly outnumbered clergy in terms membership; in fact, only one third of the 18,000 Protestant clergy belonged to the movement.²¹⁹ This means that only 1% of the total German-Christian membership were clergymen. Though we do not have figures for the proportion of men and women members, “accounts from the Confessing Church and from state and party offices consistently show that, contrary to German Christian claims [that it was a ‘manly’ movement], women outnumbered men at the movement’s events, often by a wide margin.”²²⁰ So, while the movement boasted only some 600,000 self-identified members (which was only about 2 percent of the Protestant population in Germany), it still managed to exert a disproportionate influence over German churches and communities throughout the twelve years of the Nazi Dictatorship. And though the movement lost some popularity in late 1933, the movement still managed to advance a popular blend of Christianity and Nazi ideology from the pulpit throughout the Nazi era.

At this point let us pause to consider the question whether the German Christian movement might accurately reflect the anti-Judaism or antisemitism in the Protestant churches since the days of the Protestant Reformation. As previously discussed, elements in the Christian tradition stemming all the way back to its scriptures present the Jews as

²¹⁸ Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 7. According to Bergen, this figure was accepted by the movement itself, the Nazi regime, and even the movement’s opponents.

²¹⁹ Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 178.

²²⁰ Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 73

“Christ-killers” and as an accursed people.²²¹ Is the development of the German Christian movement a logical outgrowth of a Christian tradition with ancient anti-Judaic roots?

While the German Christian movement latched onto anti-Judaic or antisemitic elements in the Protestant tradition, the movement actually so transformed the theology, practice, and ethics of Christianity through the racial principle of “Aryan” supremacy that it substantively altered the meaning and message of Christianity. In other words, the movement engaged in a process of changing the fundamental elements of Christianity, transforming the religion into a Nazi-based organization. In fact, to many Christians in Nazi Germany, the German Christian movement was “barely recognizable as Christian.”²²²

Let us first consider the theological adaptations of the German Christian movement. Fundamentally, the movement denied the “universal claims of Christianity,” and instead insisted that claims of redemption and salvation are limited to the scope of the *Volksgemeinschaft*.²²³ The movement sought to “de Judaize” Christianity, to discard the Hebrew Bible, overhaul the New Testament, and even revise Christian hymns.²²⁴ For example, to the German-Christian, Jews cannot convert to Christianity and be welcomed into the German Christian movement; race restricts acceptance. Furthermore, the German Christian movement argued that the doctrine of the German churches must take

²²¹ Michael, *Holy Hatred*, 17, 34.

²²² Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 2.

²²³ Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 45; Michael, *Holy Hatred*, 175.

²²⁴ Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 143.

second place to the unity of the German people; an emphasis on doctrine leads to theological disputes, which then results in disunity.²²⁵ The German Christian movement shifted their sources of authority from the tenets of the Christian faith and scripture to the Nazi state and racial convictions.²²⁶ In short, the German Christian movement was theologically “hollow,” having whittled out the doctrines of the faith.²²⁷

In addition to its revisions of Christian theology, the German Christian movement also transformed Christian practice. Yet the German churches had long tradition of established practices and regulations. “In the established Protestant church of Germany in the 1930s and 1940s, regulations specified to whom services and sacraments could be offered.”²²⁸ The German Christian movement considerably revised these regulations. We find in the German Christian movement pastors who would hold confirmation classes and yet not conclude with an examination or a rite to include the teenagers as members in the church – and they did this to attract more youth participants.²²⁹ We find examples of pastors who violated regulations prohibiting funerals for non-Protestants when family members wanted to bury a lapsed Protestant or a Catholic according to the Protestant rite.²³⁰ They married couples outside the Protestant faith, and permitted pastors to preach and perform sacraments without theological education or ordination.²³¹ The

²²⁵ Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 46. Bergen even asserts that “Once searches their utterances in vain for any attempt to grapple with theological concerns that have shaped Christian discourse since the time of Paul” (p. 45).

²²⁶ Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 47.

²²⁷ Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 45.

²²⁸ Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 183.

²²⁹ Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 188.

²³⁰ Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 187.

²³¹ Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 183.

militarist style of the German Christians manifested in changes in the appearance of some of the clergy – the “black jacket, riding breeches, and knee-high boots” – as well as provocations in outbursts and violence in church meetings with oppositional factions (whether Confessing Church members or neutrals). The results of the consistent violation of Protestant church regulations was, as one presbytery in in the village of Soest described, “the weakening and crumbling [of] the order of the church.”²³²

If the German Christian movement did not accurately represent the theological and ecclesiological elements of Christianity, can we argue that its anti-Judaic or antisemitic foundation represents the tradition of the Protestant church? Given the virulent prejudice of some early reformers, especially Martin Luther, this is a legitimate question that demands consideration.

Antisemitism is not expressed in the Reformation Confessions (or statements of belief that pastors must accept and preach), such as the Augsburg Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, or even non-German confessions like the English Westminster Confession. Thus, these prejudices are not a foundational tenet in traditional Protestantism. In other words, “Lutheran pastors, who are bound to adhere to the teachings of the Lutheran Confessions, were not instructed to be anti-Semitic.”²³³ And yet, antisemitic expressions are evident in the earliest of Reformation texts.

It will be useful in this discussion to consider how pastors of the German churches – both in the German Christian movement and the Confessing Church – interpreted

²³² Quoted in Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 187.

²³³ Eric W. Gritsch, *Martin Luther's Anti-Semitism: Against His Better Judgment* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2013), Kindle Edition, location 1109.

Luther's views of Jews and Judaism. Recent historiography has explored in depth the complexity of Luther's views of the Jews, ranging from mild philosemitism in early works such as *That Jesus Christ Was Born a Jew* (1523), affirming Jesus in his Jewish context, to the virulent and *On the Jews and Their Lies* (1543). Evident in Luther's work is both non-rational and irrational prejudice against Jews.²³⁴ Understanding Christian anti-Jewish prejudice in terms of non-rational and irrational prejudice can help us untangle some of the confusions and misunderstandings in applying the terms anti-Judaism and antisemitism.²³⁵

While irrational thought conflicts with rational empirical observation, such as accusations of blood libel or Jewish racial inferiority, for example, non-rational thought does not conflict with rational empirical observation and can be used along together with it.²³⁶ Non-rational thought is the language of faith and art and literature. As one historian writes, “‘non-rational’ characterizes ‘anti-Judaism,’ based on non-rational symbols at the heart of religion, such as the ‘cross’ with its special Christian meaning; non-Christians view it in nonreligious terms.”²³⁷ Another example of non-rational prejudice against the Jews would be the accusation that God has punished the Jews throughout history for “killing Christ”; until after World War II the Jews were a people without a state and at

²³⁴ Christopher Probst, *Demonizing the Jews: Luther and the Protestant Church in Nazi Germany* (Bloomington: Indiana University, 2012), 12. Probst follows Gavin Langmuir's methodology described in his books *History, Religion, and Antisemitism* (Berkeley: University of California, 1990); and *Toward a Definition of Antisemitism* (Berkeley: University of California, 1996); see also Lindemann and Levy, *Antisemitism*, Kindle edition, 1684.

²³⁵ See Langmuir, *Toward a Definition of Antisemitism*; Langmuir, *History, Religion, and Antisemitism*; and Probst, *Demonizing the Jews*.

²³⁶ See Langmuir, *History, Religion, and Antisemitism*, 152, 252-255; Michael, *Holy Hatred*, 82-84.

²³⁷ Gritsch, *Martin Luther's Antisemitism*, Kindle edition, location 349; see also Probst, *Demonizing the Jews*, 4.

the mercy of their home governments and people. This non-rational belief of God's punishment is based upon a theological interpretation of the biblical text and a particular reading of history. On the other hand, irrational thinking "is boundless and defies any 'proof' for reality."²³⁸ The historian Albert S. Lindemann contends that irrational prejudice against the Jews is characterized by an "emotionally-fraught fantasy."²³⁹ He expertly draws the distinction between non-rational and irrational prejudice.

But that fantasy is typically intertwined with elements of more accurate or concrete perceptions. It is obviously not a fantasy to say that Jews reject Christ as well as peculiarly Christian messages of universal redemption. Such perfectly accurate observations, it may be noted, provide us already with enough to explain the sometimes raging hostilities of the two groups. Christian sects have murdered one another by the thousands for less. But the further step of asserting that all Jews hate all Christians (or vice versa) is unwarranted by the evidence. To push the matter to a logical and revealing extreme, it is complete fantasy to say that Jews kill children for their blood to use in matzos at Passover.²⁴⁰

Recent historiography has examined evidence of the German churches in the Nazi era and concluded that we find overwhelmingly non-rational prejudice in Confessing Church sources as opposed to irrational prejudice; and conversely, in German Christian movement sources, we find overwhelmingly irrational prejudice.²⁴¹ In other words, the German churches broke along the lines of prevailing non-rational and irrational prejudice against the Jews, and obviously both of these lines have continued since the earliest days of the Protestant Reformation and the work of Martin Luther. Thus, we can conclude that

²³⁸ Gritsch, *Martin Luther's Antisemitism*, Kindle edition, location 354.

²³⁹ Lindemann, *Anti-Semitism before the Holocaust*, 10.

²⁴⁰ Lindemann, *Anti-Semitism before the Holocaust*, 10.

²⁴¹ Probst, *Demonizing the Jews*, 170-175.

the German Christian movement represents the continuation of the irrational elements that emerged from Luther's Protestantism.

Recent historiography has also shed light on how the German Christian movement and the Confessing Church used the conceptions of Martin Luther in formulating their approaches to Jews and Judaism, especially in regard to the expressions of anti-Judaic and antisemitic prejudice.²⁴² Those in the German Christian movement uncritically read his works and held up Luther as not simply a great reformer, but a hero of Germany; they ignored Luther's writings that spoke positively of the Jews, or that encouraged love towards them.²⁴³ Luther's writings accuse the Jews of laziness, stubbornness, thievery, usury, blasphemy against Christ and his mother Mary, as well as ritual murder and poisoning wells – revealing both non-rational and irrational prejudices.²⁴⁴ The literature of the German Christian movement “is overwhelmingly laden with strident attacks on Jews based on irrational conceptions about them.”²⁴⁵ Jews are called the “scum of mankind,” a “pernicious power,” and a “Volk-disintegrating power”; they pull the strings of world politics and finance – they are “international” or “world” Jewry.²⁴⁶

Keeping the history antisemitism and the rise of the German Christian movement in mind, it is important to acknowledge a few crucial points. First, German-Christians

²⁴² Probst, *Demonizing the Jews*.

²⁴³ See Probst, *Demonizing the Jews*, 143; and Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 28, and 74.

²⁴⁴ See Probst, *Demonizing the Jews*, 55; Gritsch, *Martin Luther's Antisemitism*, Kindle edition, location 648, 771.

²⁴⁵ Probst, *Demonizing the Jews*, 142; Gritsch, *Martin Luther's Antisemitism*, Kindle edition, location 309.

²⁴⁶ Probst, *Demonizing the Jews*, 142.

failed to appreciate the complexity of how the Jewish people are presented in the New Testament. They latched onto the negative statements that reveal religious prejudice, such as the belief that “the Jews” are guilty of the crime of deicide and that as a result they are an accursed people.²⁴⁷ And yet at the same time members of the German Christian movement failed to appreciate the most basic of statements and teachings from the Christian scriptures about the Jewish people, such as the teaching that “salvation” comes from the Jews, or that the nations of the world will be blessed through the Jews. The German Christian movement couldn’t even countenance the Jewish background of the Apostle Paul or even Jesus himself (!). The German Christian movement selectively interpreted the Christian scriptures and theology to suit their nationalist and racist ends.

In the case of the Confessing Church, we most often find pastors interpret Luther’s position on the Jews and Judaism in non-rational terms, that is, in terms of religion, theology, or salvation history. Taking a defensive posture, they upheld Luther as a great reformer, and at the same time try to explain his motivations (rather than reveal irrational thinking) in his condemnations of the Jews and Judaism.²⁴⁸ This approach to Luther’s writings correlates to Confessing Church pastors’ views of Jews and Judaism. Christoph Probst contends that of the Confessing Church pastors he has investigated, “All affirm Jewish baptism and/or the possibility of Jewish conversion to Christianity via Christian mission. Most, to one degree or another, reject racial-biological notions of antisemitism.”²⁴⁹ In other words, Confessing Church pastors’ views of Jews and Judaism

²⁴⁷ Michael, *Holy Hatred*, 34; Lindemann and Levy, *Antisemitism*, Kindle location 227 and 4759; Bergn, *Twisted Cross*, 147-148.

²⁴⁸ Probst, *Demonizing the Jews*, 117.

²⁴⁹ Probst, *Demonizing the Jews*, 115. Yet Probst contends that we do find examples of irrational or racial

is interpreted through non-rational thinking (based upon religious conviction), rather than irrational thinking (based upon racial beliefs that contradict rational empirical observation).

As I will demonstrate, my research corroborates this finding that Confessing Church pastors' expressions of prejudice against Jews and Judaism is based upon non-rational thinking, that is, founded upon religious beliefs. In the 910 sermons I have examined, I have not found one example of a pastor expressing irrational prejudice against the Jews or Judaism (e.g. Jewish racial inferiority, a Jewish-Bolshevik conspiracy, etc.). Of course, this does not mean that Confessing Church pastors did not express irrational prejudice in other writings. But all the prejudicial expressions we see in these sermons are based upon non-rational thinking, grounded in religious convictions through a theological interpretation of Christian scripture.

While the irrational elements of Protestant prejudice against Jews dates back to Martin Luther and the early reformers, it is important to keep in mind that the German-Christians were so successful in part because their ideals were perfectly consonant with National Socialism, an ideology that appealed to the German masses in the context of politically and economically unstable Weimar society of the 1920s.²⁵⁰ In other words, we should not see the German Christian movement's antisemitic position simply as a logical outworking of reformation ideas on Jews and Judaism, as if it were inevitable. This interpretation takes into consideration only the anti-Judaic or antisemitic elements of historical Protestantism as opposed to the favorable views of Jews and Judaism in the

antisemitism in the writings of Confessing Church leaders (see pg. 143).

²⁵⁰ Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 3-4.

tradition.²⁵¹ Rather, we should see the German Christian movement as a historic manifestation of unfortunate irrational aspects of reformation ideas.

The Point of Contention: General Revelation versus Special Revelation

The success of German Christian movement placed front and center for the German churches the issue of interpreting the knowledge of God. As we will discuss at more length in the following chapters, Hitler and the Nazis presented a thoroughly religious political ideology – one the German Christian movement adopted – that propagated belief in a German messiah sent by Providence to redeem Germany, a racial hierarchy that intractably pit a “good” race against an “evil” race, and that would culminate in a final apocalyptic battle that would decide the trajectory of history. The people of Germany had to confront and evaluate these Nazi religious claims on the basis of reason, history, and common sense. Christians had available to them another traditional source of authority, the biblical texts, and some set out to test the compatibility between National Socialism and Christianity.

In theological terms, this is an issue about the interpretation of general and special revelation. The question for the Church is essentially, how may humanity know God so that it may preach God? What are the reliable sources for the knowledge of God? General revelation refers to God’s self-disclosure which is “natural” and available to all people; it is found through nature, its laws, and the spiritual and moral nature of the

²⁵¹ If we take Luther as an example, his *Judenschriften* includes not only his most pernicious work on the subject, *On the Jews and their Lies*, but also arguably earlier philosemitic works, such as *That Jesus Christ Was Born a Jew*.

human being.²⁵² Those in the German Christian movement believed that racial hierarchy was evident in nature – a source of knowledge available to all people – and therefore part of God’s self-disclosure, i.e. general revelation.²⁵³ A case in point is the “The Guiding Principles of the Faith Movement of the ‘German Christians,’” mentioned above, which states that the preservation of “race, folk, and nation,” as understood through history and the natural world, was a law of God given to the Germans.²⁵⁴ Their reading of history ensured them that Hitler indeed was chosen by God to lead Germany to greatness once again.

Special revelation refers to that knowledge which is “supernatural” and available to a specific people, the Jews, for instance. In the tradition of Christianity, this revelation has been preserved and passed down from generation to generation in the biblical texts. The theologian Stanley Grenz elaborates on this idea, “Special revelation, in contrast [to natural revelation], is communicated supernaturally, whether directly by God or indirectly through God’s messengers. Consequently, the employment of our natural powers of reason cannot put us into contact with it.”²⁵⁵ In short, general revelation is available to all people, and humankind may gain knowledge of God through the use of observation and reason; special revelation is the direct communication of God to humanity, for example, in the Jewish and Christian canons.

²⁵² Stanley Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 133.

²⁵³ See for example, the summation of the “New Guiding Principles of the German Christians, 16 May 1933,” which states, “In short (we support) the church morality of Germany in town and village, Sunday observance, and the nurture of every good, pious, German custom anchored in our race and our cultural heritage”; quoted in Matheson, *The Third Reich and the Christian Churches*, 23.

²⁵⁴ “Guiding Principles,” in Cochrane, *Church’s Confession under Hitler*, 222-223.

²⁵⁵ Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 133.

The eventual fracturing of the German Protestant Church came down to a conflict over how to interpret the rise of National Socialism according to the standards of general and special revelation. Is one source of revelation enough to legitimize the Nazi regime in the eyes of Christians, or must the two standards apply? Can general revelation be used independently of special revelation, and what happens if the two conflict? Just how authoritative is general revelation compared to special revelation? To answer these questions and to gain a deeper appreciation of why this issue was so controversial for the German Protestant churches in the Nazi period – and particularly the Confessing Church’s break with the German Christian movement – it is necessary to step back for a moment and gain a broad historical perspective of general and special revelation.

The importance of special revelation in the history of the Church has never seriously been challenged – for Christianity is a religion based upon the life and ministry of Jesus as testified by the apostles.²⁵⁶ But the same cannot be said of general revelation.²⁵⁷ Though not greatly emphasized in the patristic era, medieval scholastics developed what has become known as natural theology, a field of study which received perhaps its greatest champion in the thirteenth-century Roman Catholic monk and theologian Thomas Aquinas. The purpose of developing a theology independent of the biblical texts was

To articulate a universal knowledge of God, a natural theology, on which to build the specifically revealed dogmas of the church. [The medieval scholastics] argued, therefore, that God’s self-disclosure in nature and in the human person provides the basis for the construction of a limited, but

²⁵⁶ Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 392.

²⁵⁷ See Ferguson, et. al., *New Dictionary of Theology*, 585; and Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 134-37.

nevertheless true, knowledge of God available to all humans through the use of our natural powers of reason.²⁵⁸

As Aquinas' five proofs for the existence of God indicate, one can, through the use of reason, examine the natural world, history, and personal experiences, and come to a general knowledge about the existence of God.²⁵⁹ The fundamental argument is that God has revealed God's self to the world in nature and to specific human beings (as recorded and preserved in the biblical texts) and that these two forms of revelation provide valid knowledge of God.²⁶⁰

The Reformation occasioned the first great challenge to natural theology as reformers throughout Europe objected to the notion that a sinful human race is capable of interpreting God's general revelation properly.²⁶¹ The argument was that sin obscures the human perception of God's revelation in nature; in other words, corrupted human beings cannot see rightly. The Swiss reformer John Calvin eloquently explicates this point:

But though we are deficient in natural powers which might enable us to rise to a pure and clear knowledge of God, still, as the dullness which prevents us is within, there is no room for excuse... Wherefore, when we wander and go astray, we are justly shut out from every species of excuse, because all things point to the right path. But while man must bear the guilt of corrupting the seed of divine knowledge so wondrously deposited in his mind, and preventing it from bearing good and genuine fruit, it is still most true that we are not sufficiently instructed by their bare and

²⁵⁸ Grenz, *Theology and the Community of God*, 134; see also Millard Ericksen, *Christian Theology, second edition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 179-184.

²⁵⁹ Aquinas' five proofs for the existence of God include: God as prime unmoved mover, God as first cause, the various degrees of perfection in beings, the cause of order in the universe, and the teleological argument. For a useful summary of these arguments in the context of medieval scholasticism, see Justo Gonzalez's *A History of Christian Thought: From Augustine to the Eve of the Reformation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1987).

²⁶⁰ Grenz, *Theology and the Community of God*, 134-35.

²⁶¹ Grenz, *Theology and the Community of God*, 135.

simple, but magnificent testimony which the creatures bear to the glory of their Creator. For no sooner do we, from a survey of the world, obtain some slight knowledge of Deity, than we pass by the true God, and set up in his stead the dream and phantom of our own brain, drawing away the praise of justice, wisdom, and goodness, from the fountain-head, and transferring it to some other quarter.²⁶²

The unavoidable danger that reformers like Calvin warned against was the tendency of a “corrupted” human reason to interpret the natural world in a way that served its own interests, such as supporting political and religious hierarchies, maintaining social inequalities and power structures, and sustaining burdensome institutions.²⁶³ In sum, the reformers acknowledged that God revealed himself in nature, but they became suspicious of humanity’s ability to interpret this revelation rightly.²⁶⁴ This explains the great reformation emphasis on the Bible – God’s special revelation – as evidenced in the stress on biblical criticism and exposition, and most importantly, the translation of the biblical texts in the vernacular languages across Europe.²⁶⁵

But the Enlightenment breathed new life into natural theology as philosophers and theologians promoted reason and nature as ultimate authorities on matters of truth.²⁶⁶ Increasingly, general revelation gained pride of place ahead of special revelation, which

²⁶² John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, translated by Henry Beveridge (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2008), 25.

²⁶³ See S. Paul Schilling, *Contemporary Continental Theologians* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1966), 24-25. This is an argument prevalent among Confessing theologians and pastors, including Barth and Brunner. See Heinz Zahrnt, *The Question of God: Protestant Theology in the 20th Century* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1969), 62.

²⁶⁴ Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 135.

²⁶⁵ Paul Tillich, *A History of Christian Thought: From Its Judaic and Hellenistic Origins to Existentialism*, edited by Carl Braaten (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), 244; see also Paul Scott Wilson, *A Concise History of Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1992), 89.

²⁶⁶ Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 136.

was perceived as valid only insofar as it confirmed the truth established by the intellect and the natural world.²⁶⁷ Thinkers in the Age of Reason disregarded the reformers' concern about the obscuring effects of sin in human perception, and were quite optimistic of the human ability to know God as revealed in the universe and in the nature of the human being. A few examples may suffice to demonstrate the contributions of these scholars. In the *Meditations on the First Philosophy*, René Descartes relied solely on human reason in arguing a version of the ontological argument for the existence of God.²⁶⁸ The philosopher Immanuel Kant asserted that the moral imperative necessitated a divine origin of values and an afterlife where justice would be consummated.²⁶⁹ Georg Hegel's *The Philosophy of History* maintained that God and Christian values may be known through an understanding of the rational processes of history. Historians, philosophers, theologians and scientists achieved great leaps in developing the fields of natural theology, biblical criticism, historical criticism, and in the process established a rational basis upon which to evaluate the biblical texts and the life of faith.

The emergence of Pietism in the late seventeenth century tempered Enlightenment thinkers' emphasis on rationalism. Pietism was an inter-confessional religious movement that began in 1675 by the preacher Philipp Jakob Spener with his work, *Pia Desidera oder Wahren evangelischen Kirche*.²⁷⁰ Sharing similarities with Quakerism and

²⁶⁷ Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 136. See also Arthur Cushman McGiffert, *Protestant Thought Before Kant* (London: Duckworth, 1911), 195-210.

²⁶⁸ René Descartes, *Meditations on the First Philosophy*, in *Great Books of the Western World* (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1993), Meditation III, pages 307-315.

²⁶⁹ Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, Second Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1998), 180.

²⁷⁰ Koppel Pinson, *Pietism as a Factor in the Rise of German Nationalism* (New York: Octagon Books, Inc., 1968), 15.

Methodism in England and Jansenism in France, Pietism emphasized an emotional enthusiasm for the gospel message; a focus on practical Christianity and the development of a personal spirituality rather than a concentration on matters of dogma; and an appreciation of the Lutheran notion of the priesthood of all believers.²⁷¹ The movement breathed new life into the Lutheran and, to a lesser extent, the Reformed confessions, encouraging men and women not simply to assent intellectually to a religious dogma, but to engage in spiritual development through exercises of devotion, such as prayer and contemplation, as well as service to God through good works in the community.²⁷²

According to its advocates, Pietism corrected the cold rationalism and stifled spiritual growth that characterized the Church since the advent of the Enlightenment in the mid-eighteenth century.²⁷³ One scholar comments on the effects of Pietism in the Christian community, “The de-emphasis of dogma produced a pluralistic, individualized view of religion: it was the attitude of faith, rather than its content, that mattered, and so long as one believed in Christ, it was of little consequence what else and what exactly one believed.”²⁷⁴ After the devastation of the Thirty Years’ War in the seventeenth

²⁷¹ See Pinson, *Pietism*, 15-17; and Liah Greenfeld, *Nationalism, Five Roads to Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 314-15.

²⁷² See Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christianity, Vol. 2, Reformation to the Present* (Peabody, MA: Prince Press, 1997), 894-95. Pietists advocated the priesthood of all believers, claiming that each individual could relate to God through Christ in his or her own way, each in their own language and manner, without the limitation or qualification of Church dogma. This freedom of expression enabled many to enjoy a new level of intimacy with God that they may never have experienced before. The movement flourished in the German states in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries partly because it appealed to the lower classes: it fostered a self-respect and prestige through spiritual edification; it provided the tools to spiritually manage a life of uncertainty, hardship and devastation; and it encouraged their use of the vernacular for education and spiritual devotion. By the nineteenth century pietism became an elemental part of the religious landscape of German Protestantism, represented most significantly in the work of Friedrich Schleiermacher.

²⁷³ Pinson, *Pietism*, 50-54; 61-62.

²⁷⁴ Greenfeld, *Nationalism*, 318.

century, still fresh in the memories of Christians throughout the German states, men and women freely expressed their spirituality with a renewed sense of courage and independence.

Romanticism began in Germany with the *Sturm und Drang* (or Storm and Stress) writers of the 1770s—Goethe and Schiller being the most famous. Though the early romanticists were “enlightened,” the movement itself was a challenge to the Enlightenment and its stress on reason. One scholar notes, it “looked to break through the confines of desiccated, well-tempered reasonableness (they called it mediocrity) in the name of individual genius, inspiration and feeling.”²⁷⁵ The movement challenged the rationalism dominant in the age, yet still furthered the aims of the German Enlightenment’s concern with understanding the human heart.²⁷⁶ Unlike Pietism, romanticism did not emphasize an intimacy with God, or even a belief in God, yet both movements were concerned with exploring the emotions to develop the individual spirit, and to gain a clearer perception of the world and one’s place in it.²⁷⁷ In Pietism and romanticism pastors had a new language to explore the relationship between God and humanity, one that relied upon feeling and, to a lesser extent, the biblical texts.

The Enlightenment presented Christians with the problem of how to interpret biblical texts that did not always seem to hold up to the rigors of historical and scientific criticisms. Christians began to apply the emphases of Pietism and romanticism to the

²⁷⁵ This discussion is largely reliant upon David Blackbourn’s, *History of Germany 1780-1918: The Long Nineteenth Century, Second Edition* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003), 28; and also Greenfeld’s *Nationalism*, 322-330.

²⁷⁶ Blackbourn, *History of Germany*, 28.

²⁷⁷ Greenfeld, *Nationalism*, 328-330.

religious challenges of their day. Known as the father of modern liberal Protestant theology, the pastor and theologian Friedrich Ernst Daniel Schleiermacher (1768-1834) emerged as a profound religious thinker who responded to the Enlightenment challenges to faith and breathed new life into the Christianity of his day.²⁷⁸ Schleiermacher became an immensely popular preacher at Berlin's Church of the Holy Trinity, as well as an influential theologian and educator who co-founded the University of Berlin and became head of the School of Theology. Influenced by the Pietism and romanticism popular in Germany in the years following the Napoleonic Wars, Schleiermacher located religious truth not in the biblical texts alone, but in religious feeling and experience – a realm impervious to the critiques of others.²⁷⁹ This move has been interpreted as “an almost necessary consequence of the modern challenge to traditional authority.”²⁸⁰ No work better captures his popular appeal than *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers*, wherein he argues that “true religion” is simply the “sense and taste for the Infinite,” underscoring the dependence of finite man upon the infinite God.²⁸¹ In the feeling of dependence one is aware of the infinite, as when one walks beneath the starry skies or

²⁷⁸ Excellent treatments of Schleiermacher's life and work include: Karl Barth, *Protestant Thought*, 306-54; Richard Brandt, *The Philosophy of Schleiermacher* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1941); Emil Brunner, *Die Mystik und das Wort, Second Edition* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1928); Jerry Dawson, *Friedrich Schleiermacher: The Evolution of a Nationalist* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1966); Wilhelm Dilthey, *Das Leben Schleiermachers*, ed. H. Mulert, *Second Edition* (Berlin: W. de Gruyter and Company, 1922); Richard Niebuhr, *Schleiermacher on Christ and Religion* (New York: Scribner, 1964); Martin Redeker, *Schleiermacher: Life and Thought*, translated by John Wallhausser (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973).

²⁷⁹ Jerry Dawson, *Friedrich Schleiermacher: The Evolution of a Nationalist* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1966), 29-30.

²⁸⁰ Peter L. Berger, *The Heretical Imperative: Contemporary Possibilities of Religious Affirmation* (New York: Anchor Press, 1979), 69. Berger also argues that Schleiermacher “saw his mission as a defense and reformulation of Christian faith in the face of the onslaught of modern skepticism.” See Berger, *Heretical Imperative*, 68.

²⁸¹ Dawson, *Friedrich Schleiermacher*, 29-30.

experiences the wonder of transcendence in a work of art: one feels a unity with the infinite.²⁸² In one of his speeches he writes, “I ask, therefore that you turn from everything usually reckoned religion, and fix your regard on the inward emotions and dispositions, as all utterances and acts of inspired men direct.”²⁸³ Schleiermacher thus locates a knowledge of God in the self, in feeling, a locus outside the realm of scientific and rationalist inquiry; this, in addition to the traditional source, the special revelation of the Biblical texts. His theology remains consonant with Pietism and orthodoxy, and yet he convincingly answered the challenges of Deism, rationalism, and skepticism.²⁸⁴

The reliance on general revelation over special revelation held sway in Protestant Germany until after the turn of the twentieth century and the outbreak of the First World War, when the Swiss pastor and theologian Karl Barth presented a sharp and widely influential critique against it.²⁸⁵ Educated in the German liberal Protestant tradition at the University of Marburg, Barth became stunned at the outbreak of the First World War when he recognized in pro-war advocates in the Church what he perceived to be an arrogant and dangerous reading of God’s providence in German history.²⁸⁶ These pro-war advocates included many under whom Barth studied theology. When they, along with other German intellectuals, signed a statement in support of Kaiser Wilhelm II’s war

²⁸² Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), 39; see also John E. Wilson, *Introduction to Modern Theology: Trajectories in the German Tradition* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2007), 47.

²⁸³ Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*, translated by John Oman (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), 18.

²⁸⁴ Richard Brandt, *The Philosophy of Schleiermacher: The Development of His Theory of Scientific and Religious Knowledge* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1941), 307.

²⁸⁵ S. Paul Schilling, *Contemporary Continental Theologians* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1966), 19; and Zahrnt, *The Question of God*, 66.

²⁸⁶ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 187-8

policy, Barth began to seriously question the merits of liberal Protestantism.²⁸⁷ What is more, “he saw a theology which focused attention not on the gospel but on statements concerning Christian self-awareness, depriving men of a reliable norm and inviting uncritical adjustment to passing human opinions and changing social forces.”²⁸⁸

He perceived a dangerous inability of liberal theology to provide a basis for the knowledge of God and to guide human beings to an ethical life.

For me personally, one day in the beginning of August of that year [1914] stands out as a black day, on which ninety-three German intellectuals, among whom I was horrified to discover almost all of my hitherto revered theological teachers, published a profession of support for the war policy of Kaiser Wilhelm II and his counselors. Amazed by their attitude, I realized that I could no longer follow their ethics or dogmatics, or their understanding of the Bible and history, and that the theology of the nineteenth century no longer had any future for me.²⁸⁹

Liberal theology was flawed, Barth argued, and he set out to convince others why.²⁹⁰

Barth’s answer came just a year after the end of the First World War while he served as a pastor in the small Swiss village of Safenwil. He published a ground-breaking work of biblical exposition on the Apostle Paul’s Epistle to the Romans, *Der Römerbrief*, a work that emphasized the utter inability of humankind to bridge the vast distance to God. One may attempt to know God through a providential reading of history – for example, God’s

²⁸⁷ The sociologist Peter Berger writes that this event marked the beginning of Barth’s theology, which “was, at its very core, a thunderous *no* to all the assumptions and achievements of Protestant theological liberalism.” See Berger, *Heretical Imperative*, 71.

²⁸⁸ Schilling, *Contemporary Continental Theologians*, 19.

²⁸⁹ Karl Barth, *Evangelische Theologie im 19. Jahrhundert* (Zurich: Zollikon, 1957), 6; the translation is from Alister McGrath, *The Making of Modern German Christology, 1750-1990* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 124.

²⁹⁰ Berger, *Heretical Imperative*, 72.

favor for Germany given its dramatic rise and dominance in Europe – but such a view is myopic and short-sighted. Interpreters are necessarily limited by experiences, ambitions, and flaws. Barth the Reformed theologian follows his predecessor Calvin in highlighting the problem of a “corrupted” human mind attempting to gain untainted knowledge of God and the world. Furthermore, Barth argued that reason and science have their advantages, but can lead down dangerous roads – for example, the “sciences” of eugenics and phrenology. Barth advanced a “theology of crisis” (*Theologie der Krisis*), otherwise known as dialectical theology, which recognized the inadequacy of a liberal Protestantism optimistic about the potential of human reason and scientific inquiry to solve the problems of the modern world and to lead humanity to religious truth.²⁹¹ He argued that revelation is not a truth that must be discovered by humankind, or that it lies hidden in history, nature, or human experience; but rather, revelation is a divine activity that communicates “other-worldly” faith in the person of Jesus Christ to humanity.²⁹²

Furthermore, Barth argued that God’s revelation, because of its very nature, works in the soul to make it holy – the sermon is an agent of sanctification. This is a common theme stressed in the Christian tradition, and particularly since the Protestant Reformation. Melanchthon once wrote, “To know Christ is to know his benefits”; to know Christ is to know God’s grace and mercy, and this revelation is possible only through special revelation, not general revelation. General revelation, then, is altogether

²⁹¹ Wilson, *Introduction to Modern Theology*, 176; also see McGrath, *Making of Modern German Christology*, 124.

²⁹² Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, translated from the sixth edition by Edwyn Hoskyns (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 126; Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 137; and Berger, *Heretical Imperative*, 75.

insufficient to gain a sanctifying understanding of God. For Barth, human beings are totally incapable of knowing God apart from God's revelation, which exists exclusively in Jesus Christ.²⁹³ The theologian Millard Erickson writes, "Behind this position lies (probably unrecognized by Barth) an existentialist conception of truth as person-to-person and subjective, going back to both Søren Kierkegaard and Martin Buber. The possibility of the knowledge of God outside the gracious revelation in Christ would eliminate the need for Christ."²⁹⁴ In Barth's theology revelation is Christ, and Christ is the "Word of God." Thus, for a Christian, according to Barth, revelation occurs when one encounters the Word of God.

To a modern American audience this description may indicate that Barth's theology of crisis, and the Confessing Church that emerged from it, is a form of fundamentalism.²⁹⁵ But this would be inaccurate. Fundamentalism may best be defined as a staunch anti-modernist perspective that relies upon a literal interpretation of the biblical texts.²⁹⁶ But Barth and others associated with the theology of crisis and the Confessing Church movement, such as the Marburg theologian Rudolf Bultmann and also Dietrich Bonhoeffer, would not in any sense fit this definition. They valued the

²⁹³ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 189-90.

²⁹⁴ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 189.

²⁹⁵ The British historian Richard Evan's magisterial three volume work on the Third Reich refers to those sympathetic to the Pastors' Emergency League as having "basic beliefs [that] were formed by a piety that veered increasingly towards biblical fundamentalism"; *Third Reich in Power* (New York: Penguin, 2005), 226. See George M. Marsden's *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism 1870-1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980); George Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010); Ernest Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism, 1800-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1970); and Gary Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology: Idealism, Realism, and Modernity, 1900-1950* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003).

²⁹⁶ See *New Dictionary of Theology*, ed. by Sinclair Ferguson et al (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 266.

contributions of modernism, including the advances in historical and biblical criticism, and they did not hold to a simplistic literal interpretation of the biblical texts.²⁹⁷ For example, Bultmann advanced his famous method of demythologizing the biblical texts and Emil Brunner dissented from the orthodox view of the virgin birth of Jesus – both approaches that do not take a literalist view of the Bible.²⁹⁸ These individuals held tight to the belief that the biblical texts alone contained the truth essential to salvation even if we could challenge the “facts” of the biblical texts; for example, the truth of the fallenness of humankind does not depend on the historicity of Adam and Eve’s fall in the Garden of Eden.²⁹⁹ All this is to say that it is thus more appropriate to argue that Barth and the theology of crisis movement emerged from within German liberal Protestantism, rather than outside it as an attack on modernism.³⁰⁰ As one theologian writes, “Dialectical theology could not be passed off as a reversion to conservatism; rather, it had to be seen as a reaction from within liberalism against its obvious weaknesses.”³⁰¹ Their concern was to underscore the limitations of liberal theology, and to guide the Church back to a serious spiritual engagement with the biblical texts.

²⁹⁷ See John Macquarrie, *Twentieth-Century Religious Thought: The Frontiers of Philosophy and Theology, 1900-1960* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), Kindle edition, location 6835; A.I.C. Heron, *A Century of Protestant Theology* (Guildford, 1980), 5-6; S.P. Schilling, *Contemporary Continental Theologians* (London, 1966); and Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures*, 763, 776-777.

²⁹⁸ Macquarrie, *Twentieth-Century Religious Thought*, Kindle location 6835; and McGrath, *Making of Modern German Christology*, 157-58; Heron, *A Century of Protestant Theology*, 99-118; S.P. Schilling, *Contemporary Continental Theologians* (London, 1966); and James Smart, *The Divided Mind of Modern Theology: Karl Barth and Rudolf Bultmann, 1908-1933* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1967), 157-158.

²⁹⁹ Macquarrie, *Twentieth-Century Religious Thought*, Kindle location 6840; and Heron, *A Century of Protestant Theology*, 74, 99-101.

³⁰⁰ McGrath, *Making of Modern German Christology*, 158.

³⁰¹ McGrath, *Making of Modern German Christology*, 158.

Barth inspired a rejuvenation of evangelical faith in the tradition of the Protestant Reformation. He called Christians to acknowledge the gospel, the *euangelion*, as the sole basis of Protestant faith.³⁰² After the First World War the question of God's revelation took on new importance as Christians across Germany sought to rebuild their religious, social and political institutions on a secure foundation. This excursus into the historical background of general and special revelation underscores the variety of ways Protestants have relied upon these two sources of religious knowledge up until the end of the First World War.

From Theological Debate to Ecclesiastical Firestorm

In 1933, when the German Christian movement enjoyed widespread popularity and even political influence, Protestant pastors increasingly objected to their reliance on Nazi ideology as a source of truth – as general revelation – and began a year-long process that would culminate in the formal establishment of the Confessing Church.³⁰³

Theological concerns translated into political concerns when Hitler attempted to form a *Reichskirche*, a unified Protestant state church under Nazi control, and endorsed the German Christian movement candidate Ludwig Müller as the first Reich bishop.³⁰⁴

Let's return to the story of the unlikely candidacy of the little-known Müller, and why the

³⁰² It may be helpful to note that the translation of the German adjective "*evangelisch*," is properly rendered in English as "Protestant," not "evangelical," which in the United States connotes an historical movement that began in the late nineteenth century. Thus, in the United States the Lutheran and Reformed churches are mainline churches (not evangelical) while in Germany they are "*evangelisch*" churches (those that began in the Protestant Reformation). See Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 5. Yet, for the sake of simplicity and common usage, I will render the Deutsche evangelische Kirche (DEK) as the German Evangelical Church.

³⁰³ Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 2, 12.

³⁰⁴ Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 33-35; Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 5-7, 15; and Green, *Lutherans against Hitler*, 370.

controversy over the leadership of the *Reichskirche* split the German Evangelical Church in two.

Müller was a military chaplain during and after the First World War, a regional leader in the German Christian movement, and an *Alte Kämpfer*, an “old fighter” in the Nazi party.³⁰⁵ Yet Protestant leaders demanded as their historic right to nominate their own candidate, Friedrich von Bodelschwingh, a widely respected Westphalian pastor and administrator of Bethel, a hospital for the disabled and mentally ill.³⁰⁶ After intense debate, representatives from the regional churches met in May 1933 and elected von Bodelschwingh Reich Bishop by a margin of 91 to 8.³⁰⁷ Barnett writes of the aftermath, “With Müller’s defeat, August Jäger, a lawyer from the Ministry of Culture, stepped in and placed the entire Prussian Church under police jurisdiction. A number of pastors were fired, suspended, or arrested, and the ‘German Christians’ and Nazi party mounted a vicious campaign against von Bodelschwingh. Under this pressure, the leader of Bethel resigned.”³⁰⁸ This controversy indicates that from the start of Hitler’s administration, the Nazi government attempted to undermine the independence of the German Protestant Church by coordinating it to Nazi ideology. But more than this, it was willing to use its power to overturn the will of the German clergy to appoint their own institutional leader and representative.

³⁰⁵ Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 15-16; Green, *Lutherans against Hitler*, 84; see also *A Church Undone: Documents from the German Christian Faith Movement 1932-1940*, selected, translated, and introduced by Mary Solberg (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2015), 150.

³⁰⁶ Gutteridge, *German Evangelical Church and the Jews*, 134; Green, *Lutherans against Hitler*, 84; and Helmreich, *German Churches under Hitler*, 135

³⁰⁷ Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 34; Helmreich, *German Churches under Hitler*, 135-136; Robertson, *Christians against Hitler*, 29.

³⁰⁸ Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 34.

Nevertheless, the Nazi regime called for church elections for the month of July, to elect regional representatives who would then select the new Reich bishop.³⁰⁹ Any Protestant man or woman, aged 24 or older, could vote to select their church leadership.³¹⁰ The Nazi party supported German Christian movement candidates, and Hitler himself endorsed them on a radio broadcast on 22 July 1933, right before the elections.³¹¹ He said, “The strong state must welcome the chance to lend its support to those religious groupings which, for their part, can be useful to it.”³¹² Uniformed SA members stood outside churches wearing German Christian candidate sandwich boards, hoping to persuade voters at the last minute.³¹³ All the campaigning worked. The German Christian movement won two-thirds of the vote, the majority in the regional synods of Germany, and the power to appoint Ludwig Müller the new Reich Bishop.³¹⁴ As a matter of fact, when Müller was appointed at the synod (or assembly) of the Evangelical Church of the Old Prussian Union on 5-6 September 1933, detractors called it the “brown synod” because of the significant number of delegates who appeared

³⁰⁹ Helmreich argues that the July church elections were actually illegal as the state had no right to call them, a point that apparently no one made before the elections, but only after. See Helmreich, *German Churches under Hitler*, 140-143; Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 15-16; and Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 34.

³¹⁰ This information was included in an article in the *Völkischer Beobachter* supporting German Christian movement candidates. See “Völkischer Beobachter on the Church Elections, 19 July 1933,” in Peter Matheson, *The Third Reich and the Christian Churches: A Documentary Account of Christian Resistance and Complicity During the Nazi Era* (Grand Rapids, MI, 1981), 27.

³¹¹ Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 5-6; and Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 34.

³¹² “Radio Broadcast by Hitler on the Church Elections, 22 July 1933,” in Matheson, *The Third Reich and the Christian Churches: Documents*, 28.

³¹³ Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 6.

³¹⁴ Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 64; Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 34; Gutteridge, *German Evangelical Church and the Jews*, 94; Helmreich, *German Churches under Hitler*, 140-143. Again, a synod refers to a meeting of a governing council of a church, usually called to make a decision regarding doctrine or administration.

wearing SA uniforms.³¹⁵ It was here that the German Christian movement passed the infamous “Aryan Paragraph.”³¹⁶

For many German pastors, this was the moment when the German Christian movement’s uncritical acceptance of Nazi ideology crossed the point of no return. The “Aryan Paragraph” stated that only clergymen of “Aryan” dissent, and none married to Jewish women, could remain clergymen or serve in Church government.³¹⁷ This meant the effective forced retirement of an estimated 37 German pastors of “full” Jewish descent (of a total 18,000 German pastors), an unparalleled act of discrimination within the modern Church.³¹⁸ The German-Christians hoped to apply this paragraph to all Protestant churches throughout the Reich. While most Protestant Church leaders were more concerned about the implications of the Aryan Paragraph for the autonomy of the church than its antisemitism, those who objected had three main problems with this proposal.³¹⁹ First, by establishing a standard by which to judge ministers, it directly challenged an elemental aspect of the Christian tradition, the equality of all believers based on faith.³²⁰ Second, it uncritically accepted the Nazi racial categorization of Jews

³¹⁵ Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 34; Green, *Lutherans against Hitler*, 270; Gutteridge, *German Evangelical Church and the Jews*, 94; and Helmreich, *German Churches under Hitler*, 144.

³¹⁶ Amid the chaos and disunity of the German Evangelical Church, this church law would actually be repealed, and then the repeal would be repealed, and back and forth, multiple times between September 1933 and August 1934, “illustrating the bankruptcy of the church leadership.” The law would remain in effect from August 1934 onwards. Gerlach, *And the Witnesses Were Silent*, 65, and 78.

³¹⁷ See Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 128-129; Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 88-93; Gutteridge, *German Evangelical Church and the Jews*, 91-96; and Helmreich, *German Churches under Hitler*, 144-147.

³¹⁸ Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 88-93; Helmreich, *German Churches under Hitler*, 148; and Gerlach, *And the Witnesses Were Silent*, 30.

³¹⁹ See Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 35, 128-129; Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 88-89; Cochrane, *The Church’s Confession under Hitler*, 107-110; Green, *Lutherans against Hitler*, 130-134; and Helmreich, *German Christians under Hitler*, 144-146.

³²⁰ Gerlach, *And the Witnesses Were Silent*, 35.

as distinct from Germans, regardless of religious affiliation.³²¹ This racial distinction meant very little to Christians convinced that faith levels ethnic, class, and gender boundaries. Third, and perhaps most significant, the “Aryan Paragraph” subverted the traditional definition of who could be a true Christian. The German Christian movement argued that Jews could not be true Christians because they could not overcome the distinctions of race, and therefore, could not serve as clergymen or church officials. To many German pastors this was an affront to the Christian tradition that made baptism the only sign of belonging to the community of faith.³²² Essentially, the German Christian movement denied the effects of baptism for a select group. For pastors in opposition to the Aryan Paragraph, this is a good example of political and theological motivations merging on a single issue.

Returning now to late 1933, after the German Christian movement pushed the “Aryan paragraph” through the Prussian (“or brown”) synod, oppositional pastors began to unify and organize. Under the leadership of prominent pastors Gerhard Jacobi and Martin Niemöller, clergymen all across Germany banded together in the Pastors’ Emergency League (*Pfarrernotbund*, henceforth PEL) on 21 September 1933.³²³ All members had to sign a four-point pledge:

³²¹ Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 35

³²² Gerlach, *And the Witnesses Were Silent*, 24.

³²³ Even before the formation of the PEL, pastors had formed loose associations against candidates of the German Christian movement in the church elections. One example is the *Jungreformatrische Bewegung* (Young Reformation Movement), led by Walter Künneth, Hanns Lilje, and Gerhard Jacobi. They rejected the German Christian movement’s antisemitism and they sought a return to Lutheran reformation principles. See Helmreich, *German Churches under Hitler*, 142,146.

1. I pledge myself to fulfill my office as a servant of the Word, bound only by Holy Scripture and by the confessions of the Reformation as the correct exposition of the Holy Scripture.
2. I pledge myself to protest unreservedly against every infringement upon such a confessional position.
3. I realize that I share responsibility to the extent of my powers together with those who are persecuted on account of such a confessional position.
4. In making this pledge I bear witness that the application of the Aryan paragraph in the area of the church of Christ is an infringement upon such a confessional position.³²⁴

The pledge emphasized the church's confessional autonomy, but also it underscored in its very first point that the Christian biblical texts – this special revelation – would remain the principle authority in determining the loyalties and activities of the PEL pastor.

When the pastors met at the first national synod a few days later on 27 September 1933 in Wittenberg, they issued a statement of protest “against the ruthless silencing of the minorities in deliberative bodies, and against the adoption of the Aryan paragraph – which was contrary to Holy Writ and historic confessions. The statement demanded that the national synod further the unfettered preaching of the gospel.”³²⁵ To be clear, the aim of establishing the PEL was not to form a distinctive oppositional movement to the Nazi Party, but to formally separate from the perceived heresy of the German Christian movement and thus to preserve the integrity and moral authority of the Protestant church in Germany. Clergymen all over Germany quickly rallied to support the Pastors' Emergency League, and by January 1934, approximately 7,000 of the 18,000 German clergymen joined (or 39%).³²⁶

³²⁴ Helmreich, *German Churches under Hitler*, 147.

³²⁵ Helmreich, *German Churches under Hitler*, 147.

³²⁶ Helmreich, *German Churches under Hitler*, 156; Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 63. See also

Karl Barth pinpointed the key issue at stake for pastors concerned about the German Christian movement's reforms under the auspices of the Nazi regime: the issues of the election of the Reich Bishop, the establishment of a *Reichskirche*, and the passage of the "Aryan paragraph" rested on the ambition to align the Church to the State, not on the traditional source of Christian authority, the biblical texts.³²⁷ In the hopes of drawing attention to this fundamental problem in the contemporary church, Barth issued a pamphlet entitled, *Theological Existence Today*, in the summer of 1933. He writes,

The mighty temptation of our age is that we no longer appreciate the intensity and exclusiveness of the demand of the divine Word...so that in our anxiety in face of existing dangers we no longer put our whole trust in the authority of God's Word, but we think we ought to come to its aid with all sorts of contrivances, and we thus throw aside our confidence in the Word's power to triumph...And this means that we seek for God elsewhere than in Jesus Christ, and seek Jesus Christ elsewhere than in the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments.³²⁸

For Barth and a growing number of concerned pastors, the primary concern was not simply the loss of institutional autonomy or oppression by the German Christian movement, but, as the historian Arthur Cochrane puts it, "the freedom of the Word of God in preaching and theology."³²⁹ The question was not simply how the Church would administer its affairs, pick its leadership, or organize itself, but upon what authority it would preach and express its theology. Barth reminded the Church that the only basis could be the biblical texts if it was to remain faithful to God and its tradition.

Gerlach, who reports that 6,000 joined by the end of 1933. Gerlach, *And the Witnesses Were Silent*, 33.

³²⁷ Cochrane, *Church's Confession under Hitler*, 102.

³²⁸ Quoted in Cochrane, *Church's Confession under Hitler*, 102.

³²⁹ Cochrane, *Church's Confession under Hitler*, 103.

Tensions within the German Evangelical Church mounted still after another early episode, this time at the German Christian movement's rally at the Berlin *Sportpalast* on November 13, 1933, where some 20,000 gathered at the call of Dr. Reinhold Krause, a regional leader in the movement. There Krause gave a speech entitled, "The Tasks of a German Reich Church in the Spirit of Dr. Martin Luther," and it sparked a controversy that solidified the division of the German Evangelical Church. He called for four very controversial measures: the removal of all pastors hostile to National Socialism, the institutionalization of the "Aryan paragraph," to establish a segregated "Jewish Christian Church" for non-Aryan Christians, and perhaps most controversially, that the "German People's Church (*Volkskirche*) should free itself from all things not German in its services and confession, especially from the Old Testament with its Jewish system of quid pro quo morality (*jüdischen Lohnmoral*)."³³⁰ This event and the subsequent controversy led many pastors to exit the ranks of the German Christian movement and to join the Pastors' Emergency League.

By early 1934 the PEL gained increasing momentum, particularly due to the attention it gave to the question about the true identity and task of the German Evangelical Church. On 29-31 May 1934, PEL pastors met at the Barmen Conference and officially became *die Bekennende Kirche*, the Confessing Church, in acknowledgment that it remained true to the historic creeds and confessions of the Protestant faith (principally the Augsburg Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism).³³¹

³³⁰ Helmreich, *German Churches under Hitler*, 151; Green, *Lutherans against Hitler*, 48-49; and Gerlach, *And the Witnesses Were Silent*, 46.

³³¹ See Rolf Ahlers, *The Barmen Declaration of 1934: The Archeology of a Confessional Text* (Toronto Studies in Theology) (Lewiston, New York: Edwin Mellon Press, 1996); Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 53-56; Gerhard Besier and Gerhard Ringhausen, *Bekennnis, Widerstand, Martyrium: Vom*

Rather than an institutional Church, the Confessing Church was more of an association of Protestant pastors and laypeople who resisted National Socialist infringement on the theology, liturgical practice, and institutional integrity of the German Evangelical Church.³³² Most significant, it claimed that the German Christian movement adulterated the gospel message with Nazi ideology, and thus declared itself the true German Protestant Church.³³³ Its reasoning is stated in the first article of the Barmen Declaration:

The inviolable foundation of the German Evangelical Church is the gospel of Jesus Christ as it is attested for us in Holy Scripture and brought to light again in the Confessions of the Reformation. The full powers that the Church needs for its mission are hereby determined and limited.³³⁴

Again, the issue at stake for Confessing Church pastors is the primacy of the biblical texts – special revelation – against the “general revelation” advanced by the German Christian movement. They believed that not only was the German Evangelical Church at risk, but the integrity of the gospel message.

Fundamentally, for Confessing Church pastors this was an issue of Church identity. The pastors at Barmen charged the administration of the newly united German Evangelical Church, under Bishop Müller, with forsaking its historic and sacred foundation, the biblical texts. The Barmen Declaration reads:

Barmen 1934 bis Plötzensee 1944 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986); Cochrane, *Church's Confession under Hitler*, 140-175; Helmreich, *German Churches Under Hitler*, 162-163; Jan Rohls and John Hoffmeyer, *Reformed Confessions: Theology from Zurich to Barmen* (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998); Scholder, *The Churches and the Third Reich*, Vol. 2, 122-171.

³³² See Helmreich, *German Churches under Hitler*, 161-163; and Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 12.

³³³ Helmreich, *German Churches Under Hitler*, 162; Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 4; and Schilling, *Contemporary Continental Theologians*, 22.

³³⁴ “The Declarations, Resolutions, and Motions Adopted by the Synod of Barmen,” on May 29-31, 1934, in Cochrane, *Church's Confession under Hitler*, 238.

The unimpeachable basis of the German Evangelical Church is the gospel of Jesus Christ as it is testified to in Holy Scripture and brought to light again in the Confessions of the Reformation. The present Reich Church administration has abandoned this unimpeachable basis and has been guilty of numerous violations of the law and the [Church] constitution. It has thereby forfeited the claim to be the legitimate administration of the German Evangelical Church.³³⁵

This article reflects an identity that is based on the biblical text and its traditional interpretation. The Confessing Church's reactionary response highlighted the novel character of the German Evangelical Church as an institution subservient to the State, organized and administered by State functionaries, and guided by State ideology.³³⁶ To Confessing Church pastors, this adaptation of the Church to the State compromised its identity and commission to preach the gospel.

Yet it is important to note that the Confessing Church pastors walked a fine line in delineating the relationship between the Church and State. On the one hand, while the Confessing Church challenged the German Christian movement's subservience to the Nazi regime, it still acknowledged the Lutheran doctrine of the two kingdoms: that God instituted the State to rule over the mundane lives of men and women, to preserve order and establish peace; and the Church to govern their spiritual lives, to preach the gospel, to instruct in matters of morals and tradition, and to provide the sacraments.³³⁷ Though the Barmen Declaration acknowledged the State's "divine appointment" to "[provide] justice and peace," through force if need be, it "[rejected] the false doctrine, as though the State,

³³⁵ "Barmen Declaration," in Cochrane, *Church's Confession under Hitler*, 242; see also, Matheson, *The Third Reich and the Christian Churches*, 45-47.

³³⁶ Cochrane, *Church's Confession under Hitler*, 192-193, 206.

³³⁷ See Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 11; Green, *Lutherans against Hitler*, 181-183.

over and beyond its special commission, should and could become the single and totalitarian order of human life, thus fulfilling the Church's vocation as well."³³⁸

Likewise, the Church rejected the idea that it "should or could appropriate the characteristics, the tasks, and the dignity of the State, thus itself becoming an organ of the State."³³⁹

The church leaders and pastors at Barmen took a definitive stand on the issue of general revelation and the German Christian movement's assertion that the truths of God can be known through Nazi ideology.³⁴⁰ They explicitly denied reliance on any source outside the biblical texts. With an eye toward the German Christian movement, Hitler, the Nazis, and National Socialist ideology, the Declaration issued an unambiguous rejection of any extra-scriptural authority: "We reject the false doctrine, as though the Church could and would have to acknowledge as a source of its proclamation, apart from and besides this one Word of God, still other events and powers, figures and truths, as God's revelation."³⁴¹ In other words, the biblical texts became the standard of truth by which all claims – National Socialist or otherwise – must be measured. Again, the purpose was to maintain the historic identity of the Church as defined by the biblical texts and affirmed in the Reformation confessions, and more importantly, to preserve the integrity of the gospel.

³³⁸ "Barmen Declaration," in Cochrane, *Church's Confession under Hitler*, 241. See also Schilling, *Contemporary Continental Theologians*, 22.

³³⁹ "Barmen Declaration," in Cochrane, *Church's Confession under Hitler*, 241.

³⁴⁰ Cochrane, *Church's Confession under Hitler*, 180-185.

³⁴¹ "Barmen Declaration," in Cochrane, *Church's Confession under Hitler*, 239.

All of these fine points of theology had a direct impact on the manner of preaching in the Confessing Church. The Church would not accept the State's limitation on who could or could not preach the gospel; it was the Church's affair to call and ordain pastors to preach. It would not accept sources of authority on Christian theology or practice beside the biblical texts; all knowledge of God must be verified and measured against the biblical texts. The Confessing Church recognized preaching as the fundamental commission of the Church, its historic purpose and mission in the world. The Barmen Declaration emphasizes the role of preaching for the Confessing Church:

The Church's commission, upon which its foundation is founded, consists in delivering the message of the free grace of God to all people in Christ's stead, and therefore in the ministry of his own Word and work through sermon and sacrament.

We reject the false doctrine, as though the Church in human arrogance could place the Word and work of the Lord in the service of any arbitrarily chosen desires, purposes, and plans.³⁴²

In no uncertain terms, the Barmen Declaration denies the German Christian movement's reliance on general revelation and Nazi ideology and its agenda in furthering the Nazification of modern Christianity. Essentially, the Barmen Declaration drew an unmistakable line in the sand and demanded that German pastors pick sides in the debate.³⁴³ The gospel message is not to be hindered, altered, or put to political service. They reflected on Jesus' great commission, to preach the gospel to the four corners of the world (Matt. 28:20), and confronted the German Christian movement's apparent compromise. And they took to heart the Apostle Paul's teaching that "the word of God is

³⁴² "Barmen Declaration," in Cochrane's *Church's Confession under Hitler*, 242.

³⁴³ Schilling, *Contemporary Continental Theologians*, 22.

not fettered,” that no Christian could accept restrictions or limitations on the gospel (II Tim. 2:9).³⁴⁴ The importance of preaching for the identity of the Confessing Church only underscores the necessity of examining its sermons to see how consistent they were to these principles.

Without trudging too deep in the weeds of ecclesiastical governance, it will be helpful to outline the Confessing Church’s organizational structure and administration and its relationship with the *Reichskirche*. In most of the 28 state churches, members of the German Christian movement took over leadership in 1933. The Confessing Church referred to these provincial churches as “disturbed churches” because their traditions and administrations had been overturned, and their leadership instituted the policies of the national church administration.³⁴⁵ Yet in a few Land churches, the old authorities remained in place, and they invariably sided with the Confessing Church – through to varying degrees.³⁴⁶ These Land churches were called “intact churches” because their traditions and administrations had remained unobstructed. Among them were the Land churches of Bavaria, the Hanover-Lutheran and -Reformed churches, as well as the Land church of Württemberg. Of course, individual churches in either intact or disturbed provinces could align themselves with the Confessing Church, the German Christian movement, or neither and remain neutral.

From its inception in May 1934, the Confessing Church was a self-governing organization of churches, organized by province throughout Nazi Germany.³⁴⁷ This was

³⁴⁴ “Barmen Declaration,” in Cochrane’s *Church’s Confession under Hitler*, 244.

³⁴⁵ Helmreich, *German Churches under Hitler*, 163.

³⁴⁶ Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 69; and Helmreich, *German Churches under Hitler*, 163.

³⁴⁷ Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 69; Conchrane, *Church’s Confession under Hitler*, 140-145; and

accomplished through a series of tiers of brotherhood councils established at the congregational, district, and provincial levels, and this structure assured a degree of representation for individual congregations.³⁴⁸ Each of the 28 state churches had provincial brotherhood councils, and each sent delegates to Confessing synods; yet the Land Church of the Old Prussian Union led the way in organizing and structuring the Confessing Church – partly because of its size and membership, but also because of its location, headquartered in Berlin. As Helmreich argues, the brotherhood council of the Land Church of the Old Prussian Union “actually became the working executive and directing body of the Confessing Church in the Old Prussian Union and furnished the militant leadership for the Confessing Church of all Germany.”³⁴⁹

At the inception of the Confessing Church, congregations that wished to join the organization put the question to their members: if an individual wished to join the Confessing Church, then they had to sign a red card.³⁵⁰ One could become a member of the Confessing Church, and yet still retain their membership in the Land church.³⁵¹ The obvious problem was that it was rare for an entire congregation to align itself with either the Confessing Church or the German Christian movement; many simply remained neutral. Congregations would often be split between Confessing members, German Christians, and those who wished to remain neutral, a reality that led to conflicts within the church. In fact, in a predominantly neutral church or one aligned with the German

Helmreich, *German Churches under Hitler*, 161.

³⁴⁸ Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 69; and Helmreich, *German Churches under Hitler*, 161.

³⁴⁹ Helmreich, *German Churches under Hitler*, 161-62.

³⁵⁰ Helmreich, *German Churches under Hitler*, 161.

³⁵¹ Helmreich, *German Churches under Hitler*, 161.

Christian movement, there could be a small group of Confessing members who met together alone in Bible studies or other classes.³⁵² And as one historian writes, “the dualism came to be recognized, and pastors and laity accommodated themselves to it.”³⁵³ This indicates that while churches could split over the issue of allegiance, congregants found ways to cope and to worship with like-minded others. Nevertheless, some 2,000 congregations throughout Nazi Germany identified with the Confessing Church, and in just the regions of the Rhineland and Westphalia alone, there were approximately 800,000 card-carrying members by 1935.³⁵⁴

While the membership of the Confessing Church over-shadowed that of the German Christian movement (with only 600,000 across all of Germany), they were about equal in terms of the numbers of pastors with the former at 7,000 and the later at approximately 6,000. Essentially, the 18,000 Protestant pastors of German were split about evenly between the Confessing Church, the “German Christians,” and those who remained neutral in the Church Struggle. Yet of course, the German Christians movement rose to dominance because of its close association with National Socialism and the patronage of the Nazi regime.

One point that should be kept in mind is that the Confessing Church claimed to be the “true” German Evangelical church, and thus they “always maintained its right to historic revenue, particularly from church taxes which were levied on all German

³⁵² Helmreich, *German Churches under Hitler*, 164.

³⁵³ Helmreich, *German Churches under Hitler*, 165.

³⁵⁴ Robertson, *Christians against Hitler*, 10, 65. Unfortunately, we do not have reliable statistics on Confessing Church membership in all the German regions, and so estimates of a cumulative total are not available.

Protestants who had not officially withdrawn from the various Land churches.”³⁵⁵ Thus, Confessing Church pastors continued to receive their paychecks from the government, which no doubt was a motivation to curb criticisms of the state, lest they risk biting the hand that feeds them.³⁵⁶ Yet as the Nazi regime arrested or imprisoned Confessing pastors, or leaders of German Christian movement ousted them, the Confessing Church took up collections from their congregations in their support, which would be dispersed by the provisional brotherhood councils by region.³⁵⁷

Therefore, the Confessing Church was more a loose collection of intact churches, congregations, smaller groups within congregations, as well as brotherhood councils. As Helmreich argues, “The Confessing church never had a clear-cut structure. It was unique in its organizational complexity; it had no constitution, no elaborate system of laws and ordinances comparable to the usual German church administration. It always claimed to be the true German Evangelical church, and thereby did not cut itself off from the legalistic maze created by the past. Instead it made use of these laws, customs, and traditions to protect itself.”³⁵⁸ The Confessing Church was a church that emerged in crisis and that allowed for adaptation in the face of persecution, yet its lack of clear organization and structure impeded its ability to unify Confessing pastors in staunch opposition to the Nazi regime.

³⁵⁵ Helmreich, *German Churches under Hitler*, 166-167; and Robertson, *Christians against Hitler*, 48.

³⁵⁶ Robertson, *Christians against Hitler*, 35.

³⁵⁷ Helmreich, *German Churches under Hitler*, 162; and Robertson, *Christians against Hitler*, 35. Robertson also notes that many congregations openly supported their pastors if they were disciplined or lost state sanction, and so they did not need to petition their regional brotherhood council for financial assistance.

³⁵⁸ Helmreich, *German Churches under Hitler*, 167.

In sum, the Confessing Church staunchly criticized the German Christian movement and the Nazi regime for their racist ideology and policies, their attempts at eliminating the Jewish roots of the Christian faith, and for trading the authority of the biblical texts for the authority of the state, race, and the dictates of Hitler. The Confessing Church proclaimed itself the “true” Protestant Church of Germany, submissive to the authority of the biblical texts alone, unsullied by any Nazi claims to religious or transcendent truth.³⁵⁹ It thereby took the historical step of breaking with the traditional Lutheran concept of the church’s subservience to the state.

The Emergence of the “New School” in German Protestant Homiletics

The establishment of the Confessing Church marks a distinctive turning point in the history of preaching on the European continent.³⁶⁰ A vocal minority of pastors, influenced by Barth and dialectical theology, united on the principle that religious truth must be dependent upon the biblical texts alone, thus breaking from the tradition of German liberal Protestantism and its emphasis on natural theology as a source of knowledge.³⁶¹ The Confessing Church refused to acknowledge any form of revelation apart from the Hebrew and Christian biblical texts, which included reliance on a providential interpretation history, scientific theory, and more recently in European

³⁵⁹ By calling themselves the “true” Protestant church, the Confessing Church argued that they had remained supportive of and loyal to the historic confessions of the German churches, reaching back to the Reformation (e.g. the Augsburg and Heidelberg Confessions).

³⁶⁰ Old, *Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church, Volume 6*, 759.

³⁶¹ As Schilling writes of Barth’s argument, “Seeing both man and God from below, instead of from above in the light of Jesus Christ, it simply articulates what man himself is and creates God in man’s image. But our finite human understandings of lordship, creation, reconciliation, and redemption cannot make accessible to us the being of one who is Lord, Creator, and Redeemer in an infinite sense.” See Schilling, *Contemporary Continental Theologians*, 25.

historical thought, racial theory. At the same time, they emphasized two other points that would shape the new school of homiletics: that the sermon should be used as a practical means, or a tool, to address the great spiritual confusion of the time; and lastly, that Christian pastors must reaffirm the use and value of the Hebrew Bible as elemental to the Christian scripture, acknowledging its continuity and close relationship with the Christian gospel.

Given this focus on the biblical texts as the sole source of revelation, the Confessing Church took preaching exceptionally seriously as the primary means for the church to effect the sanctification of a German society under Nazi rule. In the following section we will examine how the practice of preaching significantly changed in the period prior to and after the establishment of the Nazi dictatorship.

To properly evaluate the sermons of the Confessing Church, which is the major task of this dissertation, we must first survey the tradition of homiletics in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century German Protestantism. A discussion of modern preaching must begin with the towering figure of the Reformed church pastor and theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher.³⁶² Preaching, according to Schleiermacher, is the common expression of the feeling in a faith community. The preacher is a representative member of the congregation, given no higher status or pride of place, who must seek to give voice to its harmony and unity. In his speeches to Christianity's critics, Schleiermacher writes,

When one stands out before the others he is neither justified by office nor by compact; nor is it pride or ignorance that inspires him with assurance. It is the free impulse of his spirit, the feeling of heart-felt unanimity and

³⁶² In Germany, the Reformed churches were directly influenced by the teachings of the Reformation theologian and pastor John Calvin.

complete equality, the common abolition of all first and last, of all earthly order. He comes forward to present to the sympathetic contemplation of others his own heart as stirred by God, and, by leading them into the region of religion where he is at home, he would infect them with his own feeling. He utters divine things and in solemn silence the congregation follows his inspired speech. If he unveils a hidden wonder, or links with prophetic assurance the future to the present, or by new examples confirms old truths, or if his fiery imagination enchants him in visions into another part of the world and into another order of things, the trained sense of the congregation accompanies him throughout.³⁶³

For Schleiermacher, preaching is a means to explore and intensify religious feeling in a community of faith. But more than this the pastor has the responsibility of leading his congregation in the experience of religious feeling, in navigating the direction the church is to take. He is the first among equals, and he has the task of guiding the community of faith in the realm of feeling. Barth comments on this sensibility, “In his capacity as a living personality, with the common impulses as his starting point, he has to steer the bark of the congregation as it floats down the stream of feeling.”³⁶⁴ The pastor, then, exercises great influence in giving voice to the impulse of religious feeling in his congregation.

Schleiermacher’s influence in the German church and its theology can hardly be overstated. For the next century his view of religion as feeling would dominate theological discussion and inspire pastors, theologians, historians, and philosophers to examine the means by which one may come to the knowledge of God and Jesus Christ. As previously mentioned, the German liberal theological tradition emerged from this context, and in the nineteenth century religious authority no longer rested predominantly

³⁶³ Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, 151.

³⁶⁴ Barth, *Homiletics*, 22.

in the biblical texts, but instead in a variety of sources: in historical and biblical criticism, experience, feeling, scientific inquiry, nature, and the biblical text itself.³⁶⁵ The pastor had the difficult job of mediating all these sources of knowledge to his community of faith in a consistent and coherent manner.

In the 1912 edition of the encyclopedia *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, the theologian Johannes Bauer wrote the article “*Homiletik*,” underscoring the centrality of the preacher in the pulpit, leading and edifying the congregation through his personal confession of faith.³⁶⁶ The sermon, he asserts, is the “free, individual, living confession of faith and personal proclamation of saving faith.”³⁶⁷ One can readily see traces of Schleiermacher’s emphasis on feeling and the dependence upon God in religious discourse. The biblical texts are preached and a text is important, but Bauer argues that the preacher’s life experience in faith is the confirmation of the gospel’s veracity. Bauer writes,

The sermon is speech, and it follows a single purpose, namely, to determine the will of the listener; thus, this is intended for a religious-moral idea, feeling, or decisive act. The course of this, the sound, the shape, the substance, determines interest in the sweeping success on the will of the worshiping community and forms the oratorical character of the sermon. The effect is not an externally manageable fact, but rather the production of the spirit, mind, that is, edification. It rests on how to achieve the way, at every speech, of the moral purposes with moral

³⁶⁵ John Wilson, *Introduction to Modern Theology: Trajectories in the German Tradition* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 84-87.

³⁶⁶ Johannes Bauer, in his article, “*Homiletik*,” in *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart; Handwörterbuch in gemeinverständlicher Darstellung*, edited by Friedrich Schiele and Leopold Zscharnack (Tübingen: Verlag von J.C.B Mohr, 1912), 126; Bauer writes: “*die Predigt ist immer auch persönliches Glaubensbekenntnis.*”

³⁶⁷ Bauer, “*Homiletik*,” 126.

persuasion in the personal conviction of the preacher by the truth of the matter of the Gospel, which he represents.³⁶⁸

The idea is an old one, that living faith is best exemplified in a blessed Christian life. The pastor's confession is a testimony to God's benevolence and faithfulness, and as such, must be shared with the community of faith for the benefit of all. Thus, as one of the most trusted and authoritative members of the faith community, the preacher had considerable influence in applying his personal views and convictions to the life of the congregation. A potential problem, as Barth commented in his own treatment of homiletics, was that this reliance upon personal confession of faith in the pulpit is a poor and potentially dangerous substitute for biblical exegesis and a coherent theology.³⁶⁹

Increasingly in the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, Protestant churches in Germany encouraged preachers to appeal not only to religious knowledge as expressed in the biblical texts to engage their congregations, but to emphasize the importance of feeling and religious experience. An example is found in D. Eugen Sachsse's *Evangelische Homiletik: Ein Leitfaden für Studierende und Kandidaten* (1913), a homiletic textbook for seminarians. Sachsse charges pastors to edify congregations by appealing to feeling and will:

Also, the sermon has a practical purpose, but it does not want to bring about an isolated decision, but to promote the Christian life, i.e. edify. The essence of Christianity is renunciation from sin and faith in the grace of God in Christ. "Believe and turn unto the gospel." That was the goal of all the preaching of Christ (Mark 1:15). This decision should be caused by recognition and feeling, set into motion through the message: the kingdom of God is at hand! All Spiritual Life exists in recognition,

³⁶⁸ Bauer, "Homiletik," 125-126.

³⁶⁹ Barth, *Homiletics*, 34-37.

feeling, will; these three functions can never be separated. In particular, the religious life takes place in all three functions; it seizes the entire person in all its power... This is the edification of Christians; it is the aim of every sermon. The sermon is to promote the recognition, intensify the feeling, and determine the will.³⁷⁰

Sachsse acknowledges the complexity of the human being in encountering truth – acceptance is not simply a matter of reason, but also of feeling and the will. The resourceful preacher will appeal to each of these aspects of the human being to most effectively present the gospel message, to encourage men and women to repent of their sins and believe in the work of God in Christ. Essentially this is advice about how to best communicate in the context of a community of faith, where the language, symbolism, and imagery of the sanctuary appeals not to reason, but feeling and the will.

Protestant pastors may have appealed to feeling, will, experience, and historical criticism with ease and regularity, but surprisingly, their use of the biblical texts focused on the New Testament while passing over the Hebrew Bible. There is an assumption, rarely even addressed, that preaching is necessarily based primarily upon the New Testament, and that the Hebrew Bible is merely a supplement to the gospel message proclaimed in the New Testament.³⁷¹ This assumption carries connotations of the superiority of the New Testament over the Hebrew Bible, and a judgment of its perceived

³⁷⁰ D. Eugen Sachsse, *Evangelische Homiletik. Ein Leitfaden für Studierende und Kandidaten* (Leipzig: A. Deichert'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung Nachf., 1913), 138.

³⁷¹ Scott Gibson offers several reasons why this assumption is prominent in the modern age: biblical Hebrew is perceived to be a more difficult language to master than biblical Greek; the culture of the Hebrew Bible is perceived to be more foreign than that of the New Testament; pastors do not appreciate how dependent the New Testament is upon the Hebrew Bible; and the perception that the advent of Christ obviates the need for the Hebrew Bible. See Scott Gibson, "Challenges to Preaching the Old Testament," in *Preaching the Old Testament*, Scott Gibson, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2006), Kindle edition, location 176.

inadequacy for the edification and sanctification of the community of faith. If preaching meant proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ, then pastors were left wondering what to make of the Hebrew Bible. If a preacher neglected the preaching of the Hebrew Bible from a conviction of its lesser or even insignificant status in the canon, then how can the Church make sense of its sacred history? Very few of the homiletic texts reviewed in the present discussion treat the Hebrew Bible as a source base for sermons. This in itself is telling. It indicates a low view of the Hebrew Biblical texts and an unwillingness to engage in a period of sacred history common to Jews and Christians. An implication of this perception is that that the Christian community in Germany did not understand or appreciate this common heritage with the Jewish people, thus creating a distance between the two groups.

One rare example of a theologian specifically treating the preacher's use of the Hebrew Bible is Christian Palmer and his classic work *Evangelische Homiletik*, a five hundred page magnum opus on homiletics. Published in 1842 and used as a standard text in seminaries throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, Palmer reiterates the common theme in Christian homiletics that the Hebrew Bible is not sufficient to present the gospel in a sermon, but that the Christian preacher must depend upon the preaching of the New Testament. If the pastor does preach from the Hebrew Bible, he must find Christ in the text in order to demonstrate the continuity of God's blessing from the time of Adam to the advent of Jesus in Bethlehem.³⁷²

³⁷² Finding Christ in the Hebrew Bible would often be demonstrated through selective metaphors (e.g. the rose of Sharon in the Psalms), prefigurations (e.g. Jacob's wrestling partner in Genesis), and prophecies of the messiah in the prophetic books.

But it is the nature of all God's actions among human beings that he gradually goes to work, and so also is the appearance of Christ not like a sudden meteor illuminated in the history of the world, but it is like the starting point of a new series... This preliminary revelation is itself in turn the Word of God, but not independently, for its sufficiency has its focus outside itself, in the New Testament...³⁷³

The Hebrew Bible is not a complete text itself; it is not a text to be understood in its own terms. The Hebrew Bible is to be interpreted according to the Christian understanding. Again, this is not new to homiletics, only a clear example of this style of interpretation presented in a textbook on preaching for seminarians.

Despite this view of the Hebrew Bible as partial, incomplete, and only useful in relation to the New Testament, Palmer emphasizes that this sacred text is God's revelation to humanity, and as such it ought to be cherished. He writes, "We give [sermons] with a special love, as we very much wish it would be used in our churches on every opportunity, to better exploit the treasure of the Hebrew Bible to the benefit of the community..."³⁷⁴ Christian pastors are to commonly use the text, treasure its riches, and profit from its lessons. The problem is that Palmer seems to present mixed messages here: the Hebrew Bible is valuable, but it is inferior to the New Testament. The preacher is left to wonder why he should rely upon the Hebrew Bible at all. As we will see shortly, when the Nazis came to power the Confessing Church addressed this problem in re-evaluating homiletics.

As a result of the spiritual and intellectual disorientation caused by Germany's devastating defeat in the First World War and also the increasing awareness of the limits

³⁷³ Christian Palmer, *Evangelische Homiletik* (Stuttgart, 1845), 238.

³⁷⁴ Palmer, *Evangelische Homiletik*, 248.

of German liberal Protestantism, many German pastors and theologians came to re-evaluate how human beings may come to a true knowledge of God, and in turn, adjusted their understanding of preaching. The question of God's revelation took on new importance for pastors as Germans sought to rebuild their religious and political institutions on an unyielding foundation. Church historian Timothy Oliphant Old demonstrates how a "new school of preaching began to spring up over the whole of German-speaking Protestantism," one that "[reaffirmed] biblical preaching."³⁷⁵ We begin to see a clear line of demarcation among theologians who wished to emphasize the basis of preaching in the biblical texts themselves, and not in feeling, experience, or some social or political philosophy.

As previously discussed, Confessing Church leaders believed that the German liberal Protestant tradition of homiletics became unmoored from the orthodox bedrock of the Church, the biblical texts themselves. If one can sidestep the authority of the biblical texts by preaching from his own experience, then what happens when one's experience differs from another's? Confessing Church pastors grew increasingly concerned that the German liberal Protestant tradition of homiletics left an open door, particularly to the German Christian movement, to the preaching of unchristian and even anti-Christian claims in the service of the Nazi regime. This new school of homiletics, often associated with neo-orthodox circles, asserted the reliability of the biblical texts as preserved by the

³⁷⁵ Old, *Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures*, 763. At the same time, Heinz Zahrnt has argued that "the renewal of Protestant theology in the twentieth century arose from the central task of the Church, that of preaching, or more precisely from the 'specific problem of the pastor, the sermon.'" As Barth pointed out, the pastor must speak to the tremendous problems of modern life using the scripture. "He wants to speak to *men*, to the fabulous contradiction in their lives, but he has to do so as a pastor by means of the no less fabulous message of the Bible." Thus, developments in preaching and theology in the early twentieth century went hand in hand. See Zahrnt, *The Question of God*, 17.

Church. This meant a return to an orthodox Reformation theology that emphasized the biblical texts as the sole source of authority, albeit still making use of the advantages of biblical and historical criticism. As Old states, preachers of this new school believed that “Only this strongly biblical sort of preaching had the authority to denounce the apostasy of the day.”³⁷⁶ They became increasingly critical of the type of preaching that relied upon the preacher and his religious experience, feeling, and philosophies, and instead they elevated the importance of the biblical texts as the sole basis of authority in preaching.

Yet, as we will see, the development of this new school of preaching contributed to an on-going debate within the Confessing Church, particularly among Lutherans committed to the Lutheran confessions of the Reformation, about doctrines that support natural (or general) revelation as well as the role of God in creation.³⁷⁷ While the Confessing Church united against the threat of the German Christian movement and other pro-Nazi Christians, it soon became divided because of centuries-old confessional disputes between Lutherans and Reformed.

For the remainder of this chapter I will explore the three fundamental elements of this new school of homiletics: first, the emphasis on the biblical texts as the sole authority for preaching; second, the aim to use the sermon as a practical means to address the great spiritual confusion of the time and, more strikingly, as a “weapon” to combat the evil forces at work in the world; and third, the reaffirmation of the use and value of the Hebrew Bible, acknowledging its continuity and close relationship with the Christian

³⁷⁶ Old, *Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures*, 763.

³⁷⁷ Green, *Lutherans against Hitler*, 177-179.

gospel. These themes will provide a necessary foundation to understand and evaluate the sermons of the Confessing Church in the following chapters.

Three distinguished Confessing Church theologians re-evaluated the preacher's task of proclaiming the gospel in this new post-war context and disseminated their views either in the classroom or in published form. These texts give us an excellent indication not only of how they taught and encouraged pastors to preach, but also how they wished to preach differently from their German liberal predecessors. Karl Barth, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and Wolfgang Trillhaas – each a pastor and theologian – taught the subject of homiletics in the early- to mid- 1930s to young men interested in pursuing a career in the ministry. At the University of Bonn, Barth taught two seminars on homiletics in 1932 and 1933, and his text *Homiletics*, is a compilation of students notes that he approved for publication in 1966. Bonhoeffer taught homiletics as the leader of the underground Confessing Church seminary in Finkenwalde, where he delivered these lectures from 1935 to 1937. He was executed in a Nazi prison at the end of the war on 9 April 1945, and thus did not have the opportunity to revise or otherwise approve these lectures for publication.

Unlike Barth and Bonhoeffer, their colleague Trillhaas is virtually unknown in the English-speaking world. Trillhaas was born in 1903, and in his late 20s became a young and gifted professor of pastoral theology at the University of Erlangen. But he was also an early and ardent supporter of the PEL and later the Confessing Church, and as a result he was held back in his career, along with several of his fellow Confessing colleagues,

because of their opposition to the Nazis and National Socialism.³⁷⁸ Trillhaas was not only a professor of pastoral theology at the University of Erlangen, but he was also pastor at Trinity Lutheran Church in Erlangen.³⁷⁹ As professor and pastor, Trillhaas published a concise yet thorough homiletic textbook to meet the new pastoral challenges of his day. The book was entitled *Evangelische Predigtlehre* and it was published in 1935 with the reputable Christian-Kaiser Publishing House. Of the three homiletic texts I have found between the years 1933 and 1945, only Trillhaas' was actually published and made available to active pastors and seminary students in the Nazi dictatorship. Like Barth and Bonhoeffer, Trillhaas' work of homiletics demonstrates academic rigor as well as a deep engagement with the practical concerns of pastors who have to preach week after week.

It is important also to keep in mind that Bonhoeffer's and Trillhaas' homiletic texts were written after Ludwig Müller, the Reich Bishop, issued the "muzzling decree" (*Maulkorbgesetz*). Inundated with criticism in the German churches over a variety of missteps, including his treatment of the respected Bodelschwingh as his rival to the office of Reich Bishop in the summer of 1933, the debacle at the Berlin *Sportpalast* on November 14, 1933, as well as the incorporation of church youth groups into the Hitler Youth in December 1933, Müller attempted to silence critical voices in the Protestant churches by issuing the "Ordinance for the Restoration of Orderly Conditions in the German Evangelical Church" on January 4, 1934.³⁸⁰ This "muzzling decree," as it

³⁷⁸ Green, *Lutherans against Hitler*, 328.

³⁷⁹ Green, *Lutherans against Hitler*, 328.

³⁸⁰ See Cochrane, *Church's Confession under Hitler*, 129; Green, *Lutherans against Hitler*, 91-92; Helmreich, *German Churches under Hitler*, 153-154; and Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 341.

became known, sought to restore peace and order within the German Evangelical Church – and also between the Church and the state. It stated that anyone who stirs up controversy in the church in violation of the decree would be “automatically suspended from office and a formal disciplinary process will be initiated immediately with the aim of removing him from office.”³⁸¹ The decree “forbad pastors from discussing current controversies during church services, specifying that church services were to be used only for preaching the Gospel, not for discussing church-political matters.”³⁸² In this light, we can see Barth, Bonhoeffer, and Trillhaas advising their students to focus their sermons on the scriptures not simply to emphasize the gospel message to bring spiritual renewal to Germans, but perhaps also to help seminarians abide by the law. This may account for the low percentage of sermons (9.6%) that in some way subvert the Nazi regime or its ideology, as we will discuss in the next chapter. Even so, the three theologians believed the gospel to be a powerful weapon against Nazi ideology.

These primary sources represent three Confessing Church theologians’ views on the preacher’s task, and though one cannot argue they are representative of the views of all pastors in the Confessing Church, they are immensely important because they indicate how its leadership adapted its methods of ministry to confront the German Christian movement and a regime that appeared intent on “coordinating” the German churches or limiting their influence in Nazi Germany.

³⁸¹ “The Muzzling Decree, 4 January 1934,” in Matheson, *The Third Reich and the Christian Churches: Documents*, 41-42.

³⁸² Green, *Lutherans against Hitler*, 92.

Let us now turn to the first main theme in the new school of homiletics, the emphasis on the biblical texts as the sole authority for preaching. No other pastor or theologian had more of an impact in this regard than Karl Barth. He was born on 10 May 1886, in Basel, Switzerland, and by the time of his death on 10 December 1968, he was widely acknowledged as one of the greatest Protestant theologians of the twentieth century. He is perhaps most well-known for his contribution to Protestant theology, his magnum opus, the *Church Dogmatics*, a thirteen-volume systematic theology published in parts for over thirty-five years. Barth was raised in a Swiss Reformed household, and discovered early in life a passion for theology, which he studied first at the University of Bern, and then in Germany at the Universities of Berlin, Tübingen, and Marburg. After graduation Barth accepted an appointment as the pastor of a parish in the small town of Safenwil, Switzerland, and though he enjoyed his pastoral work immensely, he decided after ten years to begin a teaching career. He accepted a position at the University of Göttingen, then later at the Universities of Münster and Bonn. It was at the University of Bonn in the early 1930s that Barth, a member of the Social Democrat Party, recognized National Socialism as a dangerous movement in German politics, and the German Christians a threat to the unity and mission of the German churches.³⁸³ Barth became an early leader in the Confessing Church, even drafting its foundational document, the Barmen Declaration. Yet Barth was forced out of Germany when in 1934 he refused to swear the loyalty oath to Adolf Hitler, as required of all civil servants.³⁸⁴ He returned to

³⁸³ Eberhard Busch, *Karl Barth: His Life from Letters and Autobiographical Texts* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1976), 223-6; and Will Herberg, "The Social Philosophy of Karl Barth," in *Community, State and Church*, by Karl Barth (New York: Anchor Books, 1960), 38.

³⁸⁴ Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 156-157; and Helmreich, *German Churches under Hitler*, 178.

Switzerland and continued to teach systematic theology at the University of Basel, still a guiding influence of the young Confessing Church movement.

Barth begins his homiletics lectures with an evaluation of the history of German preaching. He concludes that nineteenth and early twentieth century homiletics can be characterized as moving away from an emphasis on the preacher as subject, as the mediating representative of the Christian community of faith. For Barth, this was a problem that he believes contributed to the lack of clarity of much liberal theology.³⁸⁵ Christian pastors did not just have one source of revelation to choose from – the biblical texts – but they had a variety in the arsenal of general revelation. These sources could complement, challenge, or undermine the traditional authority of the biblical texts, and so it is obvious to see how the pastor's theology could become less precise, perhaps muddled, and in some cases contribute to the loss of conviction amid the differing voices about the being and work of God.³⁸⁶ Barth contends that because of this problem, liberal theology has consistently failed to proclaim Christian theology with scholarly rigor and clarity. For example, in a criticism of one of the leading liberal German theologians of the period, Johannes Bauer of the University of Heidelberg, Barth condemns the liberal Protestant approach that emphasizes ethics at the expense of the clarity of theology: “We have here a theology that is totally superficial, verbose, ill-defined, and in the final analysis obscure. Systematic clarity and unambiguity were simply not to be had...”³⁸⁷ Barth argued that German liberal Protestantism had lacked the necessary clarity to sustain

³⁸⁵ See Barth, *Homiletics*, 38

³⁸⁶ Barth, *Homiletics*, 34.

³⁸⁷ Barth, *Homiletics*, 34.

Germany after the devastation of the First World War. A new approach was needed. He argued that the biblical texts must be the sole authority in preaching the gospel because it alone had the spiritual power to redeem, to work in and sanctify those who heard it.³⁸⁸

One example in this shift in homiletics is Leonhard Fendt's argument for a return to evangelical preaching in the tradition of the Reformers, which Barth summarizes in his *Homiletics*. A pastor in Magdeburg and then a professor of practical theology at the University of Berlin, Fendt defines preaching as an act of worship in which an academically trained and religiously ordained Christian proclaims the gospel of salvation, the Christian *kerygma*.

As we have it in the New Testament [the kerygma is given] to the people of [Jesus'] own day in their own terms, but without impairing or supplementing the substance of the *kerygma*, and to do this, not for pedagogic, aesthetic, or other important human reasons, but because the Christian *kerygma* is the Word to which the promise is annexed, that by this Word the Holy Spirit will awaken faith wherever and whenever God pleases.³⁸⁹

The preacher is not to add to the scripture, alter its meaning, or change it in any way, but to proclaim it and let it do its work among the people. In stark contrast to the homiletics of Schleiermacher and subsequent German liberal Protestants, Fendt argues for a return to the Reformation dictum of *sola scriptura*, that the authoritative revelation of God necessary for salvation is found in the biblical texts alone.³⁹⁰

³⁸⁸ Barth, *Homiletics*, 75-81. See also, Berger, *Heretical Imperative*, 74.

³⁸⁹ Quoted in Barth, *Homiletics*, 42.

³⁹⁰ See Edwin Charles Dargan, *A History of Preaching, Vol. 1, From the Apostolic Fathers to the Great Reformers, A.D. 70-1572* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1968), 376-380; and O.C. Edwards Jr., *A History of Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004), 304.

Barth's lectures point out that a new dawn of homiletics has come and he hopes to provide an impetus to changing the preaching ministry for the twentieth century.

Preaching is the fundamental act of the church.³⁹¹ For Barth, "Preaching is simply the form in which the church's existence comes most clearly to expression," and this is because through preaching the church relives the words and actions of Jesus of Nazareth, inspiring its mission to the world.³⁹² And thus the church and its pastors must preach with conviction and understanding.

Barth argues that preaching is constituted of several fundamental elements, which if absent, undermine the efficacy of the sermon.³⁹³ This model will become the standard of the Confessing Church. First, preaching conforms to God's revelation as contained in the biblical texts, and thus the preacher's religious experience, feelings, or philosophies are an irrelevance and distraction. Second, preaching occurs in the context of the church, and its mission is to bring the gospel to all nations, including Jews – this is its place and purpose. Third, God commands the proclamation of the gospel, and therefore, preaching is obedience to this commission. Fourth, individuals who sense God's "calling" will step forward to preach the gospel. Fifth, preaching is a heralding of the coming of God. Sixth, it is an exposition of the biblical texts, a carefully and conscientiously prepared statement of God's Word. Seventh, it is the expression of "free human words" spoken by

³⁹¹ See Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 16; and Dargan, *History of Preaching I*, 12 and 552.

³⁹² Smart, *The Divided Mind of Modern Theology*, 20.

³⁹³ Barth, *Homiletics*, 43. Barth is not reinterpreting the nature and meaning of preaching; rather he is summarizing historical characteristics of preaching in the Christian tradition. This list of characteristics is often repeated in standard texts on homiletics and the history of preaching. See David Buttrick, *Homiletic: Moves and Structures* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1987), 29-44; Thomas Oden, *Pastoral Theology: Essentials of Ministry* (New York: HarperCollins, 1983), 127-139; John Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 50-91; Paul Scott Wilson, *A Concise History of Preaching* (Nashville, TN: Abington Press, 1992), 11-20.

one living by God's grace and the forgiveness of sins. Eighth, it is for those whom God has already acted in Christ. And ninth, the Holy Spirit is "the starting point, center, and conclusion" of preaching.³⁹⁴ Taking all of this into consideration, Barth offers a clear and concise definition of preaching:

Preaching is the Word of God which he himself speaks, claiming for the purpose the exposition of a biblical text in free human words that are relevant to contemporaries by those who are called to do this in the church that is obedient to its commission.

Preaching is the attempt enjoined upon the church to serve God's own Word, through one who is called thereto, by expounding a biblical text in human words and making it relevant to contemporaries in intimation of what they have to hear from God himself.³⁹⁵

For Barth, this is not a new definition of preaching, but only a new distillation of what preaching is and does according to the scriptural mandate.³⁹⁶ As Peter Berger writes, Barth's view of the Word of God, "originally spoken to the prophets and witnesses of the past, is contained in the Holy Scriptures and is ever again made alive in the preaching of the church."³⁹⁷

The fundamental characteristic of this new shift in homiletics is a return to the Reformation idea that the biblical texts are the sole basis of knowing God, and thus it is the only source of authority for the preacher. In fact, Luther's reformation movement in

³⁹⁴ See Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 15.

³⁹⁵ Barth, *Homiletics*, 44.

³⁹⁶ Barth's definition of preaching is consonant with the earliest Christian traditions. Gueric DeBona concisely summarizes the elements of preaching as liturgical, exegetical, and prophetic; that is, it preaching occurs in a religious context for a religious purpose, it is grounded in the scriptures, and it speaks God's word to a living community of faith. See DeBona, *Fulfilled in Our Hearing*, 9; and also Yngve Brilioth, *A Brief History of Preaching*, translated by K.E. Mattson (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1965), 8-10.

³⁹⁷ Berger, *Heretical Imperative*, 74.

Germany took the name *Evangelische Kirche* (not the “Lutheran” Church as it is known in the United States) to emphasize the belief that the gospel (*euangelion*) was the primary source of authority in the Christian life. In the Protestant tradition the sermon has served as the centerpiece of the worship service, and this is due to the Church’s understanding of the gospel as constitutive of the Church itself. The sermon, as a reading and exposition of the biblical texts to the community of faith, unifies the various elements of the worship service – it gives meaning to them: the liturgy, hymns, baptism, communion, and prayers. For example, in his homiletic Barth emphasizes the sanctity of preaching and reminds his students to continue the Protestant practice of preaching in the context of the sacraments – the signs of grace of the gospel: “preaching must orient itself solely to baptism as the sign of grace, to the Lord’s supper as the sign of hope, and to scripture as the record of the truth that is the basis of the church.”³⁹⁸ Preaching, then, is a commentary on the sacraments, proclaimed after baptism (a sign of dying to self and rising to new life), and communion (a sign of membership in the body of Christ).³⁹⁹ As an interpretation of the sacraments, the sermon has a dignity that underscores its significance to the church’s self-identity, and I might add, to the historian’s attempt to understand the church in a particular historical period.

Echoing Fezer and Fendt, Barth is adamant that the biblical texts alone is to dictate the content of the sermon, not the ambitions of the preacher or the perceived needs of the congregation.⁴⁰⁰ He categorically disagrees with Schleiermacher’s view that the

³⁹⁸ Barth, *Homiletics*, 87.

³⁹⁹ Barth, *Homiletics*, 58.

⁴⁰⁰ In this sense, Barth “placed the theologian in his proper place, ‘beneath’ holy scripture.” See Zahrnt, *The Question of God*, 20.

preacher must preach the gospel in accord with the common religious impulse of the congregation.⁴⁰¹ As Schleiermacher writes, “By its very nature the process is dialogical. There is a dialogue with the text which the preacher questions and which replies to him, and also with the congregation.”⁴⁰² Schleiermacher’s theology is intended to ensure the unity of the congregation, to inspire the faith of Christians living in the age of enlightenment and revolution, and to encourage an interaction between the biblical texts and human emotion that leads to spiritual growth.⁴⁰³ But as Karl Barth observes, Schleiermacher’s homiletics raises significant concerns about whether the content of the sermon is derived from the congregation itself, and whether instead, it should come to the congregation from outside, that is, from God in revelation.⁴⁰⁴

For Barth, the preacher must allow his agenda and interests to fade into the background, and let God speak through him. The preacher merely repeats the gospel; he does not create it or add to it. God speaks, and God reveals; the preacher is simply the messenger.⁴⁰⁵ Barth contends that the task of preaching is ultimately to “[preach] the past and future revelation of God, the epiphany and *parousia* of Jesus [his advent and return].”⁴⁰⁶ It is through preaching that the biblical texts become God’s Word, they are experienced as God’s Word, and thus the church becomes the place where Christians can

⁴⁰¹ See DeBona, *Fulfilled in Our Hearing*, 16-17.

⁴⁰² Quoted in Barth, *Homiletics*, 24; see Schleiermacher, *Praktische Theologie: Theologische Schriften*, vol. 8, 248.

⁴⁰³ Barth, *Homiletics*, 21; see also DeBona, *Fulfilled in Our Hearing*, 16-17.

⁴⁰⁴ Barth, *Homiletics*, 20-22

⁴⁰⁵ See Berger, *Heretical Imperative*, 74; Schilling, *Contemporary Continental Theologians*, 20; and also Zahrnt, *The Question of God*, 118.

⁴⁰⁶ Barth, *Homiletics*, 86.

hear the voice of God. Thus, the preacher must be humble and sober, utterly dependent upon God to hear the needs of God's people.⁴⁰⁷ As Barth says, the task of preaching, then, becomes a sort of prayer, "the seeking and invoking of God, so that ultimately everything depends upon whether God hears and answers our prayer."⁴⁰⁸

Barth's homiletics reflected his position in the Barmen Declaration that the scripture is the basis of the knowledge of God, thus rejecting general (or natural) revelation. While this position was accepted at the Barmen Synod by the Confessing Church, it concerned (or even alienated) many German Lutherans who believed that the orders of creation theology was essential to a Lutheran identity.⁴⁰⁹ The doctrine of the orders of creation asserted that because God created the earth, "it stood to reason that traces of the Maker could be found in his creation" as well as in human history.⁴¹⁰ Furthermore, it stresses that God is still active in the world through these orders – in marriage and the family God ensures procreation; in civil government God exercises his rule; and in the Church God is "working salvation through human instrumentality."⁴¹¹ Yet Barth conceived of God as "wholly other," that there existed an "infinite qualitative distinction" between man and God, and that thus, history and nature are not reliable sources for knowledge of God.⁴¹² He believed that the German Christian movement and Nazis exploited this doctrine of creation to support their own racial and fascist

⁴⁰⁷ See Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 320-322.

⁴⁰⁸ Barth, *Homiletics*, 90.

⁴⁰⁹ Green, *Lutherans against Hitler*, 177-178.

⁴¹⁰ Green, *Lutherans against Hitler*, 199.

⁴¹¹ Green, *Lutherans against Hitler*, 199-202.

⁴¹² Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 10.

ideologies.⁴¹³ The fact that many Lutherans did join the Confessing Church – Niemöller and Bonhoeffer among them – indicates their acknowledgement of the problem of interpreting the orders of creation, and their acknowledgement that the German churches’ response to the Nazi regime and the German Christian movement rested on a strong view of scripture as the one unassailable source of the knowledge of God.

But this theological debate had important ramifications. As I mentioned, it concerned or alienated Lutherans who felt obligated to uphold the traditional Lutheran confessions, as per their oath of ordination. It also meant a denial of a central aspect of their identity as Lutheran. The history of Lutheranism in the nineteenth century Germany is instructive here. In 1817, the Hohenzollern king, Frederick William III, desiring the ability to receive communion with his wife, forcibly united the 7,000 Lutheran congregations with the 130 Reformed congregations, forming the Prussian Union.⁴¹⁴ Lutherans resented being forced to join a union of churches that denied their theological distinctions – distinctions that they believed mattered and that had separated the churches for centuries. For a Lutheran to join the Confessing Church meant compromising and accepting another interpretation of the doctrine of creation – and this was a compromise many refused to make because it undermined their confessional unity and identity.⁴¹⁵ While for Barth, and perhaps other Confessing Church pastors who felt a stand of opposition to the Nazi regime and the German Christian movement paramount, the historic creeds or Lutheran confessional statements were relative, that is, they were only

⁴¹³ Green, *Lutherans against Hitler*, 199.

⁴¹⁴ Green has argued that this forced union became a model for Hitler to “herd all German Protestants into one Reich Church that would be submissive to him.” Green, *Lutherans against Hitler*, 26-27.

⁴¹⁵ Green, *Lutherans against Hitler*.

meaningful in an act of confession. And yet at the same time for conservative Lutherans they were central to their identity and autonomy.⁴¹⁶

Of course, members of the German Christian movement and other pro-Nazi Christians denied Barth's and the Confessing Church's sole reliance on special revelation. Many Christians sincerely believed that, with the rise of Adolf Hitler and the National Socialist movement, "God was now speaking a new message to man through German history."⁴¹⁷ Even many of the foremost theologians of Germany in the 1930s, perceived God at work in the National Socialist movement, and affirmed the view that God reveals himself in nature and history. Consider such luminaries in the German theological faculties as the University of Tübingen expert on Judaism and the New Testament, Gerhard Kittel; Paul Althaus, the great professor of New Testament and renown Luther scholar at the University of Erlangen; and Emanuel Hirsch, the well-respected systematic theologian at the University of Göttingen.⁴¹⁸ Kittel's widely used *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament* can still be found in any seminary library reference shelf, and Althaus's works on Luther are still considered classics in the field. While these theologians, and many other pro-Nazi Christians, may have accepted general revelation as a valid source of knowledge, this does not mean that they jettisoned special revelation. Rather, they attempted to use them together to understand the

⁴¹⁶ Green, *Lutherans against Hitler*, 101.

⁴¹⁷ Robert Ericksen, *Theologians under Hitler: Gerhard Kittel, Paul Althaus, Emanuel Hirsch* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 86.

⁴¹⁸ Ericksen, *Theologians under Hitler*, 1-5.

meaning of history and the nature of God, especially in the context of the upheavals of Germany since the First World War.⁴¹⁹

Let us transition now to Bonhoeffer's homiletics lectures at the underground seminary in Finkenwalde from 1935 to 1937. In this collection of lectures, Bonhoeffer offer insights into how a persecuted church trained the next generation of pastors. Before we explore Bonhoeffer's agreement with Barth that preaching must be grounded in the authority of the biblical text above all else, it will helpful to provide some context. At the urging of seminarians, clergy and presbyteries, the Confessing Church leadership in Prussia, known as the Old Prussian Council of Brethren, established five seminaries under the direction of five well-respected and trusted leaders of the Confessing Church: Pastor Herman Sasse in Elberfeld in 1934; Professor Otto Schmitz in Bielefeld-Sieker in 1934; Professor Hans Iwand in Bloestau, Prussia in 1935; Pastor Gerhard Gloege in Naumburg, Silesia in 1935; and lastly, Pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer in Zingst, Pomerania in 1935 (which later moved to Finkenwalde).⁴²⁰ Bonhoeffer received a stipend of 360 marks a month and was named the director of the institution – a status that protected him against the requirement to swear to Hitler an oath of loyalty.⁴²¹ He was charged with directing the seminary and teaching twenty-three ordination candidates, mostly from

⁴¹⁹ Ericksen, *Theologians under Hitler*, 25. As Ericksen argues, the acceptance of special revelation and the exclusion of general revelation did not necessarily prevent one from joining the Nazi Party. Some theologians who sided with Barth and the Confessing Church did initially support Hitler, such as the dialectical theologian Friedrich Gogarten; and others who accepted the view that one can interpret history as a means of knowing God, were oppositional to Hitler from the start, such as the existentialist philosopher and theologian Paul Tillich.

⁴²⁰ Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography, Revised Edition* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 422.

⁴²¹ Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 424.

Berlin-Brandenburg.⁴²² Unlike an academic setting, this preachers' seminary offered a communal setting in which a variety of spiritual practices regularly took place, such as prayer, meditation, confession, communion, and even exercise, in addition, of course, to Bonhoeffer's lectures on homiletics. This was an intimate environment more like a monastery than a college.

In his homiletics lectures, Bonhoeffer reiterates Barth's main concern that preaching be grounded in the authority of the biblical texts above all else.⁴²³ He emphasizes that the sermon is the activity of God speaking to the congregation the Word of life. The preacher then must step into the background as God communicates through the Word.⁴²⁴

Our [the preachers'] speaking must become clearly independent of our own personal aims because God must speak through it. This inherent life of the Word itself must be audible every time the Word is spoken. In the proper sense, God is the one who speaks, not us. We must make room in every speech for the inherent purpose of the Word itself.⁴²⁵

Of course, this is not to say that God is actually delivering the sermon, as if God is behind the pulpit, but that the preacher speaks not his word but what he understands as God's word in the scripture.⁴²⁶ The discernable distance between the preacher and the Word is crucial. The Word is not the preacher's, but God's; the preacher is merely the messenger

⁴²² Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 424.

⁴²³ Bonhoeffer, *Worldly Preaching*, 156.

⁴²⁴ This understanding of the preaching of scripture as giving expression to God's voice is evident even in earliest Christian preaching. See Paul Scott Wilson, *A Concise History of Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992), 19.

⁴²⁵ Bonhoeffer, *Worldly Preaching*, 140.

⁴²⁶ Schilling, *Contemporary Continental Theologians*, 20.

of the good news.⁴²⁷ The purpose of the sermon, then, is that the congregation learns this Word and remembers it as they go out into the world.

Bonhoeffer forcefully argues that the sermon must be based upon the one true source of all knowledge of God, that is, the biblical texts.⁴²⁸ The sermon is distinguished from all other forms of speech because it is an “exposition of a biblical text.”⁴²⁹ He argues, “Since the sermon is the proclamation of the Word of God, its whole promise rests upon the assumption that it remains bound to the scripture and the text.”⁴³⁰ Thus, the preacher is bound to the gospel in what he speaks. As such, Bonhoeffer advises that the sermon should be based upon one particular text, a specific pericope (a unified segment of biblical verses) in most instances.⁴³¹ But when it is not, such as in occasional or holiday sermons, then it must still be based in accordance with the biblical texts. In sum, the preacher can rely upon no other authority than the special revelation in preaching to the community of faith, and therefore, the sources of liberal protestant preaching – religious experience, feeling, historical interpretation, or political ideologies – retain no special authority.

⁴²⁷ As John Stott argues, preachers do not invent the gospel message, but “it has been entrusted to them.” Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 136.

⁴²⁸ Bonhoeffer, *Worldly Preaching*, 140-141. The historian O.C. Edwards notes that sermons are not always based on a particular biblical text, though they usually are. Here Bonhoeffer takes a strong stand to ensure the sermon is based on the biblical text. See Edwards, *A History of Preaching*, 4.

⁴²⁹ Bonhoeffer, *Worldly Preaching*, 128.

⁴³⁰ Bonhoeffer, *Worldly Preaching*, 128.

⁴³¹ Bonhoeffer, *Worldly Preaching*, 156. The theologian David Buttrick comments on the reliance on the authority of scripture in sermons in the Christian tradition, and notes that the authority connotes the “power to command and wisdom to consult.” Thus, basing the sermon on a biblical text provides congregants with authority that the preacher alone does not have. See David Buttrick, *Homiletic: Moves and Structures* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 239-240.

Reiterating the same themes of Barth and Bonhoeffer, Trillhaas contends in his homiletics text *Evangelische Predigtlehre* (1935) that the pastor must preach based on the biblical texts, subjecting his own will to the demands of gospel. He writes, “The Church of Jesus Christ lives from the Word and sacrament as the gifts of their Lord. It is never the church of free speech. As it is bound to the written word, so is their sermon bound to scripture, explained and confirmed through the sacrament.”⁴³² Thus, the preacher preaches the scripture for a specific time and place, to the Christian community of faith, through the sermon. “The responsible human preacher is therefore only the secondary and indirect subject of Christian preaching.” This reliance upon the gospel accounts for the relative stability of the Christian message through the centuries, for “The Christianity of preaching, is thus decided in its content, not on the good will of the preacher... Which fate would have long ago overtaken the church, if Christianity depended upon the preaching of the preacher’s ‘Christianity.’”⁴³³ In 1935, when Trillhaas published this work, he knew that the only way for the Church to serve as an unwavering and dependable institution upon which to rebuild Germany, would be to acknowledge the gospel as its foundation and sole authority.

This theme is further expressed and elaborated upon a couple years later in Fendt’s three volume textbook on practical theology, *Grundriss der Praktischen Theologie für Studenten und Kandidaten* (1938). Though not specifically a homiletics text, Fendt agrees with much that Confessing Church members have argued. He writes,

⁴³² Trillhaas, *Evangelische Predigtlehre*, 24.

⁴³³ Trillhaas, *Evangelische Predigtlehre*, 35.

The content of preaching is thus the Bible. But the reason why the Bible provides the sermon content lies in God's kingdom efficacy, which began in Jesus from God, and will be accomplished in Jesus Christ from God; but even now is done, in "the between-times of faith," from God in Christ and in the Holy Spirit... Thus the sermon is not just a lecture about religious matters and religious people, not some instruction about the Bible, but service in God's kingdom efficacy; so the sermon must preach the content of the Bible (or in other words: Jesus Christ as the content of the Bible).⁴³⁴

Readily apparent is a distancing from any reliance upon feeling or religious experience in establishing the authority of the preacher or his message. The Christian is not simply to experience a fleeting feeling, but to learn the sacred stories that inspire love and joy and forgiveness, and which leads to a lasting and more stable devotion to God. But more than this, the proclamation of the life, ministry, and death of Jesus Christ – the contents of the biblical texts – has the greatest power to awaken faith in the despairing individual. And notice how Fendt connects his homiletic with living a right and just life according to the kingdom of God. The sermon is a message designed to instruct the Christian of the contents of the biblical texts, that they may know and apply them in day to day life. The moment a preacher departs from reading the biblical texts, he compromises his service as a preacher of the kingdom of God.

This is a crucial development in the history of twentieth century homiletics because the reliance on the biblical texts as the sole authority in preaching significantly limits debates among Christians about the validity, relevance, or authority of a preacher's religious experience, feeling, views of natural theology or a providential interpretation of

⁴³⁴ Leonhard Fendt, *Grundriss der Praktischen Theologie für Studenten und Kandidaten; Abteilung I. Grundlegung, Lehre von d. Kirche, vom Amt und von d. Predigt* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1949), 76-77.

history. Barth, Bonhoeffer, Trillhaas, and Fendt are calling for conformity, simplicity, and clarity in preaching, so that Christians sitting in the pews every Sunday do not have the opportunity to question or challenge a preacher's conclusions that are based on mere religious feeling or his own opinion. This approach is particularly important in a period of political and ecclesiastical struggle. It effectively unites Christians on the basic and authoritative source that all Christians, of whatever stripe, agree is revelation – though of course they may still argue about its interpretation.

Let us now move on to a second important theme in this homiletic turn of the early twentieth century, that the sermon is an instrument of sanctification – in short, God works through the sermon to make people holy.⁴³⁵ This theme actually intensifies in its expression from 1933 to 1937, the dates of our sources. In Barth's 1933 lectures he argues that preaching is an act of God that brings light into the world, and that transforms people. The sermon is an instrument of change. He puts it like this,

A human being becomes a hearer of the Word of God: This is our sanctification. The human being, the preacher, the listener – they are not left to themselves. They still are what they were before. But they are not left in peace. As what they are, they are placed in a totally new situation. Anything that we might say here about the power of God's Word to create anew is much too weak in view of the rest and unrest that are present when in faith a human being may grasp the calling of Jesus Christ.⁴³⁶

Strictly speaking, this idea that God acts in the sermon is nothing particularly new in the history of the Christian tradition.⁴³⁷ But we see here an emphasis that God alone is the

⁴³⁵ See Gueric DeBona, *Fulfilled in Our Hearing: History and Method of Christian Preaching* (New York: Paulist Press, 2005), 5; and also Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 105-107.

⁴³⁶ Barth, *Homiletics*, 74.

⁴³⁷ See Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 100-101; Edmund P. Clowney, *Preaching and Biblical Theology*

subject – again we see the preacher fade into the background. God is the one who sanctifies the human being. The hearer then must in turn make a decision to step out in faith. Sanctification is really the key word here, meaning to make holy in the presence of God. Preaching, then, becomes an activity that seeks to change people for the better, to change systems and institutions for the better.⁴³⁸ As Barth puts it, “[Preaching] must stand under the insight that all things must change.”⁴³⁹ For Confessing Church pastors, preaching is an act of hope in a world that desperately needs it.

Likewise, Trillhaas contends that “the sermon is a power over hearts.” It has the power to challenge people where they stand in the world, to change the way that people think and behave. Significantly, Trillhaas points out that the sermon is thus not only for the continuing sanctification of Christians, but also for non-Christians as well. “The word from the pulpit, supported in the mouth of an eloquent preacher by manifold influences on the mind in the form of music and ceremonies can also influence irreligious people... The sermon is a public power. This power is placed in the hands of the pastor.”⁴⁴⁰ The image Trillhaas paints is that of a pastor on the front lines of a spiritual struggle, confronted by Christians and non-Christians alike who must undergo a change of heart – a process of renewal in a time of crisis. The pastor must understand the power of the sermon if he is to use it effectively in this struggle.

(London: Tyndale Press, 1961), 24; P.T. Forsyth, *Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind* (New York: A.C. Armstrong and Son, 1907), 6.

⁴³⁸ David Buttrick writes, “Preaching is the ‘Word of God’ in that it participates in God’s purpose, is initiated by Christ, and is supported by the Spirit with community in the world.” The idea here is that preaching is an activity that actively seeks the reconciliation of the world to God, to align the values of our lives and institutions to God’s values as revealed in the Christian scriptures. See Buttrick, *Homiletic*, 456.

⁴³⁹ Barth, *Homiletics*, 55.

⁴⁴⁰ Trillhaas, *Evangelische Predigtlehre*, 59-60.

Bonhoeffer takes this one step further in his lectures by referring to the sermon as a weapon in a spiritual battle.⁴⁴¹ Bonhoeffer argues that the preacher must rely upon the biblical text to act, to sanctify the lives of those who hear, and to battle the forces of evil in the world. He cannot rely upon his own experiences or wisdom. The preacher must engage in “the proclamation of the Word and the warning of the godless.” He writes, “Beyond that we cannot say anything, and we cannot force anything to happen either. We must leave everything up to the Word.”⁴⁴² The preacher steps into the background to allow the freedom of the Word to emerge as the agent of change. Bonhoeffer contends that the work of this Word should be understood in terms of spiritual warfare, as if the preacher himself is engaged in combating evil from behind the pulpit: “As a witness to Christ, the sermon is a struggle with demons. Every sermon must overcome Satan. Every sermon fights a battle.”⁴⁴³ Thus, the sermon becomes a weapon against evil, apathy, ignorance, and aggression.

We have to remember that Confessing Church pastors preached these sermons in a context in which all social and cultural institutions had been coordinated to the Nazi regime. Nazi-approved messages saturated German society through the radio, cinema, newspapers, and books. Richard Evans argues that by 1937-1938, “virtually all the organs of opinion-formation in German society had been taken over by Goebbels and his Propaganda Ministry, co-ordinated, purged of real and potential dissenters, Aryanzed

⁴⁴¹ Bonhoeffer, *Worldly Preaching*, 133.

⁴⁴² Bonhoeffer, *Worldly Preaching*, 165.

⁴⁴³ Bonhoeffer, *Worldly Preaching*, 133.

and brought under ideological, financial and administrative control.”⁴⁴⁴ That is, all except for the Confessing Church, which maintained its institutional and theological autonomy, thus becoming one of the very few places in Nazi Germany where public opinion could be debated and shaped. In this context Bonhoeffer and other like-minded pastors used sermons as a way to confront or oppose the Nazi propaganda machine, to “fight a battle” using the repertoire of the Christian tradition against National Socialist ideology.

As another short, but important example of this profound shift in homiletics is a pamphlet by W. Lempp published in Stuttgart in 1937, entitled *Zwanzig Thesen über zeitgemässe Predigt*, which, along with presenting twenty theses for composing effective sermons, strongly asserts the importance of the sermon as a “weapon” of the godly in an age of spiritual warfare. The preacher must speak from the authority of biblical text, and not from his own authority. He ought to preach with a seriousness of manner and intent, cognizant that his message is the most important that his audience will hear in the hubbub of daily life in Nazi Germany. But perhaps most important, Lempp contends that “every sermon means a battle against the present ‘Prince of the power in the air,’ who must be defeated”.⁴⁴⁵ This statement is evidence that Lempp believed spiritual warfare to be taking place in Nazi Germany at this time, and that the sermon was a weapon or a tool to engage the spiritual powers. The moniker, the “Prince of the power in the air,” is a direct quotation from the Apostle Paul’s letter to the Ephesians: You were dead through the

⁴⁴⁴ Richard Evans, *The Third Reich in Power* (New York: Penguin, 2005), 213.

⁴⁴⁵ W. Lempp, *Zwanzig Thesen über zeitgemässe Predigt* (Stuttgart: Verlag der Ev. Gesellschaft) 1937, thirteenth thesis.

trespasses and sins in which you once lived, following the course of this world, following the [prince] of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient (2:1-2). Though the names “Satan” or the “devil” are not mentioned, this is the usual interpretation. The key point here is that Lempp believes evil forces are at work in the world and that the preacher is uniquely equipped to combat this evil by the authority of the biblical texts through the practice of preaching. In addition, he advises pastors to use the “whole armor of God” that St. Paul mentions in his letter to the Ephesians, “For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.” Pastors must arm themselves with the “belt of truth,” the “breastplate of righteousness,” the “shield of faith,” the “helmet of salvation,” and the “sword of the spirit” (Ephesians 6:10-17). In periods of conflict throughout the history of the church, this language is not unusual or unique, but it reflects a mentality that the biblical texts and its gospel message are the greatest weapons of offense and defense that the Christian can utilize. Finally, Lempp argues that the pastor must be “fearless, upright, and manly,” a leader whom all can look upon for clarity, direction, and an example of a faithful and righteous life.⁴⁴⁶

Along with a renewed reliance on the authority of the biblical texts for preaching and an emphasis on the sermon as an instrument to bring light into the darkness, the third important emphasis in the post-First World War shift in homiletics is a defense of preaching from the Hebrew Bible text. Though we can detect a degree of ambivalence

⁴⁴⁶ W. Lempp, *Zwanzig Thesen über zeitgemässe Predigt*, fifteenth thesis.

about the significance of the Hebrew Bible in its own right apart from the New Testament, we see a clear desire among Barth, Bonhoeffer, and Trillhaas for the Church to regain an apparently lost appreciation for the Hebrew Bible as a foundational component of the Christian biblical texts, and thus to rely upon it as an authoritative source for preaching.⁴⁴⁷ For instance, Bonhoeffer reminds his students that Christians cannot obediently preach the gospel while at the same time neglecting one half of the Christian biblical texts. The Hebrew Bible is the sacred history of God's work in the world and, therefore, Christians must esteem and study and preach from the text as they do with the New Testament. He argues,

The Old Testament must once again be preached much more often. For Luther it was a relevant part of the Holy Scripture, although he saw the New Testament as the glad tidings of the fulfillment of the Scripture. Schleiermacher, on the other hand, refused to preach from the Old Testament.⁴⁴⁸

This admonition indicates that in the early twentieth century many in the Protestant churches considered the Hebrew Bible to be obsolete, incomplete, and inferior in contrast to the New Testament and its testimony of the coming of Christ. Additional research is needed to gain a greater understanding of the frequency of Christian preaching generally from the Hebrew Bible texts – we will see how the Confessing Church fared in the following chapters – but it appears that its frequent use paled in comparison to that of the

⁴⁴⁷ This neglect of the Hebrew Bible is evident in the work of the influential early-nineteenth century Friedrich Schleiermacher. The historian David Larson notes that in the ten-volume collection of Schleiermacher's sermons, there are only 20 sermons based on Hebrew Bible texts. See Larson, *The Company of Preachers*, 353.

⁴⁴⁸ Bonhoeffer, *Worldly Preaching*, 160-161.

New Testament. Bonhoeffer is trying to recalibrate the church's view and use of the Hebrew Bible. Bonhoeffer would follow his own advice: of the 56 sermons he preached from 1933 to 1945, 17 (or 30%) of them were on the Hebrew Bible.

Barth also encourages his students to preach from the Hebrew Bible, but his advice is more in keeping with the traditional views expressed by Christian Palmer, as previously discussed. He contends that preachers must preach from the Hebrew Bible, that they should not neglect any part of the biblical texts. However, he writes,

[The Hebrew Bible] is valid only in relation to the New. If the church has declared itself to be the lawful successor of the synagogue, this means that the Old Testament is witness to Christ, before Christ but not without Christ. Each sentence in the Old Testament must be seen in this context... As a wholly Jewish book, the Old Testament is a pointer to Christ... Preaching must bring out what the Old Testament passage actually says, but in a way that affirms the basic premise on which the church adopted the Old Testament... The Old Testament points forward, the New Testament points backward, and both point to Christ.⁴⁴⁹

So while Barth encourages preachers to use the Hebrew Bible, he teaches them how to use it appropriately in service of the gospel message. This position reflects supersessionism, the notion that the Christian religion supersedes Judaism, and also that the Hebrew Bible should be interpreted in a way that confirms the claims of the New Testament.⁴⁵⁰ Barth is careful here not to encourage giving the text a “second sense,” and

⁴⁴⁹ Barth, *Homiletics*, 80-81.

⁴⁵⁰ As James Carroll writes, “The idea is that the Jesus movement, as it evolved into the Church, effectively replaced the Jews as the chosen people of God. Replacement became the motif, even in trivial ways, and even in relation to the emerging symbol of the cross: Before any follower of Jesus had touched a hand to forehead, heart, and shoulders, making the ‘sign of the cross,’ some Jews had used a similar manual rubric to symbolize the Hebrew letter with which the word ‘Torah’ begins.” See Carroll, *Constantine’s Sword*, 59. Furthermore, Susannah Heschel argues that supersessionism is a “kind of colonization” that seeks Judaism’s “arrogation and exploitation for Christian purposes.” See Susannah Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus: Christian Theologians and the Bible in Nazi Germany* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008),

not to “oppose historical and Christian exposition to one another,” but rather promotes an interpretation of the text that “points beyond itself” to Christ.⁴⁵¹ One can see here a glimmer of the anti-Judaic theology that devalued Judaism as a religion in its own right.

In contrast to Barth’s and Bonhoeffer’s minimal but incisive treatment on preaching from the Hebrew Bible text, Trillhaas offers his readers a full chapter on how to integrate the Hebrew Bible text in the preacher’s task. He writes that this is a “special difficulty” for the Christian pastor because the Hebrew Bible offers an “indirect witness to Christ” as opposed to the direct witness of the New Testament. He argues without equivocation that “any rejection of an Old Testament text, however it may be justified, betrays a misunderstanding of the New Testament revelation on decisive points. This is already the case, where one suspects in the Old Testament a document of Judaism.”⁴⁵² Trillhaas takes direct aim at the German Christian movement, which sought to undermine the credibility of the Hebrew Bible and to remove it from the Christian canon.⁴⁵³ The biblical texts, he writes, are not the work of man – or of one particular people – but a work of God. It is God’s word. The preacher must acknowledge two profoundly important truths, that “the God of the Old Testament is the God and Father of Jesus Christ” and that “the Old Testament was the Bible of Jesus.”⁴⁵⁴ The Christian cannot

26-27.

⁴⁵¹ Barth, *Homiletics*, 80-81.

⁴⁵² Trillhaas, *Evangelische Predigtlehre*, 99.

⁴⁵³ See Susannah Heschel’s superb history, *The Aryan Jesus*, which tells the story Protestant Christians, many of whom were members of the German Christian movement, who formed the Institute for the Study and Eradication of Jewish Influence on German Religious Life. As the title implies, this group not only sought the dismissal of the Hebrew Bible and a revision of the New Testament, but also advanced the argument that Jesus was not Jewish but “Aryan,” thus preserving the possibility for antisemites to continue to worship Jesus as the Son of God. See Heschel, *Aryan Jesus*, 1-2, 13, and 26.

⁴⁵⁴ Trillhaas, *Evangelische Predigtlehre*, 100.

tolerate any qualitative division between the Old and New Testaments, or the identity of the God portrayed in each. Trillhaas' treatment of the Hebrew Bible encouraged Christians to identify with the Jews as spiritual kin, as a people of faith with the same God and, in part, the same biblical texts.

The three emphases I have delineated – the scripture as the primary authority in preaching, the sermon as a tool to address the spiritual confusion of the times, and the reaffirmation of the use and value of the Hebrew Bible – have significant implications. As Barth, Bonhoeffer and Trillhaas all emphasized the sermon as the proclamation of the gospel based on the authority of the biblical texts, and thus they emphasized dignity and sacred nature of the preacher's task, it is no surprise that each strongly encouraged pastors to consider their words carefully and to write a manuscript of their sermons to ensure they stay on message. This is certainly no new development in this post-First World War shift in homiletics; the historical record reveals many pastors throughout the ages who have preached from manuscripts.⁴⁵⁵ But in this period of inter-church conflict and struggle against an antagonistic regime, it is significant that three of the most well respected theologians associated with the Confessing Church each argued that the preacher must undertake the preaching task seriously, to express the gospel in measured

⁴⁵⁵ The American theologian and pastor Jonathan Edwards is a notable case in point; see Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 255. Also, the historian O.C. Edwards specifically mentions the American pastor Harry Emerson Fosdick and Anglican Archbishop John Tillotson as clergymen who habitually read sermons from manuscripts, yet he also makes the sweeping generalization that, "with rare exceptions, the most effective preachers have not preached from manuscripts." Though his meaning of "effective" is not entirely clear, my research suggests that if he is correct, we see a more careful and conscientious approach to sermon construction and delivery in the Nazi period than we see in much of church history. See Edwards, *A History of Preaching*, 836.

words and to articulate theology carefully to the congregation. This necessitated the delivery of the sermon from a manuscript as opposed to *ex tempore* or by mere outline.

Barth contends that preaching is a sacred task unique to the office of the preacher. As such, preaching is a blessed endeavor that demands commitment, preparation, humility, and focus. For these reasons Barth heartily recommends that pastors write their sermons in manuscript form.⁴⁵⁶ The sermon is not just another speech, but it is understood to be God's revelation to the world – to the Christian community of faith – and thus, it must be undertaken very seriously and soberly. He writes,

A sermon is a speech which we have prepared word for word and written down. This alone accords with its dignity. If it is true in general that we must give an account of every idle word, we must do so especially in our preaching. For preaching is not an art that some can master because they are good speakers and others only by working out the sermon in writing. The sermon is a liturgical event. It is the central act of Protestant worship, closely related to the sacrament. Only a sermon in which each word is carefully accounted for is a sacramental act.⁴⁵⁷

Every word must be weighed and accounted for. There could be no room for mistakes, ambiguity, inappropriate levity, or distraction. The sermon was not an occasion for speaking *ex tempore*, or talking “off script,” because the very words of the sermon by definition necessitated reflection and prayer as a sacred element of the liturgy.⁴⁵⁸

Bonhoeffer reiterates the considerable preparation entailed in composing a sermon. One cannot just walk up to the pulpit and deliver a quality sermon that does

⁴⁵⁶ Barth, *Homiletics*, 119.

⁴⁵⁷ Barth, *Homiletics*, 119.

⁴⁵⁸ See Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 255-257. For example, one of the chief leaders of the Confessing Church, Martin Niemöller, transcribed every word of his sermons, with great attention to detail. See Robertson, *Christians against Hitler*, 59-60.

justice to the gospel message. Each sermon requires careful thought, prayer, and contemplation on a biblical text.⁴⁵⁹ Invoking the name of a giant in German Protestantism and a personal and family friend, Bonhoeffer offers this tidbit of practical advice: “The preacher should not avoid writing out his sermon. Adolf von Harnack said, ‘My pen is much wiser than my head.’”⁴⁶⁰ He also presents a number of practical suggestions to the seminarian on the writing of sermon manuscripts: to begin with prayer, to develop an outline, to write in the light of day, to ask specific exegetical questions of a text, to take plenty of time to write and reflect on the sermon, to begin on Tuesday and finish on Friday (at the latest), and to memorize the “thoughts,” not words, of the sermon manuscript to internalize the message.⁴⁶¹ But he adds,

The congregation does not want to be shown a child which was born in the study. The work of sermon preparation should set free the hour in the pulpit and not hinder it or lead to fear. The quality of this preparation will determine how much concentration the preacher can develop in the pulpit.⁴⁶²

The preparation in the study, the writing of the manuscript, is all only prologue. The preacher relies upon the Holy Spirit to be present when he steps into the pulpit and to work in his heart and in the hearts of the congregants. For this reason, the preacher is to pray before and after delivering the sermon.

⁴⁵⁹ Bonhoeffer, *Worldly Preaching*, 145-146.

⁴⁶⁰ Bonhoeffer, *Worldly Preaching*, 149.

⁴⁶¹ Bonhoeffer, *Worldly Preaching*, 148

⁴⁶² Bonhoeffer, *Worldly Preaching*, 149.

Trillhaas also recommends writing out the sermon in manuscript form in keeping with the dignity and gravity of the preacher's task. Again, like Barth and Bonhoeffer, the advice is to write out the sermon and to preach directly from it to prevent any verbose extemporizing. "The pastor must have a plan and may in no case yield in the pulpit to such a present tendency to have ideas and suddenly 'come to talk about something else' ... The manuscript is the indispensable and most reliable weapon against the chatter in the pulpit."⁴⁶³ The concern is to keep the preacher on message, to maintain focus on the prepared material, which is based on an extensive study of the biblical text. And again, the issue at stake is the foundation upon which the sermon is based: upon the biblical texts and not on the impulse of the pastor.

The consistent admonition among Confessing Church theologians to write out the sermon in manuscript form is significant because it highlights their emphasis on preaching on the authority of the biblical texts and not on the personality of the preacher or the chemistry between the preacher and the congregation. The manuscript anchors the pastor in the gospel message as elucidated and explored in the hours of meditation and study. Having said this, we should note that just because a pastor composed a sermon manuscript does not mean that he actually read directly from it word for word – though we might surmise this for a great number of extant sermons. And furthermore, this is not to say that pastors from other churches did not share the same practice of composing a manuscript. What this dissertation will demonstrate is that literally hundreds of Confessing Church sermons exist in the archives of Germany, and that this can be in no

⁴⁶³ Trillhaas, *Evangelische Predigtlehre*, 165-66.

small measure due to the solemnity and dignity of the preacher's task and to the renewed emphasis on leaning primarily on the authority of the biblical texts.

The influence of these three men on the history of preaching and theology in Germany is immense. One historian has argued that Barth, as the leading representative, has offered a theology of preaching that is a double-edged sword. "On the one hand, without it present-day preaching would not be so pure, so biblical, and so concerned with central issues, but on the other hand, it would also not be so alarmingly correct, boringly precise, and remote from the world."⁴⁶⁴ In other words, the preaching may be biblical and precise, yet it oftentimes misses the human elements that make the sermon relevant to politics, society, and culture.

To sum up, these sermon manuscripts provide the historian with a rich and detailed record of the messages the Confessing Church presented to the Christian faithful week after week. We can tell not only the general information and outline of a sermon – the central text and the argument – but also the use of language, the illustrations, metaphors, and turns of phrase. If we listen carefully, we can hear the pastor's passion and conviction through the page, and place ourselves there in the church, amid the men and women of the congregation. Given the dignity and seriousness of the preaching task reflected in the homiletics texts discussed, we can be reasonably assured that the sermon manuscripts faithfully represent the pastors' words preached from the pulpit. The sermons of the Confessing Church are tremendously valuable as windows into the thought-world of clergymen in the Nazi period.

⁴⁶⁴ Zahrnt, *The Question of God*, 118.

In this chapter we have provided a brief history of preaching in the Christian tradition, an examination of the theological debate about the nature of revelation and the tension between its general and special varieties, and also an overview of how this issue became critical for the German Evangelical Church after the devastation and disorientation of the First World War. The theological debate became an ecclesiastical conflict and ended in the establishment of the Confessing Church as the self-proclaimed true Protestant Church in Germany. In this context a shift in homiletics occurred that emphasized a return to the authority of the biblical texts in the Church's commission to preach the gospel, which in turn meant the reevaluation of the use of the Hebrew Bible in preaching and also a greater degree of solemnity and dignity in the practice of preaching.

CHAPTER FOUR

Opposing Persecution and Nazi Ideology: Confessing Sermons on the Nazis and National Socialism

In every sermon that is a real sermon there is some casting out of demons!

– Karl Barth and Eduard Thurneysen⁴⁶⁵

In early February 1935, a full two years after Hitler's rise to power, the preeminent Confessing Church leader Martin Niemöller delivered a sermon in Berlin that not only highlighted his growing frustration towards the Nazi dictatorship, but also his deep concern for what he considered National Socialist "neo-paganism" that has spoiled the harmony of the German Protestant churches. He preached on the Apostle Paul's famous text on obedience to the state, Romans 13, which begins with these words, "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God." Reflecting back over the past two years, Niemöller expressed deep sadness that the great expectations of the Nazi rise to power have turned to a nightmare, and that the Nazi dictatorship has "shattered" the hopes of Christians because of its persecution of the German churches.

He continued,

We see more and more clearly how there is being propagated a new paganism which wishes to have nothing to do with the Saviour who was crucified for us, while the church which acknowledges that Saviour as its only Lord is reproached with being an enemy of the state and has

⁴⁶⁵ Karl Barth and Eduard Thurneysen, *God's Search for Man*, translated by George W. Richards, Elmer Homrighausen, and Karl Ernst (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1935), 72.

difficulty in obtaining a hearing for its most earnest assurances to the contrary.

And it is hard, bitter hard, for us to bear this ignominy. Our good conscience rebels violently when in one breath people call us criminals and traitors to our nation.⁴⁶⁶

Niemöller and his Confessing Church colleagues often speak in the passive voice to avoid naming the persecutors or offenders, but his audience knew these were the Nazis and pro-Nazi supporters in the churches, specifically members of the German Christian movement.

In this sermon we see evidence of a battered and bruised Confessing Church that is trying to figure out how to respond to the Nazi challenge to the churches. As discussed in the previous chapter, the Nazi regime attempted the coordination of the German Protestant churches with the establishment of the *Reichskirche* and the support of church leaders from the German Christian movement in the church elections of July 1933. Pro-Nazi members of the German Christian movement were intent on passing the Aryan Paragraph in regional churches to rid Nazi Germany of non-Aryan clergy, and they were in some cases successful, such as in the Evangelical Church of the Old Prussian Union. In addition, the German Protestant churches witnessed their youth movements dissolve into the Hitler Youth in December 1933.⁴⁶⁷ In response, Niemöller and other like-minded pastors founded the Pastors' Emergency League, which later became the Confessing Church, to stem Nazi intrusions in church affairs. As a result of these conflicts and the

⁴⁶⁶ Martin Niemöller, *Here Stand I*, translated by Jane Lymburn (New York: Willett, Clark & Co., 1937), 118.

⁴⁶⁷ Conway, *Nazi Persecution of the Churches*, 57, 72; Helmreich, *German Churches under Hitler*, 153, 263.

Confessing Church's demand for ecclesiastical autonomy, the Nazi persecutions of Confessing Church pastors greatly increased. Confessing Church records indicate that the Nazi regime disciplined 1,043 Confessing Church pastors by October 1934, including interrogations and arrests.⁴⁶⁸

In this tenuous situation, Pastor Niemöller's accepted the advice of the Apostle Paul and counsels his congregation to seek guidance from scripture, to "bow to the dispassionate objectivity of the word of God," and to submit to the Nazi regime and acknowledge its mandate to administer the law, to protect citizens, and to "resist the actions of the evildoer."⁴⁶⁹ Even so, Niemöller argued, Christians have a right to disobey, "but this right may be exercised only when we are asked to do wrong, and then it is a duty, for 'one must obey God rather than men.'"⁴⁷⁰ Unfortunately, he did not give examples of when or how to disobey, but let the matter drop. According to him, every Christian must weigh in the balance where his duty to the state ends and disobedience must begin. Finally, as is common in German Lutheran churches, Niemöller ended with a prayer for Germany and its leader:

And while we thank God today for having given our nation a government, and for having through it preserved order and peace for us, at the same time we ask him to guide and rule our Führer and his counselors, our nation and our church, in such a way that his kingdom may come and be a reality among us. Amen.⁴⁷¹

⁴⁶⁸ Victoria Barnett, *For the Soul of the People: Protestant Protest against Hitler* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 83.

⁴⁶⁹ Niemöller, *Here Stand I*, 119-121.

⁴⁷⁰ Niemöller, *Here Stand I*, 122

⁴⁷¹ Niemöller, *Here Stand I*, 123.

This sermon reveals ambivalence common in the sermons of Confessing Church pastors who, on the one hand, are willing to advocate for obedience to the Nazi state and, on the other hand, reserve the right to disobey when it contradicts what they interpret to be one's duty to God. More importantly, we see a deep concern that the regime is vilifying and attacking the German Protestant churches. And we find evidence of distress that "neo-paganism" is undermining the unity of the Church and the purity of its theology. Yet, we see no clear condemnation of Hitler or the Nazi state, but instead a hope that Nazi leadership will steer the right course in strengthening Germany while at the same time respecting the authority and mission of the churches. In this chapter we will explore this ambiguity at work as pastors criticize the Nazi regime and pro-Nazi supporters, and National Socialist ideology as well, yet in a manner that, for the most part, conforms to obedience to the Nazi state. These sermons provide a window into how Confessing Church pastors gave expression to this ambivalence from the authority of the pulpit. Unlike much of the historiography on the German churches in Nazi Germany, my analysis takes seriously the sermons of the Confessing Church as a historical source in understanding the perspectives of these pastors.

My argument in this chapter is that while some confessing pastors may have occasionally made bold, and even at times impassioned, criticisms of the Nazi regime in their sermons, the majority rarely spoke out from the pulpit. And when they did, they most often used passive or indirect language to moderate the aggressive tone of the criticism. My analysis reveals that Confessing Church pastors had the freedom, at least for a time, to criticize the Nazi regime and, especially, the members of the German

Christian movement. Thus, my research follows the work of historians such as Barnett and Scholder in arguing that the German churches were institutions in Nazi Germany where Germans could voice public criticism against the regime and its ideology.⁴⁷² My analysis contributes to the historiography in demonstrating that Confessing Church sermons on occasion criticized Hitler, the Nazi leadership, and claims of "Aryan" racial superiority; undermined the Nazi regime as unjust persecutors of Christians and the German churches; and condemned Nazism as morally corrupt. And yet, at the same time, given the passivity and infrequency of the comments, the sermons reveal criticism from a position of obedience and subservience to the Nazi state.

Of the 910 sermons examined in this dissertation, 88 (9.6%) contain subversive content about the Nazi regime and its ideology and policies, signifying infrequent, but still vocal and for the most part public expressions that attempted to challenge the dominance of the Nazi state, at least in regard to Nazi and pro-Nazi supporters' infringements in Church theology and practice.⁴⁷³ As I will demonstrate, Gestapo and Security Service (*Sicherheitsdienst*, henceforth SD) reports reveal suspicion and concern about German clergymen preaching subversive comments in public. Keep in mind that pastors delivered these sermons in diverse locations – including German churches, an underground confessing seminary, over the airwaves, churches abroad, and even in concentration camps – and thus, as I will discuss, their meaning and impact varies. When

⁴⁷² Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 55; and Klaus Scholder, *The Churches and the Third Reich, Vol. 2, The Year of Disillusionment 1935, Barmen and Rome* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 169. See also Kirk, *Nazi Germany*, 108.

⁴⁷³ Thus, these sermons may be considered oppositional according to Kershaw's distinctions between resistance, opposition, and dissent; see Ian Kershaw, *The Nazi Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives, Third Edition* (New York: Arnold, 1993), 170-171.

we consider that the German churches were one of the very few institutions in Germany to have a measure of success in staving off Nazi coordination (*Gleichschaltung*), Confessing Church pastors' sermons provide us with a new, unique, and as of yet unexamined, perspective of ideological opposition in a totalitarian state.⁴⁷⁴ Nevertheless, the relative infrequency and most often implicit nature of the criticisms support the conclusions of historians such as Gerlach and Barnett who assert that the majority of Confessing Church pastors did not speak out effectively in opposition against the Nazi dictatorship, its ideology, or policies.⁴⁷⁵ My aim in this chapter is to contribute the findings of this neglected source base of hundreds of sermons, to categorize the criticisms, and to explore their meaning when they did in fact occur.

To begin, we will take a close look at a few methodological and historiographical issues that need clarification before examining the sermons. Then we will proceed to an analysis of the sermons, focusing our attention on two major themes Confessing Church pastors were most concerned about: persecution of the churches by the Nazi regime and its supporters, and the challenge of National Socialism as a false ideology (or form of “neo-paganism”) in the life of the Church and the German nation. We will also explore how the Gestapo and SD perceived pastors' critical comments expressed in their sermons toward the Nazi regime and its ideology and policies.⁴⁷⁶ This will give us some

⁴⁷⁴ See Tim Kirk, *Nazi Germany* (New York: Palgrave, 2007), 108.

⁴⁷⁵ See for example Wolfgang Gerlach's *And the Witnesses were Silent: the Confessing Church and the Persecution of the Jews*, translated and edited by Victoria J. Barnett (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), vii-viii; and also Victoria Barnett, *For the Soul of the People: Protestant Protest Against Hitler* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 198-199.

⁴⁷⁶ See for example, Heinz Boberach, ed., *Berichte des SD und der Gestapo über Kirchen und Kirchenvolk in Deutschland 1934-1944* (Mainz: Matthias-Grünwald-Verlag, 1971). I will also provide evidence from the Reports of the Social Democratic Party in Exile (SOPADE). However, these records overwhelmingly

indication about the reception of these sermons in German society. Lastly, we will end the chapter with a discussion of the wider implications of the sermons and their reception for the history of Nazi Germany.

The Fragmentation of the German Evangelical Church

At the outset it is important to emphasize that the presentation of these Confessing Church pastors' criticisms of the Nazi regime and National Socialism should not be construed as an assertion that Confessing Church pastors were unified in their condemnation of Hitler, National Socialism, or the regime's policies. My research supports Barnett's judgement of the Confessing Church: "The only thing all Confessing Christians had in common was their opposition to the absolute demands of Nazi ideology on their religious faith."⁴⁷⁷ As she and others have argued, Confessing Church pastors could even be found among the ranks of Nazis or pro-Nazi supporters; many of them welcomed the Second World War; and one would not need to look far to find anti-Judaic or antisemitic comments in their sermons.⁴⁷⁸

One need look no further than Martin Niemöller to find a pastor excited about the new direction the German nation was going in the early months of 1933. Just weeks after Easter Niemöller preached a sermon in Berlin entitled "We Would See Jesus!" on John 12:20-27, a passage that underscores the necessity of following Christ and the possibility

focus on Confessing Church organization and activities, particularly with respect to the conflict with the German Christian movement; but they include very little evidence about confessing sermons or their reception in Germany society.

⁴⁷⁷ Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 5.

⁴⁷⁸ See Chapter 5 for a thorough discussion of anti-Judaic expressions in Confessing Church sermons.

of eternal life. He witnesses the German people awakening, “and in spite of all its storm and stress, in spite of all its effervescence and fermentation, that awakening tells us that we are still a young nation which does not wish to be drawn into the collapse of Western Civilization: we wish to live! May God speed us on our way!”⁴⁷⁹ Niemöller appears genuinely hopeful about the changes occurring in his nation, but his emphasis is not on the political changes brought by the Nazi regime; rather, his excitement is due to a spiritual “awakening” that has rejuvenated his nation.⁴⁸⁰ The Weimar-era decline in church membership finally came to an end. The German Protestant churches staunchly held the numbers of those leaving to approximately 50,000 in 1933, while nearly 325,000 people joined. Steigmann-Gall argues, “There could have been no clearer sign that national renewal and religious renewal were believed to be deeply connected.”⁴⁸¹ By Eastertide 1933, many like Niemöller witnessed “signs of a returning spring.”⁴⁸²

Some pastors who would soon join the Confessing Church even supported Hitler in their sermons in this first year of the dictatorship. For example, Pastor Wetzel gave a sermon on Mother’s Day 1933, in which he said that God sent Hitler to Germany.⁴⁸³

⁴⁷⁹ Niemöller, *Here Stand I*, 29.

⁴⁸⁰ James Bentley, *Martin Niemöller* (New York: The Free Press, 1984), 43.

⁴⁸¹ Richard Steigmann-Gall, *The Holy Reich: Nazi Conceptions of Christianity, 1919-1945* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 114. See also Klaus Scholder, *The Churches and the Third Reich, vol. I, Preliminary History and the Time of Illusions, 1918-1934*, translated by John Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 520-521. Scholder agrees that “many signs seemed to point to a great future for the church in the Third Reich”; he breaks down the numbers by region, for example, in Saxony, 10,000 people “returned to the church” in 1933, while the numbers of those leaving the church decreased from 28,000 in 1932 to 8,000 in 1933.

⁴⁸² Niemöller, *Here Stand I*, 30.

⁴⁸³ R. Anton, ed., *Nationale Feiertagspredigten und Ansprache* (Helingsche Verlagsanstalt Leipzig, 1935), 79.

Even more, he said that Hitler's "ardent love and his iron will power woke up the people from sleep and flabbiness, and now wants to make them a 'united nation of brothers.'"⁴⁸⁴

Another example is from the conservative Lutheran bishop of Württemberg, Theophil Wurm (1868-1953).⁴⁸⁵ During the Nazi years he earned respect from his fellow pastors when he resisted the inclusion of his regional church into the Nazi-backed *Reichskirche* in 1934, and further, when he protested "Nazi policies of eugenics, abortion, genocide, racism, euthanasia, the destruction of 'useless life,' and atrocities against the Jewish population."⁴⁸⁶ But in 1933 Wurm was genuinely optimistic about Hitler and the National Socialist movement. He preached a sermon on September 27, 1933, on Matthew 22:2-14, which began with thanks to God "that he has averted this uttermost and most difficult [situation] in that he gave us a leader who...takes together all the forces of the people, to remove all uncleanness from the administration and public life and takes on the struggle with the economic distress."⁴⁸⁷ Admittedly, these comments were rare among Confessing Church pastors, especially after the Church Struggle intensified in late 1933 through 1934. Nevertheless, they reveal openness to the Nazi regime as an agent of "positive" change, and to Hitler himself as the instigator of this change.

⁴⁸⁴ Anton, *Nationale Feiertagspredigten und Ansprache*, 79.

⁴⁸⁵ See Reinhold Sautter, *Theophil Wurm: Bekenner und Kämpfer* (Stuttgart: Verlag Junge Gemeinde, 1954); Karl Schumacher, *Theophil Wurm in den Krisen und Entscheidungen seiner Zeit* (Bad Cannstatt: R. Müllerschön, 1958); and Jörg Thierfelder, *Das Kirchliche Einigungswerk des württembergischen Landesbischofs Theophil Wurm* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1975). A controversial figure, Wurm would assert after the war that the devastation on all sides was due to Europe turning away from God – both the Nazis and Allies committed atrocities and equally deserve judgment (Hockenos, *A Church Divided*, 50).

⁴⁸⁶ Green, *Lutherans against Hitler*, 308.

⁴⁸⁷ Anton, *Nationale Feiertagspredigten und Ansprache*, 57.

Though most Confessing Church pastors did not publicly support Hitler in sermons, a more widespread sentiment among German pastors in general is that Christians should be obedient to the Nazi state in accordance with the Apostle Paul's admonition in his letter to the Christians in Rome – as Niemöller's sermon that opened the chapter illustrates.⁴⁸⁸ Romans 13:1-7 states,

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists authority resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Do you wish to have no fear of the authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive its approval; for it is God's servant for your good. But if you do what is wrong, you should be afraid, for the authority does not bear its sword in vain! It is the servant of God to execute wrath on the wrongdoer. Therefore one must be subject, not only because of wrath but also because of conscience... Pay to all what is due them – taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honor to whom honor is due.

This statement is the basis for Luther's doctrine of the two governances (or two kingdoms) under God, that of earthly rulers and that of the Church, whereby Christians owe political obedience to the earthly ruler and spiritual obedience to God and the Church.⁴⁸⁹ According to this doctrine, to be a good Christian meant to also be an obedient citizen. This doctrine took deep roots in the German states during the Reformation when Protestant churches left the Catholic fold and sought the protection of

⁴⁸⁸ Niemöller, *Here Stand I*, 118. See Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 47-48; and also Matthew Hockenos, *A Church Divided: German Protestants Confront the Nazi Past* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 23 and 27.

⁴⁸⁹ Probst, *Demonizing the Jews*, 11-12.

provincial rulers, who became their patrons and titular heads.⁴⁹⁰ Thus, by the twentieth century, “Institutionally and ideologically...the German Evangelical Church was aligned with the state, a situation formalized over the centuries by law.”⁴⁹¹ Even the Barmen Declaration of 1934, accepted by Confessing Church pastors of both Lutheran and Reformed backgrounds, did not explicitly challenge the two kingdoms doctrine, though it did remind the Nazi regime that God sanctioned the state’s duty to serve the public, keep the peace, and to stay out of Church affairs.⁴⁹²

However, this issue is an example of how Luther’s theology would draw boundaries between the factions in the German Church Struggle. The debate about the two governances would divide Confessing Church pastors from their neutral Lutheran colleagues. The problem for Lutherans is precisely that the Barmen Declaration neglected the doctrine of the two governances, and instead described political power as “godless ties” from which humans must be freed.⁴⁹³ In neglecting this doctrine, the connotation was that that temporal rulers have not been commissioned by God to rule, to keep order and peace, and thus they are not accountable to God or the people.⁴⁹⁴ As one

⁴⁹⁰ Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 11.

⁴⁹¹ Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 11. While the Lutheran doctrine of the two governances is important for any discussion of the long tradition of Protestant obedience to the state, the Reformed tradition was not as explicit on this issue. Barth is the most influential reformed theologian (certainly after Calvin), and his emphasis on the Bible as the basis of Christian behavior and freedom significantly informed Confessing Church pastors trying to justify opposing or even resisting the Nazi state; see Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 47-48.

⁴⁹² Hockenos, *A Church Divided*, 23 and 27.

⁴⁹³ Green, *Lutherans against Hitler*, 181. Green translates Article 2 of the Barmen Declaration: “Just as Jesus Christ is God’s promise of the forgiveness of all our sins, so with the same seriousness he is also God’s powerful claim upon our whole life; through him we experience the joyful liberation from the godless ties of this world to free, thankful service to his creatures.

⁴⁹⁴ Green, *Lutherans against Hitler*, 181.

historian writes, “Lutherans held instead that political ethics should be placed under divine rule.”⁴⁹⁵ Debate about this subject divided Lutherans in Nazi Germany: some willing to overlook this issue in the Barmen Declaration and joined the Confessing Church, a movement that had the potential to oppose Nazi intrusions into church life and administration; and others refused to compromise their Lutheran principles in this period of crisis, and remained neutral in the German Evangelical Church.

The increasing tensions of the Church Struggle and the Nazi persecution of Christians did not seem to temper most pastors’ sense of obedience to the state. The German Social Democratic Party in exile (*Sopade*) provides a transcript of an anonymous Confessing Church sermon on Romans 13, given on October 11, 1937.⁴⁹⁶ The pastor emphasizes obedience to the Nazi state because, based on the Apostle Paul’s text, God ordains all governing authorities. He declares, “Every one of us, without exception, must be in subjection to the Nazi Führer-state as the authority which actually has power over us... So for us the National Socialist authority is ordained of God, that we should be in subjection to her.”⁴⁹⁷ Regardless of whether the authority respects the teachings and ministry of Jesus, the pastor argues, Christians should remain obedient to it. He continues, “Authority remains authority, even if it does injustice, just as father remains father and mother mother, even if their children do injustice.”⁴⁹⁸ This reading of Romans

⁴⁹⁵ Green, *Lutherans against Hitler*, 182.

⁴⁹⁶ *Deutschland-Berichte der Sozialdemokratischen Partei Deutschlands (Sopade), Vierter Jahrgang 1937* (Salzhausen: Verlag Petra Nettelbeck, 1980), 237-239.

⁴⁹⁷ *Sopade 1937*, 237.

⁴⁹⁸ *Sopade 1937*, 287.

13 became a significant obstacle for German pastors to oppose or resist the Nazi regime due to perceived anti-Christian ideologies or policies.

Returning to 1933, conflicts intensified within the Protestant churches throughout the year about whether or how the church should evolve with the political changes occurring in Nazi Germany. Pastor Heinz Pflugk illustrates the complexity of the church conflicts in a sermon delivered in Mecklenburg in late 1933, on Jesus' Parable of the Sower (Luke 8:4-15), a well-known text about the results of "the Word of God" scattered among the rocks, thorns and thistles, and on good and bad soil (referring to one's condition and cares in the world). Pflugk preaches about the conflicts and changes of the German churches under the Nazi Germany,

Some want to have the church other than it is. The others say that pastors should be different. The third think that it is up to the government of the church. The fourth want to throw away the Old Testament and perhaps even the letters of the Apostle Paul. The fifth would like to change the church services. The sixth say that the church service does not fit us because the pastor does not speak about our present time; this is as if the church lives in the last century. Still others say the service is not right because the gospel is speaking a word to the questions of our time, and that is to us too political.⁴⁹⁹

The chaos of the German Protestant churches is palpable in Pflugk's sermon. Yet he and his future confessing colleagues had to navigate a difficult path to maintain the unity and identity of the Church, while at the same time addressing the significant challenges that National Socialism and the regime itself posed to them. Despite all differences among

⁴⁹⁹ Karl Kampffmeyer, ed., *Dein Wort ist deiner Kirche Schutz: Predigten von der Kirche* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1934), 37.

them, Confessing Church pastors were united against Nazi infringements into Church life and the Christian faith.⁵⁰⁰

Methodological and Historiographical Considerations

Before delving into our discussion of how Confessing Church pastors criticized the Nazi regime or National Socialism from the pulpit, it is worth pointing out what they did not say. They did not explicitly call for Hitler's removal from office or the overthrow of the National Socialist government. They did not call for Germans to sabotage or otherwise fight against the Nazi state, the German military, or the police. In fact, they consistently called for Christians to be good citizens to the state, as Niemöller argued. Given these facts, my analysis follows the work of Gerlach in concluding that the Confessing Church pastors did not go far enough in resisting the Nazi regime – especially as men who preached to a captive audience week after week – by discussing specific and concrete ways to undermine the Nazi regime and seek its eventual destruction.⁵⁰¹ Nevertheless, the comments that we do find demonstrate that some Confessing Church pastors sought to undermine the Nazi state, its ideology, and policies, specifically as they related to infringements on Christian life and church affairs.

In this and the following chapters, I am interested in examining Confessing Church expressions that do more than offer standard Christian tropes on relating to others, such as calls to “turn the other cheek” or to “bless those who curse you.” I will explore confrontational and oppositional messages against the Nazi regime, its ideology,

⁵⁰⁰ Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 5; see also Helmreich, *German Churches under Hitler*, 147 and 161.

⁵⁰¹ Gerlach, *And the Witnesses Were Silent*, vii-viii.

or its policies, as well as against those who support them, such as the German Christian movement. We can expect a variety of general and familiar messages that implicitly encourage support of the Jews, such as loving one's neighbor or caring for those in need.⁵⁰² But these are simply insufficient to argue a pastor's intention of undermining the Nazi dictatorship. I am looking for specific instances when a pastor directly challenges the dominance of the Nazi state, thus taking a public stance of opposition and offering German society an alternate, subversive perspective.⁵⁰³ For example, the pastor who explicitly juxtaposes Christianity's emphasis on God's grace in salvation against the Nazi emphasis on blood and race; or likewise, contrasting Jesus and Hitler as diametrically opposed saviors. I am looking throughout these sermons for messages that oppose the Nazi worldview as false, corrupt, and contrary to the gospel message.

In addition to analyzing the content of what Confessing Church pastors said, it is also important to consider where they said it. To preach a sermon in the Berliner Dom that condemns National Socialism certainly differs in significance from one delivered in a concentration camp. Determining the significance of location presents some methodological difficulties. Not all sermons require the same degree of courage or have the same impact on German society. Many if not most of the sermons in this collection identify the date and city, and some indicate the actual church in which the sermon was delivered. However, virtually none indicate the composition of the audience – the number of adults present, their ages, backgrounds, political beliefs, occupations, and loyalty to the Confessing Church. The sermons in this collection were delivered in

⁵⁰² For more on Confessing Church pastors' views of Jews and Judaism, see Chapter 5.

⁵⁰³ Kershaw, *The Nazi Dictatorship*, 170-171.

German churches, in concentration camps, in an underground seminary, over the radio, in foreign lands, and in unknown locations.

Important to this discussion is an insightful argument by Detlev Peukert about the politicization of private domains in the totalitarian Nazi state. In his book *Inside Nazi Germany*, he concludes, “Whereas it is a fundamental assumption of a liberal social order that the domains of the private (and/or social) and the political coexist side by side, National Socialism politicized society by importing political claims into domains that had previously been private.”⁵⁰⁴ Thus, the locations in which preaching occurred in German society, whether “out in the open” or in more private settings such as an underground seminary chapel, became politicized. This politicization of the German Protestant churches confronted Confessing Church pastors with a dilemma: either to challenge the politicization of their faith as leaders of their communities or to allow the intrusion of the Nazi state and its values into the German churches. No doubt many – perhaps even most – chose the latter. Still, many chose the former and decided to oppose this politicization in the most public and meaningful manner possible for a pastor, in a sermon from the authority of the pulpit. Thus, a criticism of the Nazi regime or National Socialism from a religious motivation has political meaning in a totalitarian society, and could incur political consequences regardless, such as arrest or imprisonment. After all, religious motivations can enable actions that have political implications.⁵⁰⁵

⁵⁰⁴ Detlev Peukert, *Inside Nazi Germany: Conformity, Opposition and Racism in Everyday Life*, translated by Richard Deveson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 84.

⁵⁰⁵ Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 92.

Of the total 910 sermons, 22 were delivered by Confessing Church pastors in concentration camps or in imprisonment. While these sermons may not be considered to have taken place “out in the open” in German society or to have had an effect on the general population, we can surmise that they still contributed to the religious milieu of the camps and the morale of the prisoners. Though some may question the degree of courage required to make subversive comments while already in a camp, Christians often had to break camp rules to gather and meet for services.⁵⁰⁶ Furthermore, these sermons help us to better understand the spiritual lives and expressions of Christian concentration camp prisoners.

Also included in this collection are 16 sermons delivered in an underground Confessing Church seminary. After the Gestapo closed the Finkenwalde Seminary on September 28, 1937, Bonhoeffer and his confessing colleagues established underground locations in Köslin and Groß-Schlönwitz (later called Sigurdshof) and continued the theological training of seminarians.⁵⁰⁷ Sixty-seven seminarians graduated between 1937 and 1939, and moved on to church apprenticeships in local parishes.⁵⁰⁸ Like sermons delivered in concentration camps, these had a limited impact on the German population and, for the most part, did not take place “out in the open” in German society.⁵⁰⁹

⁵⁰⁶ The historiography is unclear about how uniform the prohibitions were on Christian worship in the camps. While Niemöller and other clergymen at the Dachau camp were allowed to gather for services, this was not the case in other camps; see his *Dachau Sermons*, translated by Robert H. Pfeiffer (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1946), v-vii. However, Corrie ten Boom speaks of smuggling a Bible into the Ravensbrück camp and holding clandestine “services,” such as they were, in the dormitory where women from a variety of faiths would worship together, translating the Bible into multiple languages as they read; see *The Hiding Place* (Grand Rapids, MI: Chosen Books, 2006), Kindle edition, location 4127.

⁵⁰⁷ See Victoria Barnett’s introduction in Bonhoeffer, *Theological Education Underground, 1937-1940*, Kindle edition, location 819-825.

⁵⁰⁸ Bonhoeffer, *Theological Education Underground*, Kindle edition, location 825.

⁵⁰⁹ However, one sermon indicates a practice that appears widespread among Confessing Church pastors:

Nonetheless, they did harden the resolve of confessing seminarians to withstand Nazi propaganda and the coordination of the Protestant churches, and thus, helped them to preserve their own faith tradition.

A small group of these sermons were also preached over the radio to German audiences. The German pastor of Jewish descent Franz Hildebrandt preached 13 sermons over the British Broadcasting Corporation (or BBC) from London, and later Cambridge, to audiences in Nazi Germany.⁵¹⁰ It is also conceivable, perhaps likely, that some Confessing Church pastors took to the airwaves and broadcast sermons from the local radio station to reach a wider audience.⁵¹¹ Hildebrandt's sermons took courage in that his critical comments of Hitler and the Nazi regime could have been construed by his fellow Germans as treasonous and as serving the enemies of the nation (particularly Great Britain). Thus, he risked ostracization at home and among his German colleagues. Yet he did not face the possibility of arrest by the Gestapo or imprisonment as an agitator. Simply stated, he preached from the safety of a microphone across the English Channel. Nevertheless, these sermons are immensely significant because they demonstrate the

Bonhoeffer wrote a sermon on Matthew 2:13-23 for New Year's Eve 1940, to be read by a lector filling in for a pastor who had been called to serve in the war. The editor explains, "Once the war began, many clergy were drafted into the military, and the number of Confessing Church clergy and seminarians drafted early was particularly high. As ministers became scarce, trained lectors were often asked to read prepared sermons"; see Bonhoeffer, *Theological Education Underground*, Kindle edition, location 14439. Thus, these sermons written for lectors (perhaps to be read by several at a time) could have reached a far wider audience than any one pastor on any given Sunday.

⁵¹⁰ See Chapter 7 for a discussion of his sermons.

⁵¹¹ Helmreich notes that "In the first years of the regime, religious broadcasts were encouraged and a morning religious hour was a regular part of all network programs. From 1935 on, restrictions were gradually imposed – sometimes speakers were censored, funds were not available, or the program was dropped entirely. Over the protests of church leaders, both Protestant and Catholic hours were ended on April 7, 1939. During the war, even the customary morning orchestral playing of church chorales at the spas was stopped." See Helmreich, *German Churches under Hitler*, 222.

concerns a Confessing Church pastor would express to his fellow Christians in Germany if given the freedom and the chance.

Eighty-nine of the 910 total sermons were delivered outside Nazi Germany in lands of exile, refuge, and mission, and they too at times criticized the Nazi regime and National Socialism. German pastors of Jewish descent, such as Hildebrandt, Hans Ehrenberg, and Friedrich Forell, as well as confessing leaders in trouble with the Nazi regime, such as Karl Barth and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, preached to friendly (and often German Protestant) congregations in England, Switzerland, and the United States. The main problem in evaluating confessing sermons delivered outside Nazi Germany is judging their effects. Though a Confessing Church pastor may have given voice to an oppositional statement, the fact that such a statement occurs in a safe and perhaps even friendly environment limits the impact such a statement can have – at least on those who have the power to cause political or social change. We might ask ourselves whether these oppositional statements can even be identified as effectively oppositional at all. Nevertheless, we do not know the contexts in which most of these sermons were delivered, nor the identities of the individuals who heard them. Thus, we cannot know if they heard these sermons and contributed in some way towards the effort to undermine the Nazi regime – through the giving of resources or participating in the war effort in some way. In a few cases we know that pastors petitioned for assistance for the German churches, such as Bonhoeffer's work in winning the support of German congregations in Britain for the Confessing Church, and Friedrich Forell's preaching to New Yorkers for

assistance to the German churches.⁵¹² At the very least they reveal what Confessing Church pastors believed were the most important messages for foreigners to know, giving us unique insights into what Christians abroad knew about what was happening in Nazi Germany.

And lastly, the remaining 770 sermons of the 910 total were delivered and disseminated in Nazi Germany. It goes without saying that sermons delivered “out in the open” in German society are the most important in our discussion of confessing sermons as expressions of opposition to the Nazi dictatorship. These sermons were delivered in churches across Germany, where Germans freely sat in their pews to listen to the gospel message. Pastors preached these sermons at regular Sunday services, holidays, confirmation celebrations, and weddings and funerals. This act of preaching in public may have required a degree of courage, depending on how oppositional the content of the sermon was and on whether the pastor believed he had a sympathetic congregation or not. A pastor cognizant that his congregation judged every word he preached might pause before expressing any sentiments of opposition or dissent in fear of punishment. In contrast to sermons delivered in concentration camps, an underground seminary, or over the radio, Confessing Church pastors preached these sermons freely in German society and contributed to the on-going discussions of religion and politics in Nazi Germany.

But regardless of where pastors preached their sermons, they most often directed their critical comments against those they believed to be persecuting Christians and the

⁵¹² See Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 402-404. See also Forell’s speech, “Church Life and Church Work in Germany and America, delivered sometime in 1944 (UIL, SC, MSC 358). I will discuss Forell’s sermons at length in Chapter 7.

churches, and those who advanced an ideology that threatened traditional Christianity. As previously discussed in the last chapter, the Confessing Church emerged in response to the German Christian movement's aim to transform Christianity according to National Socialist ideology and their subsequent success in gaining important leadership positions in the German Evangelical Church's elections in July 1933.⁵¹³ The German Christian movement emerged in the context of post-First World War German culture – that is, it was not simply a creation of National Socialists – and was filled with religious or nominally religious people who sincerely wished to transform historic Christianity so that it aligned with a Nazi volkish, racist, and nationalist worldview.⁵¹⁴ This movement was a small but by no means inconsequential Christian group: its 600,000 self-identified members (approximately 2 percent of the German population) managed to exert a disproportionate influence over churches and theological schools throughout the twelve years of the Third Reich.⁵¹⁵ The Nazi regime openly supported the movement from its inception in 1933, and then spearheaded the unification of regional Protestant churches into the *Reichskirche*, administered by the Reich bishop Ludwig Mueller.⁵¹⁶ Throughout

⁵¹³ See Doris Bergen, *Twisted Cross: The German Christian Movement in the Third Reich* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Kurt Meier, *Die Deutschen Christen: Das Bild einer Bewegung im Kirchenkampf des Dritten Reiches* (Göttingen, 1964), and *Kreuz und Hakenkreuz: Die evangelische Kirche im Dritten Reich* (Munich, 1992); Reijo Heinonen, *Anpassung und Identität: Theologie und Kirchenpolitik der Bremer Deutschen Christen 1933-1945* (Göttingen, 1978); James Zabel, *Nazism and the Pastors: A Study of the Ideas of Three Deutsche Christen Groups* (Missoula, Montana, 1976); Hans-Joachim Sonne, *Die Politische Theologie der Deutschen Christen: Einheit und Vielfalt deutsch-christlichen Denkens, dargestellt anhand des Bundes für Deutsche Kirche, der Thüringer Kirchenbewegung "Deutsche Christen" und der Christlich-Deutschen Bewegung* (Göttingen, 1982); Robert Ericksen, *Theologians under Hitler: Gerhard Kittel, Paul Althaus and Emanuel Hirsch* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).

⁵¹⁴ Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 3-4.

⁵¹⁵ Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 7-8; and Susannah Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus: Christian Theologians and the Bible in Nazi Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 3.

⁵¹⁶ Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 15 and 229.

the Nazi dictatorship this movement managed to advance a popular blend of Protestantism and Nazi ideology from the pulpit.⁵¹⁷

The historiography of the German Christian movement – the most notable being Doris Bergen’s *Twisted Cross* – offers insights into the leadership, ideology, and programs of the movement, but does not engage in discussions of the practical theology and liturgy of the churches in the movement. Nor do they examine their sermons. A quick glimpse at the sermons of the German Christian movement reveals a deep divide between them and the Confessing Church. For example, in a sermon on the fourth anniversary of Hitler’s rise to power, on January 30, 1937, Pastor Hans Baumgärtner in Nürnberg preached a sermon entitled, “Adolf Hitler – A Man of God,” which is essentially a prayer of thanks to God for Hitler. In the sermon, Baumgärtner offers lavish praise to Hitler, even going so far as to say:

We German Christians are profoundly grateful that we belong to the sighted. That we are not rigid on the “Word,” as is the Marxist professor Karl Barth and many theologians who had thoroughly corrupted it. We profoundly thank God for Adolf Hitler, the man of God, the only man of God in the whole world who received a political kingdom.⁵¹⁸

In the same breath Baumgärtner praises Hitler and condemns Barth, one of the founders of the Confessing Church. Notice Baumgärtner’s description of Barth’s homiletics as “rigid on the ‘Word,’” reflecting his emphasis on special revelation in contrast to general revelation. But this is precisely the kind of rhetoric Confessing Church pastors

⁵¹⁷ Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 229-230.

⁵¹⁸ Hans Baumgärtner, ed., *Deutsches Christentum dargestellt in Predigt und Vortrag* (Nürnberg: Fr. Städler, 1937), 13.

challenged in their sermons. Confessing Church pastors often responded to the ideological challenges that the German Christian movement and the Nazis themselves advanced, even if they did not explicitly name them as opponents. By exploring the sermons of the Confessing Church in the context of the intra-church struggles for the hearts and minds of German Protestants, we will find that the Confessing churches became sites of opposition and centers that sought to protect traditional Christianity from a newfangled ideology.

I argue throughout this chapter that Confessing Church pastors' expressions of criticism against the Nazi persecution of Christians – whether from the regime itself or from its supporters – as well as against a National Socialism, constitutes opposition to the regime itself because it publicly undermines its ideology and policies. I disagree with Barnett's characterization that the Confessing Church simply limited its efforts at helping those persecuted by the Nazi dictatorship:

This is the essence of the resistance within the Confessing Church. The Confessing Church sought neither to overthrow Nazism nor even, on the political level, to undermine it. It viewed its purpose, as a Christian church, as helping those (in Bonhoeffer's words) "under the wheel."⁵¹⁹

Barnett is accurate in arguing that the Confessing Church helped those "under the wheel," and in this and the following chapters I will explore how pastors did this through their sermons. But what Barnett and others have missed is that the sermons preached throughout the Third Reich expressed content that undermined specific aspects of the

⁵¹⁹ Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 181.

Nazi dictatorship, and that these deserve examination so that we can have a better understanding of the Confessing Church's response to the regime.

Lastly, the sermons provide us insight into why some Germans, specifically those in the Confessing Churches, opposed the Nazi regime. Of course there were many motivations for disapproving of the Nazi regime, its ideology, and policies. One could fundamentally disagree with its anti-democratic principles, its racist ideology, aggressive position on foreign affairs, or ostentatious militarism. The motivations are myriad. Yet these sermons present distinctly religious motivations for criticisms of the Nazi regime and National Socialism.

We should keep in mind that Nazi Germany was not as divided as previously thought.⁵²⁰ Confessing Church pastors preached these sermons in the context of a regime that actively pursued the formation of a unified *Volksgemeinschaft*. In the early 1930s, the Nazi regime offered the German people “a new improved version of national life” that promised security and prosperity, and they did this through a variety of media, including radio, film, newspapers and magazines, and even advertising.⁵²¹ As Peter Fritzsche has argued, “Coordination was a process of dissolution *and* affiliation” (italics in original), and the Nazi propaganda machine was critical to inculcating the National

⁵²⁰ Ian Kershaw has argued that material conditions that affected people's everyday lives “provided the most continuous, and usually the most dominant, influence upon the formation of public opinion.” Ian Kershaw, *Popular Opinion and Political Dissent in the Third Reich: Bavaria 1933-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 373. More recent research has indicated that the Nazi regime was largely successful in making the *Volksgemeinschaft* a reality. See Peter Fritzsche, *Germans into Nazis* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998) and *Life and Death in the Third Reich* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008); and Robert Gellately, *Backing Hitler: Consent and Coercion in Nazi Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

⁵²¹ See Fritzsche, *Life and Death in the Third Reich*, 37; Carolyn Birdsall, *Nazi Soundscapes: Sound, Technology and Urban Space in Germany, 1933-1945* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012), 136.

Socialist vision.⁵²² The Nazi regime constantly reaffirmed this vision of a racial and ethnic community, which enabled it to effectively pursue policies of racial discrimination, deportation, mass killings, and war, amid an approving German public.⁵²³ Robert Gellately writes, “In attempting to forge that ‘community,’ which was based on a maddening logic of sameness, purity, and homogeneity, [the Nazis] and the German people got caught up in a murderous game of pillorying, excluding, and eventually eliminating unwanted social ‘elements’ and ‘race enemies.’”⁵²⁴ The press informed the German public about the concentration camps and antisemitic discrimination – the German public approved of these measures as a means to the fulfillment of the *Volksgemeinschaft*.⁵²⁵ While the Nazi regime may have worked tirelessly to build a “community of the people,” my research indicates that the sermons of the Confessing Church had the potential to divide it.

The gathering of Christians in a service – whether in a church, concentration camp, or huddled around a radio – creates a unique space to voice dissent or opposition and to begin a debate about the spiritual problems that have led to the present conditions of conflict, disunity, and compromise among Germans under the Nazi dictatorship. These are not the same expressions of dissatisfaction one would find in coffee houses, universities, or the factory floor. Thus, these sermons present a unique glimpse into oppositional motivations one would perhaps hear only in the churches. After all,

⁵²² Fritzsche, *Life and Death in the Third Reich*, 51; and Fritzsche, *Germans into Nazis*, 193-196

⁵²³ Gellately, *Backing Hitler*, location 6315.

⁵²⁴ Gellately, *Backing Hitler*, location 6430.

⁵²⁵ Gellately, *Backing Hitler*, location 304.

Christians in Germany might have had a variety of religious concerns about Nazi intrusions in the German Protestant churches, such as the problem of preserving the traditions and autonomy of the churches, combating racist and nationalist beliefs that undermined Christian teaching, and defending persecuted co-religionists. For some devout Christians, religious motivations might have tipped the balance of favor against the Nazis and National Socialism.

Against the Nazi Persecution of Christians

Now we move to a discussion of the first major theme of Confessing Church pastors' criticisms of the National Socialist state, its ideology, and policies, and this concerns the Nazi persecution of Christians and the German Protestant churches. In 36 (4%) of the 910 sermons, 11 Confessing Church pastors condemned the persecution of Christians under the Nazi dictatorship. They did this in two significant ways: in remembering the persecuted and publicly acknowledging their suffering; and in encouraging Christians by affirming their religious beliefs in the love and justice of God.

The Nazi dictatorship arrested and imprisoned Confessing Church pastors for a variety of offenses. The regime took action when Confessing Church pastors acted in unison against National Socialist ideology. In March 1935, Pastor Heinrich Vogel, along with two other pastors, composed a statement condemning Nazi "heathenism" and the totalitarian state as a response to the Nazi recommendation to teachers and students to use Alfred Rosenberg's "ideological handbook of the Nazi movement," *The Myth of the*

Twentieth Century, in classrooms.⁵²⁶ The statement was to be read aloud during services by Confessing Church pastors who realized this might mean their imprisonment. Many Confessing Church pastors read this statement and the Nazi regime arrested 700 of them as a consequence.⁵²⁷ The Nazi dictatorship attempted to limit the financial autonomy of the Confessing Church by forbidding the collection of funds not approved by the Ministry of Church Affairs (the law passed on March 11, 1935). In 1937, Pastor Franz Hildebrandt was arrested and briefly imprisoned for forwarding collections from Confessing churches to the Council of Brethren (instead of the regional church consistory).⁵²⁸ In fact, the year 1937 was a tumultuous year for the Confessing Church. In June 1937, the confessing leader Otto Dibelius of Berlin was arrested by the Gestapo and put on trial for conspiracy against the state, all due to an open letter sent to the Minister of Church Affairs, Hans Kerrl, rejecting the new revelations of National Socialist ideology that advanced political not spiritual concerns.⁵²⁹ Conway asserts that by November 1937, over 700 pastors were arrested for various infractions against the Nazi state, such as the illegal collection of funds and the reading of the names of pastors persecuted by the state.⁵³⁰ Martin Niemöller read a forbidden announcement of this type from the pulpit and was subsequently arrested and accused of encouraging treason and

⁵²⁶ Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 80; Gerlach, *And the Witnesses Were Silent*, 80; and Conway, *The Nazi Persecution of the Churches*, 56.

⁵²⁷ Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 80.

⁵²⁸ The Council of Brethren was the leadership body of the Confessing Church, whereas the regional church consistory was the leadership body of the *Reichskirche*. See Bonhoeffer, *Theological Education Underground*, Kindle edition, location 1329. Upon his release Hildebrandt immigrated to England and found work as a minister. For more on the life and ministry of Franz Hildebrandt, see Chapter 7.

⁵²⁹ Conway, *The Nazi Persecution of the Churches*, 208-211.

⁵³⁰ Conway, *The Nazi Persecution of the Churches*, 208-211.

provoking the state.⁵³¹ In addition to these cases are those of the German pastors of Jewish descent, many of whom were harassed or arrested for no apparent reason other than their family background.⁵³²

The Nazi regime attempted to limit the unity and effectiveness of the Confessing Church by targeting its pastors through a variety of measures. Conway summarizes the “less severe” actions of the state:

Some pastors were forbidden to preach or lecture; some were ejected from their parishes; some were deprived of their stipends... In July [1938] all pastors were forbidden to teach religious instruction in State schools. Orders were issued banning the Confessing Church’s private seminaries and forbidding the payment of stipends to pastors who had taken their ordination examinations at such seminaries. All theological students were obliged to become members of one or other of the Nazi affiliated associations.⁵³³

As previously mentioned, the Gestapo closed Bonhoeffer’s seminary at Finkenwalde, compelling him and his colleagues to establish a seminary underground, where the state could not interfere. By November 1937, 27 of the Finkenwalde seminarians had been sent to prison, and by “January 1938 Bonhoeffer himself was banned from traveling to Berlin and the surrounding regions of Brandenburg.”⁵³⁴

Despite the persecutions, only 11 pastors among the 95 included in this study – and most of them leaders of the Confessing Church – criticized the Nazi regime or pro-

⁵³¹ Conway, *The Nazi Persecution of the Churches*, 209.

⁵³² See Chapters 6 and 7.

⁵³³ Conway, *The Nazi Persecution of the Churches*, 210.

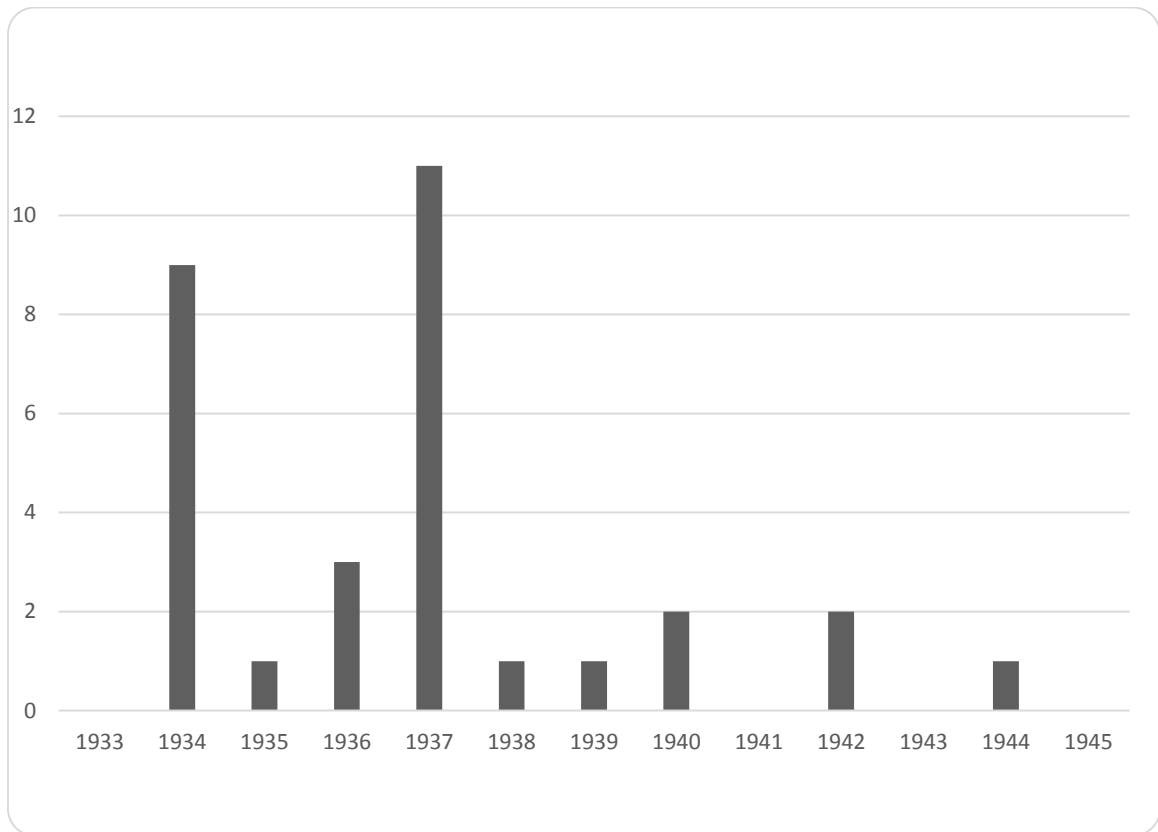
⁵³⁴ Bonhoeffer, *Theological Education Underground*, Kindle edition, 825.

Nazi supporters for persecuting Christians and the German churches. This represents only 1.1% of the 95 pastors examined in this study. Moreover, the majority (55%) of these sermons were delivered by Martin Niemöller in his Dahlem-Berlin church. Here is a list of the pastors and the numbers of times they made criticisms of this type:

Karl Barth	1
Dietrich Bonhoeffer	4
Rudolf Bultmann	2
Gerhard Ebeling	1
Franz Hildebrandt	3
Julius von Jan	1
Heinz Kloppenburg	1
Martin Niemöller	20
Paul Schneider	1
Wolfgang Trillhaas	1
Heinrich Vogel	1

Furthermore, the dates of the sermons are also significant as they demonstrate the approximate times when the Confessing Church faced intense persecution under the regime and its supporters.

GRAPH 1 – Sermons Critical of the Nazi Persecution of the German Churches



The spike in criticisms in 1934 is likely due to the intensification in that year of the inter-church conflicts with the German Christian movement. This was the year that the Confessing Church broke with the German Evangelical Church to, in the words of the Barmen Declaration, “withstand in faith and unanimity the destruction of the Confession of Faith, and thus of the Evangelical Church in Germany.”⁵³⁵ The increase of criticisms in 1937 is likely due to an increase in the Nazi regime’s anti-church measures and arrests of its pastors. As I previously mentioned, by November 1937, the regime arrested over

⁵³⁵ “Barmen Declaration,” translated in Arthur Cochrane’s *The Church’s Confession under Hitler* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962), 237.

700 Confessing Church pastors for alleged infractions or crimes.⁵³⁶ Also, in August 1937, the chief of the Secret Police, Heinrich Himmler prohibited confessing churches from collection funds, thus severely limiting their ability to function as autonomous churches, and banned confessing seminaries like Bonhoeffer's at Finkenwalde.⁵³⁷ In fact, as I will discuss shortly, Gestapo and SD reports even reveal concern about clergymen voicing criticism of Nazi persecution of Christians and the German churches.

Of the five sermons that occurred during wartime, only one took place in Germany: a sermon written by Bonhoeffer but delivered by an unknown lector at an unknown location for the first Sunday after the New Year 1940.⁵³⁸ Hildebrandt delivered three over the BBC to a German audience, and Karl Barth preached one on September 24, 1939, in Zurich. Thus, 31 of the 36 (86%) sermons with oppositional content took place before the war.

In fact, the total numbers of wartime sermons (278) is a fraction of the 910 total sermons included in this study. Though Hitler's regime waged war for six of its dozen years, the confessing sermons in this collection comprise only 30% of the total. The most obvious reason for this is that there were simply fewer pastors to preach. Of the 18,000 Protestant pastors in Nazi Germany in 1941, 6,800 (40%) were mobilized in the army or navy.⁵³⁹ Not only pastors, but non-ordained vicars and theological candidates were

⁵³⁶ J.S. Conway, *The Nazi Persecution of the Churches* (Vancouver (Regent College, 1968), 209; see also Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 92.

⁵³⁷ See Victoria Barnett's introduction in Bonhoeffer, *Theological Education Underground*, Kindle edition, location 819-825.

⁵³⁸ Bonhoeffer, *Theological Education Underground*, Kindle edition, 14339-14435; see also Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 159-72.

⁵³⁹ For a discussion of the mobilization of German pastors, see Helmreich, *German Churches under Hitler*, 306-308.

called up as well. This is the reason why Bonhoeffer's underground seminary finally closed: not because the Gestapo simply forbade it, but because the students were mobilized for war.⁵⁴⁰ By October 1944, 45% of all pastors and 98% of non-ordained vicars and candidates were mobilized.⁵⁴¹ This left a much smaller contingent of pastors at home to preach.⁵⁴² Also, given that the wartime need to ration paper supplies meant a reduction in newspapers printed across Germany (approximately 1450 newspapers shut down by 1943), we can surmise that publishing houses sharply decreased the publication and distribution of sermons.⁵⁴³ Thus, the historical record for wartime sermons is limited but still useful in understanding Confessing Church pastors' preaching during the Second World War.

The evidence from this collection of sermons indicates that pastors very seldom criticized the Nazi regime or its supporters for persecution against the German churches. The 36 sermons (4%) do not represent an impressive stand against the regime, especially given that Niemöller accounts for 20 of them. Nevertheless, the evidence we do have indicates the concerns that Confessing Church pastors may have had, though largely unwilling to express them publicly. In this section of the chapter, we will review the two main themes present and how they represent criticisms of the Nazi regime and its supporters: encouragement in times of trouble, and remembering the persecuted.

⁵⁴⁰ Edwin Robinson, editor and translator, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Christmas Sermons* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 126.

⁵⁴¹ Helmreich, *German Churches under Hitler*, 306.

⁵⁴² Incidentally, this situation led to many women, often the wives of pastors, filling in and leading congregations; see Helmreich, *German Churches under Hitler*, 308.

⁵⁴³ Richard Evans, *The Third Reich at War* (New York: Penguin, 2009), 565.

As pastors are the spiritual guides of their faith communities, it is not surprising that they offered encouragement to their own persecuted people. Predominantly, this message was coupled with an affirmation of belief in the love and justice of God, and that the oppression will one day end. For example, on January 21, 1934, Bonhoeffer preached to his German congregation in London on Jeremiah 20:7, a passage about God's overwhelming presence and calling for his chosen messengers. Midway through the sermon Bonhoeffer reflects on the perils Christians encounter in Nazi Germany:

Today in our home church, thousands of parishioners and pastors are facing the danger of oppression and persecution because of their witness for the truth. They have not chosen this path out of arbitrary defiance, but because they were led to it; they simply had to follow it – often against their own wills and against their own flesh and blood... How often they must have wished that peace and calm and quietness would finally return; how often they must have wished that they did not have to keep on threatening, warning, protesting, and bearing witness to the truth!⁵⁴⁴

Bonhoeffer's sermon reflects the fragmentation of the German churches and the hostile combativeness of the Church Struggle. Note he does not say who oppresses or persecutes, but instead focuses on the actions of the faithful Christians who must meet this unjust treatment. He ends the sermon with a proclamation of faith in the end of sorrows and sin, and in God's final victory.

Pastor Heinz Kloppenburg of Wilhelmshaven, a Confessing Church pastor and member of the Barmen Synod, preached a sermon on April 15, 1934, on Jesus' parable of the Good Shepherd who protects his sheep from the "raging" of a wolf. Kloppenburg

⁵⁴⁴ Bonhoeffer, *London*, 352.

speaks of a wolf that attacks and struggles against the kingdom of God, as if this wolf is presently causing mischief in the German churches. He points out that the sheep themselves cannot protect against the wolf, and they cannot rely on hired hands. But they must trust in the true Pastor. In this sense, this sermon is a warning to Christians to beware of the wolf, and it is also an encouragement to trust God. But in middle of this theological reflection, Kloppenburg pauses to affirm the separation of religious and political affairs. He argues that the state must keep to its domain outside the walls of the church, and the church to its domain inside. He says, “When we gather together in the church, then it is not about political things, but it is about the kingdom of God and his glory.”⁵⁴⁵ On the one hand, Kloppenburg gives the state the respect and obedience he believes is its due, but on the other hand, he criticizes a “wolf” that seeks to intrude in church affairs to scatter and devour the sheep. It is not clear whether Kloppenburg considers Hitler the “wolf,” or if this is merely to say that there are wolves that seek to do damage to the church – whether those in the German Christian movement or others. He leaves this conveniently ambiguous.

As I previously mentioned, there was perhaps no more vocal critic of the Nazi persecution of the German churches than Martin Niemöller, often using strong and colorful language to make his point. Niemöller speaks out about the German Christian movement’s persecution of Christians in Württemberg in an October 1934 sermon on Matthew 21:23, 24, 28-32. Niemöller is responding to a series of events that began a few months past in March, when the Reich Bishop Müller and the newly appointed legal

⁵⁴⁵ Heinz Kloppenburg, Sermon manuscript on John 10:12-16, 15 April 1934, Papers of Heinz Kloppenburg. EZA 613/65.

administrator of the *Reichskirche*, August Jäger, attempted to dissolve the leadership of the provincial churches that resisted coordination into the *Reichskirche*, and this included the popular bishops of Württemberg and Bavaria, Theophil Wurm and Hans Meiser respectively.⁵⁴⁶ And so Müller decided to make a public stand and single out Wurm as an example.⁵⁴⁷ On April 16, 1934, Müller issued a radio announcement stating that the *Reichskirche* determined that Wurm was unacceptable as a church leader and public figure. Yet the people of Württemberg roundly supported their bishop, and just a couple days later, on April 22, Wurm held his own conference at the Ulm Cathedral to plan the founding of a new and independent church government.⁵⁴⁸ A few other provincial churches followed suit and resisted the subjugation of the *Reichskirche*, including Bavaria, Westphalia and Brandenburg. Only a month later, like-minded Protestants would gather at the National Synod in Barmen, where they would approve the Barmen Declaration in defiance of the *Reichskirche*.

Yet the conflict continued into autumn when Müller and Jäger used coercive measures to interfere in the leadership of the provincial churches. In the months of September and October, they trumped up charges and placed Wurm and Meiser under house arrest, searching their offices and taking legal control of the provincial leadership, under the direction of the *Reichskirche*. The arrests and usurpation of church leadership led to a fury of popular condemnation of both Müller and Jäger. Peoples throughout

⁵⁴⁶ See Conway, *Nazi Persecution of the Churches*, 81-83; Green, *Lutherans against Hitler*, 95-96; Helmreich, *German Churches under Hitler*, 171-172; and Meier, *Der evangelische Kirchenkampf*, 174-175.

⁵⁴⁷ Conway, *Nazi Persecution of the Churches*, 82.

⁵⁴⁸ Conway, *Nazi Persecution of the Churches*, 82-83.

Württemberg and Bavaria demonstrated in support of their bishops, and pastors condemned their unjust treatment in church services.⁵⁴⁹

And this leads us to Niemöller's confrontational sermon on Matthew 21 given in October 1934. The sermon is entitled, "The Father's Will," and the first words he speaks are of a condemnation of the German Christian movement:

The lawful bishop of the province [Theophil Wurm] has been deposed by an unlawful and unchristian synod. He and his fellow workers have been deprived, with the aid of secular authority, of their personal liberty and have been forbidden to act in an official capacity... We are already receiving new reports of the violent attack of the anti-Christian forces on the church in Bavaria; there, too, a reign of terror is being set up, while the public is being misled by lies and half-truths. The bishop of Bavaria [Hans Meiser] also has been deposed and robbed of his personal freedom, and that so-called "union" which is destroying a church already united in creed and constitution has been carried out with the assistance of temporal power against the unanimous will of the Protestant community.⁵⁵⁰

He speaks of this time as an "hour of darkness" akin to Jesus' trial in the Garden of Gethsemane – Christians must prepare themselves for betrayal and temptation.⁵⁵¹

Niemöller asks his congregants to reflect on their obligation to remain obedient to the

⁵⁴⁹ Conway, *Nazi Persecution of the Churches*, 98-99.

⁵⁵⁰ Niemöller, *Here Stand I*, 104. For the historical background, see Helmreich, *German Churches under Hitler*, 170-172; and Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 63-65. Niemöller does not name the bishop of Württemberg, Theophil Wurm, the Bishop of Bavaria, Hans Meiser, nor the Nazi officials who removed them from office, Reich Bishop Ludwig Müller and the leader of Reich Church Affairs, August Jäger. Niemöller takes for granted that his audience is fully aware of the details. Reich Bishop Ludwig reconstituted the national synod of Protestant churches to further their goals of establishing harmony in the churches and to place their control in the hands of the German Christian movement. In this process, Müller and Jäger were able to gain enough support to remove Bishop Wurm and Bishop Meiser. Both bishops were later arrested for their opposition to the nazification of the German churches, yet quickly released due to public protests in their support.

⁵⁵¹ Niemöller, *Here Stand I*, 106.

will of God, to reevaluate where their allegiances lie and upon whom they place their trust. This reflection should be accompanied by repentance, he argues, which should strengthen obedience and trust. He continues,

Repentance: heart searching and conversion. However strange it may sound, that is the Lord's call to us in this conflict, so that we may not carry on the struggle as our own cause in lighthearted self-confidence, while talking of professing and confessing our faith in him. Now amid the satanic temptations of this period of persecution, we can less than at any time dispense with going quietly apart and mercilessly submitting our own will and our own passion to the will, the jurisdiction of the Lord Jesus Christ, and then, under his guidance, making a new beginning in faith, in obedience to his word and in the confidence that he himself will carry on his cause.⁵⁵²

Niemöller gives concrete advice: to repent and trust in God; this in turn will inspire renewed obedience to God. The problem with this advice is that introspection and soul searching do not in themselves lead to active and public acts of opposition or resistance in the service of the persecuted – like those in Württemberg. Thus, this call to action can have only a limited, individual impact, rather than significant social consequences.

Niemöller targets not only the German Christian movement, but the Nazi dictatorship as well. On Passion Sunday in 1934, Niemöller preached on Psalm 43, which reads in part: “Vindicate me, O God, and defend my cause against an ungodly people; from those who are deceitful and unjust deliver me!” He clearly wishes to condemn the Nazi dictatorship for its persecution of the Protestant Church. He declares,

⁵⁵² Niemöller, *Here Stand I*, 109.

Today all the bells of the German Protestant churches are silent, and in every divine service a prayer of intercession is being said for the five Protestant pastors from Hesse and Saxony who have been taken away from their congregations and put into the concentration camp in spite of the remonstrances made by the interim church management to the authorities. And so the only course left open to us is to act according to the words, “Whether one member suffers, all the members suffer with it,” and we turn, seeking justice and help, to the supreme and highest court.⁵⁵³

He continues by mentioning a “dear young colleague” in Frankfurt who was arrested nearly three weeks prior because he refused the order of an “unlawful bishop” to leave his church – and his congregation refused to leave him as well.⁵⁵⁴ Niemöller acknowledges that he and his congregation are bitter and may have a hard time forgiving their persecutors, and he asks for mercy and grace to be able to do so. He does not advocate any course of action except to trust in “the light and the truth of God, which are present in Jesus Christ, [and which] have a compelling force,” that will bring lasting change.⁵⁵⁵

In a sermon on November 11, 1937, Heinrich Vogel also condemns the Nazi regime. He preached on Psalm 94:12-19, which deserves to be quoted at length:

Happy are those whom you discipline, O Lord,
 And whom you teach out of your law,
 Giving them respite from days of trouble,
 Until a pit is dug for the wicked.
 For the Lord will not forsake his people;
 He will not abandon his heritage;

⁵⁵³ Niemöller, *Here Stand I*, 139.

⁵⁵⁴ See Helmreich, *German Churches under Hitler*, 170-172; and Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 63-65.

⁵⁵⁵ Niemöller, *Here Stand I*, 142.

For justice will return to the righteous,
And all the upright in heart will follow it.

Vogel refers in this sermon to the persecution of the German churches, though he does not name Hitler or the Nazi government or the German Christian movement as the perpetrators. He specifically speaks of the “wave of over 700 arrests” in the church that occurred. Against the Nazi dictatorship and the German Christian movement, he affirms that the Church’s mission “is the message of the victory of the grace of God all over the world to align in the certainty that God himself creates and gathers the pious hearts, whom God will judge...It says to the world, which does not know, that everything that lives, that people and states in truth are held together through nothing other than the victory of the law of God’s grace...”⁵⁵⁶ In this intercessory sermon meant to call upon God for the comfort of his people in a time of persecution, Vogel reminds his congregants that the message of the church stands in stark contrast to the Nazi message of power and domination. He encourages them by asserting that God’s grace conquers all.

Again, by 1934 the German churches faced Nazi attempts to gain administrative control of their institutions with the establishment of the *Reichskirche* in 1933 and the Ministry of Church Affairs in 1935, as well as an ideological struggle “to capture the heart and mind of the whole German nation and to establish a new cult to replace the two-thousand-year-old influence of Christianity.”⁵⁵⁷ At the same time the Nazi regime

⁵⁵⁶ Heinrich Vogel, Sermon manuscript on 11 November 1937, Papers of Heinrich Vogel, EZA 665/76.

⁵⁵⁷ Conway, *Nazi Persecution of the German Churches*, 95-96.

instigated a “campaign of terrorism and intimidation” carried out by the Gestapo to demoralize and silence opposition within the German churches.⁵⁵⁸

When the Wehrmacht began its invasion of Poland in September 1939, Nazi policy with regard to the German churches changed.⁵⁵⁹ Hitler acknowledged he needed a unified nation to wage war, and so he called a truce in the Church Struggle.⁵⁶⁰ He gave up trying to unify the German Evangelical Church. Yet in the early months of the war, the Nazi regime initiated measures to diminish the German churches further, among them, the closure of various Catholic churches that were “too far” from air-raid shelters; the melting of church bells, many historic and valuable; and religious journals could not petition members of the military for subscriptions.⁵⁶¹ By late-1940, other measures were added, such as the restrictions of Catholic priests to substitute teach in the schools; theological schools were closed; religious orders were banned from accepting novices; and churches were required to bury anyone regardless of their confession or lack of belief. Thus, while Hitler and the Nazi regime gave up on forcing the unity and harmony of the German churches along National Socialist lines, they still persecuted the churches in a variety of ways.

Yet these persecutions did not keep all pastors silent. In a sermon delivered in January 1940, in the Confessing Church underground seminary, Bonhoeffer affirmed the common theme that though the people of God are persecuted, God is not silent and will

⁵⁵⁸ Conway, *Nazi Persecution of the German Churches*, 96.

⁵⁵⁹ Conway, *Nazi Persecution of the German Churches*, 232.

⁵⁶⁰ Conway, *Nazi Persecution of the German Churches*, 232.

⁵⁶¹ Conway, *Nazi Persecution of the German Churches*, 237-238.

deliver them. The sermon was based on Matthew 2:13-23, reflecting on the story of Herod's slaughter of the innocents at the time of Jesus' birth. Bonhoeffer observes that the people of God – Israel and the Church – have been persecuted throughout history, and will continue to be persecuted. But there is hope. He proclaims, “The mighty Herod is dead without having attained his goal, but Jesus lives.”⁵⁶² Throughout the Church, the persecutors have come and gone. “Nero is dead, Diocletian is dead, the enemies of Luther and the Reformation are dead, but Jesus lives, and with him lives those who are his.”⁵⁶³ This is a sermon of hope and encouragement for the seminarians, to stay faithful in a difficult time. Though Bonhoeffer does not name Hitler and the Nazis here, it is clear that they belong with Herod, Nero, and Diocletian as persecutors of God's people. These are after all Christians driven underground to study and worship by a regime that finds their faith dangerous.⁵⁶⁴

In all these sermons, pastors rarely mentioned the name of Hitler, the Nazis, or even the German Christian movement. One of the very few examples where a Confessing Church pastor named the persecutor is found in a sermon given by Karl Barth on September 24, 1939, in Horgen, Switzerland – beyond the reach of Nazi authorities. He preached on Ephesians 3:14-21, which speaks of God's great love of the Christian family, which also includes the remarkable doxology: “Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine...”⁵⁶⁵ Barth considers what he describes

⁵⁶² Bonhoeffer, *Theological Education Underground*, Kindle edition, location 14397.

⁵⁶³ Bonhoeffer, *Theological Education Underground*, Kindle edition, location 14406.

⁵⁶⁴ See Bonhoeffer, *Theological Education Underground*, Kindle edition, location 809-828. The editor of this volume writes, “At the end of August 1937, Heinrich Himmler, the head of the secret police, banned Confessing seminaries, as well as related activities such as the taking up of church collections.”

⁵⁶⁵ In the Christian tradition a doxology is a hymn or formula of praise to God, often used in the liturgy of a

as the great love of God for his people and then says, “What then, can Hitler, Stalin and Mussolini and their ilk ever harm those who believed?”⁵⁶⁶ This statement places Hitler alongside the leader of the “godless” communist power in Europe, Stalin, who was known in Germany as an infamous persecutor of Christians.⁵⁶⁷ The fact that this one statement explicitly names Hitler’s persecution of Christians is virtually all we have in 910 Confessing Church sermons indicates that pastors in Germany may have feared sending any messages from the pulpit likely to land them in serious trouble with the Nazi authorities.

As we have seen, this common label of “persecutor” emphasizes not a group identity or belief system per se, but rather the actions of the offender. For these Confessing Church pastors, the proof of their opponents’ enmity against Christianity is their treatment of Christians, not simply the content of their religious or beliefs. As such, this charge of persecution infers that Confessing Church opponents are not only enemies of the German churches, but also of God; in maltreating God’s people, they reveal their hostility against God. At the same time, the label “persecutor” infers not benign passivity, as if the Confessing Church could easily dismiss their opponents as harmless, but rather it supposes continual and active harm to the German churches that must be opposed.

church service.

⁵⁶⁶ Karl Barth, *Fürchte Dich Nicht! Predigten aus den Jahren 1934 bis 1948* (Chr. Kaiser Verlag München, 1949), 200.

⁵⁶⁷ See for example Kenneth Scott Latourette’s *A History of Christianity, Vol. II* (New York: Prince Press, 1997), 1396-1399.

But casting one's self or group as the "persecuted" also has significant meaning in the Christian tradition. First, it places the Confessing Church in the role as righteous victims, who through merely living their religion faithfully are targeted and attacked unjustly. Confessing Church pastors thus place themselves in the same situation as the persecuted early churches during the Roman Empire, as well as the stories of the Christian martyrs throughout the past two thousand years. Yet setting themselves within this narrative of a persecuted church, these pastors affirm the Christian belief that the outcome of this persecution is certain – that God will defeat the persecutors and liberate the oppressed. This is why we can note a hopeful tone in these sermons.

This leads us to the second theme among these sermons that criticized the Nazi persecution of the German churches, remembering the persecuted. For example, on the fifth Sunday after Epiphany 1935, in a sermon entitled, "Fellowship in the Gospel," Niemöller speaks of the church conflict, that this may be a time of life and death for the German Protestant churches: a time of "freedom or more bitter slavery, peace or renewed struggle."⁵⁶⁸ He speaks of pastors who have been driven out of the church without pay, and how Christians have been there to serve them and their families. Confessing churches took up offerings to support pastors who have fallen afoul of the Nazi regime or the German-Christian authorities and lost their jobs; in fact, this was one of the first tasks of the Council of Brethren, to care for pastors and their families.⁵⁶⁹ Niemöller speaks of the German Protestant Church as one that has been divided and become lukewarm, referring to one of the seven churches the Book of Revelation.

⁵⁶⁸ Niemöller, *Here Stand I*, 124.

⁵⁶⁹ Robertson, *Christians against Hitler*, 35.

In the same sermon, Niemöller celebrates the promise of Christian unity, even despite the Church struggle dividing the Christians in Germany. He speaks of Christians taking care of one another, particularly pastors who have lost their jobs because of their confession of faith:

The fact that not one of the many hundreds of our brethren who have been driven from office has had to suffer want with his family, the fact that helping hands have been stretched out from all sides – and that not only once, but again and again during many months – is surely reason for joy and gratitude. For who would have thought that there was still so much sympathy and unity of spirit in our poor church, which has been so split up and has grown so lukewarm?⁵⁷⁰

From the pulpit Niemöller says that “hundreds” of men lost their jobs due to the Church conflict, not a handful or even scores, but hundreds. This obvious show of sympathy and support for these men and their shared cause must have had a positive impact on congregants listening attentively. And he reminds his congregants of ancient Israel, “the more they [Israel’s enemies] afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew.”⁵⁷¹

A sermon entitled, “One Last Word,” delivered on June 27, 1937, the last Niemöller delivered in Dahlem before the Gestapo arrested him, focuses on the wisdom of the Pharisee named Gamaliel, who argued with his colleagues to refrain from persecuting the early Christians in case they actually were men and women of God (see Acts 5:34-42).⁵⁷² Niemöller opens the sermon with a prayer: “Israel has nevertheless

⁵⁷⁰ Niemöller, *Here Stand I*, 126.

⁵⁷¹ Niemöller, *Dachau Sermons*, 128.

⁵⁷² Bentley, *Martin Niemöller*, 129.

God for his comfort! Grace be with us and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” He contends that Christians must not simply observe the persecutions of Christians in Nazi Germany, but to make a decision and take a stand. In the sermon he mentions a press notice the previous Friday that disparaged Confessing Church pastor Hans Asmussen for leaving Berlin on the advice of the Prussian Council. Niemöller witnesses the unjust persecution of not just one pastor, but many. He lists persecution after persecution, driving the point home that the church is under attack. But the persecution is not limited to one person, for the German churches suffer together. He declares,

Anyone who has gone through the fiery ordeal of the tempter in these last days – I think, for instance, how on Wednesday the secret police penetrated into the closed church of Friedrich Werder and arrested at the altar eight members of the Council of Brethren who were assembled there, and took them away...⁵⁷³

And he continues to list event after event of Nazi persecution of the Confessing Church and its pastors. In Saarbrücken six women and one man were arrested for circulating a leaflet promoting Confessing men for an upcoming church election. Just the Friday prior, there was no one at his communion service “except three young Gestapo men, who have to inform upon the activities of the community of Jesus”; the congregants were apparently too frightened to attend.⁵⁷⁴ And that very day, Niemöller’s colleague Pastor Müller and forty-seven other confessing men and women were taken into custody. He

⁵⁷³ Niemöller, *Here Stand I*, 226.

⁵⁷⁴ Niemöller, *Here Stand I*, 226.

tells of each of these events from the pulpit, evidently incensed, and yet with encouragement that they suffer for Christ's sake.

Confessing Church pastors throughout Germany would often read intercessory lists (*Fürbittenliste*) of “members who had been arrested, banished, or forbidden by the Gestapo to preach or to travel,” during services to encourage their congregants to pray for them.⁵⁷⁵ While some pastors argued that the lists should not be used, in the words of Bishop Marahrens, “as pressure from the church public upon state organs,” and so they left off the list those arrested for political reasons. Yet the Nazi regime itself viewed the lists as political provocation.⁵⁷⁶ In fact, the intercessory lists “constitute one of the best records we have of the state's terroristic action against the church.”⁵⁷⁷ The result of reading intercessory lists in church services was the galvanization of the Confessing Church movement.⁵⁷⁸ While Niemöller was not alone in naming Christians persecuted by the Nazi regime, he was one of the very few who incorporated the lists into his sermons. Like this last sermon in Dahlem, he provided a narrative and context of the arrests and displacements, thus providing his church with an even greater opportunity to sympathize with the persecuted.

Bonhoeffer also spoke out against the persecution of the German churches. Preaching to a German congregation in the city of London in January 1934, Bonhoeffer reflects on Jeremiah's struggle to accept his calling as the prophet of Israel (20:7).

⁵⁷⁵ See Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 90; Conway, *Nazi Persecutions of the Churches*, 209; and Helmreich, *German Churches under Hitler*, 215.

⁵⁷⁶ Quoted in Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 90-91.

⁵⁷⁷ Helmreich, *German Churches under Hitler*, 215.

⁵⁷⁸ Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 91.

Jeremiah faced persecution and suffering, but he persevered and served God. Bonhoeffer then reminds his congregation of the German churches, where

thousands of parishioners and pastors are facing the danger of oppression and persecution because of their witness for the truth. They have not chosen this path out of arbitrary defiance, but because they were led to it; they simply had to follow it – often against their own wills and against their own flesh and blood.⁵⁷⁹

These suffering Christians in Nazi Germany desired peace and harmony, but they felt compelled to stand against Nazi ideology and policies that undermined their faith.

Again, in a sermon delivered on September 3, 1938, in the town of Groß-Schlönwitz, Bonhoeffer preached on Romans 5:1-5, a text that speaks of character forged through suffering and perseverance. He argues, “Our church has suffered great affliction during the last few years: destruction of its order, the incursion of false proclamation, much enmity, evil words and slander, imprisonment and distress of all kinds, up to this very hour.”⁵⁸⁰ Bonhoeffer counsels his listeners to take heart in their sufferings and to look to Christ as an example of bearing them. Notice that he does not specify who is afflicting, destroying, and speaking falsely, but the perpetrators can be understood as members of the German Christian movement specifically, or the Nazis more generally. Though one may argue that the German Christian movement may have destroyed the order of the German Protestant churches, only the Nazi regime could have imprisoned Christians.

⁵⁷⁹ Bonhoeffer, *London*, 351-352.

⁵⁸⁰ Bonhoeffer, *Theological Education Underground*, Kindle edition, location 13914.

Gauging the reception of these sermons is exceptionally difficult. Congregants did not (and do not) typically respond to sermons in letters or articles or books that have been preserved in the historical record. But we can get an appreciation for how the Nazi regime may have perceived these sermons by examining the reports of the Gestapo and the SD.⁵⁸¹ These reports indicate what the government found inappropriate or even criminal behavior by Confessing Church pastors. As we will see, the Gestapo and SD reports demonstrate concern over these three key themes: criticisms of the Nazi persecution of Christians, National Socialism as a false ideology, and the worship or undue reverence of false idols.

My purpose is not to present an exhaustive account of Gestapo and SD reports on Confessing Church pastors' sermons, but rather to gain an understanding of the types of criticisms from the pulpit that might have pricked the ears of Germans most sensitive to politically charged comments. These Gestapo and SD reports present verbatim quotes by pastors from various confessions, all of which were of concern to the regime for undermining Nazi ideology and values. The indications from the reports are that Gestapo or SD agents, or more likely, their informers, attended services to report on problematic religious leaders. My aim here is simply to demonstrate that the sermons discussed in this chapter might easily have caught the attention of the Nazi dictatorship as significant statements of opposition.

⁵⁸¹ I have gathered these reports from the Bundesarchiv in Berlin (BA) and the published source from editor Heinz Boberach, *Berichte des SD und der Gestapo über Kirchen und Kirchenvolk in Deutschland 1934-1944* (Mainz: Matthias-Grünwald-Verlag, 1971).

As we will see throughout the chapter, the reports filed by the Gestapo and the SD provide revealing insights into how the Nazi dictatorship viewed the work of the German churches, and into which actions it deemed offensive or criminal. Not surprisingly, I found very few that addressed Confessing Church pastors discussed in this chapter (as these 95 pastors are a small percentage of the 7,000). And those that did, rarely related to preaching, but rather to comments or actions taken outside the church. Lastly, most reports did not mention Confessing Church affiliation, if there was one. Unfortunately, the reports only indicate that a certain action took place but not whether the Nazi dictatorship took any action as a consequence. Nor do they provide any commentary about their interpretation of the action. Despite these limitations, these reports do indicate which actions and comments the Nazi dictatorship found objectionable and the degree to which the regime was aware of pastors' oppositional comments from the pulpit.

Aside from preaching, the Gestapo reports mention several "offensive" actions by pastors, including public criticisms of Hitler and other Nazi officials, the war effort, the persecution of the churches, and the "paganization" of Christianity in Nazi Germany. For example, a pastor named Lemke from Templin declared publicly (whether in a service or not is undisclosed), likely in January 1934, that Hitler discourages people from attending church and that National Socialism was a godless ideology.⁵⁸² Likewise, the Gestapo reported that the Confessing Church pastor Kurt Scharf commented at a meeting of the Pastors' Emergency League on 12 December 1933, that "a man like Baldur von Schirach" should not lead the youth of Germany (as the head of the Hitler Youth)

⁵⁸² Gestapo Report on Pastor Lemke of Templin: "Staatsfeindliches Verhalten evangelischer Geistlicher, v.a. der Bekennenden Kirche, 1934-1935." Papers of the Reichssicherheitshauptamt. BA R58/5679.

because he believes that Hitler is Germany's Savior and Leader.⁵⁸³ A report from the Chief of the Security Police and the SD concerning the political attitudes of the churches and sects written on October 20, 1939, just a month after the German invasion into Poland, indicates concern that confessing churches and other protestant groups "portray the war as a consequence of atheism in Germany, and that God's judgment is coming."⁵⁸⁴ The report does not indicate the names of pastors behind this portrayal, but it does mention the Niemöller Office in Berlin-Dahlem.

One Gestapo report indicates a humorous but critical opinion from a former Nazi member, Pastor Grüber of Templin (it is unlikely, but possible, that this is the same Pastor Heinrich Grüber of the Berlin Grüber Office). Dated September 13, 1933, the report indicates that Pastor Grüber resigned his membership in the Nazi Party with the words: "The Nazis are similar to a beefsteak: brown on the outside and when one touches it, the red soup runs [*läuft die rote Suppe*]."⁵⁸⁵ This is a curious statement and somewhat difficult to interpret. The offensive aspect of this statement appears to be the comment, "the red soup runs," which may refer a perception that the Nazis had more in common with the Socialists (or the Left) than they cared to admit.⁵⁸⁶

⁵⁸³ Gestapo Report on Pastor Kurt Scharf: "Staatsfeindliches Verhalten evangelischer Geistlicher, v.a. der Bekennenden Kirche, 1934-1935." Papers of the Reichssicherheitshauptamt. BA R58/5679. Another similar comment was made by a superintendent from Insterburg named Federmann, who called the Hitler Youth leader Baldur von Schirach a "neo-pagan"; see Gestapo Report: "Beobachtung der Vorläufigen Kirchenleitung der Deutschen Evangelischen Kirche, 1936-1937." R58/5670.

⁵⁸⁴ Boberach, *Berichte des SD und der Gestapo*, 361.

⁵⁸⁵ Gestapo Report on Pastor Heinrich Grüber: "Staatsfeindliches Verhalten evangelischer Geistlicher, v.a. der Bekennenden Kirche, 1934-1935," Papers of the Reichssicherheitshauptamt, BA R58/5679.

⁵⁸⁶ Thanks to Frank Biess for this insight.

The Gestapo reports also include remarks made in sermons that caused concern. A Gestapo report from Berlin on February 19, 1940, mentions priests and pastors cited for subversive remarks during a service. One pastor from Steinbach referred to a local postal worker's recent arrest for embezzlement: "Look at the Aryans who steal postal envelopes from each other!"⁵⁸⁷ Though the report does not go into any further detail about why this comment was considered subversive, one can surmise that the pastor did not need to mention "Aryans" at all, and since he did, he may have meant to undermine the sense of *Volksgemeinschaft* (national community) that the Nazis tirelessly advanced. The same report mentions another clergyman, a Catholic priest from Kreise Deutsche-Krone who faced a criminal proceeding because he said of the recent German invasion of Poland: "It looks as if the campaign (*Feldzug*) against Poland was a robbery (*Raubzug*)!"⁵⁸⁸ The clergyman's clever wordplay might have elicited chuckles or at the very least reflection about the moral nature of Germany's invasion of its neighbor.

A wartime Gestapo report August 24, 1942, tells of a sermon from the Poznan area in which an unnamed pastor complained that while "our sons fight Bolshevism," at home "the church is persecuted and oppressed."⁵⁸⁹ He adds that the floods and food shortages of the past winter were judgments of God for the suppression of Christianity in Germany. These comments are meant to highlight the hypocrisy of the popular belief that the Nazis are the defenders of German tradition (including Christianity) against the "godless" communists.

⁵⁸⁷ Boberach, *Berichte des SD und der Gestapo*, 401.

⁵⁸⁸ Boberach, *Berichte des SD und der Gestapo*, 401.

⁵⁸⁹ Boberach, *Berichte des SD und der Gestapo*, 720.

These Gestapo and SD reports demonstrate that the Nazi regime was listening and taking note of pastors in the German churches. They reveal an interest in pastors who criticized Nazi leaders, such as the Baldur von Schirach, the leader of the Hitler Youth, and or who condemned National Socialism as neo-pagan or anti-Christian. They even demonstrate concern over pastors who made jokes at the expense of the regime. In wartime, the reports indicate that the Gestapo and SD took note of anti-war comments made from the pulpit. The reports reveal that even within the bounds of church walls, the regime was paying attention.

Let us return now to the 36 of the 910 sermons that criticized the Nazi regime and its supporters as persecutors of Christians and the German churches. In voicing public criticism, the pastors undermined the fabricated image of Hitler and the regime as respectful of the churches' right to carry out its religious functions in society. Nazi persecution of Christians amounts to a betrayal of Christians by those purporting to be Christians (or at least those supposedly respectful of Christianity in German society).⁵⁹⁰ The pastors' acts of opposition in this group of sermons mean to re-define Hitler and the Nazis as enemies of God, Christians, and the gospel, and as such seek to challenge the legitimacy of the Nazi regime, at least in its policies towards the German churches.

⁵⁹⁰ See Steigmann-Gall, *The Holy Reich*, 3. He advances the provocative argument that "leading Nazis in fact considered themselves Christian (among other things) or understood their movement (among other ways) within a Christian frame of reference."

Against False Ideologies and Idols

The most common criticisms Confessing Church pastors made against Hitler, the Nazi regime, and its supporters, were that National Socialism was a false belief system that supported the worship of false idols and caused devastating conflict in the German churches. Of the 910 sermons in this collection, 61 (6.7%) make criticisms of this type. I have broken down these sermons according to three themes: first, criticisms that National Socialism or associated “false beliefs,” such as nazified Christianity or volkish religion, are false ideologies in direct contradiction to traditional Christianity (41 sermons); second, criticisms that Hitler, the “Aryan” race, the German nation, or “fallen heroes” of the past, are in some sense worshiped or given undue reverence (8 sermons); and third, admonishments or encouragements that a choice must be made in the religious conflicts under the Nazi dictatorship to prioritize allegiances, to make a choice to fight for the gospel against false ideologies (11 sermons). Altogether, the 61 sermons indicate a desire among Confessing Church pastors to warn their congregants that National Socialism is a destructive ideology and that the German people must spiritually reorient themselves.

Unlike the small number of Confessing Church pastors to criticize the Nazis and their pro-Nazi supporters for persecuting the German churches and Christians, 20 of the 95 pastors (21%) examined in this collection of 910 sermons challenged National Socialism (or associated “false beliefs”) as a false ideology.⁵⁹¹ The following is a list of their names and the number of times each made critical comments in their sermons:

⁵⁹¹ Instead of repeatedly referring to National Socialism (or associated “false beliefs”), I will henceforth refer to “National Socialism” for the sake of brevity, given that the pastors most often did not explicitly identify a “false ideology” but the context of all their sermons indicate a great concern about National

Dietrich Bonhoeffer	7	Hanns Lilje	1
Helmut Gollwitzer	2	Martin Niemöller	19
Franz Hildebrandt	6	Rudolf Bultmann	1
Paul Hinz	8	Julius Sammentreuther	1
Heinz Pflugk	1	Paul Schneider	2
Rudolf Eberhard	1	Hans Schnieber	1
Friedrich Frick	1	George Schulz	1
Hans Iwand	1	Karl von Schwarz	1
Günther Harder	2	Wilhelm Staehlin	1
Hans Hertzberg	1	Heinrich Vogel	2

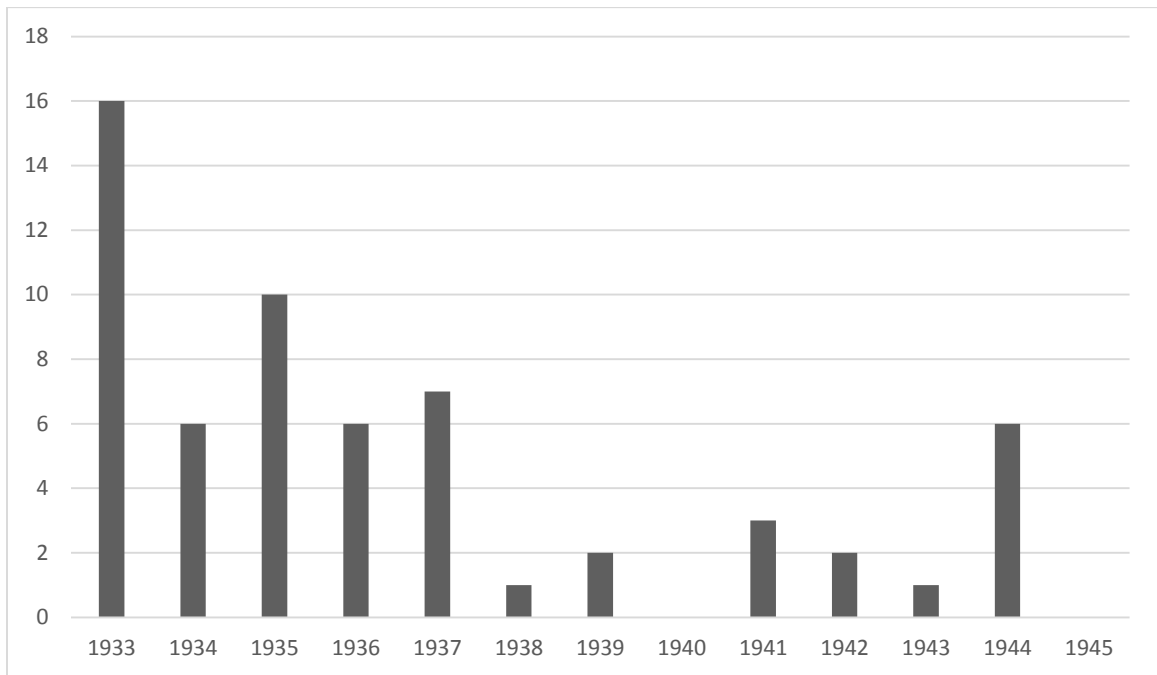
Again, the name of Martin Niemöller jumps from the page as the pastor who most often spoke out. His 19 critical comments alone account for 31% of the total. But in this grouping we also see a few other names of pastors who frequently criticized National Socialism, including Bonhoeffer, Hildebrandt, and Hinz.

Like many of the sermons discussed in the previous section, the majority (32) of the sermons critical of National Socialism took place during the most intense period of the Church Struggle, between 1933 and 1935. The yearly breakdown is as follows:⁵⁹²

Socialism and its use by the German Christian movement to transform Christianity for the new Nazi era.

⁵⁹² The dates of a couple sermons are impossible to know for certainty. One of the sermons categorized in 1933 may have been delivered in 1934, though no precise date is given; see Rudolf Eberhard's sermon on Ps. 98, in Anton's *Nationale Feiertagspredigten und Ansprachen*. Again, the date of one of the sermons categorized in 1935 is indeterminate, but most likely took place in 1935; see Julius Sammentreuther's sermon on I John 5:1-5, in his collection, *Predigtmeditationen ueber die Altkirchlichen Episteln und die Eisenacher (neuer) Evangelien* (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1936).

GRAPH 2 – Sermons Critical of National Socialism as a False Ideology



This reveals not only the intensity of the conflict between the churches over the purity of its theology, but also that Confessing Church pastors were willing to engage in a public debate about how National Socialist or otherwise volkish elements undermined traditional Christianity. Thus, a religiously-supported criticism took on political significance as a stand against National Socialist intrusion in church affairs. And again, as we will see, the Gestapo and SD reports reveal concern that German clergymen voiced criticisms from the pulpit that their government or its leaders govern according to a “false ideology.”

In the beginning months of the Nazi dictatorship future Confessing Church pastors became aware of the conflicts between the values and ideals of Christianity and

National Socialism. The focus in these sermons is often on the unwarranted Nazi elevation of race, ethnicity, and nationalism that defy the universalism of Christianity. In their effort to make their congregants aware of this contradiction between the two ideologies, they often speak of the contemporary threats to Christianity, such as the German Christian movement's denigration of the Hebrew Bible, the inclusion of Hitler as a savior of the German people alongside Christ, efforts to "Aryanize" Jesus, and also efforts to transform Christianity into a volkish religion.

One example of a sermon that celebrates Hitler as a savior of the German people is an anonymous but obviously pro-Nazi sermon delivered at Christmas in 1936, in the town of Solingen.⁵⁹³ The preacher recalls the German winters of ancient days when families would gather on the winter solstice, attach torches to a tree in the woods, and take joy that daylight would last a bit longer every day. The pastor compares the post-First World War years with the days before the solstice, when Germany was in its deepest, darkest days – then finally light broke and a leader appeared. "The Sun is rising ever higher, with our ancient German symbol, the Swastika, and its warmth surrounds the whole German people, melts our hearts together into one great German community." He declares that "Adolf Hitler is our benefactor," the one who has overcome "the winter night" to lead us to a new and brighter day.⁵⁹⁴ Strangely for a Christmas sermon, the pastor makes no mention of the birth of Jesus or the Christian meaning of Christmas.

The sermons of the German Christian movement did not only just revere Hitler, but they also expressed racist and xenophobic views. One sermon by Heinrich Kalb from

⁵⁹³ The sermon is reproduced in Conway, *Nazi Persecution of the Churches*, 364-365.

⁵⁹⁴ Conway, *Nazi Persecution of the Churches*, 365.

Wiessenburg, entitled “Judenchrist – deutscher Christ?” argues for the separation of Jewish Christians from “Aryan” congregations, which he sums up in the phrase, “Germany for Germans, and also in the Church!”⁵⁹⁵ He and those in the German Christian movement wished to purify the German churches of all “foreign” elements, particularly church leaders of “foreign” backgrounds.⁵⁹⁶ “Only German men may speak to the German people from German pulpits; not Turks, Chinese, or even Jews!”⁵⁹⁷ In the next chapter I will elaborate on the German Christian movement’s views of the Jews and Judaism, but for now it is important to note some key volkish elements in the sermons, most notably an emphasis on the so-called “purity” of the German churches and its leadership.

Even before the Nazis came to power, pastors became concerned with Nazi and volkish approaches to Christianity. Pastors such as the Swiss clergymen Karl Barth and Eduard Thurneysen commented on the dark times in which they lived, and also for the need for Christians to choose sides. Together they published a collection of their sermons in the early 1930s entitled, *God’s Search for Man*, and in one sermon on Ephesians 6:18-20, the pastor (unnamed, but either Barth or Thurneysen) reiterates the Apostle Paul’s concern about the dark days in which the early church thrived. But more important, he encourages his congregants with hope grounded in a sense of God’s nearness in times of trouble. The pastor says,

⁵⁹⁵ Heinrich Kalb, „Judenchrist – deutscher Christ?“ in *Deutsches Christentum, dargestellt in Predigt und Vortrag* (Nürnberg: Fr. Städler, 1937), 21.

⁵⁹⁶ Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 82-83.

⁵⁹⁷ Kalb, „Judenchrist – deutscher Christ?“ in *Deutsches Christentum*, 19.

God has laid his hand upon men again. This is the “Gospel”; this is Jesus Christ. Because that is true, and just because of it, we are in these hard battles of light against darkness into which we have been pulled. Times are so difficult because God’s truth is beating a path again on this earth. But, therefore, it is also a great time. “Years of decision” are upon us, not because economics and politics have entered a crisis. Just the reverse – it is because God has stepped upon the scene again that the demons are beginning to come to life. For that reason things are not at all hopeless, but, rather hopeful.⁵⁹⁸

Though the language is unusually stark, we should not interpret this as hyperbole. The pastor argues that the times are characterized by spiritual darkness, chaos or lost-ness that requires people to spiritually ground themselves and to choose sides. A time of spiritual warfare has begun, the pastor says, and he warns his audience to beware of the snares of demons that seek to lead people astray. But the Church has a powerful weapon at its disposal: the sermon: “In every sermon that is a real sermon there is some casting out of demons!”⁵⁹⁹ As Germany reels from its “awful revolutions,” Christians have an obligation to preach sermons that offer stability and the message of renewal. If they fail, he says, then they “too will perish in the deluge of wrong and violence which will irrevocably break forth where God’s word and truth die out.”⁶⁰⁰ The author perceives the gospel as the best weapon, or to mix metaphors, the best antidote, to resolving the great problems of their time. For pastors like Barth and Thurneysen, Christians hold the answer to renewal, not the political parties, or ideologues, or military men.

⁵⁹⁸ Barth and Thurneysen, *God’s Search for Man*, 66

⁵⁹⁹ Barth and Thurneysen, *God’s Search for Man*, 72.

⁶⁰⁰ Barth and Thurneysen, *God’s Search for Man*, 76.

Pastor Rudolf Eberhard from Spremberg preached a sermon (undated, but on an unspecified national holiday in 1933), that expresses the need for Christians to evaluate how consistent National Socialism and Christianity are with each other. He says,

I need only recall the question of the nationality and the purity of the race, in an endeavor to root out all foreign-born [*fremd stämmigen*] influence from the national and political life. These ideas demand a balance and according to a reconciliation with the ideas of the ancient gospel of the Father in Heaven and his crucified Christ... They are the thoughts that today have found the swastika their symbol.

But to us it is about the vital nerve of the poignant question of our nation: Will the swastika as a sign of nationalist idealism [*völkischen Idealismus*] encounter and see the cross of Golgotha, the sign of biblical Christianity?⁶⁰¹

Eberhard seems confident that the two ideologies can co-exist, but he is clear that Christians must remain faithful to the gospel as the ancient foundation of Christian identity. The task then is to work to adapt National Socialism to biblical principles, not the other way around, and herein is his mild criticism: the German churches cannot let Nazi ideology and its symbol, the swastika, silence the gospel message that is available to all people, regardless of race or nationality. In any case, this sermon is likely part of the debate within the German Protestant churches about how to come to terms with the success of National Socialism and the establishment of the Nazi state.

It is important to keep in mind that in light of current debates about whether National Socialism should be understood as neo-pagan or as a political religion, as I discussed in Chapter 2, this research suggests that Confessing Church pastors – those on

⁶⁰¹ Anton, *Nationale Feiertagspredigten und Ansprachen*, 45.

the front lines of the conflict between the German churches and pro-Nazi supporters – did not deliberate on what kind of ideological system it was, but rather acted *as if* it were a competing religious system. In describing National Socialism, they would use terms like “pagan” or “neo-pagan,” as well as “false belief.” In short, Confessing Church pastors were not so much concerned with how to categorize National Socialism – though they were sure it overstepped the bounds of traditional political ideologies into religious belief – as they were with the varieties of ways Nazism undermined or contradicted Christianity.

Their main bones of contention with Nazism as a religious phenomenon were as follows: Nazi racism as a denial of the gospel’s universalism; the image of Hitler as German savior or messiah in denial of Christ and his work; and lastly, the emphasis on national salvation and redemption through human-devised means of exclusion that could only lead to division and aggression. We should keep in mind that one job of the pastor is to warn and protect his or her congregation against ideas and beliefs that threaten its unity and spiritual well-being. In pointing out these contradictions and conflicts with Christianity, the pastors exposed National Socialism as a religious belief system, and not simply a political ideology, that demanded trust in and obedience to Hitler as Führer, rather than God.

In a remarkable sermon on July 23, 1933, Bonhoeffer preached in Berlin on the challenges facing the German Protestant churches in the church elections on that very day.⁶⁰² Hitler even weighed in on the elections, broadcasting a fifteen minute speech on

⁶⁰² See Chapter 3 for a discussion of the church elections of July 23, 1933.

the radio supporting the German Christian movement's candidates in an attempt to align the churches with National Socialist ideology.⁶⁰³ Bonhoeffer uses the famous passage in Matthew 16:13-18, which recounts Peter's declaration that Jesus is the Christ, and Jesus' response that upon "this rock I will build my church." It is a passage that speaks to the very nature and identity of the Church: one that confesses Jesus as "the Christ, the Son of the living God." Bonhoeffer urges his listeners to maintain the Church that "confesses Christ, the Confessing Church – not the church of opinions and ideas..."⁶⁰⁴ Nazi ideas have no place in the Church, Bonhoeffer argues, and Christians should vote accordingly. The task of Christians is not to build the Church themselves, to form it into something new, but to continue to confess Christ. Bonhoeffer perceives in the German Christian movement a desire to adapt the church, to revise its teachings, to rebuild it for a new era. He responds, "Whoever thinks he can build the church is already destroying it. For what he is building is a temple for idols, without knowing or wishing it."⁶⁰⁵ This sermon presents an election-day debate about the nature and identity of the German Protestant churches. Bonhoeffer supports a traditional understanding of the Church as one that fundamentally confesses Christ and argues against the German Christian movement, which seeks to change it to suit the times.

Just months later, the Church Struggle intensified with the *Sportpalast* controversy. On November 13, approximately 20,000 members of the German Christian movement convened at the *Sportpalast* in Berlin, organized by Reinhold Krause, a leader

⁶⁰³ "Radio Broadcast by Hitler on the Church Elections, 22 July 1933," in Matheson, *The Third Reich and the Christian Churches: Documents*, 28; see also Helmreich, *German Churches under Hitler*, 142.

⁶⁰⁴ Robertson, ed., *Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Christmas Sermons*, 78.

⁶⁰⁵ Robertson, ed., *Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Christmas Sermons*, 80.

in the German Christian movement as well as an official in the Brandenburg and Prussian synods.⁶⁰⁶ Krause gave the keynote address that evening entitled, “The Tasks of the German *Reichskirche* in the Spirit of Dr. Martin Luther,” and he explained the main components of their resolution, which read, in part:

An enduring peace can only be created by the transfer or removal of all pastors who are neither willing nor able to cooperate in leading the religious renewal of our people and the fulfillment of the religious reformation in the spirit of National Socialism.

We expect from our nation’s church that it will immediately carry through the Aryan paragraph corresponding to the church law passed by the Prussian general synod. Besides this, we expect the church to bring together all Protestant Christians of alien blood in special church congregations and that it undertakes to form a Jewish Christian Church.

We expect that our nation’s church as a German People’s Church (*Volkskirche*) should free itself from all things not German in its services and confession, especially from the Old Testament with its Jewish system of quid pro quo morality (*jüdischen Lohnmoral*).⁶⁰⁷

Needless to say, this resolution, published just days later, caused great confusion and strong reaction in the German Evangelical Church. It was not surprising that volkish religious ideas had support among German Protestants, but what was startling was that these ideas had gained respectability in the Protestant churches, and so much so, that Krause promoted them as the future of the German churches and entirely consistent with Reformation values.⁶⁰⁸

⁶⁰⁶ Helmreich, *German Churches under Hitler*, 149-150.

⁶⁰⁷ Translated in Helmreich, *German Churches under Hitler*, 150.

⁶⁰⁸ Scholder, *The Churches and the Third Reich*, vol. 1, 553.

Pastor Heinrich Vogel of Dobrikow responded to this controversy in a sermon on November 19, 1933 (just a week after the *Sportpalast* meeting). Vogel, a future member of the Barmen Synod, preached a sermon from I Kings 18:17-40, which tells the story about the Prophet Elijah's confrontation with King Ahab and his challenge to the people of Israel to choose to follow either God or Baal. Vogel says,

You have heard what was said at the *Sportpalast*: the abolition of the Old Testament, the cropping of the New Testament, etc. And the worst of what was said in this *Sportpalast* rally is not even that. It is that the Old Testament has been spoken of as a book full of Jewish cattle-drivers and mafia stories. So then, the cross of Christ has been rejected... Ask yourself, what would Luther say? What would Luther have done in this *Sportpalast* rally? I say to you, he would not have been silent, but he would have climbed on a chair and shouted: that is damage to our faith, which is blasphemy.⁶⁰⁹

Vogel speaks of a revolution in the German churches in the summer of 1933, and the sermon serves as a call to choose sides. These are the days of Elijah all over again, says Vogel, and Germans must make an either/or decision for God or Baal. Vogel's palpable anger is not simply because members of the German Christian movement have excluded the Hebrew Bible from their services and spiritual devotions, which is bad enough in Confessing Church pastors' estimation, but because Krause and others have degraded the Hebrew Bible to a detestable collection of obsolete or morally corrupt stories. Thus, in this sermon we see a Confessing Church pastor use the Old Testament to condemn

⁶⁰⁹ Heinrich Vogel, Sermon manuscript: Reformationsgedächtnistag, I Koenige 18:17-40, 19 November 1933, Papers of Heinrich Vogel, EZA 665/75.

members of the German Christian movement for their denial of it and their substitution of the true faith for a false one.

Shortly after, on the day of the Reformation Festival, October 31, 1933, Niemöller preached at his Dahlem church on Romans 3:28, a passage central to the Lutheran tradition: “For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law.” The trials of their day pose a question of existence. Just a month prior, on September 21, 1933, Niemöller sent a circular letter to all German Protestant pastors inviting them to join the Pastors’ Emergency League and to affirm that they are bound by scripture and the Reformation confessions.⁶¹⁰ Two thousand voiced their support in the first week.⁶¹¹ In his Halloween service, Niemöller reminded his church that it must choose its own path to travel: the neo-pagan or the Christian. Niemöller criticizes the oft-praised “Luther spirit” to extol the courage and tenacity of the man, but at the same time to neglect the content of his message:

Certainly I do not wish to dissuade anyone from taking the man Luther as a pattern; but I must certainly dissuade anyone from thinking – nay, I must seriously warn anyone against thinking – that the struggle for existence between the Protestant church and Rome and the neo-pagans of today could possibly be waged and won with this Luther spirit.⁶¹²

His reference to “neo-pagans” likely refers to those in the German Christian movement who wish to adapt traditional Christianity with National Socialist ideology, particularly

⁶¹⁰ Conway, *Nazi Persecution of the Churches*, 49.

⁶¹¹ Conway, *Nazi Persecution of the Churches*, 49.

⁶¹² Niemöller, *Here Stand I*, 61.

its racial and nationalist elements. Niemöller warns his congregants not to be swayed by the propaganda and smooth words, but to remain steadfast in faith. For Niemöller, Luther's great contribution to Christianity was his emphasis on faith alone, and not his forceful personality. In this same sermon Niemöller criticizes those in German society who say:

‘If you are as much of a nationalist and as much of a socialist as your Führer desires, you are a Christian though you may not know it.’ It is even said that our whole nation would be doing the will of God if only it has purified its species and race. Deeds of the law on which to base a claim to God's favor! Of course Christ is to remain and faith is to remain – they are also to remain.⁶¹³

For the Christian, he argues, there exists one path to salvation, and that is through Christ as testified in the scripture, and thus all other “gods or demigods” can only distract and lead one astray.⁶¹⁴

Krause's *Sportpalast* speech and these sermons reveal a controversy in the German Protestant churches about how to read and use the tradition of Martin Luther to advance a view of the Church in modern Germany. Luther as German hero played a significant role, on both sides, in drawing the boundaries and setting identities between the German Christian movement and the Pastors' Emergency League (later the Confessing Church). And this says nothing of the use of Luther's works to advance antisemitism or anti-Judaism in the Nazi dictatorship.⁶¹⁵

⁶¹³ Niemöller, *Here Stand I*, 65.

⁶¹⁴ Niemöller, *Here Stand I*, 65.

⁶¹⁵ See Christopher Probst, *Demonizing the Jews: Luther and the Protestant Church in Nazi Germany* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2012).

Continuing our discussion on sermons that oppose National Socialism as a false ideology, let us now turn to a pastor unique in his boldness and audaciousness in confronting the German Christian movement and the Nazi regime, Paul Schneider (1897-1939).⁶¹⁶ He was a simple pastor from a small rural parish in Hochelheim, not far from where he grew up. At the age of 17, Schneider enlisted in the German army to serve in World War I, earning the Iron Cross, 2nd Class, and after the war he matriculated to the university in Giessen.⁶¹⁷ As part of his theological education, he served a year-long practicum with a coal mining community so that he could personally engage with laborers to better understand their struggles and needs, and in his own words, to see “into what little corner of their hearts religion had hidden itself.”⁶¹⁸ Schneider continued his work with the working classes in a Berlin suburb on the east side, when in 1926 his father died, leaving him the opportunity to return to Hochelheim and become pastor in his stead.

Schneider’s appointment lasted eight years, from 1926 to 1934, when his reputation among the community suffered because of his vociferous criticisms of the German Christian movement, as well as essays against Nazi leaders such as Goebbels. In one of his last sermons, delivered on January 28, 1934, just one month before the community and his church compelled him to resign, Schneider offers a biting critique of the German Christian movement and Nazism. He bases his sermon on two texts: first,

⁶¹⁶ This biographical sketch is in large part based on the excellent profile of Schneider by Dean Stroud in *Preaching in Hitler’s Shadow*. See also Albrecht Aichelin, *Paul Schneider: Ein radikales Glaubenszeugnis gegen die Gewaltherrschaft des Nationalsozialismus* (Gütersloh: Chr. Kaiser/ Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1994); Rudolf Wentorf, *Der Fall des Pfarrers Paul Schneider: Eine biographische Dokumentation* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1989); and *Paul Schneider, Der Prediger von Buchenwald*, ed. Margarete Schneider (Neuhausen/ Stuttgart: Hänssler, 1995).

⁶¹⁷ Stroud, *Preaching in Hitler’s Shadow*, Kindle Edition, location 1637-1688.

⁶¹⁸ Quoted in Stroud, *Preaching under Hitler’s Shadow*, Kindle Edition, location 1637.

the story of Jesus calming the stormy sea in Luke 8:22-25; and the second, the story of Jesus' walking on the water in a stormy sea, asking Peter to have the faith to step out of the boat and walk also in Matthew 14:22-32. Schneider opens immediately with the obvious: the German Evangelical Church is in the midst of a terrible storm caused by the ambitions of German Christian members to adapt Christianity to the racial ideology of Nazism. He continues,

Insofar as they place 'blood and race' alongside the will of God as authentic sources of revelation, alongside the will of God revealed alone in the words of Scripture, alongside Jesus as the only mediator between God and men, they, in all truth, fall away from the living God and his living Christ. In our church a blazing fire has broken out over these matters, and there can be no peace until those who have betrayed the pure teaching and those wolves who have come into the sheepfold in sheep's clothing have vacated their bishops' chairs and their seats as our representatives...⁶¹⁹

Schneider does not mince words. As discussed in the previous chapter, we see a debate over sources of revelation: the German Christian members wish to add Nazi racial ideology to the Christian scriptures as valid forms of revelation – and Schneider will have none of it. But what is perhaps most interesting about this passage is Schneider's condemnation of “wolves” who have come into the German Evangelical Church and taken up the seats of authority, of the bishoprics and the representatives of the provincial churches. Schneider is warning his congregants to wake up in the middle of a tempest, to batten down the hatches, and fight for the survival of the “little boat of the

⁶¹⁹ Stroud, ed., *Preaching in Hitler's Shadow*, Kindle Edition, location, 1677-1688.

church...traveling on stormy seas.”⁶²⁰ Schneider then proceeds to criticize Alfred Rosenberg and the “naked paganism” of his book, *The Myth of the Twentieth Century*. Denunciations of this book would continue to build until a year later when over 700 Confessing Church pastors read a statement from the pulpit criticizing Rosenberg and his book and were subsequently arrested by the Nazi regime.⁶²¹

This sermon was the last straw for his congregation, who pressured him to resign. Schneider found friendlier congregations among the Confessing Church, and began working as a pastor simultaneously in the Rhineland towns of Dickenshied and nearby Womrath. Even in these friendly congregations, Schneider continued to preach against the German Christian movement and Nazism, and had been arrested three times, at which point, on 24 July 1937, the Nazi regime banished him from his congregation and the area, a punishment known as “internal exile.”⁶²² While Schneider initially refused to leave his congregations at Dickenshied and Womrath, his wife and friends compelled him to flee to Baden-Baden, which he finally did. However, the ruling elders at his church in Womrath urged him to return because the people had no pastor to serve their spiritual and pastoral needs, and he returned on 3 October 1937 to preach once again. Schneider delivered his

⁶²⁰ Stroud, ed., *Preaching in Hitler's Shadow*, Kindle Edition, location, 1688.

⁶²¹ Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 80; and Gerlach, *And the Witnesses Were Silent*, 80. In fact, one of three authors of the statement, Heinrich Vogel, later recalled writing the statement in a hotel room, cognizant of the “immense responsibility” of representing the church that “dared to speak in God’s name.” Vogel must have sensed tremendous support to write this statement of protest, signifying a build-up of collective protest among Confessing Church pastors. He recalled, “Now, I sat there in my hotel room with my paper and wrote... Afterward, I returned to my friends, read it to them, and I can still hear how one of them laconically said, ‘So, we’ll all end up in jail.’ And that’s what happened. The totalitarian state noticed indeed that it wasn’t just the *Myth of the 20th Century* being attacked, but its totalitarian demands, and it reacted by arresting 700 at once, namely, all those who read the statement.” Quoted in Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 80.

⁶²² Stroud, ed., *Preaching in Hitler's Shadow*, Kindle Edition, location 2014-2022.

last sermon first in Dickenshied, and then made his way to Womrath – though he would never make it. The Gestapo pulled him over, arrested him, and took him to the jail in Koblenz.⁶²³ On 27 November 1937, Schneider was taken to the concentration camp at Buchenwald. In the camp he continued to preach, and he even criticized Nazi atrocities in the camp. After beatings and torture did not silence him, the camp infirmary staff gave him a lethal injection of strophanthin on 18 July 1939, becoming the first Protestant clergyman murdered in the concentration camps of Nazi Germany.⁶²⁴

Confessing Church pastors at times took aim at specific Nazi leaders to condemn their ideologies. Niemöller reflects on the course of action for the Confessing Church in a sermon entitled, “Martha and Mary,” delivered on Septuagesima in 1935.⁶²⁵ He criticizes two men in particular as having a detrimental effect on the German churches and on the German nation: “What shall we in the Confessional Church do that our nation may be saved for the Lord Jesus Christ and led back to the Christian faith? Can this result be achieved by a united church, by bishops and synods, or by discussions with the German Christians, with Dinter and Rosenberg?”⁶²⁶ The health of the German churches is not dependent upon organization, Niemöller argues, or the installation of new leadership and governance, or especially compromises with individuals or groups that want to adapt it to suit the new challenges of the day. He explicitly calls out leaders of

⁶²³ See Rudolf Wentorf, *Der Fall des Pfarrers Paul Schneider: Eine biographische Dokumentation* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1989), p. 98.

⁶²⁴ See Stroud, ed., *Preaching in Hitler's Shadow*, Kindle Edition, location 2022; Trence Prittie, *Germans against Hitler* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1964), 117-19; Conway, *Nazi Persecution of the Churches*, 209; and Claude Foster Jr., *Paul Schneider: The Buchenwald Apostle: A Christian Martyr in Nazi Germany. A Sourcebook on the German Church Struggle* (West Chester, PA: West Chester University, 1995).

⁶²⁵ In the Christian liturgical calendar Septuagesima refers to the ninth Sunday before Easter.

⁶²⁶ Niemöller, *Here Stand I*, 136.

the Nazi dictatorship, Alfred Rosenberg, the author of the *Myth of the Twentieth Century* and Nazi Germany's leader of intellectual and spiritual education; and Arthur Dinter, the Thuringian *Gauleiter*, who propagated a brand of German volkish religion with the name of the "German People's Church."⁶²⁷ Niemöller asserts that the approach of the Nazis and their supporters is wrong and can only lead to the decline of the German churches. Only one thing needs to be done, he argues, and that is to confess Christ before God and humanity. Confession defines the Church, and is the only action that can renew it.

Likewise, Paul Hinz preached a sermon on September 1, 1935, on Romans 8:33-39, in which he criticizes those in his own day who reject the Jewish and Christian concepts of sin and grace. He says, "Rosenberg and many of his subsequent speakers [*Nachredner*] claim that sin and grace are terms that the Jewish Rabbi Paul introduced from Jewish thought into Christianity and with which he had falsified the original message of Jesus."⁶²⁸ Hinz directly challenges the notion that Christian concepts such as grace and sin make for a "weak-minded" and "submissive" people, instead contending that they enable men and women to confront the worst of humanity and, with God's help, to change for the better. Hinz's sermon not only criticizes pro-Nazi Christian attempts to "Aryanize" Christianity by diminishing Judaism as its foundation – and which we will discuss at length in the next chapter – but it also openly challenges Alfred Rosenberg for his false and damaging characterization of Christianity.⁶²⁹

⁶²⁷ Conway, *Nazi Persecution of the Churches*, 13.

⁶²⁸ Paul Hinz, Sermon manuscript on Romans 8:33-39, 1 September 1935, Collected Sermons of Paul Hinz, EZA 766/38.

⁶²⁹ In fact, Rosenberg was one of the most often criticized Nazi officials for voicing anti-Christian beliefs. His book, *The Myth of the Twentieth Century*, published in 1930, made him a leading and popular proponent of the Nazi "false ideology" frequently condemned by Confessing Church pastors. See Barnett,

Another example from Hinz is a sermon he delivered in Kolberg a year later on September 2, 1936, on Jeremiah 9:22-23, in which he confronts the pro-Nazi “neo-pagans” seeking to transform Christianity into a religion for the Nazi era.⁶³⁰ Significantly, Hinz uses the biblical text to challenge the arrogance of his religious opponents. The text reads in part: “Do not let the wise boast in their wisdom, do not let the mighty boast in their might, do not let the wealthy boast in their wealth.” His concern is where his opponents place their trust and where their allegiances lay. He argues that Christians cannot compartmentalize their Christian worldview separate from how they live their lives, as if they can live or hold values inconsonant with their faith. One must read between the lines of Hinz’s sermon. It is as if he is challenging those in the German Christian movement to reevaluate the efficacy and humility of their worldview and faith.

Similarly, Bonhoeffer reflects on the role and rightful use of ideas. In fact, he offers a useful rule to judge whether an idea is consonant with Christianity: whether or not the idea serves the interests of life. In a wartime sermon meditation on Psalm 119, composed sometime between 1939 and 1940, Bonhoeffer reflected on the dangers of ideologies and the consequences of war. He writes,

Life is not a means to an end but is fulfillment in itself... He [God] does not want to see the triumph of ideas over a devastated field of corpses. Ideas exist for the sake of life, not life for the sake of ideas. Where life is turned into an idea, there the truly created and redeemed life is destroyed more thoroughly than through any other idea... This is the circumstance in which we find ourselves before we receive life in God, and we have been

For the Soul of the People, 26; and Helmreich, *German Churches under Hitler*, 154-155.

⁶³⁰ Paul Hinz, Sermon manuscript dated 2 September 1936, Collected Sermons of Paul Hinz, EZA 766/38.

taught to call this circumstance ‘good.’ We became haters and despisers of life and lovers and devotees of ideas.⁶³¹

At a time of war, the “ideas” that Bonhoeffer indirectly references must be National Socialism’s reasons for waging a war for European dominance – such as racism, militarism, and *lebensraum*. Bonhoeffer instructs his listeners about how to judge these ideas: ideas serve life, and when this is no longer the case, we must deny the ideas and the power we give them.

In a similar vein, Heinrich Gollwitzer of Dahlem-Berlin, diminishes the importance many Germans give to race, ethnicity, and culture. In a Christmastime sermon in 1941, he reflects on Isaiah 9:1-6, and the phrase, “unto us a child is born.” In celebrating the birth of Jesus, he makes an argument for the equality of all peoples in the light of the gospel message. Gollwitzer argues,

There is no kinship joy, no nationalist pride that leads us here to rejoice. And who asks whether this child was Aryan or Jew... It is a child of another people, another culture, another language and another world...and yet we kneel – people [*Menschen*] of different people [*Völker*] and races, saints and criminals, pious and godless... “Unto us a child is born!”⁶³²

Gollwitzer’s remarkable statement about the birth of Jesus confronted his congregation with a critical question in the context of Nazi Germany, that is, what is the value of race from a Christian point of view? Gollwitzer responds by revealing the pettiness of focusing on race and nationalism when the Christian biblical texts contend that Christ

⁶³¹ Bonhoeffer, *Theological Education Underground*, Kindle edition, location, 14858.

⁶³² Helmut Gollwitzer, „*Wir dürfen hören...*“ *Predigten* (Evangelische Verlag Albert Lampp in München, 1941), 3-4.

was born the savior of all humanity. For Gollwitzer, Jesus' race and nationality were irrelevant to his mission.

Another example will suffice. This theme of National Socialism as a false ideology recurs four times in the wartime sermons of Paul Hinz of Kolberg. An instance is his Sunday of the Dead sermon on November 23, 1941, in which he and his congregation remember the fallen on the battlefield and affirm that the German people have a common destiny, for better or worse. He reminds his congregants that God is the ruler of this world, that nations rise and fall as a matter of course, and that “everything else that we perceive in the world, the attachment to peoples [*der Völker*] and states, the back and forth and ups and downs of world history, it is ultimately only scaffolding, exterior construction.”⁶³³ Though implicit, he clearly challenges the National Socialist ideology as a dangerous worldview that shifts humanity's worship from God to race, the German people, a political savior, and the domination of Nazi Germany in Europe. We see this same theme again and again in Hinz's sermons, that political ideology is no substitute for the Christian faith,⁶³⁴ and that the German people must reconsider in whom or what they place their faith.⁶³⁵

A second theme heard less often, but still noteworthy, is the condemnation of the worship or undue reverence of false idols, including Hitler, the “Aryan” race, the German nation, and the “fallen heroes” of the past. Of the 61 sermons critical of the Nazis and

⁶³³ Paul Hinz, Sermon manuscript entitled “...Er hat dich doch in Händen!” 23 November 1941, Collected Sermons of Paul Hinz, EZA 766/36.

⁶³⁴ Paul Hinz, Untitled sermon manuscripts, 1 November 1942 and Pentcost 1943, Collected Sermons of Paul Hinz, EZA 766/36.

⁶³⁵ Paul Hinz, Sermon manuscript entitled “Der Heiland,” 25 December 1942, Collected Sermons of Paul Hinz, EZA 766/36.

National Socialism, eight sermons raise this criticism. Pastors Hildebrandt, Frick, Schnieber, Bonhoeffer, and Niemöller, each criticized the worship of men or people as false idols.

Just a month after Hitler's rise to power, Bonhoeffer preached a sermon in Berlin on the first Sunday of Lent, February 26, 1933, on Gideon's great faith in trusting God to defeat his enemies on the battlefield (Judges 6:15-16; 7:2; 8:23). Bonhoeffer argues that all people put their faith in something, and he asks his audience to reflect upon what this is for them. He affirms that Christians can trust in only one Lord, and must then offer to God alone worship. He then criticizes those Christians who attempt to place another savior on the altar. Bonhoeffer declares,

In the church we have only *one* altar – the altar of the Most High, the One and only, the Almighty, the Lord, to whom alone be honor and praise, the Creator before whom all creation bows down, before whom even the most powerful are but dust [emphasis in original]. We don't have any side altars at which to worship human beings.⁶³⁶

It has been suggested that Bonhoeffer was referring to the adoration of Hitler as the savior of Germany by some in the German Christian movement.⁶³⁷ While this is possible, Bonhoeffer does not explicitly mention Hitler by name in this sermon. But he does offer a warning to all those who put their ultimate faith and hope in themselves or others as opposed to God. He contends, “all the altars of gods and idols fall down, all

⁶³⁶ Bonhoeffer, *Berlin*, 462.

⁶³⁷ Bonhoeffer, *Berlin*, 462; see editor's notes on this sermon. Scholder's *The Churches and the Third Reich, Vol. 1*, also mentions the practice of a Nazi man in 1933, condemned to death for the murder of a communist in Upper Silesia, who fashioned for himself a little altar in his cell with Hitler's picture before which to pray (page 180).

worship of human beings and human self-idolization. They are all judged, condemned, cancelled out, crucified, and toppled into the dust before the One who alone is Lord.”⁶³⁸

Robert Frick of Bethel challenges the practice of hero worship or of giving the living or dead undue reverence. In a sermon on July 23, 1933, he warns Christians about leaders and symbols that can lead one astray from the gospel message, though it must be said that he does not mention Hitler or the Nazis explicitly. Frick argues that, yes, Germans ought rightly to celebrate the lives and sacrifices of national heroes and leaders, such as Luther, but also of the kings and prophets of old, such as Solomon and Jonah. But this appreciation must have its limits, or one risks placing mortals in the place of God. In strong, succinct style, he summarizes the rule Christians ought to follow:

No other symbol than the symbol of the cross – no other leader than the living Christ.

Only one symbol: the cross! Only one Führer: Christ! And only in the knowledge of our powerlessness is given the assurance of his power! This is the earnest conclusion of this conversation with the pious Jews.⁶³⁹

We will discuss the significance of this sermon in regard to its perspective of the Jews later in the next chapter, but for now what is important is Frick’s assertion that Christians in Germany must remember that their allegiance, their source of unity and strength, lies in God, not worldly figures.

In a sermon on Ephesians 2:19-22, in July 1933 (Pentecost), Pastor Wilhelm Hertzberg of Caldern (near Marburg) preached on God’s miraculous work of building the

⁶³⁸ Bonhoeffer, *Berlin*, 467.

⁶³⁹ Kampfmeyer, ed., *Dein Wort ist deiner Kirche Schutz*, 47-48.

Church on the “foundation of the apostles and prophets.” And in this discussion he affirms that no political leader can be the savior of the Christian people. He says,

Christ is the cornerstone of our lives. Our souls brought him. We need him for our sins and for our death. We must have him as our savior and the bringer of peace (*Friedebringer*). No one, no state, no political leader (*Führer*) can give us peace and happiness. Only he can do that, in the hands of time and eternity, which is set to judge the living and the dead.⁶⁴⁰

We see this same theme in another sermon by Pastor Hans Schnieber of St. Johannes in Leipzig. At the evening service of the people’s Day of Mourning (*Volkstrauertag*) 1933, also the Second Sunday of Lent, he warns his congregants of making idols of leaders, and closes his sermon with prayer and thanks to “the highest Leader, Jesus Christ.”⁶⁴¹

Neither Herzberg nor Schnieber name Hitler or criticize his work as the Chancellor of Germany. Their concern in these sermons does not appear to be what Hitler has done in office or his plans for the future of Germany, but rather the undue reverence or hero worship they perceive other Christians giving to him. Furthermore, these can be read as criticisms of Hitler’s own self-promotion as *der Führer*, as the savior for the German people.

Remarkably, half of these criticisms of the worship of false idols came in 1933 in Germany, and decreased in frequency until 1941 when they ceased altogether.⁶⁴² Also worthy of note is that three of them were delivered in the Nazi capital city, Berlin, plus

⁶⁴⁰ Kampfmeier, ed., *Dein Wort ist deiner Kirche Schutz*, 55.

⁶⁴¹ Anton, ed., *Nationale Feiertagspredigten und Ansprachen*, 203.

⁶⁴² Pastor Franz Hildebrandt preached one sermon on this theme in England over the BBC on February 23, 1944. I will examine this sermon in chapter six. See National Library of Scotland (NLS), 9251.53/54.

one that was composed in Berlin but delivered in Ohlau.⁶⁴³ The pastors would have been front and center to see the people's adulation of Hitler, and evidently became concerned enough to criticize this in their sermons.

The third and last major theme in this category of sermons is the necessity for Germans living in Nazi Germany to make a choice in the context of great conflict and persecution to fight for the gospel in the Nazi dictatorship. The pastors often selected a biblical text that refers in some sense to a choice. A common biblical story repeated is Jesus' birth narrative, compelling listeners to make the choice to accept the coming of God's messiah as opposed to political leaders that demand allegiance. Other choices referred to in these sermons include Jesus' call to either remain dead in the faith or to awaken to a true and living faith, as written to the Church in Sardis (Revelation 3:1).⁶⁴⁴ Pastors used the demands of the biblical text to challenge their congregants or listeners to re-evaluate their priorities in faith. The biblical text often gave the pastors an opportunity to confront their listeners to make a choice.

For example, on the ninth Sunday after Trinity 1934, Niemöller preached a sermon on I Corinthians 10:1-13, about the temptation that faces the German churches in Nazi Germany and the faith needed to bear this burden. The Church Struggle has clearly had a tremendously negative effect on Niemöller personally, and on the unity and peace of the German churches more generally. He says,

And now we see with some horror that this happy situation [humanity and God in common cause] does not exist; that our personal struggle for a

⁶⁴³ This last sermon was by Bonhoeffer in October 1941; see Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Conspiracy and Imprisonment, 1940-1945* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 625.

⁶⁴⁴ Paul Hinz, Sermon manuscript dated Pentecost 1943, Collected Sermons of Paul Hinz, EZA 766/36.

Christian life in faith and obedience is not enough, for we are being drawn into a titanic battle between heaven and hell, between God and the devil, between angels and demons.⁶⁴⁵

Niemöller does not mince words because his purpose is to alert his congregants to the nature of the struggle they face. “Now we are fighting for the cross – for faith or unbelief, for the sovereignty of the crucified Christ or the sovereignty of the prince of this world. And we must not dream of peace.”⁶⁴⁶ He then points to the example of God’s leading the Israelites through the trial of the wilderness to lead them into the Promised Land. The Church, like ancient Israel, must persevere and trust in God’s guidance.

Likewise, Pastor Paul Hinz of Kolberg preached a sermon at a military service on August 25, 1935, on Ephesians 6:10-17 and Matthew 10:32-33, two texts that encourage the bold confession of Christ before God and men. Hinz acknowledges the difficult times in which Christians live, and argues that the way forward for Christians is to confess Christ and in this way “fight anti-Christian beliefs.” Remember, he says,

Christ himself, our eternal Lord, our highest commander, is given all power in heaven and on earth... And his order of mobilization is summarized in one word, from the previously-selected text: Confess! Confess him before men! That is what we are called to do. And no one can be a Christian without confessing.⁶⁴⁷

⁶⁴⁵ Niemöller, *Here Stand I*, 187.

⁶⁴⁶ Niemöller, *Here Stand I*, 188.

⁶⁴⁷ Paul Hinz, Sermon manuscript: “Durch die Wahrheit zur Freiheit,” Pentecost 1943, Collected Sermons of Paul Hinz, EZA 766/5.

The military tenor of the sermon suits not only the immediate context of a military worship service, but the context of the Church Struggle as well. The instruction to “confess” is not simply about differentiating within the German churches “true” believers from those seeking to adapt Christianity to National Socialist principles, but more importantly, it acknowledges the Christian belief that there is power to salvation in the proclamation of the gospel. For pastors like Hinz, the gospel is a force that changes lives and, like Barth says, “casts out demons.” In this sermon Hinz readies his congregation for battle.

In other sermons we see only brief and vague mentions of conflict within the churches and German society, and that Christians must fight to stay the course. For example, Niemöller preached a sermon on Psalm Sunday 1934 called “The Anointing,” on John 11:57 and 12:1-8, which refers to Judas’ betrayal of Jesus. At the end of the sermon Niemöller reflects on the manner in which the fight for the Church Struggle must take place: “...I feel it particularly incumbent upon me to say today, when we are actually fighting a battle about and for our faith, that we are fighting a vain and human battle if we do not fight in the love of Christ and because of this personal bond with him.”⁶⁴⁸ No matter how intense or vicious the battle might seem, Niemöller reminds his congregants why they are fighting and how they ought to fight. Though the sermon does not dwell on the theme of the Church Struggle, it calls the attention of the congregant to the struggle, and it takes a clear position on which side is in the right.

⁶⁴⁸ Niemöller, *Here Stand I*, 77.

Likewise, Günther Harder of Fehrbellin gave a speech on New Year's Day 1936, on Revelation 13:10, a call for "endurance and faith of the saints."⁶⁴⁹ Harder celebrates a year of faithful commitment in the Confessing Church, and reminds his audience of the wisdom in the confessions of the Church (including Augsburg and Barmen) that anchor Christians in the gospel message. He speaks of the strife heretics have inflicted on the German churches, and encourages Christians to remain faithful. His comment is brief and lacks specifics, but nonetheless must have served as a reminder to his congregation of the conflict with the Nazi-supported German Christian movement, a reinforcement of the Confessing Church position, and an encouragement to choose sides in this matter.

Let us end our discussion of Confessing Church sermons that condemn Nazism as a false ideology with one last example. Gerhard Ebeling (1912-2001) is an all but unknown Confessing Church pastor, especially in the United States. He was at one time a student of Dietrich Bonhoeffer at the underground seminary at Finkenwalde.⁶⁵⁰ After later graduating with a degree in theology from the University of Basel in 1938, Ebeling first began preaching to a congregation that split during the Church Struggle, with some Confessing Church members in the congregation, some German Christian members, in which a Thuringian German Christian pastor preached from the pulpit.⁶⁵¹ Ebeling preached in the only place he could within the church walls, a small space apart in the sanctuary designated for Confessing Church members. This status essentially made him

⁶⁴⁹ Günther Harder, Sermon manuscript dated 1 January 1936, Collected Sermons of Günter Harder, 1933-1936. EZA 50/488.

⁶⁵⁰ This biographical sketch is largely based on the information provided in Dean Stroud's recently published and edited work, *Preaching in Hitler's Shadow* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013), Kindle Edition, location 2864-2898.

⁶⁵¹ Stroud, *Preaching in Hitler's Shadow*, 2864-2873.

an "illegal" Confessing Church pastor. As one writer comments, "he was not the legal pastor of the Confessing group nor had the recognized church ordained him, but rather the 'illegal' Confessing Synod of Berlin-Brandenburg."⁶⁵² However, this situation was short-lived as Ebeling was drafted as a medic upon the outbreak of World War II just one year later.

Yet remarkably, he was still able to preach when an opportunity presented itself, and he published a collection of sermons entitled, *Sermons of an Illegal*. One of the sermons included was delivered on July 17, 1940, in Berlin-Hermsdorf. A couple came to Ebeling with news that their son had mysteriously died of an unknown illness at an institution for the mentally ill.⁶⁵³ The parents believed that their son had been killed as part of a Nazi regime policy to "ethanize" men and women with mental illnesses or disabilities. By the summer of 1939, Hitler and the Nazi regime began planning a "ethanasia" program, known as Action T4, a mundane codename for a chilling program, which was run from the Chancellery in Berlin, on Tiergartenstrasse 4.⁶⁵⁴ The "ethanasia" program targeted men and women in asylums for the mentally ill, who were deemed "unworthy" of life, and thus "burdens" to society.⁶⁵⁵ The program initially

⁶⁵² Stroud, *Preaching in Hitler's Shadow*, 2873.

⁶⁵³ Stroud, *Preaching in Hitler's Shadow*, 2873

⁶⁵⁴ See Richard Evans, *Third Reich at War* (New York: Penguin, 2009), 82-101; Burleigh and Wippermann, *The Racial State: Germany 1933-1945* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 101-104, 141-149. The Nazi T4 program of murdering the mentally and chronically ill by gas in vans or killing centers was a precursor to the Nazi mass murder of Jews by lethal gas. See for example, Debórah Dwork and Robert Jan van Pelt, *Holocaust: A History* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2002), 260-265; Christopher Browning, *The Origins of the Final Solution: The Evolution of Nazi Jewish Policy, September 1939 – March 1942* (Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 183-193; Leni Yahil, *The Holocaust: The Fate of European Jewry*, translated by Ina Friedman and Haya Galai (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 308-311.

⁶⁵⁵ Conway, *Nazi Persecutions of the German Churches*, 268-269.

employed approximately 50 functionaries, including doctors, nurses, lawyers, professors to administer the program, and murdered approximately 100,000 throughout the war.⁶⁵⁶ By the summer of 1940, rumors spread throughout the population about Nazi efforts to murder the mentally ill and disabled, even sparking protests by leading churchmen such as Cardinal Adolf Bertram of Breslau and, most famously, Bishop Clemens August von Galen of Münster, whose sermons galvanized public opposition to the Nazi policy and forced Hitler to only proceed with the program in utmost secrecy.⁶⁵⁷

Ebeling hears this family's story, and agrees to conduct the 17 July 1940 memorial service. The sermon focuses on Matthew 18:10, which states, "Take care that you do not despise one of these little ones; for, I tell you, in heaven their angels continually see the face of my Father in heaven." On the one hand, Ebeling warns not to speculate about what happened to this man, and yet on the other hand he identifies the "little ones" as those "the world pushes aside, from whom people walk away, about whom no one inquires."⁶⁵⁸ They are "the ones whom the world despises for the sake of its own belief"; and they are "those with no rights and the sick..."⁶⁵⁹ This sermon is a condemnation of the false belief system in Nazi Germany that has denigrated lives of the "little ones" as, in Nazi parlance, lives "unworthy of life." Ebeling encourages the mourners at this man's memorial service to model their behavior after Jesus, who "called

⁶⁵⁶ Conway, *Nazi Persecutions of the German Churches*, 268-269.

⁶⁵⁷ Conway, *Nazi Persecutions of the German Churches*, 271-272; Michael Phayer, *The Catholic Church and the Holocaust, 1930-1965* (Bloomington, IN; Indiana University Press, 2000), 68-69.

⁶⁵⁸ Stroud, *Preaching in Hitler's Shadow*, 2942.

⁶⁵⁹ Stroud, *Preaching in Hitler's Shadow*, 2953.

‘injustice’ ‘injustice,’ ‘wrong’ ‘wrong,’ and ‘sin’ ‘sin.’”⁶⁶⁰ And even more, to “not abandon those Christ has accepted and for whom he died.”⁶⁶¹ Christians of Nazi Germany, according to Ebeling, must “stand with the sick and the weak and those without rights to the end...”⁶⁶²

This sermon is remarkable because it implicitly acknowledges what they all suspect, that this man has been murdered because he was ill, and that the reason he was murdered was because he was despised according to worldly “belief.” Ebeling does not name Hitler, the National Socialist regime, or its ideology, yet the sermon condemns a society, and a mental health system under Nazi control, that denies dignity and life to the “little ones,” those who cannot care for themselves. In this way, it is a criticism of National Socialism. This sermon is not a bold denunciation of the Nazis policy of euthanasia, or how to actively resist Nazi policies of death, but a reflection on how to care for those society has swept aside as worthless.

The Gestapo and SD reports indicate that the Nazi regime was sensitive to public perception that National Socialism was a pagan or anti-Christian ideology. Among the Gestapo reports is one concerning a sermon by Pastor Ulrich of Prenzlau, delivered on January 1, 1934, nearly a year after the establishment of the Nazi dictatorship. He speaks of the transformation of Christianity under the Nazis. Ulrich says,

Lord, come and see it, how your Christianity today is paganized
[*verheidnisch* wird]. The true Christianity is gagged and suppressed.
Man idolizes today great men who have achieved much, but the Christ

⁶⁶⁰ Stroud, *Preaching in Hitler's Shadow*, 2953.

⁶⁶¹ Stroud, *Preaching in Hitler's Shadow*, 2965.

⁶⁶² Stroud, *Preaching in Hitler's Shadow*, 2965.

who let himself be nailed to the cross, whom one forgets, he is no longer considered. Jesus Christ was also a Jew, yes indeed, but the faith teaches: Go into the world and make disciples of all the peoples, etc. If a Jew cannot be a German, so can he very well – and I stress this explicitly – be a good Christian.⁶⁶³

It is unknown whether Pastor Ulrich was a member of the Confessing Church, but his criticisms seem consistent with many we have seen so far in this chapter, including the reference to paganism, suppression of Christianity, the idolization of man, the “Aryanization” of Jesus, and the exclusion of Jews from the church. Statements such as these clearly caught the attention of the Gestapo as a public statement of opposition to National Socialism.

All concerns mentioned in the previous examples are summed up in an illuminating March 1935 SD “Special Report” written by the Chief of the Reich Main Security Office of the *Schutzstaffel* (SS).⁶⁶⁴ At the outset the report indicates that the majority of the pastors investigated belong to the Pastors’ Emergency League, the precursor to the Confessing Church, but that the movement itself cannot necessarily be judged by the comments of a few.⁶⁶⁵ The report lists examples of pastors who preached against the Nazi worldview, Nazi leaders, the Nazi Party, and antisemitism. We will leave the discussion of antisemitism for the next chapter, and take a closer look at some criticisms.

⁶⁶³ Gestapo Report on Pastor Ulrich: “Staatsfeindliches Verhalten evangelischer Geistlicher, v.a. der Bekennenden Kirche, 1934-1935,” Papers of the Reichssicherheitshauptamt, BA R58/5679.

⁶⁶⁴ Boberach, *Berichte des SD und der Gestapo*, 63-78.

⁶⁶⁵ Many of the comments listed predate the establishment of the Confessing Church in the spring of 1934.

The SD kept records of pastors who criticized the Nazi worldview in church services, revealing concern about the effects such statements might have on the German people. A pastor named Peterson from Pellworm preached a sermon on April 3, 1934, in which he said, “The way to Jesus is without any attachment to the new Germany and is even opposed to the people and state... We must not even hesitate to go to the concentration camp for this truth.”⁶⁶⁶ This comment does not speak explicitly of Hitler, the Nazis, or National Socialism, but only of the “new Germany,” which could only be understood by his congregation as a criticism of the Nazi dictatorship as un-Christian or even anti-Christian. Another pastor named Töllner used common sense and a simple reading of the Bible to argue that love is from God, and hate and pride are from the devil. If this is the case, he argued, then national pride and national hate must be from the devil as well.⁶⁶⁷ These are just two examples that illustrate the SD took note of pastors who criticized the Nazi worldview from the pulpit.

This document lists only a couple examples of criticisms in sermons about Nazi leaders. The most striking example is from one pastor from Seebucknow named Kniess, who gave a sermon at a funeral on August 8, 1934, in which he refused to give the Hitler salute, saying, “I have never yet greeted with ‘Heil Hitler,’ and I will not make this greeting. Salvation comes from God and not from men.”⁶⁶⁸ This comment does not deny obedience to the Nazi state, or undermine Hitler’s legitimacy as the temporal ruler of Germany, but affirms a limit to the deference (or worship) Germans owe to their leader.

⁶⁶⁶ Boberach, *Berichte des SD und der Gestapo*, 76.

⁶⁶⁷ Boberach, *Berichte des SD und der Gestapo*, 76.

⁶⁶⁸ Boberach, *Berichte des SD und der Gestapo*, 76.

In doing so, Pastor Kniess undermines the National Socialist image of Hitler as the great demi-god who saved Germany from ruin.⁶⁶⁹

This concern for undue reverence or even worship of Hitler or the German nation is particularly significant. For a Christian to assert that other Christians “worship” Hitler was tantamount to charging them with idolatry for breaking the first commandment. There are two ways a pro-Nazi Christian might interpret a Confessing Church pastors saying Hitler is not worthy of worship: first, they could be extremely offended at the accusation and deny the “worship” of any being but God; second, they stand corrected, embarrassed at their over-zealous support and admiration for Hitler. In any case, Confessing Church pastors who made this accusation drew a line in the sand about how Christians ought to relate to their political leadership.

My research is unique in the historiography of the German churches because it demonstrates that Confessing Church sermons occasionally delegitimized Nazi ideology and the regime’s policies of persecution against the churches, as well as challenged the “worship” or undue reverence to Hitler, the Nazi leadership, fallen heroes, or the German nation. Hitler and the Nazi propaganda machine bombarded the German people with assertions of German greatness and racial superiority, as well as images of Hitler as the savior of the German people and National Socialism as gospel truth. The Confessing Church pastors who challenged their fellow Christians not to worship or give undue reverence to unworthy people or objects, confronted them with the question of allegiance

⁶⁶⁹ Ian Kershaw, *Hitler: A Biography* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2008), Kindle edition, location 7203-7309.

and loyalty. And this confrontation could have the effect of challenging their perspectives and reconsidering their loyalties.

The Gestapo and SD reports indicate that the Nazi dictatorship was indeed concerned not only with clergymen's oppositional activities outside the church, but also oppositional activities within the church walls that might undermine Nazi figures or aspects of Nazi ideology or policy. Though we do not know the consequences faced by each individual named, the historical record indicates that hundreds of Confessing Church pastors were arrested and even imprisoned for opposition or resistance to the Nazi state.⁶⁷⁰ My analysis reveals that the Confessing Church pastors discussed in this chapter may have caught the attention of the Gestapo or Security Police with a critical sermon, but this alone likely did not result in arrest or imprisonment. Some may well conclude that the Confessing Church pastors were not courageous or bold enough in their opposition from the pulpit – surely they could have gotten away with more. As far as my research indicates, it was exceedingly rare for a Confessing Church pastor to be arrested or imprisoned simply for preaching a sermon against the Nazi state, its leaders, ideology, or policies.⁶⁷¹ Even Martin Niemöller preached highly critical sermons from 1933 to 1937, up until the very week before his arrest for reading a forbidden announcement from the pulpit.⁶⁷²

⁶⁷⁰ Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 80; see also Conway, *The Nazi Persecution of the Churches*, 56, 209.

⁶⁷¹ One can point to Paul Schneider, who was arrested after violating Nazi law banning him from returning to his old parish to deliver a sermon. But he had a history of preaching against the German Christian movement and the Nazi regime, as did Martin Niemöller, who also was arrested after one too many anti-Nazi sermons. Yet my point is that the Nazi regime did not, as far as I can tell, arrest any pastor for simply one blatantly anti-Nazi sermon.

⁶⁷² Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 92; see also Conway, *The Nazi Persecution of the Churches*, 209.

The Gestapo reports also provide insights into how some pastors and priests felt about the Nazi propaganda machine and its success in spreading a false ideology. One Gestapo report from Berlin on August 22, 1940, mentions a Catholic priest from Frankfurt am Main who made a connection between the Nazi leaders and false prophets. He said, “The modern false prophets work with the resources of modern mass persuasion. They use the stage, art, beautiful literature, and above all film. Beware of false prophets.”⁶⁷³ It is unclear where the priest made this statement – in a sermon or in public. Another Catholic priest from Nürnberg preached a sermon on July 14, 1940, in which he commented on the Nazi use of the radio to influence the German people. “What good is a two-hour victory on the radio against the Almighty God[?]”⁶⁷⁴ Unfortunately, the report does not indicate the context of this comment, or what “victory” the priest refers to. These two examples demonstrate that some priests, and presumably Protestant pastors as well, were well aware of the means the Nazis used to spread propaganda and warned congregants to listen with a critical ear.

In sum, the confessing sermons reveal a deep concern that National Socialism represents a false ideology – or a false religion – that Germans have accepted, leading them away from the traditional Christian faith. Though some of these sermons might have been directed specifically at the pro-Nazi German Christian faction in the Protestant churches, the Confessing Church pastors’ criticisms apply to National Socialism’s platform supporting a racist, nationalist, apocalyptic, millennialist, messianic ideology in

⁶⁷³ Boberach, *Berichte des SD und der Gestapo*, 454.

⁶⁷⁴ Boberach, *Berichte des SD und der Gestapo*, 454.

direct conflict with Christianity.⁶⁷⁵ Another key point is that the Confessing Church pastors oppose Nazi racial theory and advance arguments for the dignity of all human beings. During the Nazi dictatorship Confessing Church pastors like Hinz criticized the racial hierarchy of National Socialism, undermining not only Nazi social policies dividing Germans into Jews and “Aryans,” but wartime policies that sought German dominion over the peoples of Europe. Lastly, we also see in these sermons the argument that Christ is the savior over all others, including political rulers, and that Christians must prioritize their allegiances in life. This is in direct opposition to the oaths that many Germans were forced to take as civil servants (and pastors), which reads “I swear: I will be true and obedient to the Führer of the German Reich and nation Adolf Hitler, observe the laws, and conscientiously fulfill my official duties, so help me God.”⁶⁷⁶ The evidence of these sermons indicates Confessing Church pastors became increasingly worried that Christians’ “true and obedient” service was tragically misdirected.

Conclusions

Robert Ericksen makes the provocative argument that in Nazi Germany “the killers who resemble those of us who are members of Western culture were given a license to kill by their churches and universities.”⁶⁷⁷ The messages that these institutions expressed in the daily course of their activities provided the ideological foundation and

⁶⁷⁵ See David Redles, *Hitler’s Millennial Reich: Apocalyptic Belief and the Search for Salvation* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 45.

⁶⁷⁶ Helmreich, *The German Churches under Hitler*, 178.

⁶⁷⁷ Robert P. Ericksen, *Complicity in the Holocaust: Churches and Universities in Nazi Germany* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 230.

rationale for the crimes of the Holocaust. He asks a great question: “What would they [the killers] have been taught if they paid attention in church, if they listened during their religious education classes, or if they read their church newspapers?”⁶⁷⁸ The problem with Ericksen’s argument is that historians have not sufficiently examined pastors’ sermons in the German churches – Catholic or Protestant – during the Nazi dictatorship. Like most historians, Ericksen’s treatment does not explore this source base, but relies on the pronouncements of the institutional church, the activities of select church leaders, or controversies and conflicts between the church and the Nazi state. This chapter takes Ericksen’s question seriously. What would an attentive listener learn from a Confessing Church sermon on any given Sunday?

In this chapter we have explored the ways that Confessing Church pastors expressed criticisms of the Nazi regime and its ideology. They did this in two principle ways: through condemnations of Nazi or pro-Nazi supporters’ persecution of the German churches and Christians (36 sermons, or 4%); and by condemning National Socialism and other volkish “false beliefs” that support the worship or undue reverence of false idols (61 sermons, or 6.6%). Taken together, they total 97 criticisms in 88 of the 910 total sermons (9.6%), and they occurred in a variety of locations: out in the open in German churches, in an underground confessing seminary, over the airwaves, in churches abroad, and even in concentration camps.⁶⁷⁹

⁶⁷⁸ Ericksen, *Complicity in the Holocaust*, 230.

⁶⁷⁹ This percentage counts only once the 8 sermons that included criticisms of both persecution and false ideology.

The 24 total Confessing Church pastors who expressed criticism against the Nazi regime represents 25% of the 95 total pastors examined in this dissertation.⁶⁸⁰ One-fourth of the pastors made some critical comment about the Nazi regime, its ideology, or policies. While this figure may seem impressive at first, we must remember that most of them only made one or two critical comments, while the majority of the comments came from a few select individuals: Bonhoeffer, Hildebrandt, Hinz, and Niemöller. In fact, Niemöller's criticisms account for nearly half (39) of the total. Of these four Confessing Church pastors, all but Hinz were arrested and imprisoned – Hildebrandt was the only one able to escape into exile after his arrest. This evidence suggests that while some Confessing Church pastors may have made strong, and even at times impassioned, criticisms of the Nazi regime in their sermons, most rarely ventured to voice opposition from the pulpit.⁶⁸¹ My research follows the work of historians such as Barnett and Conway in asserting that opposition in the Confessing Church seldom occurred from the pulpit.⁶⁸² And when pastors spoke out, they most often used passive or indirect language.

The language Confessing Church pastors used seldom explicitly named Hitler, the Nazis, National Socialism, or even the German Christian movement. Instead pastors most often criticized their opponents or opposing ideologies indirectly. One the few occasions when pastors directly criticized Hitler, they referred to him as “*Führer*.” Criticisms of the Nazis or pro-Nazi supporters focused on their persecution of Christians,

⁶⁸⁰ For a full list of Confessing Church pastors examined in this dissertation, see chapter one.

⁶⁸¹ Helmreich rightly points out that the Nazi regime itself considered the Confessing Church an oppositional movement, and because of this, arrested and intimidated thousands of pastors; see *German Churches under Hitler*, 344-345.

⁶⁸² Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 198-199; and Conway, *Nazi Persecution of the Churches*, 334-336.

thus labeling them as persecutors rather than as members of a particular political or religious group. The criticisms also focused on the incompatibility of their ideologies with traditional Christianity, and thus they were referred to as “heretics” or those espousing “false beliefs.” Again, political and religious identities remain vague. Confessing Church pastors may have used an indirect manner of criticism to moderate the aggressive tone of the criticism, or to provide plausible deniability that any given criticism was directed at a specific person, group, or ideology. The result was a less threatening and less controversial sermon than could have been the case. Furthermore, this lack of distinction in naming opponents reveals how even Confessing Church pastors’ religious disputes with the German Christian movement took on political significance as criticisms of persecution and false belief condemned not only those within the German churches, but also their patrons and ideological leaders – the Nazi leadership.⁶⁸³

Another reason Confessing Church pastors might not have wanted to explicitly name their opponents relates to an emphasis on the new school of homiletics discussed in Chapter 3. Confessing Church pastors conscientiously made the biblical texts the basis of their preaching and submitted their political and social views to its authority.⁶⁸⁴ This meant that the sermon ought to serve the interests of the gospel message, not a political agenda or a pastor’s personal inclinations. In a context in which members of the German Christian movement unashamedly politicized their sermons in accordance with Nazi

⁶⁸³ See Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 198-199.

⁶⁸⁴ See Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church, volume 6, the Modern Age* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 759 and 763.

ideology, Confessing Church pastors stand in stark contrast as they by and large muted their political or personal beliefs. The Confessing Church pastors' non-conformist approach in narrowing their focus on the biblical texts, and largely excluding references to contemporary events or the Nazi regime, certainly helped them to stay out of the fray of political and religious conflicts. Ironically, their non-conformity as pastors contributed to their passivity vis-à-vis the regime, and subsequently, contributed to their safety in Nazi Germany. The new school of homiletics led by Barth, Bonhoeffer, and Trillhaas, may have solved one problem by limiting a pastors' manipulation of the gospel to serve his own interests, but at the same time it may have discouraged pastors from using the gospel to judge the morally and ethically corrupt nature of the Nazi regime, its ideology, and policies. In other words, Confessing Church pastors by and large failed to demonstrate how the "kingdoms of the world" fell short of the "kingdom of God" as encapsulated in the gospel message.

Turning to a discussion of the locations of these sermons, this research indicates that the vast majority of the 910 sermons were preached "out in the open" in German society, indicating a degree of freedom to criticize the Nazi regime and its ideology. These sermons were delivered in major cities like Berlin, Münster, Hannover, and Leipzig; and they were also given in smaller cities and towns such as Spremberg, Kolberg (Kolobzeg), and Finkenwalde. The exact locations of many of the sermons remain unknown, but of the 88 sermons that made critical comments about the Nazi dictatorship, its leadership, ideology, or policies, an astonishing 45 of them (51%) were delivered in Berlin. And most of these were given by leaders in the Confessing Church who witnessed Nazi persecution and the incessant proclamation of National Socialist

ideology: Bonhoeffer (4), Niemöller (39), and Schulz (1). Niemöller's overwhelming representation in these figures sidelines any attempt to make conclusions about them. Nevertheless, it is remarkable that especially Niemöller and Bonhoeffer were able to voice such bold and specific criticisms of Nazi persecution and the problems of Nazi ideology in the heart of the Nazi dictatorship. We should remember that Niemöller was arrested on July 1, 1937, and Bonhoeffer was banned from publicly speaking in Berlin just six months later on January 11, 1938. While historians of the German churches such as Barnett and Scholder argue that the Confessing Church possessed a degree of independence and freedom from Nazi control, my research indicates that Confessing Church pastors had the freedom, at least for a time, to publicly preach against the Nazis and pro-Nazi Christians. My analysis supports the arguments of Scholder and Barnett that the churches were one place in German society in which individuals could speak out against the regime.⁶⁸⁵

While none of the sermons given in concentration camps were critical of the regime or its ideology, four sermons were delivered clandestinely in Nazi Germany – all of them by Bonhoeffer. He gave three of the four while teaching confessing seminary students underground in Groß-Schlönwitz and other locations. After the seminary disbanded he prepared another critical sermon in October 1941, though it is not clear when this was delivered.

⁶⁸⁵ Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 55; and Klaus Scholder, *The Churches and the Third Reich, Vol. 2, The Year of Disillusionment 1935, Barmen and Rome* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 169. See also Kirk, *Nazi Germany*, 108.

Eleven (of 89) sermons delivered outside Germany contained critical comments. Bonhoeffer gave two of these to a German congregation in London in 1934; and Hildebrandt broadcast nine from London over the BBC into Nazi Germany. Thus, of the 11 sermons, all of them were purposely directed at a German audience. Hildebrandt was a German pastor of Jewish descent, and I will examine his sermons at length in Chapter 7. As might be expected, the percentage of critical sermons given outside Nazi Germany (13.6%) exceeds – though not by much – the ratio of critical sermons delivered inside (9.6%).

The significance of all these numbers is debatable. One may consider these 88 critical sermons (or 9.6%) a significant proportion in a collection of 910 sermons, and on this build the case that these sermons are representative of all confessing sermons under the Nazi dictatorship. One can then surmise that one of every nine sermons in a Sunday service had some oppositional content; multiply this by 52 weeks in a year and by all the Confessing Church pastors at work, and the numbers of sermons with oppositional content can be staggering.

However, we cannot assume that these sermons are representative of the sermons preached by the 7,000 Confessing Church pastors scattered throughout Nazi Germany. Furthermore, the data reveals that only a handful of dedicated and courageous pastors frequently made critical comments of the Nazi dictatorship in their sermons, while the rest made very few or none at all. In fact, the four pastors that made the most comments – Bonhoeffer, Hildebrandt, Hinz, and Niemöller – account for 82% of the total oppositional sermons. In one way or another, the Nazi regime removed three of the four from the pastorate (Hinz remained). If we consider the mass arrests, intimidation, and the

high percentage of pastors, vicars and seminarians who went to war, we can imagine a much less bold, vocal, and confrontational pastorate as the years passed.⁶⁸⁶ Nevertheless, the sermons indicate that pastors did have the freedom to criticize the Nazi regime from the pulpit, and that many of them did.⁶⁸⁷

Let us move on now to distinguish the ways these sermons were oppositional under the Nazi dictatorship. First, the sermons that criticized Hitler, the Nazi leadership, the “Aryan” race, or the German nation, undermined them as not worthy of worship or undue reverence, and thus de-legitimized the Nazi totalitarian claim to the individual.⁶⁸⁸ These sermons redirected the allegiance and obedience of the Christian away from others and toward God.

Second, these sermons also undermined them as the unjust persecutors of the German churches and Christians, and thus destabilized their legitimacy as the just and God-instituted rulers of the state. This criticism asserts not only that the Nazi dictatorship is unjust in its treatment of its citizens, but that the leadership is in some sense anti-Christian and thus at odds with the tradition of the German Reformation. Furthermore, it calls into question Hitler’s and many Nazi leader’s claims to be Christians themselves or at least respectful of the Christian tradition.⁶⁸⁹

Third, the sermons that criticize National Socialism and other volkish religions as morally corrupt ideologies that elevate one people, one race, one nation, as intrinsically

⁶⁸⁶ See Helmreich, *German Churches under Hitler*, 306; and Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 156.

⁶⁸⁷ Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 55; and Scholder, *Churches and the Third Reich*, Vol. 2, 169.

⁶⁸⁸ Michael Burleigh, *The Third Reich: A New History* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000), 252-255.

⁶⁸⁹ Steigmann-Gall, *The Holy Reich*, 3.

superior (thus denigrating all others), become oppositional to the priorities and policies of the Nazi dictatorship. These sermons publicly undermine the Nazi philosophy of governance, and provide an alternative vision for governing a society and nation.

But one should not over-emphasize the oppositional nature of these sermons. In very few of these sermons do we find a sustained attack on Hitler, National Socialism, or the regime's policies. We do not find any calls for Germans to sabotage or otherwise fight against the German military or police state. Nor are there any sermons that call for organized and united action against the state. Confessing Church pastors did not speak out in their sermons on the issue of euthanasia, unlike the Roman Catholic Bishop of Münster, Clemens August Galen, who on August 3, 1941, roused Catholics in a bold and courageous sermon to oppose this state policy. Galen's rank and popularity compelled Hitler to order the operation halted on August 28.⁶⁹⁰ With the possible exception of Niemöller's sermons, the Confessing Church pastors' critical comments examined in this chapter are not part of a sustained attack on the regime its ideology, or specific policies; instead, they are isolated comments in the context of a sermon's theological reflections. Thus some may reasonably conclude that the pastors did not go far enough in resisting the Nazi regime.⁶⁹¹

The comments the pastors made, taken in consideration with what they did not say, indicates an ambivalent stance toward the Nazi dictatorship: criticism from a position of obedience and subservience. The pastors may have criticized the regime to an extent, but they did so recognizing and honoring their obedience to the state. This

⁶⁹⁰ See Conway, *Nazi Persecution of the Churches*, 271.

⁶⁹¹ Gerlach, *And the Witnesses Were Silent*, vii-viii.

ambivalence is what makes Bonhoeffer such a unique figure in the Confessing Church; he refused subservience to a morally corrupt state that had lost its legitimacy, and engaged in a conspiracy to overthrow the Nazi dictatorship.⁶⁹² Based on what we see in these sermons, most Confessing Church pastors did not come to the point of denying the Nazi state legitimacy, and they continued to give it obedience. The fact that there were so few Confessing Church pastors to engage in active resistance testifies to the priorities of Germans valuing political and social “stability” over the protection of human rights and fidelity to the gospel message.

Lastly, the sermons indicate that while Confessing Church pastors did not deliberate on *how* National Socialism might or might not be a political religion, they preached *as if* it were. The common description of National Socialism or the nazified Christianity of the German Christian movement as “pagan,” “neo-pagan,” or as a “false belief” signifies an understanding that they represent a competing ideology with Christianity.⁶⁹³ Confessing Church pastors took issue with National Socialism’s emphasis on racism as a denial of the gospel’s universalism; on Hitler’s messianism as a denial of Christ and his work; and on national salvation and redemption as human-made systems that could only lead to division and aggression. Their sermons provide an antidote for their congregations who were incessantly exposed to Nazi propaganda and its worldview.

⁶⁹² See Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, translated by Victoria Barnett (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 794-797.

⁶⁹³ Burleigh, *The Third Reich*, 252.

This research qualifies Ericksen's bold assertion that if one were to sit in a church pew on any given Sunday, then she would hear a sermon that in no way undermined the regime or its policies. The data indicates that if one were to sit in a confessing church during the Nazi dictatorship, one would hear – but only rarely – a critical comment about the Nazi regime, its ideology, and policies. On that rare occasion, the parishioner would hear a sermon like any other – a testimony about God's work in the world in times past and present. But she would also hear a brief comment, perhaps only buried in the commentary about the biblical text, which undermines Nazi leaders, National Socialism, or its persecution of Christians. She would hear an opposing voice that at the very least sought to preserve the Church's identity and protect its theology and people in a hostile environment. No doubt it would take concentration, reflection, and will-power for this parishioner to actually be moved to some kind of action based on the pastor's criticism.

Acknowledgments

Chapter 4 contains material that is being prepared for publication in an article entitled, "Preaching to Nazi Germany: Sermons of the Confessing Church in the Second World War," as a chapter in the book, *Outside the Foxhole: Religion and World War Two*, edited by John Corrigan and G. Kurt Piehler.

CHAPTER FIVE

“The Bearers of Unholy Potential”: The Confessing Church on the Jews and Judaism

The whole history of Israel from Sinai to the Pharisees is a history of waywardness. And if today this people had all the gold in the world and all the power in the world, the waywardness will remain: it should be a light to lighten the Gentiles... Also the Aryan race is no exception, despite all the idealization.

—Pastor Karl von Schwartz of Braunschweig, 1933

Confessing Church pastors had a unique role in Nazi Germany as professionals who had the opportunity to speak to the German population about the Jews and their tradition – from a decidedly Christian perspective. As moral and spiritual guides, how did they present the Jews and Judaism to their Christian congregations during the Nazi dictatorship, a period of extraordinary exclusion and persecution?

To open this chapter, let us take a look at a sermon by Confessing Church Pastor Paul (or Paulus) Hinz of Kolberg, preached on June 30, 1935. Hinz was a veteran of the First World War, and later a student of theology and art history at the universities of Greifswald and Halle. After seminary at Wittenberg and assistant pastorates in various Pomeranian towns, Hinz became pastor of St. Mary's Cathedral (St. Marien-Dom) in Kolberg from 1930 to 1945, and served as a leading member of the Confessing Church in Pomerania, even serving as a leader on the Pomeranian Provincial Council of Brethren (*Bruderrat*, or governing council). On this early summer day of 1935, he took as his biblical passage Romans 10:1-5, wherein the Apostle Paul both expresses his displeasure with the Jews' “ignorance of the righteousness that comes from God,” and also his hope

that they will one day experience salvation in Christ. But Hinz takes Paul's criticism of the Jews even further, and argues that because Israel rejected Christ in "stubborn blindness" to God, Israel was no longer God's chosen people, but instead "under the judgment of God's wrath."⁶⁹⁴ He contends that God cast the Jews aside and welcomed all peoples throughout the world into God's kingdom. Furthermore, he contends that the Jews trust in their own descent, in blood and race, and in their own chosen-ness. But Hinz does not stop here; he reminds his congregation of the anti-Judaic theme of the Jews' curse in Matthew 27:25. According to the gospel writer, the Jews demanded that Pilate crucify Jesus and free Barabbas: "[Jesus'] blood be on us and on our children!" This curse, Hinz contends, has "uncannily" been accomplished throughout history and even until this day.⁶⁹⁵ The sermon takes a biblical text that is critical of the Jews, and adds layer upon layer of traditional Christian anti-Judaic theology that ends with a "proof" for all to see and verify – the punishment of the Jews in history.

Hinz's sermon reveals key elements that arise time and again in Confessing Church sermons, and which I will explore in this chapter. First, this example exposes a close connection between the anti-Judaic prejudice expressed and the biblical text examined. Though this is not always the case, it underscores the necessity of reading Confessing Church sermons together with the biblical text and noting the correspondence and divergence of the two. How are pastors using the Bible to lend authority to their anti-Judaism? Second, this example highlights a significant problem in interpreting

⁶⁹⁴ Paul Hinz, Sermon manuscript on Romans 10:1-15, 30 June 1935, Collected Sermons of Paul Hinz, EZA 766/38.

⁶⁹⁵ Paul Hinz, Sermon manuscript on Romans 10:1-15, 30 June 1935, Collected Sermons of Paul Hinz, EZA 766/38.

Confessing Church sermons: one must distinguish types of anti-Jewish prejudice. We cannot necessarily assume that prejudice directed against Jews in the context of a sermon during the Third Reich is the same as that found in the newspapers and propaganda of the Nazi regime. Like many of his Confessing Church colleagues, Hinz's sermons reflect a distinct non-rational (in contrast to irrational), religiously-based prejudice against the Jewish people.⁶⁹⁶ And lastly, as this example demonstrates, Confessing Church pastors perceived their Jewish contemporaries through a thick lens of three millennia of history and tradition. Thus, any interaction with their increasingly singled-out and persecuted Jewish neighbors resulted not simply from sympathy or sense of human connection, but also from the troubled history of Christian anti-Judaism.

My argument in this chapter is that Confessing Church pastors often preached themes that informed and perhaps influenced their congregants' views about modern day Jews and Judaism – for better or worse. After researching 910 Confessing Church sermons, I have found that 70 sermons (7.6%) expressed views that contributed to how their congregations perceived Judaism and the Jews of Nazi Germany.⁶⁹⁷ Expressions were evenly divided against and in support of the Jewish people. In 40 sermons (4.4%), Confessing Church pastors made anti-Judaic statements that corroborated the Nazi antisemitic narrative that the Jews and their religion are inferior. At the same time, in 40 sermons (4.4%), pastors expressed support and solidarity with the Jewish people and

⁶⁹⁶ See my discussion of these categories in Chapter 3. In short, non-rational religious prejudice refers to bias based upon the tenets of religious faith, which are found in the Christian scriptures. This prejudice is not necessarily contrary to reason, but it can be. Non-rational prejudice is opposed to irrational prejudice, which refers to bias based upon emotions such as fear, envy, anger, or contempt, among others. Irrational prejudice contradicts reason and empirical evidence.

⁶⁹⁷ The total number of comments about Jews and Judaism is 80, but 10 sermons include both positive and negative comments.

honored Judaism as a foundation of the Christian religion. These sermons reveal not only ambivalence among Confessing Church pastors about Judaism and the Jewish people, but a millennia-long ingrained prejudice that often reared its ugly head. As some of these sermons demonstrate, even when a pastor supported the Jewish people or affirmed the value of Judaism as a basis of Christianity, still anti-Judaic theology confuses what could be a clearer message to the Christian faithful in Nazi Germany.

But even more striking, we often find Confessing Church pastors use anti-Judaic tropes to critique or challenge the antisemitism of the Nazi regime, the German Christian movement, or Germans generally. Confessing Church pastors such as Niemöller, Bonhoeffer, and Hinz, for example, argue that like the Jews of ancient Israel, Germans of their own day have hardened their hearts; they are race conscious and emphasize racial purity; they are assured of their “chosen-ness” and superiority according to Providence. This demonstrates that anti-Judaic expressions were not often simply extemporaneous comments, or simply meant to denigrate Jews in Germany society, but that they were often employed purposefully to challenge the Nazi regime and its racial policies and ideology. As far as I am aware, no other historian has examined these phenomena in the historical record of the Confessing Church.

Also, the anti-Judaic expressions reveal religious prejudice. I did not find any examples of racial prejudice among the Confessing Church sermons, though we must keep in mind how religious prejudice can inform or shape racial prejudice. And yet at the same time, we see that Confessing Church pastors expressed positive statements about the Jews and Judaism to also criticize the Nazi regime and its policies, as well as the German Christian movement. These sermons reveal tremendous complexity and

ambivalence regarding how Germans perceived Jews and Judaism. The sermons demonstrate the widely-held views of Jews as both an “accursed people” and yet also as chosen by God; Judaism is considered legalistic and antiquated and yet also foundational for Christianity. This complexity is further evidenced in the reports of the Gestapo and the SD, which were concerned not only with pastors supporting and defending Jews, but also with pastors drawing connections between Christians and Jews based on shared values, traditions, and biblical texts.

I will begin this chapter on Confessing Church pastors’ sermons by exploring the prejudice evident in the 910 sermons, and analyze its meaning in the context of the German churches in the Nazi dictatorship. Subsequently, I will examine pastors’ statements that support the Jews and Judaism, and I will interpret them in the context of the anti-Judaic sentiments previously discussed. And lastly, I will draw implications and offer conclusions about this research.

I combed through 910 sermons to find any expressions of support or prejudice for the Jews and Judaism. This does not mean that I noted every instance pastors spoke of Jews or Judaism. Naturally, we expect Christian pastors to preach on the Hebrew Bible, to tell the stories contained in this book. Therefore, I paid particular attention to comments that reflect views of Jews and Judaism relevant to the current situation in Nazi Germany. The sermon at the opening of the chapter is a case in point. Hinz’s sermon reflects age-old religious prejudice that was consonant with twentieth-century German racial prejudice. While I examined expressions such as these, I did not catalogue more mundane examples of pastors discussing the traditions of the Jewish people, such as reiterations of the story of Jonah and the whale. Nevertheless, as I will discuss later in

this chapter, the fact that these Confessing Church pastors preached on the Hebrew Bible and held up Hebrew and Jewish figures as heroes or moral and spiritual examples, demonstrates not only their appreciation of the Hebrew Bible as a sacred text, but differentiates them from their German Christian movement counterparts in practice and not only in theology.

Confessing Church Expressions of Anti-Judaism

After analyzing 910 sermons of the Confessing Church I found that 40 (4.4%) contain messages that express prejudice against the Jewish people or Judaism. And in contrast to the small number of pastors who made critical comments of National Socialism, Hitler, or the Nazi regime, 15 of the 95 Confessing Church pastors (16%) voiced anti-Judaic views from the pulpit.

Importantly, I did not see a single reference to the “racial inferiority” of the Jewish people, or an expression of blame against them for the social and economic ills that Germany had recently experienced. None of the 40 contains aspects of racial, political, social or economic antisemitism as discussed in Chapter 1. In point of fact, all of the 40 expressions reflect traditional Christian anti-Judaism, specifically the following six elements: first, the general view that the Jews are a stubborn or wayward people; second, the view that Christianity is superior because it emphasizes grace and freedom over Judaism’s purported emphasis on law and works; third, the claim that the Jews are a stubborn people for rejecting Jesus, or that they are actually responsible for putting him to death (and thus, the charge of deicide); fourth, the perception that God has or is currently punishing the Jews for the rejection of Jesus; fifth, the belief that upon the

rejection of Jesus and the establishment of the Church, the Jews have ceased to be the people of God; and sixth, a generalized sentiment that hopes for the mass conversion of the Jews, reflecting a belief in the inferiority of Judaism and the lack of salvation for the Jewish people.⁶⁹⁸

The sermons of Confessing Church pastors reveal anti-Judaism, or non-rational religious prejudice that is based on religious convictions or interpretations of scripture and history.⁶⁹⁹ We do not find antisemitic expressions, that is, irrational prejudice based on racial hate, fear, or paranoia. In fact, as discussed in the previous chapter, the evidence indicates that pastors criticized Nazi racial ideology as a false belief, inconsistent with Christianity. However, as I pointed out in Chapter 1, the line between antisemitism and anti-Judaism can easily become blurred when one believes the Jewish people, as a people, killed Jesus, and have been under the punishing curse of God throughout history. This view implies a moral or spiritual degeneracy that is passed down genetically from generation to generation; a faith-based anti-Judaism can then easily become a racially-based antisemitism.⁷⁰⁰ For these reasons, some historians prefer to call a religiously-based prejudice against the Jews “religious antisemitism.”

⁶⁹⁸ These six characteristics are common in the historiography of anti-Judaism. See James Carroll, *Constantine's Sword: The Church and the Jews* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2001); Daniel Goldhagen, *A Moral Reckoning: The Role of the Catholic Church in the Holocaust and its Unfulfilled Duty of Repair* (New York: Knopf, 2002); Léon Poliakov, *The History of Anti-Semitism, Vol. 1, From the Time of Christ to the Court of the Jews*, translated by Richard Howard (New York: Vanguard, 1965); Dan Cohn-Sherbok, *The Crucified Jew: Twenty Centuries of Christian Anti-Semitism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997).

⁶⁹⁹ See Langmuir, *History, Religion, and Antisemitism*, 152, 252-255; Michael, *Holy Hatred*, 82-84.

⁷⁰⁰ Robert Michael, *Holy Hatred: Christianity, Antisemitism, and the Holocaust* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 5-6. To reiterate my comments in Chapter 1, Goldhagen argues against making a distinction between the terms anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism because it masks the hatred implicit in anti-Judaism (*A Moral Reckoning*, 78-9). Carroll insightfully observes that in the end, “[this] distinction becomes meaningless before the core truth of this history: Because of the hatred of the Jews had been made holy [in the biblical texts], it became lethal” (*Constantine's Sword*, 22).

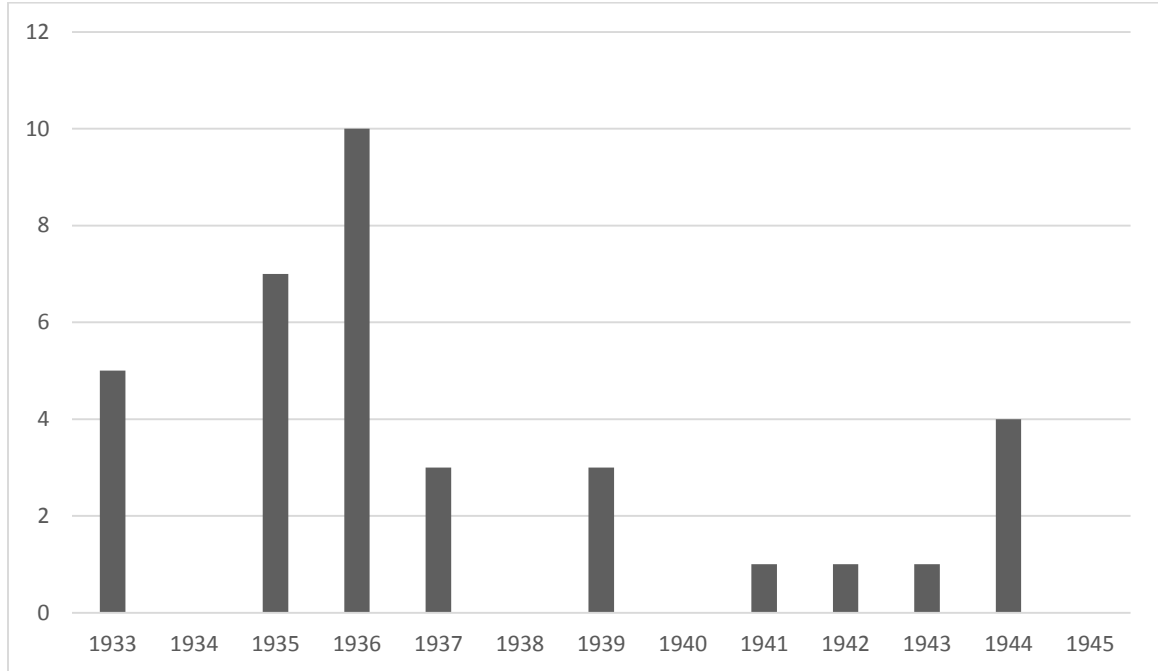
Now let us take a closer look at the pastors who expressed anti-Judaic comments and the years in which we find their comments. A total of 15 pastors of the 95 total pastors (16%) expressed religious prejudice against Jews or Judaism. Here is a list of the pastors and the number of critical expressions:⁷⁰¹

Karl Barth	2	Hanns Lilje	1
Friedrich von Bodelschwingh	3	Paul Hinz	4
Dietrich Bonhoeffer	1	Martin Niemöller	7
Friedrich Delekat	1	Julius Sammentreuther	8
Otto Dibelius	1	Hermann Sasse	1
Hermann Diem	1	Karl von Schwartz	4
Robert Frick	1	Hans von Soden	1
Heinrich Grüber	1		

If we break down the years in which they expressed their comments, several important observations can be made. First, 28 of the 35 sermons (80%), whose dates are known, were expressed between 1933 and 1939, prior to the outbreak of World War II. Also, more than half of the expressions were given between 1933 and 1936 (62%). Given the low figures we are working with, we cannot claim that these percentages are representative of all Confessing Church sermons. Yet they indicate a decrease in the frequency of anti-Judaic expressions from 1936 until the end of the war, suggesting that pastors may have wanted to “tone down” criticisms of Jews as Nazi persecutions increased.

⁷⁰¹ The precise dates of the sermons for Grüber and Lilje are unknown, though they took place between 1933 and the end of World War II.

GRAPH 3 – Anti-Judaic Expressions from the Pulpit



As we proceed keep in mind that most of the anti-Judaic comments I will mention were not from pastors on the fringe of the Confessing Church, spouting off at the mouth views that would have embarrassed their colleagues. In fact, many of these pastors are widely considered heroes of the Confessing Church. For example, Dietrich Bonhoeffer ran an underground seminary before participating in a conspiracy against Hitler and the regime. Martin Niemöller courageously spoke out against Nazi intrusions in church administration and theology, and also against persecutions of its pastors. Friedrich von Bodelschwingh, was a candidate for Reich bishop before German-Christians made his leadership of Germany's newly-unified Reich Church untenable; he was also the influential administrator of the Bethel Institution, a public health organization for the poor, who opposed Nazi euthanasia and sterilization measures. Heinrich Grüber ran an

office in Berlin specifically designed to support and minister to German pastors of Jewish descent and their families. They were admired leaders in their movement, and yet they expressed anti-Judaic views that could only have alienated Christians from their Jewish neighbors or confirmed their already-existing antisemitism. If the best and the brightest of Confessing Church pastors, the most courageous and insightful, made such anti-Judaic statements in their sermons, we can conclude that these sentiments were deeply ingrained in Christian theology and that they were widespread.⁷⁰²

Let us now take a closer look at how Confessing Church pastors expressed each of these anti-Judaic views. First, there were two general expressions of the Jews as a stubborn or wayward people. A good example of this is a sermon published in late 1933, but possibly preached earlier, by Pastor Karl von Schwartz from Braunschweig. He argued that

The whole history of Israel from Sinai to the Pharisees is a history of waywardness. And if today this people had all the gold in the world and all the power in the world, the waywardness will remain: it should be a light to lighten the Gentiles... Also the Aryan race is no exception, despite all the idealization.⁷⁰³

⁷⁰² My analysis follows the work of historians such as Baranowski, Ericksen, Hayes, among others, that anti-Judaism was a widespread characteristic of early 20th century German Protestantism. See Shelley Baranowski, "The Confessing Church and Antisemitism: Protestant Identity, German Nationhood, and the Exclusion of the Jews," in Robert P. Ericksen and Susannah Heschel, eds., *Betrayal: German Churches and the Holocaust* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999); Doris Bergen, "Catholics, Protestants, and Antisemitism in Nazi Germany," in *Central European History*, vol. 27, (1994), pp. 329-348; Wolfgang Gerlach, *And the Witnesses Were Silent: The Confessing Church and the Persecution of the Jews*, translated and edited by Victoria Barnett (Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 236; Stephen R. Haynes, "Who Needs Enemies? Jews and Judaism in Anti-Nazi Religious Discourse," in *Church History*, vol. 71, no. 2 (June 2002), pp. 341-367; Uriel Tal, "On Modern Lutheranism and Jews," in the *Year Book of the Leo Baeck Institute* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1985), 203-213.

⁷⁰³ Karl von Schwartz, *Gottes Wort an Gottes Volk: Ein Jahrgang Predigten* (Braunschweig: Hellmuth Wollermann Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1933), 58.

Schwartz repeats the old Christian anti-Judaic trope that the Jews are a stubborn, wayward people, whom God wishes to use as a sign to the world to encourage repentance. Schwartz presents the Jews as unaware of God's will and stubborn in their own beliefs. The implication is that this people is not to be trusted, but kept at a distance as a sign to the world of a people gone astray. Yet surprisingly, Schwartz contends that "Aryans," despite their glorification in Nazi propaganda, must take a lesson from the Jewish people: even the "Aryan race" is in need of repentance and must humbly submit to and follow God or face God's punishment. This general expression of anti-Judaism is thus employed to reveal the common need of both Jews and "Aryans," placing both populations in need of God's redemption. This is a criticism of a Nazi ideology that glorifies the "Aryan" as superior. Schwartz's implication is that the two groups are not all that different – both are wayward and need to submit to God.

A second theme found in nine of the 40 sermons that express anti-Judaism is that Christianity is superior because it emphasizes grace and freedom over Judaism's alleged emphasis on law and works. A couple examples will suffice to demonstrate how and why pastors presented this idea. The most striking aspect of these nine sermons is that the anti-Judaic expressions are never explained or argued; instead they are simply assumed and serve explicit purposes other than denigrating Judaism. For example, in late August 1935 the Berlin pastor Martin Niemöller preached a sermon entitled, "The Office of the Church," in which he asserts that ancient Judaism was legalistic and works-oriented. Niemöller did this not because he wanted his congregation to know that first-century Judaism was legalistic, but to demonstrate to the critics of Paul that Paul himself fought against Judaism's legalism. Recalling our discussion in Chapter 3 of the conflicts

between the Confessing Church and the German Christian movement, Niemöller's sermons come less than two years after the *Sportpalast* controversy in which the headline speaker, Dr. Reinhold Krause, gave a speech attacking the Hebrew Bible for its legalistic morality and scorning the Apostle Paul for judaizing Christianity, ideas that would greatly increase in popularity among the German Christian movement by the end of the 1930s.⁷⁰⁴ Following Krause, members of the German Christian movement condemned "Rabbi Paul" and his theology "with its scapegoats and inferiority complex."⁷⁰⁵ In this sermon Niemöller defends Paul against critics who sought the removal of his letters from the New Testament.⁷⁰⁶

His text was II Corinthians 3:1-6, in which Paul defends his credentials as an apostle of Jesus Christ and a minister of the gospel to the nations. Niemöller notes that Paul's opponents are "of Jewish origin" – though Christians – and thus "set a particularly high value on the law."⁷⁰⁷ Here again we can see a generalizing of first century Judaism, that it was legalistic as opposed to spiritually life-affirming in its own right. This argument is an integral component of a supersessionist theology that affirms the superiority of Christianity over Judaism.⁷⁰⁸ Nevertheless, Niemöller continues,

⁷⁰⁴ Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 17. As Susannah Heschel writes, by 1939 pro-Nazi Christians established the Institute for the Study and Eradication of Jewish Influence on German Religious Life, the aim of which was to "Aryanize" Jesus and the New Testament. See Susannah Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus: Christian Theologians and the Bible in Nazi Germany* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton, 2008).

⁷⁰⁵ Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 158. While Krause's views held sway among members of the German Christian movement, Bergen points out that they "said little about Paul" as they were more concerned with "aryanizing" Jesus and the New Testament. Nevertheless, as Niemöller's sermons demonstrates, Confessing Church pastors defended the apostle against the attacks of critics.

⁷⁰⁶ Martin Niemöller, *Here Stand I!* Translated by Jane Lymburn (New York: Willett, Clark & Company, 1937), 200.

⁷⁰⁷ Niemöller, *Here Stand I!* 200.

⁷⁰⁸ See Carroll, *Constantine's Sword*, 612.

If the campaign against Paul has been resumed in our day, if after nineteen hundred years the legitimacy of his apostolic office is again being questioned, and if it is spread abroad that this Paul falsified the teaching and message of Jesus of Nazareth, then we are directly affected in the highest degree. For this attack is not directed against the man who died a martyr under Emperor Nero and was buried in Rome, but against the apostle and his message – that is, against the church and its teaching.⁷⁰⁹

This is the crux of the problem for Niemöller. If the German Christian movement condemns Paul and his “Jewish” teaching, and if Paul’s writings are in part foundational for the Christian faith, then the Christian faith itself is gravely undermined. One cannot hope to just sideline Paul and reform Christianity. Paul’s writings comprise nearly one third of the New Testament. Niemöller relates how he hears all over Germany calls for the German Evangelical Church to free itself from the “dead formulas and dogmas” that prevent it from giving and sustaining life. He hears cries for a “positive” Christianity free of Jewish elements, to forge a new path for a new Germany. Alas, Niemöller admits, Christians are not free to just toss out whatever in the biblical texts is not to their tastes: “So long as we call ourselves the church we are not free in what we preach or do, but are bound to the Lord of the church to whom belongs the [religious] office in which we stand.”⁷¹⁰ He concludes that Christians must stand before the Hebrew Bible, before the “inexorable will” of God, and respond to his grace and mercy.⁷¹¹ The irony of course is that in defending Paul and the Hebrew Bible, he diminishes the scriptural foundation of

⁷⁰⁹ Niemöller, *Here Stand I!* 200.

⁷¹⁰ Niemöller, *Here I Stand!* 202.

⁷¹¹ Niemöller, *Here I Stand!* 204.

Judaism (in the Hebrew Bible) as legalistic and impoverished.⁷¹² Thus, Confessing Church pastors such as Niemöller critiqued attempts by members of the German Christian movement to eliminate the Jewish foundations of Christianity by drawing on anti-Judaic ideas.⁷¹³

Another well-respected leader of the Confessing Church movement, Friedrich von Bodelschwingh, delivered a Christmas sermon in 1943 (without using a specific biblical text) and argued that Jesus came to a Jewish people weary under the demands of the law. Bodelschwingh contends that Second Temple Judaism could only offer a “stone” to a spiritually hungry people, and this explains why Jesus and his “nourishing bread” found such success.⁷¹⁴ Bodelschwingh’s main point here is not primarily to diminish ancient Judaism, but to explain why Jesus appealed to the masses. His point is clearly that Jesus came at a time when people needed him, but in doing this, he denigrates Judaism.⁷¹⁵

⁷¹² It was quite common for opponents or resisters of the Nazi regime to express antisemitic or anti-Judaic ideas. See Louis Eltscher, *Traitors or Patriots? A Story of the German Anti-Nazi Resistance* (Bloomington, IN: iUniverse: 2013), 64-66; Joachim Fest, *Plotting Hitler’s Death: The Story of the German Resistance*, translated by Bruce Little (New York: Metropolitan, 1996), 150; Theodore Hamerow, *On the Road to the Wolf’s Lair: German Resistance to Hitler* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 226; Peter Hoffmann, *The History of the German Resistance, 1933-1945, Third Edition* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1996), 318; Robert Michael, *Holy Hatred: Christianity, Antisemitism, and the Holocaust* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 165; Nechama Tec, *Resistance: Jews and Christians Who Defied the Nazi Terror* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), Kindle edition, location 770. Eltscher argues, “Many of the men in the officer corps of the German Army shared the anti-Semitic prejudices of their civilian counterparts, that is, those in the upper-middle class and landed aristocracy. It was said of the military officers that, like their civilian counterparts, ‘few were out and out anti-Semites. [Although regrettable, some were.] They generally regarded Jews with disdain rather than hatred.’ Like everyone, they were children of their time, and the era of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was an age of racial prejudice, much of it anti-Semitic.” See Eltscher, *Traitors or Patriots?* 66.

⁷¹³ Michael, *Holy Hatred*, 160.

⁷¹⁴ Friedrich von Bodelschwingh, *Lebendig und Frei, 2. Folge* (Bethel: Verlagshandlung der Anstalt Bethel, 1947), 22.

⁷¹⁵ In two sermons later in the year he speaks of the Jewish hatred and rejection of Christ. He does not elaborate on this hatred but asserts it as a means of conveying the obstacles Jesus faced and his suffering in ministry.

Like Niemöller and Bodelschwingh, the other pastors do not explain how exactly ancient Judaism was legalistic or on what basis they judge its ability to meet the needs of first-century Jews; they merely assume their congregants already acknowledge the superiority of Christianity over Judaism. The sermons that express this anti-Judaic trope affirm an existing hierarchy that differentiates the spiritually superior from the spiritually inferior. Though the prejudice is not racial in nature, it contributes to the alienation of Jews to Christians in Nazi Germany.

Third, and by far the most common anti-Judaic theme expressed in these sermons is that “the Jews” rejected or killed Christ because of their supposed hatred. This theme occurs 14 times in these 40 sermons, by a total of nine different pastors. These expressions vary widely in judgment and blame. Many of these refer simply and as a matter of fact to the Jews’ hatred of Jesus. Four of these retell the trial and crucifixion of Jesus and in doing so argues that “the Jews” hated Jesus and rejected him. For example, in a sermon during the Second World War, Pastor Otto Dibelius, the general superintendent of the Brandenburg Land church, calls the crucifixion a “great [attempt] of human hatred,” and Pastor Bodelschwingh said in 1944 that “Jewish hatred of Christ is a contagious force.”⁷¹⁶ Other pastors were more explicit that the Jews actually killed Christ. This point is tremendously significant as the charge of deicide was often used during the Holocaust to justify violence against the Jewish people.⁷¹⁷ Irving Greenberg

⁷¹⁶ Bodelschwingh, *Lebendig und Frei*, 2. Folge, 170.

⁷¹⁷ Michael, *Holy Hatred*, 182.

has noted “literally hundreds” of instances where this kind of statement was made to justify antisemitic violence.⁷¹⁸

Let us take a closer look at these 14 sermons that express the Jewish rejection or murder of Jesus. Most of the sermons were delivered before the start of World War II. Nine of the 14 occurred between 1933 and the outbreak of war, while four occurred during the war itself.⁷¹⁹ Given the general decrease in the sermons we have during the war compared to the pre-war period, this proportion is not surprising.⁷²⁰ However, eight of the sermons occur in just the first few years of the Nazi regime, between 1933 and 1936, when the Nazi persecution of the Jewish people ranged from a national boycott of Jewish-owned businesses, the expulsion of Jews from employment in the civil service and the professions, as well as the stripping of Jewish citizenship and restrictions on sexual relationships with non-Jews as promulgated in the Nuremberg Laws of 1935.

Three of the four sermons during wartime were delivered in 1944, a two years after the "Final Solution" to the Jewish Question evolved from mass murders on the eastern front to the gas chambers. Even when the war looked all but lost, when Germans heard reports and rumors of massacres of Jews, after years of Nazi propaganda proclaiming the end of the Jewish people in Germany, still we find German pastors expressing this age-old anti-Judaic trope. This reveals just how deeply ingrained anti-Judaism was in the Christianity of even the Confessing Church pastors.

⁷¹⁸ Irving Greenberg, “Cloud of Smoke, Pillar of Fire,” in *Auschwitz: Beginning of a New Era?* Edited by Eva Fleischner (New York: KTAV, 1997), 308.

⁷¹⁹ One of the 14 does not provide enough information to determine if it was delivered before or during the war.

⁷²⁰ See the yearly breakdown of sermons in Chapter 3.

I would also add that 13 of the 14 sermons were based on New Testament texts, while only one was based on the Hebrew Bible (from the book of Micah). And at the same time, 11 of the 14 were based on the gospels (and five from the book of Matthew). This evidence suggests that Confessing Church pastors interpreted the New Testament, and especially the gospels, in a way conducive to the most destructive of anti-Judaic tropes, that the Jews were responsible for the death of Jesus of Nazareth, and that God had cursed them as a punishment.

For example, in a Passion Service only three Sundays before Easter in 1937, Niemöller preached a sermon on Pilate's question to "the masses," would they rather free "Christ or Barabbas?" His text is Matthew 27:17, and in exploring the meaning of this question he expresses a perception of the Jews that could not have helped their situation in Nazi Germany. The first paragraph strikes my attention because of the nonchalance with which Niemöller expresses what he considers a commonplace perception:

Again and again, dear friends, when we hear the story of Christ's Passion we have a feeling of sympathy, probably common to all of us, with the figure of this Roman, Pilate, whereas we most emphatically dissociate and separate ourselves from all the others who helped to bring about the death of Jesus. The cold hatred of the Jewish authorities fills us with horror, the groundless and unfathomable treachery of Judas makes us shudder, *and the pusillanimous fanaticism of the multitude rouses our contempt*; but Pilate is different [emphasis added].⁷²¹

Niemöller does not discuss his view of the Jews again in this sermon, but this first paragraph alone reveals what may be a commonly held view in Germany that the Jews –

⁷²¹ Martin Niemöller, *God is My Fuehrer: Being the Last Twenty-Eight Sermons*, translated by Jane Lymburn (New York: Philosophical Library, 1941), 169.

its leaders and the masses – were responsible for the execution of Jesus. Niemöller invokes in the congregation sympathy for Pilate, the Roman governor who actually had Jesus tortured and crucified as an insurrectionist.

Even a few years later, one New Year's Eve 1944, Niemöller makes a similar comment in a sermon in vastly different circumstances. After his arrest by the Gestapo in 1937 for vociferously criticizing the Nazi regime, and after his subsequent trial, release, and immediate re-arrest as Hitler's personal prisoner, Niemöller found himself among half a dozen other "special prisoners" in the Dachau concentration camp.⁷²² By Christmastime 1944, the seven men were suddenly allowed – for reasons unknown to them – to worship together as Christians.⁷²³ And they did so despite coming from different Christian traditions. Niemöller never understood why his captors suddenly allowed them to worship together – and the indication is that this was a very rare concession and due to their "special" status. He reports simply that a fellow prisoner, the Dutch Royal minister, asked to worship for Christmas service, and that permission was granted. One week later, on December 31, 1944, Niemöller delivered a New Year's Eve sermon on the story of the man Simeon, the devout Jew of Jerusalem who, according to Luke's gospel, faithfully waited for the Lord's Messiah (Luke 2:29-32). While Niemöller praises Simeon for waiting for the Messiah and recognizing him in Jesus of Nazareth, he condemns the Jews of Jesus' day for rejecting him. He makes the charged generalization

⁷²² Niemöller describes his fellow inmates as "a Dutch cabinet minister, two Norwegian shippers, a British major from the Indian army, a Yugoslavian diplomat, and a Macedonian journalist." See Martin Niemöller, *Dachau Sermons*, Translated by Robert H. Pfeiffer (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1946), v.

⁷²³ For Niemöller this would be the first time in nearly seven years that he could worship together with other Christians. These sermons were thus composed and written in the concentration camp at Dachau by Niemöller himself. See *Dachau Sermons*, vi-vii.

that “The people of Israel could do nothing better with this Saviour than to try him and hand him over to the executioners.”⁷²⁴ Again, this fits with the charge of deicide. Yet even after years of persecution and incarceration – even in a concentration camp, where he must have witnessed the persecution of the Jews first-hand – Niemöller employs the charge of deicide and reiterates centuries of Christian anti-Judaism. This example indicates just how deeply ingrained anti-Judaism had become in the Christianity of many Germans by the Nazi era.

The sermons that express Jewish hatred for Jesus do not aim for historical accuracy, but paint the entire Jewish population as opponents if not outright enemies of Christ and Christianity. While these statements about Jewish hatred for Jesus may suggest to Christians listening in Nazi Germany that their Jewish neighbors still harbor this hatred, the implication may not have been intended. Nevertheless, we should remember the context in which these sermons were delivered. As Nazi persecutions changed from public policies of exclusion from German social and civil life, to the “Aryanization” of Jewish property and businesses, to the ghettoization and finally extermination of Jews, the effects of these sermons on the German public could only have legitimated Nazi oppression and perhaps even cooled the consciences of congregants who may have been concerned for their Jewish neighbors.

The fourth, and perhaps most dangerous, anti-Judaic expression is the perception that God has or is currently punishing the Jews for the rejection of Jesus. I began this chapter with a sermon by Pastor Hinz who reminded his congregants of the curse of the

⁷²⁴ Niemöller, *Dachau Sermons*, 25.

Jews for rejecting Jesus, and as a result they live “under the judgment of God’s wrath,” which he contends is evident in their own day.⁷²⁵ I have found seven examples in these 910 sermons, from five different pastors that reflect this view of God’s curse upon the Jews and his subsequent punishment of them. While this is not a large percentage (a little less than 1%), and we should be wary of drawing any hard and fast conclusions from this, the sermons reveal evidence of a deep rupture in the relationship between Christians and Jews that may have contributed to Christians taking the role of bystanders when the Nazis persecuted Jews. Like Hinz, many Christians in Nazi Germany may have interpreted persecution as divine punishment.

Martin Niemöller voiced this view three times, more than any other Confessing Church pastor (twice in 1935 and once in 1936). One example occurred in late summer 1935 (on the tenth Sunday after Trinity). In a sermon entitled, “Ye Would Not!” Niemöller explores Matthew 23:34-39, in which Jesus pronounces “woes” upon the scribes and Pharisees for their unwillingness to accept his gospel message. After criticizing Nazi “positive” Christianity and challenging his congregants to remain faithful to the unsullied gospel message, Niemöller makes unfortunate comments about the Jewish people, which I will reproduce at length. He says,

Today is the tenth Sunday after Trinity, a day which has for centuries been dedicated in the Christian world to the memory of the destruction of Jerusalem and the fate of the Jewish people; and the gospel lessons of this Sunday throw a light upon the dark and sinister history of this people which can neither live nor die because it is under a curse which forbids it to do either.

⁷²⁵ Paul Hinz, Sermon manuscript on Romans 10:1-15, 30 June 1935, Collected Sermons of Paul Hinz, EZA 766/38.

We speak of the “eternal Jew” and conjure up the picture of a restless wanderer who has no home and who cannot find peace. We see a highly gifted people which produces idea after idea for the benefit of the world, but whatever it takes up becomes poisoned, and all that it ever reaps is contempt and hatred because ever and anon the world notices the deception and avenges itself in its own way. I say “in its own way,” for we know full well that there is no charter which would empower us to supplement God’s curse with our hatred. Even Cain receives God’s mark, that no one may kill him; and Jesus’ command, “love your enemies!” leaves no room for exceptions. But we cannot change the fact that until the end of its days the Jewish people must go its way under the burden which Jesus’ decree has laid upon it: “Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord!”⁷²⁶

Niemöller sums up the reasoning for this two-thousand year long “punishment”: “the Jews brought the Christ of God to the cross.”⁷²⁷ They did this, he argues, because of their priority of race and nation over faith, akin to the Nazi “positive Christianity.” The Jews were

ready to approve of its Messiah just as long and as far as it thought it could gain some advantage for its own plans and aims from him, his words and his deeds. It bears a curse because it rejected him and resisted him to the death when it became clear that Jesus of Nazareth would not cease calling to repentance and faith, despite their insistence that they were free, strong and proud men and belonged to a pure-blooded, race-conscious nation...⁷²⁸

⁷²⁶ Niemöller, *Here Stand I!* 195

⁷²⁷ Niemöller, *Here Stand I!* 195.

⁷²⁸ Niemöller, *Here Stand I!* 196.

Niemöller draws a stark parallel between the Nazis who advanced “positive” Christianity and the Jews of Jesus’ day, and both stand condemned for using religion to claim some advantage for themselves rather than accept the gospel of Christ. He uses the anti-Judaic prejudice his congregants would know and understand well to condemn the German Christian movement for the same “sins” of ancient Israel: the rejection of Christ, the refusal of repentance and true faith, and the steadfast assertion that they were a “pure-blooded” and “race-conscious nation.” Christians and the nation of Germany face the same dilemma about positive Christianity as ancient Israel faced. He ends with a prayer for God to have mercy on them.

Likewise, in another sermon Niemöller makes periodic reference to the anti-Judaic view of God’s curse of the Jewish people for supposedly putting Jesus to death on the cross. In a sermon entitled “The Wedding Garment,” given on October 25, 1936, in the Church of Jesus Christ, he preaches on Jesus’ parable likening the kingdom of God to a king who invites chosen guests to his son’s wedding feast. They refuse, greatly angering the king, who then destroys them and burns their city. The king then invites all and sundry to attend to ensure a full and lively celebration. Niemöller continues his analysis of this passage, but for our purposes what is most important is his argument that the Jews rejected their “invitation” and have since been cursed like those who rebuffed the king’s invitation. He says, “Dear friends, it is easy to interpret the first part of the parable, and, from the fate of the people of Israel who made light of the king’s invitation, to draw conclusions regarding the punishment which threatens our own nation if it does

not or will not heed the call.”⁷²⁹ Again, we find a Confessing Church pastor using anti-Judaic tropes to criticize the Nazi regime. Niemöller interprets the history of the ancient Jews’ moral and spiritual “failures” in light of what he interprets to be the same failures among Germans in his own day.

We need to keep in mind here that Germans have already witnessed their Jewish neighbors expelled from the civil service and other professions, and just a year earlier, the Nazi regime passed the Nuremberg Race Laws, stripping Jews of German citizenship and prohibiting sexual relationships and marriages between Jews and “Aryans.” While the Nazi regime deliberately eased its anti-Jewish stance during the Olympic Summer Games of 1936, the attentive listener to Niemöller’s sermon could consider his statement a legitimation or justification for the suffering of the Jewish people since the time of Jesus of Nazareth, and even for the Nazi treatment of their Jewish neighbors: the consequences were befitting a “cursed people” who refused their king’s invitation. And at the same time, they may have also picked up on Niemöller’s criticism of Nazi Germany, a nation which so far had not “heeded the call.”

Let us take a look at the work of another famous Confessing Church pastor. A sermon by Dietrich Bonhoeffer identifies Germans of his day with Israel in rebelling against God, setting up false idols, and then reaping God’s punishment as a result. He wrote the material to be delivered by his close friend and colleague (and later biographer) Eberhard Bethge at the Mission Festival in Ohlau, Silesia, on October 20, 1941. This was mere months after the start of Operation Barbarossa, Germany’s invasion of the

⁷²⁹ Niemöller, *God is My Fuehrer*, 20.

Soviet Union in June 1941. But it was also shortly after he began to hear reports of massacres on the eastern front from his collaborators in the *Abwehr* resistance.⁷³⁰ By the fall of 1941, Bonhoeffer had begun *Unternehmen 7* (Operation 7), an intricate plan to smuggle seven Jews out of German and into Switzerland to report on Nazi treatment of the Jewish population.⁷³¹

Despite his concern and concrete actions to save Jews in Nazi Germany, Bonhoeffer still expresses anti-Judaic ideas as a clergyman. The prepared message was based in part on Jeremiah 16:21, which reads: “Therefore I am surely going to teach [the Israelites], this time I am going to teach them my power and my might, and they shall know that my name is the Lord.” Playing the prophet, Bonhoeffer mirrors Jeremiah’s admonition against his own people: a time will come when God will cease simply asking his people to stop idolatry, and he will eventually punish his people to set them right. In this context Bonhoeffer recalls the anti-Judaic trope that Israel is a stubborn people who have consistently rebelled against God. He writes, “There is a last resort by which God leads his people (Israel), who have repeatedly misused and resisted God’s grace and have toyed with it, to lead them to the recognition of God’s authority: namely, the *powerful* angry strike of God’s hand [emphasis in the original].”⁷³² Christians are the new Israel, Bonhoeffer asserts, and Christians in Germany have been struck with “war, crises,

⁷³⁰ Eric Metaxas, *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2010), Kindle Edition, location 7080.

⁷³¹ Bethge, *Bonhoeffer*, 747-752; Metaxas, *Bonhoeffer*, Kindle Edition, location 7098; Elizabeth Sifton and Fritz Stern, *No Ordinary Men: Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Hans Dohnanyi, Resisters against Hitler in Church and State* (New York: New York Review Books, 2013), 96-98.

⁷³² Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Conspiracy and Imprisonment, 1940-1945* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 625.

imprisonment, distress of all kinds.”⁷³³ The meditation is a call for Germans to consider their response to God’s “dark revelation”: will they return to God or harden their hearts? Once again we see anti-Judaism used to criticize the shortcomings of Christians in Nazi Germany.

One more example will suffice. Pastor Heinrich Grüber preached a sermon entitled, “I am not ashamed,” echoing the famous line of the Apostle Paul from Romans 1:16, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.” Grüber had been arrested for his leadership of the Grüber Office in Berlin, an organization that supported Christians of Jewish descent by providing legal aid, pastoral care, welfare aid, finding employment abroad, and facilitating emigration, often by procuring false passports.⁷³⁴ A conservative estimate indicates that by 1940 the Grüber Office helped 1100 individuals to emigrate out of Nazi Germany.⁷³⁵ Unfortunately, the Gestapo arrested Grüber in 1941 and sent him to the concentration camp at Dachau, where he delivered this sermon.

Grüber reiterates the myth of the Wandering Jew in need of reconciliation to God, and yet at the same time argues that “the Greek” needs this redemption also. He says, “There is not only a Wandering Jew, but also an eternal Greek. The Jew is the man for whom everything is ancestry, type, nationality, and tribalism and blood.”⁷³⁶ Grüber

⁷³³ Bonhoeffer, *Conspiracy and Imprisonment*, 625.

⁷³⁴ See Lutherhaus Eisenach. *Wider Das Vergessen: Schicksale judenchristlicher Pfarrer in der Zeit von 1933-1945* (Herausgegeben vom Evangelischen Pfarrhausarchiv, April 1988 - April 1989), 18-19; Haim Genizi, *American Apathy: The Plight of Christian Refugees from Nazism* (Ramat-Gan, Israel: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1983), 29; Helmreich, *German Churches under Hitler*, 329; Christopher Probst, *Demonizing the Jews: Luther and the Protestant Church in Nazi Germany* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2012), 10.

⁷³⁵ Genizi, *American Apathy*, 29.

⁷³⁶ Martin Niemöller, ed. *Das Aufgebrochene Tor: Predigten und Andachten Gefangener Pfarrer im*

essentializes an entire group of people to the caricature of the Wandering Jew, evoking the medieval legend of the man who laughed at the condemned Christ on the way to the crucifixion, and whom God in turn cursed to wander forever until Christ's second coming.⁷³⁷ It is remarkable that Grüber selects a character of derision in medieval legend, a man condemned and separated from God, to compare to the state of non-Jews, or "Greeks" in biblical terminology. The reconciliation offered to Israel as told in the Hebrew Bible (through a series of covenants between God and Israel), is the same reconciliation available to "Greeks."⁷³⁸ In other words, the same reconciliation that will give rest to the Wandering Jew is the very same that will give peace to the "eternal Greek." Thus, in condemning Nazi racial policy that asks for proof of ancestry, Grüber affirms that God calls Jews and "Greeks" to reconciliation with God: "To this salvation both Jews and Greeks are called. We do not ask, where you come from and what your father was and who your grandmother was."⁷³⁹ In his larger message of opening the door for humankind's reconciliation to God, Grüber unfortunately and ironically employs a Jewish stereotype to argue that all are welcome. Thus, we see again that a pastor's

Konzentrationslager Dachau (München: Neubau Verlag, 1946), 178-179.

⁷³⁷ This figure is also referred to as the "eternal Jew" in medieval legend. See for example, George Anderson, *The Legend of the Wandering Jew* (Providence, RI: Brown University Press, 1965); and Galit Hasan-Rokem and Alan Dundes, *The Wandering Jew: Essays in the Interpretation of a Christian Legend* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1986); Michael, *Holy Hatred*, 118, 136; Albert S. Lindemann and Richard s. Levy, *Antisemitism: A History* (New York: Oxford, 2010), Kindle location 1021.

⁷³⁸ The word "salvation" is used variously in Christian theology to refer, according to the *New Dictionary of Theology*, to "any kind of situation in which a person is delivered from some danger, real or potential; as in healing a person from illness, from enemies or from the possibility of death. The noun 'salvation' can refer positively to the resulting state of well-being and is not confined to the negative idea of escape from danger." See *New Dictionary of Theology*, by Sinclair Ferguson, David Wright, et. al. eds. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 610.

⁷³⁹ Niemöller, ed., *Das Aufgebrochene Tor*, 180.

criticisms of Nazism draw on the same anti-Jewish stereotypes that play easily into Nazi racial ideology.

A fifth anti-Judaic expression found in our 910 sermons is that Christians have supplanted the Jews as God’s favored people upon the establishment of the Christian faith and the Church, thus suggesting that God’s covenant with the Jews has ended and his blessings on them has ceased. Let me back up and unpack the dense theological language for a moment. According to the Hebrew Bible, God initiated a sacred pact with the Hebrew people (e.g. Genesis 6:18 and Exodus 6:4-5) – this is what is meant that they are the “chosen people” of God.⁷⁴⁰ In this covenant God promises to be faithful to them forever, that is, they will always be God’s “chosen people,” and at the same time God promises blessings for their obedience and curses for their disobedience (e.g. Leviticus 26:44-45 and Deuteronomy 4:31). Moreover, the biblical tradition is that the nations of the world will be blessed through the Hebrew people as the “chosen” people of God.⁷⁴¹ At the very least, to affirm that the Jews are the people of God is to affirm God’s covenant with them and his special favor upon them.⁷⁴²

Without digging too deep into the weeds of historical theology, early Christians had to grapple with the fact that most Jews did not convert to Christianity, and so the

⁷⁴⁰ Though considered as one, the covenant was established between God and numerous figures, such as Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David, among others. See *New Dictionary of Theology*, eds. Sinclair and Ferguson, et. al., 173-174.

⁷⁴¹ See for example, Genesis 12:2-3, in which God says to Abraham: “I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

⁷⁴² See for example, John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, translated by Henry Beveridge (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2008), 880; Stanley Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 453; Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology, 2nd Edition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1998), 561; and Veli—Matti Kärkkäinen, *The Doctrine of God: A Global Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2004), 31-33.

obvious question presented itself: what about God's covenant with the Jews in the light of Christ's inauguration of a new covenant? The early Christian argument of supersession became increasingly ingrained in Christian theology, that the Church replaced or supplanted the Jews as the chosen people, who then became a sign for the nations of stubbornness and waywardness in their refusal to convert to Christianity.⁷⁴³

In my research I have found one pastor who explicitly expresses this perspective in four distinct occasions between January 1935 and October 1937. Pastor Paul Hinz from Kolberg preached that Christians have superseded the Jews as God's chosen people upon the establishment of the Church, thus suggesting that God's covenant with them has ended and his blessings on them has ceased. In the Kolberger Dom on September 9, 1937, Pastor Hinz preached on a famous passage in 1 Peter 2:9, about Christians being the people of God. The text states, "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." Hinz argues based on this passage that God calls all people, regardless of race or ethnicity, to become Christians, and thus part of this new "chosen race." He contends that because Israel resisted God and rejected Christ, the community of Christ is now the people of God.⁷⁴⁴

Hinz would repeat similar comments a month later, this time right on the heels of Hitler's Nuremberg Party Rally speech on September 13, 1937, when Hitler condemned

⁷⁴³ See Carroll, *Constantine's Sword*, 59, 564-565; Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, *A Moral Reckoning: The Role of the Catholic Church in the Holocaust and its Unfulfilled Duty of Repair* (New York: Knopf, 2002), 71-72, 206-207; and Robert Michael, *Holy Hatred: Christianity, Antisemitism, and the Holocaust* (New York: Palgrave, 2006), 18-19.

⁷⁴⁴ Paul Hinz, Sermon manuscript on I Peter 2:9, 9 September 1937, Collected Sermons of Paul Hinz, EZA 766/6.

the Jews as racially inferior, unscrupulous, and determined on undermining German society.⁷⁴⁵ Hinz delivered his sermon in the Kolberger Dom on October 10, 1937, and he preached on Revelations 2:8-11, a text that speaks of encouragement and perseverance amid the persecution of Christians by Jews as the two groups became more and more divided. Hinz says, “Since Christ came down to earth and was crucified, the Jews as Jews have ceased to be the people of God, the community of God.”⁷⁴⁶ He continues by arguing that the Jews place trust in “blood and race, in the thought: We have Abraham as our father.”⁷⁴⁷ Hinz’s then repeats a key phrase in the biblical text, that Jews who trust external or material conditions (like blood and race) are a “synagogue of Satan” (*einer Gemeinde des Satans*). One could interpret Hinz’s sermon in two ways: first, as a description of a passage in the Book of Revelations about the persecution of the early Christians, which reflects poorly on Jews of that time (and possibly the present) as focused on externals; or second, as a criticism of those in Nazi Germany who, inspired by racist ideology, persecute Christians in the German churches. It is possible that this text then could appear to some as casting a poor light on ancient (and perhaps contemporary) Jews and Nazis as persecutors of Christians.⁷⁴⁸

The sixth and last anti-Judaic sentiment expressed follows the other five perspectives, the hope for the mass conversion of the Jews, which reflects a belief in the inferiority of Judaism and the Jews’ need for salvation. This view was voiced explicitly

⁷⁴⁵ Evans, *The Third Reich in Power*, 575.

⁷⁴⁶ Paul Hinz, Sermon manuscript on Revelations 2:8-11, 10 October 1937, Collected Sermons of Paul Hinz, EZA 766/6.

⁷⁴⁷ Hinz, Sermon manuscript on Revelations 2:8-11, EZA 766/6.

⁷⁴⁸ Hinz, Sermon manuscript on Revelations 2:8-11, EZA 766/6.

by three pastors, once by Julius Sammetreuther, two times by Karl Barth, and once by Hermann Sasse.⁷⁴⁹ One illustrative example is a sermon by Sammetreuther around the year 1936. By this time in his early fifties, Sammentreuther was an experienced pastor in Munich and also a leading figure in the Confessing Church, having served as a member in its governing council in Munich and as a participant in its synods in Augsburg (1935) and Bad Oeynhausen (1936). The sermon reflects a deep concern for the racial tensions in the German churches and in German society, and Sammetreuther offers a controversial solution to the persecution of the Jews. He explores the meaning of the Christian sacrament of baptism and argues that it is a visible testimony, a means of “delet[ing] all human conditions,” which become irrelevant in the life of the congregation [Gemeinde].⁷⁵⁰ Sammetreuther continues, “Here the baptism of Jews must be talked about in this time, and about the importance of race in the Church.”⁷⁵¹ The Church itself would deny the sacrament if it meant baptizing with distinctions. He contends that the baptism of Jews would resolve the racial tensions in Germany because, in effect, they would cease to exist *as Jews*, and would be converted to Christianity. This is not a new proposal, but it certainly was a controversial one.⁷⁵² Though Sammetreuther’s motive

⁷⁴⁹ See Julius Sammetreuther, *Predigtmeditationen ueber die Altkirchlichen Episteln und die Eisenacher (neuer) Evangelien* (München: Kaiser Verlag, 1936), 112; Karl Barth, *Fürchte Dich nicht! Predigten aus den Jahren 1934 bis 1948* (Chr. Kaiser Verlag München, 1949), 246, 284; and Hermann Sasse, *Zeugnisse: Erlanger Predigten und Vorträge vor Gemeinden 1933-1944*, Herausgegeben von Friedrich Wilhelm Hopf (Erlangen: Martin Luther-Verlag, 1979), 120-124.

⁷⁵⁰ Sammetreuther, *Predigtmeditationen*, 112.

⁷⁵¹ Sammetreuther, *Predigtmeditationen*, 112.

⁷⁵² The idea of the en masse conversions of Jews has been debated periodically in the modern era, both by Christians and Jews. For example, one of Moses Mendelssohn’s most famous pupils, David Friedlaender, published a proposal to Pastor Wilhelm Teller in 1799 about “the possibility of the mass conversion of leading Berlin Jews and their families.” Friedlaender spent years working to see Jews in Germany receive greater equality and freedom, and conversion was considered by some as an acceptable avenue. See Walter Laqueur, *A History of Zionism: From the French Revolution to the Establishment of the State of Israel*

appears to be to ease Jewish persecution in Nazi Germany, his solution is predicated upon the mass conversion of Jews and their willingness to give up their religious distinctiveness. In other words, he counters Nazi racial antisemitism while at the same time affirming the belief in Jewish inferiority.

The conviction that baptism could bring Jews into the Christian community is in stark contrast to the views of many Christians in Nazi Germany, particularly those associated with the German Christian movement. In fact, German-Christians sought to form a people's church founded upon "an organic tie to ethnic and racial Germanness"; and to construct this church, membership was limited to Germans baptized as infants.⁷⁵³ I agree with Bergen's assessment that this "defined the people's church as explicitly antidoctrinal," meaning that any theological or doctrinal considerations must not obstruct the spiritual unity of Germans. Pastors like Sammetreuther who taught their congregations that baptism could make Jews into Christians might expect to be harassed or even brought up on charges – depending on the perspectives of their congregations. One example is Pastor Kübel of Untersteinbach, in the district of Stadtsteinbach, who in the fall of 1938 taught his confirmation class that "Jews and heathens could also become Christians." He was met with the ire of a student who said, "But Pastor, if you pour six buckets of water over the head of a Jew, he's still a Jew."⁷⁵⁴ This reveals that the

(New York: Schocken Books, 2003), 9-11; and Deborah Hertz, *How Jews Became Germans: The History of Conversion and Assimilation in Berlin* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 98-101.

⁷⁵³ Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 11.

⁷⁵⁴ *The Jews in the Secret Nazi Reports on Popular Opinion in Germany, 1933-1945*, edited by Otto Dov Kulka and Eberhard Jäckel, translated by William Templer (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), 390. Remarkably, this same language about "six buckets of water over the head of a Jew" was repeated in another incident on 29 November 1938, concerning one Pastor Schilffarth in Streitberg, who taught the same lesson about the impact of baptism on "Jews and heathens" (397). No explanation is given for the same response used by two (presumably) different students.

historical religious significance of baptism had to contend with widespread racial biases among the German people.

Karl Barth also expresses hope for the conversion of the Jews. He prays at the conclusion of a sermon on Lamentations 3:21-23, given in the last year of the war on 29 October 1944. It is important to note that he delivered this sermon in neutral Switzerland, far from the grasp of the Nazi police apparatus, and thus he had a freedom of expression few of his confessing colleagues enjoyed. Barth connects persecuted Christians in Nazi-occupied Europe with the persecution of Jews, both as the people of God:

We remember especially our afflicted fellow believers in Holland, in Denmark, in Hungary, that they would wish to find comfort and instruction with you again and again.

We remember again and again your people Israel in its persecution and in the even greater need, that it will not recognize you.⁷⁵⁵

This example is very similar to another prayer Barth gave on May 24, 1942. In both he acknowledges that the Jews are the people of God, and yet at the same time prays for their conversion. But this time he expresses the view that the Jews' refusal to convert is the greater need (*der noch grösseren Not*) than the persecution they face. Of course, we cannot argue that Barth knew the details of the Holocaust when he made this statement in Switzerland. Ironically, the prayer reveals his concerns for the Jewish people at this

⁷⁵⁵ Barth, *Fürchte Dich nicht!* 284.

tumultuous time, yet it also demonstrates just how deeply ingrained anti-Judaism was among even the most respected of Confessing Church pastors.

After researching the Gestapo and SD records, as well as other “secret Nazi reports” on the German churches and religious leaders, I found only one occurrence when either agency reported a pastor’s anti-Judaic comments – this was in contrast to the several I found for pastors’ expressions of support or defense of the Jews or Judaism.⁷⁵⁶ Again, as I mentioned in the previous chapter, these Gestapo and SD reports present verbatim quotes by pastors from various confessions, all of which were of concern to the regime for undermining Nazi ideology and values. The indications from the reports are that Gestapo or SD informers, or perhaps agents themselves, attended services to report on problematic religious leaders.⁷⁵⁷ The obvious reason why I could only find one mention of anti-Judaic comments is that anti-Judaic statements were consistent with the Nazi regime’s antisemitic policies, and this would not concern them enough to report the pastors. Nevertheless, I did find one Berlin Gestapo report, dated April 22, 1940, that indicates several pastors gave the impression in their sermons that the Second World War was a punishment from God. Though the report does not indicate the confessional backgrounds of most pastors mentioned, it is helpful in understanding that the regime took note when pastors voiced criticism of the war from the pulpit. One unidentified pastor from Ried commented that the war was God’s punishment, and went so far as to

⁷⁵⁶ Heinz Boberach, ed., *Berichte des SD und der Gestapo über Kirchen und Kirchenvolk in Deutschland 1934-1944* (Mainz: Matthias-Grünwald-Verlag, 1971); and *The Jews in the Secret Nazi Reports on Popular Opinion in Germany, 1933-1945*, edited by Otto Dov Kulka and Eberhard Jäckel, translated from the German by William Templer (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010).

⁷⁵⁷ Richard Bessel, *Nazism and War* (New York: Modern Library, 2004), Kindle edition, location 1190. See also Gellately, *Backing Hitler*.

say, “The West is in for a bloodbath as the world has never seen (!).”⁷⁵⁸ The reporter’s inclusion of the exclamation signals his disbelief that a pastor would say this publicly or that this would be Nazi Germany’s future. Also included in this discussion is the comment of a Dominican priest from Kassel, who said, “The Jewish people did not believe in the messiah and will have to severely atone for it.”⁷⁵⁹ This comment reflects two thousand years of anti-Jewish theology that presented the Jews as a “stubborn” people whom God will punish for their intransigence.⁷⁶⁰ This report indicates that pastors viewed the war, even within the first year, as God’s punishment, yet the objects of God’s punishment varied, including Germans, “the West,” and even the Jewish people.

Beyond this, unfortunately, the reception of these anti-Judaic sentiments is very difficult to gauge. I have found only this one Gestapo report among the published Gestapo and SD records, and I have not found other information about reception in other sermons or diaries by fellow Confessing Church colleagues. The likely reason is that anti-Judaism had long been an aspect of Christianity and thus no one took note when it was expressed. The post-war reflection of Eberhard Bethge – the student and later colleague, close friend, and biographer of Dietrich Bonhoeffer – illuminates the mind-set of German citizens (and not just pastors) under the Nazi regime. In 1989, Bethge gave a talk criticizing the antisemitism of various resistance figures, and he sent a letter to one

⁷⁵⁸ Heinz Boberach, *Berichte des SD und der Gestapo über Kirchen und Kirchenvolk in Deutschland 1934-1944* (Mainz: Matthias-Grünwald-Verlag, 1971), 421.

⁷⁵⁹ Boberach, *Berichte des SD und der Gestapo*, 421.

⁷⁶⁰ Michael, *Holy Hatred*, 16-19.

German critic of his talk. Bethge argued that “the ‘old tradition’ of Christian anti-Judaism had converged with the radical anti-semitism of Nazism.”⁷⁶¹ Bethge writes,

we have simply been long, long blind and – without having been radical anti-Semites – nonetheless we were in our language and consciousness the bearers of unholy potential. I see the problem in that even extraordinary resistance fighters were at the same time still sunk in the kind of language and attitudes whose anti-Jewish content could only be made clear decades after 1945... But the problem... must be seen and must lead to new insights among Christians.⁷⁶²

Bethge speaks of “we” not only to disarm his critics, but to argue the pervasiveness of anti-Judaism even among those who were not “radical anti-Semites.”⁷⁶³

The implications of these beliefs are startling in the context of the German churches in Nazi Germany. To suggest that the Jews are no longer the chosen people of God is to suggest that God is displeased with them and has shown his displeasure by punishments throughout history, even including their persecution by the Nazis.⁷⁶⁴ Even the conscientious Christian would view the persecution of the Jews through this tainted light, complicating his own response to Jewish suffering. Though the evidence is fragmentary, the anti-Judaic comments indicate that some Confessing Church pastors interpreted the present situation of the Jews through a theological lens. Based on their

⁷⁶¹ John W. De Gruchy, *Daring, Trusting Spirit: Bonhoeffer's Friend Eberhard Bethge* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 190.

⁷⁶² Quoted in De Gruchy, *Daring, Trusting Spirit*, 191.

⁷⁶³ De Gruchy, *Daring, Trusting Spirit*, 191.

⁷⁶⁴ Richard Rubenstein, *After Auschwitz: Radical Theology and Contemporary Judaism* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1966), 56, 71. Richard Rubenstein tells of an interview he had with Pastor Heinrich Grüber, leader of Berlin's Grüber Office, who 20 years after the Holocaust told Rubenstein that he believed the mass murder of the Jews was part of God's plan because of his anger with them. See also Michael, *Holy Hatred*, 156.

sermons, their primary concern in relation to the Jewish people was “right belief” and conversion, not their material condition as a people group targeted by the Nazi regime for exclusion from German public life. At the same time, the pastors also used anti-Judaic expressions as a means to criticize the Nazi regime or members of the German Christian movement.

The effects of anti-Judaic theology during the Second World War and the Holocaust have been recorded and studied by historians and philosophers.⁷⁶⁵ Though it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to go into depth about how anti-Judaic theology found expression in actions beyond the pulpit, a few examples will suffice to demonstrate the prevalence of these views. Anti-Judaism, particularly the charge of deicide and the view that God has punished the Jews since the crucifixion of Jesus, likely contributed to Christians remaining silent or even participating in the persecution of the Jews. Irving Greenberg tells the story of a rabbi who asked the archbishop in Slovakia for help in 1942 to prevent the deportation of Jews, to which the archbishop responded:

This is no mere expulsion. You will not die there of hunger and disease. They will slaughter all you there, old and young alike, women and children, at once – it is the punishment that you deserve for the death of our Lord and Redeemer, Jesus Christ.⁷⁶⁶

⁷⁶⁵ See for example Irving Greenberg, “Cloud of Smoke, Pillar of Fire” in *Auschwitz: Beginning of a New Era?* Edited by Eva Fleischner (New York: KTAV, 1997). Also, significant works that have treated the motivations of rescuers, and how they rescued despite anti-Judaic beliefs, include Nechama Tec, *When Light Pierced the Darkness: Christian Rescue of Jews in Nazi-Occupied Europe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); and David Gushee, *Righteous Gentiles of the Holocaust: Genocide and Moral Obligation* (St. Paul: Paragon House, 2003).

⁷⁶⁶ Greenberg, “Cloud of Smoke, Pillar of Fire,” 11-12.

Nechama Tec tells the story of a woman who informed to the Gestapo about her neighbor hiding Jews. After one of the Jewish survivors returned and asked why she betrayed them, the woman answered: “It was not Hitler who killed the Jews. It was God’s will and Hitler was his tool. How could I stand by and be against the will of God.”⁷⁶⁷ Not everyone was as cold and cruel as the archbishop or the ordinary woman on the street, but anti-Judaic theology had been woven into the fabric of Christianity for nineteen hundred years and informed Christian and Jewish relationships ever since. As Tec argues, even Christians engaged in humane acts of rescuing Jews “must have had to cope with their own negative attitudes about the Jews.”⁷⁶⁸ As these examples indicate, belief in God’s curse of the Jews for the rejection and killing of Jesus motivated many to actively persecute the Jews or to stand by silently.

This evidence of anti-Judaism unaccompanied by expressions of racial or social or political antisemitism indicates that pastors preached according to the principles of the “new school” of homiletics led by Barth, Bonhoeffer, and Trillhaas.⁷⁶⁹ On issues concerning the Jews and Judaism, Confessing Church pastors did not discuss their personal opinions or conviction about race, politics, or economics in their sermons (at least as reflected in the surviving manuscripts we have available). They based their remarks about the Jews and Judaism on the biblical text (most often from the New Testament), and their interpretations align neatly with tropes of traditional Christian anti-Judaism. It appears based on this evidence that the “new school” of homiletics

⁷⁶⁷ Tec, *When Light Pierced the Darkness*, 137.

⁷⁶⁸ Tec, *When Light Pierced the Darkness*, 7.

⁷⁶⁹ See my discussion of the “New School” of Homiletics in Chapter 3.

influenced pastors to limit their comments about the Jews and Judaism to what the biblical text reflected. Unfortunately, this did not eliminate anti-Jewish prejudice from the pulpit, but actually gave fuel to the fire. And surprisingly, at the same time, they used anti-Judaic tropes to criticize the Nazi regime. The Church's theology, developed over two millennia, was the problem here, not simply the varieties of racial and political ideologies outside the walls of the Church.

About two-thirds of the sermons that contain anti-Judaic expressions were delivered in 1939 or earlier. This may reflect a growing awareness of the Nazi persecution of the Jews, or merely that once the Second World War began pastors adjusted the content of their sermons. But I find it significant that a pastor such as Niemöller, whose anti-Judaic remarks are often breath-taking in their severity, virtually ceased making such comments in his sermons after his arrest in 1937. Granted, we have many more of his sermons prior to his arrest, but we still have his sermons that he gave in the concentration camp at Dachau. This evidence indicates a change in his thinking about the Jews as their (and his) situation worsened. We can only speculate, but perhaps his new-found perspective as one persecuted gave him empathy for the suffering of the Jews in Nazi Germany; or perhaps he simply did not wish to criticize Jews given their systematic exclusion from German public life. It may well be that the seeds of his famous post-war saying were laid in Dachau:

First they came for the communists, and I didn't speak out because I wasn't a communist. Then they came for the socialists, and I didn't speak out because I wasn't a socialist. Then they came for the trade unionists, and I didn't speak out because I wasn't a trade unionist. Then they came for the Jews, and I didn't speak out because I wasn't a Jew. Then they

came for the Catholics, and I didn't speak out because I wasn't a catholic. Then they came for me, and there was no one left to speak for me.⁷⁷⁰

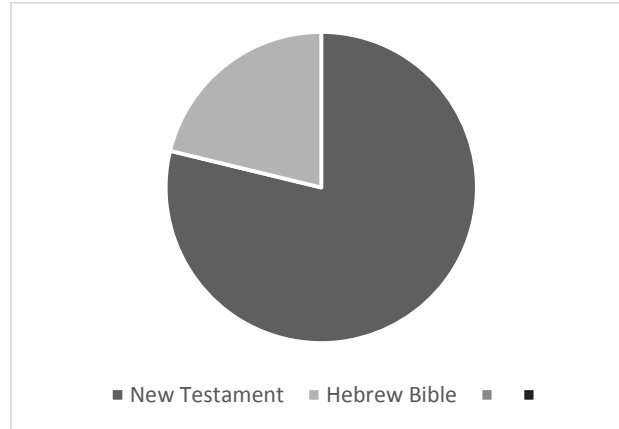
Even so, it was not until after the war that Niemöller and many in the German churches apologized and repented of their anti-Jewish prejudice.⁷⁷¹

Of the 40 sermons that expressed anti-Judaic sentiments, 31 (76%) were based on New Testament texts. Of course, this is no surprise as we are examining Christian churches that base many of their sermons on the New Testament. But it does seem significant that only seven (21%) were based on texts from the Hebrew Bible, especially when four of the seven were delivered by one pastor named Karl von Schwartz. As we will see later, pastors who expressed support for the Jews and Judaism used the Hebrew Bible much more often 47%.

⁷⁷⁰ Niemöller expressed these sentiments in various ways over the years since the Second World War. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum indicates that Niemöller often spoke and lectured extemporaneously; see <http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10007392>.

⁷⁷¹ See Wolfgang Gerlach, *And the Witnesses Were Silent: The Confessing Church and the Persecution of the Jews*, translated and edited by Victoria Barnett (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 226-227; and Matthew Hockenos, *A Church Divided: German Protestants Confront the Nazi Past* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004).

GRAPH 4 – Proportion of New Testament and Hebrew Bible Texts Compared



It might be instructive here to break down the texts used as a basis for these sermons and even for the anti-Judaic sentiments expressed.

<i>New Testament</i>		<i>Hebrew Bible</i>	
Gospels ⁷⁷²	16	Pentateuch ⁷⁷³	3
Paul's Letters ⁷⁷⁴	13	Writings ⁷⁷⁵	2
Late Documents ⁷⁷⁶	2	Prophets ⁷⁷⁷	3

⁷⁷² In more detail, the numbers are as follows: Matthew, 8 times; John, 3 times; Luke, 2 times, and Mark, 1 time.

⁷⁷³ The pastors only used the Pentateuch three times: once for Genesis and twice for Exodus.

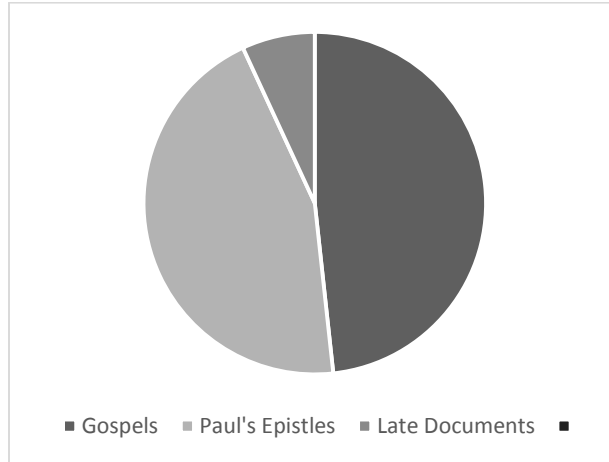
⁷⁷⁴ For the sake of simplicity, I am referring here to the letters most commonly attributed to the Apostle Paul: Romans, 4 times; Ephesians, 3 times; I Corinthians, 1 time; II Corinthians, 3 times; Galatians, 1 time; and Philipians, 1 time.

⁷⁷⁵ The books of the Writings (known as the Kesuvim in the Hebrew Bible) include the Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon, among others. In my findings, the Psalms were used once and the Proverbs once.

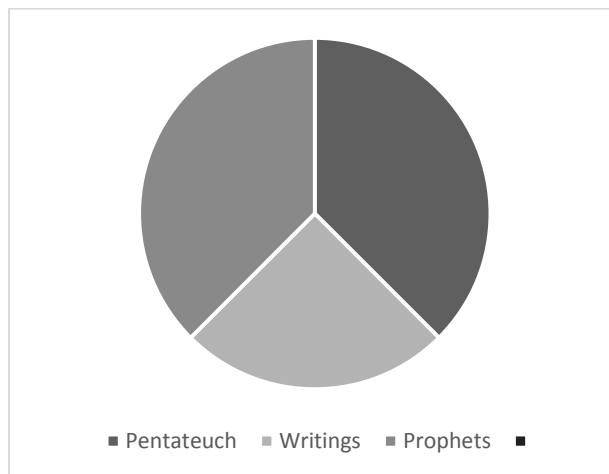
⁷⁷⁶ Very few pastors used later New Testament documents in these sermons: I Peter and Revelations, 1 time each.

⁷⁷⁷ Micah was used once; Lamentations was used once; and Jeremiah was used once as well.

GRAPH 5 – Proportion of New Testament Texts in Sermons



GRAPH 6 – Proportion of Hebrew Bible Texts in Sermons



The texts used most often were from the gospel of Matthew (eight times), which is twice as many as any other text used by the pastors in expressing anti-Judaic sentiments. After examining these texts, the sources used most often as a basis for anti-Judaic statements were those that discussed the conflicts between Jesus and the segments of the Jewish population in Palestine during his ministry (such as the Pharisees, or during his trial and crucifixion). And in the case of Paul's letters, these texts were most often his attempts to

explain the differentiation between Second Temple Judaism and the emergence of the early Christian movements; these texts often reveal conflict between the two groups. In sum, after reviewing the biblical texts used, we can clearly see that certain types of texts served as a springboard for pastors to express anti-Judaic sentiments. And yet ironically, these texts were often used as a basis from which to criticize the Nazi regime and Germans themselves as hard-hearted, obsessed with race and racial purity, and as boasting in their “chosen-ness” by Providence.

Voices of Support for Jews and Judaism from the Pulpit

Though pastors periodically expressed anti-Judaic sentiments from the pulpit, they also expressed views supportive of Jews and Judaism, thus opposing National Socialist ideology and racial policies. Of the 910 sermons I have examined, 40 (4.4%) articulate perspectives that defend Jews or Judaism. The sermons can be grouped according to the following themes: first, the importance of the tradition of Judaism as a foundation for the Christian faith, as well as the need to value and appreciate the Hebrew Bible; second, the conviction that the Jews are the people of God and must be respected as such; third, the view that there is no qualitative difference between Jews and other people groups, and thus they should be treated equally; and fourth, a handful of sermons speak out about the persecution of the Jews. My analysis follows the work of Barnett in arguing the political implications of seemingly non-political expressions.⁷⁷⁸ I will argue in this section that regardless of the pastors’ motivations or intentions, the pastors’

⁷⁷⁸ Victoria Barnett, *For the Soul of the People* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 92.

religiously-based pronouncements in support of Jews and Judaism took on political significance as implicit or explicit criticisms of Nazi ideology and racial policy. Thus, surprisingly, both negative and positive expressions about Jews could serve to criticize the Nazi regime, the German Christian movement, or Germans more generally in Nazi Germany. This reveals the tremendous complexity and ambivalence that characterized the thinking about Jews and their history in Nazi Germany.

I will organize this section as I did the previous section on anti-Judaic perspectives – according to theme. But here I will also include Gestapo and SD reports, as well as various regional government reports, to indicate how the Nazi regime responded to these publically expressed sentiments supporting the Jews and Judaism.⁷⁷⁹ These reports indicate precisely what public comments regime officials might have considered problematic or threatening, at least to the extent that they formally submitted a report. Again, as in the last chapter, my purpose is not to present an exhaustive account of these records, but to illustrate the types of comments that might have raised an eyebrow or caused the Nazi regime concern. These records do not indicate whether the pastors mentioned were members of the Confessing Church or whether the pastors faced any consequences for their remarks. Nor do they provide any commentary about their interpretation of the action itself. Nevertheless, these are the only records we have to indicate which public expressions within the German churches the Nazi dictatorship found objectionable and worthy of concern. While it would be ideal if the records

⁷⁷⁹ See Heinz Boberach, *Berichte des SD und der Gestapo über Kirchen und Kirchenvolk in Deutschland 1934-1944* (Mainz: Matthias-Grünwald-Verlag, 1971); and *The Jews in the Secret Nazi Reports on Popular Opinion in Germany, 1933-1945*, edited by Otto Dov Kulka and Eberhard Jäckel, translated by William Templer (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010).

indicated a pastor's membership in the Confessing Church, we can still gain a good understanding of Nazi objections to pastors' expressions and then compare these to the messages in the Confessing Church sermons we have before us.

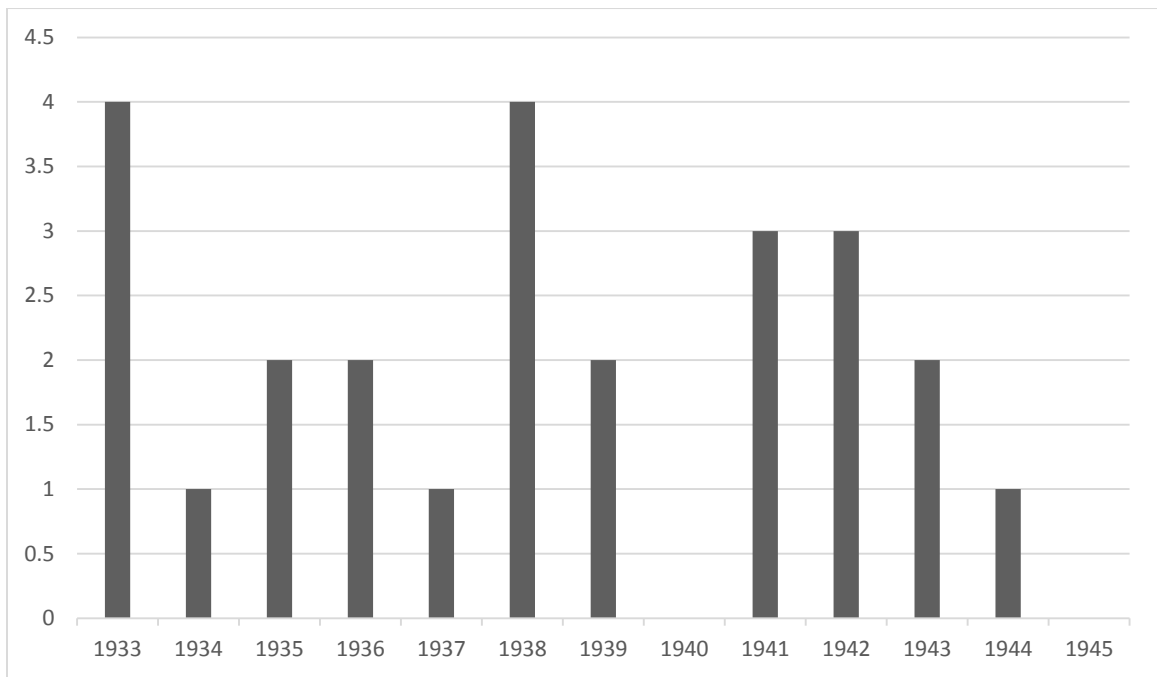
Let us begin by identifying the pastors who expressed support for Jews and Judaism in the Nazi dictatorship. Among the 95 pastors in this study, 20 (21%) of them voiced support:⁷⁸⁰

Karl Barth	4
Dietrich Bonhoeffer	2
Rudolf Bultmann	1
Hermann Diem	1
Bruno Dörhing	2
Johannes Eger	1
Helmut Gollwitzer	2
Heinrich Grüber	1
Hans Wilhelm Hertzberg	1
Hans Iwand	1
Julius von Jan	1
Köster	1
Hanns Lilje	2
Paul Hinz	3
Martin Niemöller	2
Julius Sammentreuther	4
Hermann Sasse	3
Karl von Schwartz	7
Eduard Thurneysen	1
Heinrich Vogel	1

⁷⁸⁰ The precise dates of the sermons for Eger, Sammentreuther, Dörhing, Schwartz, Köster, and Lilje, are unknown, though they took place between 1933 and the end of World War II.

These pastors preached a total of 40 expressions of support for Jews and Judaism in Nazi Germany. The breakdown by year is as follows, for the 25 precise dates that I can identify.

GRAPH 7 – Expressions of Support for Jews from the Pulpit



Each year the range remains largely between one and four expressions per year, with 1940 and 1945 being the exceptions. Again, this graph represents only 25 of the known precise dates for the 40 total sermons.

The first theme in our discussion of sermons that support the Jews and Judaism, and the most elemental to establishing a connection between Christians and Jews past and present, is that Judaism is the foundation of Christianity and, as such, Christians should value and appreciate the Hebrew Bible. This theme occurs 9 times in these 40 sermons.

By discussing a few of these sermons in detail we can discern the purpose and meaning of these expressions.

One example of these sermons is by Pastor Hans Herzberg of Caldern, who discusses the intimate connection between Christianity's Jewish and Apostolic roots. He preached a sermon on Ephesians 2:19-20, on June 4, 1933, a mere five months after Hitler's rise to power in Nazi Germany. This early date is important as the Nazi dictatorship was still implementing its oppressive police apparatus, leaving more room for public figures like Herzberg to express opposition to Nazi values.⁷⁸¹ Placing himself in the thick of the Protestant debate about the role of the Hebrew Bible in the Christian tradition, he states,

God as the lord of the house [*Hausherr*] has also laid the foundation of the house: 'Built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets'; the prophets of the Old Testament, and the apostles of the New... The book from which [the Church] hears the Word of God every Sunday, and in your houses has the place of honor, and around which the school children gather: this book is the foundation of the Church... There are many people in the Christian Church who want to apply the apostles, but not the prophets, the New but not the Old Testament to the foundation of the Church; and one understands in our day, that it may rather annoy some German countryman to see that the Jewish people were the people of the Bible. And yet we cannot correct the ways of God. His kingdom has not just fallen from heaven. Before there were apostles, prophets have had to pave the way. From both together, from apostles and prophets, from the New and the Old, God has built his Church.⁷⁸²

⁷⁸¹ Thanks to Frank Biess for this helpful and important insight.

⁷⁸² *Dein Wort ist deiner Kirch Schutz*, ed, Karl Kampffmeyer (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1934), 54.

Hertzberg contends that the Bible, of Jewish and Christian origins, has a treasured and foundational place in German society – not only important to churches, but in homes and schools. Furthermore, he makes an historical argument about the foundation of the Church, an institution that emerged from the religious and social context of the Jewish people. Hertzberg acknowledges that some may be “annoyed” that Jews and Judaism are intimately connected to the Christian tradition, but he does not give in to their reasoning for abandoning them. His logic is uncompromising: according to the Hebrew Bible, God entered into covenant (a sacred pact) with the Hebrews; the Hebrew Bible is the record of this interaction; and therefore the Hebrew Bible is an integral source for understanding the character and work of this God, and as such, Christians must maintain its legitimacy in the canon.

Likewise, the Erlangen pastor Hermann Sasse preached a sermon on November 29, 1936, on Hebrews 10:19-25, a message of perseverance in difficult times and hope in God’s promises. In his discussion of the biblical text, Sasse comments on the debate between the Confessing Church and the German Christian movement over the value of the Hebrew Bible to the modern German churches. He admits the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament are quite different, but they are united in message. He argues,

For the difference between the Old and New Testaments is certainly great. It is as great as the difference between the words of the prophets and the proclamation of the apostles, between the promise of the Messiah and the incarnation of the eternal Son of God. But no one can tear apart the two parts of scripture without destroying them completely. Whoever rejects the Old Testament – as our epistle [Hebrews] shows – also destroys the New Testament.

That is what is announced today in the streets and markets about the Old Testament and of the God of the Old Testament – blasphemy must have the consequences that all blasphemy has.⁷⁸³

Sasse's comments indicate that the debate between pastors in the German Christian movement and the Confessing Church over the value and use of the Hebrew Bible has not lost its intensity since the three years it started. It is also evidence that pastors were willing to publically condemn the anti-Judaic (and anti-Christian) argument that sought to sever Christianity from its roots in Judaism.

In a final example, the Lutheran pastor and theologian Hans Iwand of the Marienkirche in Dortmund, delivered a sermon focusing on the theme of Christianity's foundation in Judaism on August 2, 1941, just a couple months after the Nazis began the invasion of Russia earlier that summer. Up to this time, Hitler and the Nazi regime had not developed a clear and consistent policy concerning European Jewry, yet the war against Russia proved a turning point.⁷⁸⁴ As the Wehrmacht conquered new territory, the Einsatzgruppen of the SS followed and massacred Jews and Soviet "commissars" and on an unprecedented scale.⁷⁸⁵ By August 1941, hundreds of thousands of Jews had been massacred by Nazi forces and their allies in Lithuania, the Ukraine, Bialystok, Romania,

⁷⁸³ Sasse, *Zeugnisse*, 26-27.

⁷⁸⁴ See Karl Schleunes, *The Twisted Road to Auschwitz: Nazi Policy toward German Jews 1933-1939* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1990); Christopher Browning, with contributions by Jürgen Matthäus, *The Origins of the Final Solution: The Evolution of Nazi Jewish Policy, September 1939-March 1942* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska, 2004); and Ian Kershaw, *Hitler, the Germans, and the Final Solution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).

⁷⁸⁵ See Browning, *Origins of the Final Solution*, 252-63; Lucy Dawidowicz, *The War Against the Jews, 1933-1945* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1975), 125-140; Saul Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews: The Years of Extermination, 1939-1945* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2008), 207-225; and Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, 2010), 126-127, 182-200.

Belorussia, and the Soviet Union, among other war zones.⁷⁸⁶ It is possible that Iwand had not heard news of the Jewish massacres in the war zones, but he had to be aware of anti-Jewish policies closer to home: the expulsion of Jews from public and professional life was long underway, the “Aryanization” of Jewish property and businesses increased since 1937 and 1938, and the ghettoization of Polish Jews began shortly after the start of World War II.⁷⁸⁷ And after the Nazi invasion of Poland in September 1939, Jews throughout Europe would be systematically labeled with a yellow Star of David and thus targeted for persecution.

Iwand himself was particularly sensitive to the problem of Nazi persecution of Christians of Jewish descent. The Nazi regime classified his wife Ilse as *Mischling* first class, meaning that she had two grandparents of the Jewish faith.⁷⁸⁸ Iwand’s sermon affirms that the source of the gospel comes from Israel, and argues that a denial of this fact is at best ignorance. Commenting on Galatians 1:10-24, a text in which the Apostle Paul discusses the source of his revelation, Iwand argues,

Do you think you could perhaps go back on the wide strand of the gospel and you could then visit to where the source comes, and you could discover that the source comes from a land, and you could discover that the source comes from a land that is Jewish, and then you come to God

⁷⁸⁶ Deborah Dwork and Robert Jan van Pelt, *Holocaust: A History* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2002), 266-278.

⁷⁸⁷ The earliest rumors of mass killings of Jews are found as early as autumn 1941, though by mid-1942 rumors circulated far and wide and reports were even broadcast by the BBC by autumn 1942. See *Ian Kershaw, Hitler, The Germans, and the Final Solution* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 142; and also Walter Laqueur, *The Terrible Secret: Suppression of the Truth about Hitler’s “Final Solution”* (New York: Little Brown & Co., 1981).

⁷⁸⁸ Dr. F.W. Arnold. Report of the Kirchliche Hilfsstelle für evangelische Nichtarier (Büro Pfarrer Grüber. 21 December 1938. Nichtarische Geistliche Kirchengemeindebeamte, Gemeindevertreter usw., von Oktober 1933 bis Dezember 1952. EZA 7/1952

and say, Is the source something dirty, as there is a spirit that we must bring out?

Ah, how foolish! Have you not realized that this source is from above?⁷⁸⁹

Iwand challenges the perspective of Christians like those in the German Christian movement who devalue the Hebrew Bible and Judaism because they fail to appreciate the relationship between Christianity and Judaism.⁷⁹⁰ They cannot acknowledge the debt that Christianity owes to Judaism. For Confessing Church pastors like Iwand, this is a failure to understand where revelation ultimately comes, and that is, as Paul affirms, “from above.”

A common element in the nine sermons that intimately connects the traditions and spirituality of Judaism to the Christian faith is the assertion that the Hebrew Bible is a source or foundation of Christianity, and that without it Christianity loses its viability. To elucidate this further, without the Hebrew Bible one could not make sense of Jesus’ spirituality, his sense of mission, his religious debates with his interlocutors (such as the Pharisees and Sadducees), how the early Jesus movement interpreted his death and reported resurrection, or how the early churches explained the appeal of the gospel message to the non-Jewish population across the Mediterranean. These sermons represent a stake in the ground for the Confessing Church, as represented in the Barmen Declaration and the arguments of the “new school” of homiletics, that the Hebrew Bible must not be divorced from the New Testament – the two together form the Christian

⁷⁸⁹ Hans Joachim Iwand, *Nachgelassene Werke, Dritter Band* (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1963), 92.

⁷⁹⁰ See Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 26-27.

biblical texts.⁷⁹¹ In this sense, the Confessing Church pastors stand in stark contrast to members of the German Christian movement and Nazi supporters who condemned the Hebrew Bible as immoral, as a thoroughly “Jewish book,” as “un-German,” and inconsonant with “Aryan” morality.⁷⁹² As Alon Confino argues, Hitler and the Nazis wished to create a wholly new Nazi civilization and a new form of Christianity, and to do this, “Jewish civilization had to be removed.”⁷⁹³ Even more, “Germany’s historical origins needed to be purified down the Jews’ shared past with Christianity via the canonical text.”⁷⁹⁴ This explains why thugs on the pogrom of November 9-10, 1938, not only torched synagogues, but also Torah scrolls, the Hebrew Bible.⁷⁹⁵

The sermons that support the inclusion of Judaism and Jews in the Christian tradition were oppositional to the Nazi regime in the sense that they refused to exclude Judaism and the Jews from religious space – not just the German churches but the realm of individual spirituality. The pastors who voiced these expressions of support and defense did so in the context of increasing Jewish exclusion from German public life, yet they said publicly that Jews and Judaism must not be excluded from the Christian tradition. The pastors’ stance of inclusion caught the attention of the regime, as we will see.

⁷⁹¹ See Arthur Cochrane, *The Church’s Confession under Hitler* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1967), 184-185. Given the many anti-Judaic statements cited in the previous section, we must be careful not to overstate their valuation of the Hebrew Bible or Judaism, both of which they understood were superseded by the New Testament and Christianity. See Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 234; and Carroll, *Constantine’s Sword*, 38, 568.

⁷⁹² Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 144.

⁷⁹³ Alon Confino, *A World without Jews: The Nazi Imagination from Persecution to Genocide* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014), 5.

⁷⁹⁴ Confino, *A World without Jews*, 5.

⁷⁹⁵ Confino, *A World without Jews*, 1-3.

We know from Gestapo and SD reports that the Nazi regime was concerned when pastors defended Judaism and the Hebrew Bible from the pulpit. It is not mentioned whether or not the pastors were Confessing Church members. A few examples will demonstrate this concern. Recalling a Gestapo report that I mentioned in the previous chapter, Pastor Ulrich of Prenzlau gave a sermon on January 1, 1934, and lamented the paganization of Christianity in the one year since the establishment of the Nazi dictatorship.⁷⁹⁶ Ulrich drew a connection between the Christ whom the Nazis “forgot” and how the Jews were denied full participation in German life.

Man idolizes today great men who have achieved much, but the Christ who let himself be nailed to the cross, whom one forgets, he is no longer considered. Jesus Christ was also a Jew, yes indeed, but the faith teaches: Go into the world and make disciples of all the peoples, etc. If a Jew cannot be a German, so can he very well – and I stress this explicitly – be a good Christian.⁷⁹⁷

This statement not only condemns Nazi ideology and those who “forgot” Christ, but at the same time it connects all individuals who desire to be Christian, in one Christian community, regardless of nationality or culture. Ulrich’s emphasis on this point reflects the oppression that Christians of Jewish descent faced in Germany. By January 1, 1934, nearly one year after Hitler and the Nazis had come to power, the Jews suffered riots at the hands of the SA, a Nazi-sponsored boycott of all Jewish shops, the passage of the Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service banning Jews from civil service,

⁷⁹⁶ Gestapo Report on Pastor Ulrich: “Staatsfeindliches Verhalten evangelischer Geistlicher, v.a. der Bekennenden Kirche, 1934-1935,” Papers of the Reichssicherheitshauptamt, BA R58/5679.

⁷⁹⁷ Gestapo Report on Pastor Ulrich: “Staatsfeindliches Verhalten evangelischer Geistlicher, v.a. der Bekennenden Kirche, 1934-1935,” Papers of the Reichssicherheitshauptamt, BA R58/5679.

the restrictions on Jewish enrollment in German schools and universities in April, the prohibition of Jewish rituals for the slaughter of animals to keep kosher in April, among other anti-Jewish measures. Ulrich's statement caught the attention of the Gestapo because he claims Jews can be good Christians, even if the Nazis declare they cannot even be good Germans. For the Christian listening closely to Ulrich, one gets the message that German identity is less important than Christian identity. Statements such as these clearly caught the attention of the Gestapo as public expression of opposition to National Socialism.

Another Gestapo report mentions a Pastor Schäfer (first name unknown) from Greetsiel who made a similar assertion nearly a month later. Schäfer publicly repudiated the Aryan Paragraph saying, "the Jews are [God's] people as we are. Jesus and his Apostles had been Jews themselves."⁷⁹⁸ The parish council, which was composed of National Socialists, later deposed Schäfer from his seat on the council because of such remarks.⁷⁹⁹ In both of these reports, the pastors made critical comments about the Nazi regime: first, the deification of Germany's leadership (though Hitler was not named); and second, the Jews are the people of God. The main concern of both pastors appears to be the threat posed by the Nazi regime and members of the German Christian movement to traditional Christianity.

One community in the town of Heidenheim took umbrage at one Deacon Kübler who said in a sermon that church meetings should "leave the Jews and the pastors in

⁷⁹⁸ Gestapo Report on Pastor Schäfer: "Staatsfeindliches Verhalten evangelischer Geistlicher, v.a. der Bekennenden Kirche, 1934-1935," Papers of the Reichssicherheitshauptamt, BA R58/5679.

⁷⁹⁹ Gestapo Report on Pastor Schäfer: "Staatsfeindliches Verhalten evangelischer Geistlicher, v.a. der Bekennenden Kirche, 1934-1935," Papers of the Reichssicherheitshauptamt, BA R58/5679.

peace.”⁸⁰⁰ Remarkably, Jews and pastors are included together in this persecuted group. A report from the district governor of Upper and Central Franconia, dated July 1936, states that Kübler “always had some very favorable words for the Jews, and [he] attacks National Socialism because of its position on the Jews.”⁸⁰¹ Even more, Kübler speaks both openly and “in a disguised manner” about his views of Jews and the churches in Nazi Germany.⁸⁰² This man apparently had no fears about speaking his mind about Jews to his congregation. The report does not give any indication about any measures taken against Kübler or any charges brought against him.

Finally, an SD “Special Report” written in March 1935 describes an incident in Berlin-Wilmersdorf in which Pastor Lindenmeyer (no first name given) made an “anti-state sentiment” in a flyer.⁸⁰³ Lindenmeyer wrote, “What is the issue in the Church Struggle? ... If it has however pleased God to reveal himself in the Jewish people, so should it also please us, that salvation is not of the Aryans, but as Christ says, is of the Jews.”⁸⁰⁴ The report does not comment on their interpretation of this flyer, nor does it say what happened, if anything, to Pastor Lindenmeyer.⁸⁰⁵ But it indicates that the SD did pay attention to pastors like Lindenmeyer who criticized Nazi ideology while at the same time affirming the Jews as a favored people of God.

⁸⁰⁰ Kulka and Jäckel, *The Jews in the Secret Nazi Reports*, 211.

⁸⁰¹ Kulka and Jäckel, *The Jews in the Secret Nazi Reports*, 211.

⁸⁰² Kulka and Jäckel, *The Jews in the Secret Nazi Reports*, 211.

⁸⁰³ Unfortunately, I have not been able to find any other information about Pastor Lindenmeyer.

⁸⁰⁴ Boberach, *Berichte des SD und der Gestapo*, 77.

⁸⁰⁵ Unfortunately, the SD and Gestapo reports provide very little biographical information to cross check with other sources, oftentimes mentioning only the last name of the pastor and the nature of the incident.

Why would the Nazi regime have been concerned with such statements? This is a religious statement of faith that does not explicitly advocate active resistance to the Nazi regime, whether that be in the form of protests or violent confrontation or even unifying with Jews in a common cause. But the implications were troubling to the Nazi regime, as evidenced in the inclusion of this statement in the SD “Special Report.” The statement directly undermines two pillars of Nazi ideology: first, that salvation is of the “Aryans” and, presumably, the Aryan “savior,” Adolf Hitler; and second, that the Jews are a peril to Germany, as a source of decay and destruction. The implication of statements like Lindenmeyer’s is that Christians in good faith cannot join hands with Nazis and this anti-Christian ideology. The Gestapo and SD took notice of these sermons as evidence that the German churches are sites in German society where pastors could publically express anti-Nazi ideas and pro-Jewish sentiment. My analysis confirms the research of historians such as Hoffmann, Kershaw, and Kirk, that the German churches were the only institutions in Germany able to withstand Nazi “coordination” to the regime and its values, thus giving them a modicum of freedom to criticize the Nazi regime and its ideology.⁸⁰⁶ These Gestapo and SD reports reveal just how concerned the Nazi regime was with this freedom.

The second major theme in these 40 sermons that support or defend the Jews and Judaism is the expression that the Jews are the chosen people of God, the people whom God has chosen to enter into covenant with and to preserve his revelation. This is the

⁸⁰⁶ See Peter Hoffmann, *The History of German Resistance, 1933-1945, Third Edition*, translated by Richard Barry (Ithaca, NY: McGill-Queen’s university Press, 1996), 13; Ian Kershaw, *Hitler, the Germans, and the Final Solution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 166; and Tim Kirk, *Nazi Germany* (New York: Palgrave, 2007), 108.

most common theme in these 40 sermons, occurring 18 times. The expressions could be concise, straightforward statements that the Jews are the special people of God. For example, Barth's sermon on Ephesians 1:8, delivered from the security and safety of Switzerland on May 24, 1942, concludes with a prayer for "the Gentiles who are waiting for your [God's] word, and *your people Israel*, that they recognize their king [emphasis added]."⁸⁰⁷ Barth offers no elaboration or theological explanation, only the prayer. The prayer is ambivalent about Jews: on the one hand, Barth recognizes the Jews as God's people, which the Nazis and pro-Nazi members of the German Christian movement deny outright; but on the other hand, he is praying not for their safety or freedom, but for their conversion.

There are also the examples of short, merely descriptive expressions by Karl von Schwartz, the cathedral pastor of Braunschweig and also the provost of the St. Marienberg monastery. He often refers to the Jews as a "chosen" or "special" people of God. I counted five different sermons in which he deliberately pointed out the chosenness of the Jewish people, which is more than any other single pastor.⁸⁰⁸ Interestingly, these sermons were part of a collection published by Hellmuth Wollermann's *Verlagsbuchhandlung* in Braunschweig in late 1933 (though some may have been preached earlier). The unusual characteristic of this collection is that the sermons were based on Hebrew Bible texts. Clearly, Schwartz believed that Christians needed to become more acquainted with the Hebrew Bible and the Jews as the people of God.

⁸⁰⁷ Karl Barth, *Fürchte dich nicht! Predigten aus den Jahren 1934 bis 1948* (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1949), 246.

⁸⁰⁸ See Karl von Schwarz, *Gottes Wort an Gottes Volk, Ein Jahrgang Predigten* (Braunschweig: Hellmuth WollermannVerlagsbuchhandlung, 1933).

There are many cases where a pastor makes a theological point relating to the chosen-ness of the Jewish people and at the same time about Christians as a new chosen people. In a sermon entitled “I am the Lord,” delivered between 1933 and 1935 by either Barth or the Swiss Reformed pastor Eduard Thurneysen of Basel, a frequent collaborator with Barth and fellow advocate of dialectical theology.⁸⁰⁹ The pastor preaches on Psalm 37:5, which states, “Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him, and he will act.” The sermon emphasizes the need for humility and repentance in order for the individual to recognize that God is the Lord of life. The author argues that all of humankind are transgressors, just as ancient Israel was before God when Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the law of God – “Israel is a people of sinners, with this same rupture in its conscience, yet a holy people of God.”⁸¹⁰ The people of Israel are not singled out as sinners, but as a model for all humanity confronted with the righteousness of God. “[God] confronts them, holy, wrathful, awful. Because He loves them, and in order that they may in turn love Him and recognize this: ‘I am the Lord!’”⁸¹¹ The Jews are presented as God’s chosen people, whom he loves and also chastises. The author wishes to convey the same message to his Christian listeners, that as God’s adopted people Christians must follow the example of Israel, their predecessors, to turn from wickedness or face God’s chastisement.

⁸⁰⁹ See my discussion of dialectical theology in Chapter 3. The author of this sermon is not named, but the sermon is included in a collection of sermons that were preached by Karl Barth and Eduard Thurneysen. Barth and Thurneysen collaborated on the series *Theological Existence Today*, a series of pamphlets in the 1930s that advanced dialectical theology, often giving exposure to the work and concerns of Confessing Church pastors.

⁸¹⁰ Karl Barth and Eduard Thurneysen, *God’s Search for Man*, Translated by George W. Richards, Elmer Homrighausen, and Karl Ernst (New York: T&T Clark, 1935), 58

⁸¹¹ Barth, *God’s Search for Man*, 59.

Another similar example is from an anonymous Confessing Church pastor who preached on the theme of “falling away” from God on July 10, 1942. The sermon was delivered a mere six months after the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor and after Hitler subsequently declared war on the United States. The sermon was delivered at the start of a period of mass bombing raids by hundreds of British bombers against German cities, Lübeck being the first on the night of March 28-9, 1942, to be followed by Cologne on May 30th.⁸¹² Using Deuteronomy 4:25-31 as a base text, the pastor reflects on the story of the Hebrews falling away from God in the wilderness to serve other gods, but he uses this as an analogy for all people, not just Jews. The Jews are an example for humanity. He says, “Even before the people of Israel occupies the Promised Land, God already knows that they will fall away and will serve other gods of the land.”⁸¹³ But God is patient, the pastor says, allowing his children to fall, and he comes to them when they cry out and seek help. The pastor connects the “fallen-ness” of the Jews and that of the Germans: both of whom, it is understood, have suffered (or are suffering) for their waywardness. The Jews have suffered as a stateless nation of millennia, and their suffering had reached an apex under the Nazi regime. As I will discuss in detail shortly, massacres and atrocities against Jews during World War II was an “open secret” among German adults, especially among those in professions, such as the clergy, that fostered connections between peoples of different backgrounds and professions.⁸¹⁴ It is likely that

⁸¹² See Evans, *The Third Reich at War*, 438-441.

⁸¹³ Anonymous, Sermon manuscript on Deuteronomy 4:25-31, 28-29 March 1942, EZA 50/424.

⁸¹⁴ Among the best works on the knowledge of atrocities and massacres against Jews during World War II include: Walter Laqueur, *The Terrible Secret: An Investigation into the Suppression of Information about Hitler's "Final Solution"* (London, 1980); Hans Mommsen, “What did the Germans Know about the Genocide of the Jews?” in Walter H. Pehle, ed., *November 1938: From 'Kristallnacht' to Genocide* (New York: Berg, 1991), 187-221; David Bankier, *The Germans and the Final Solution: Public Opinion Under*

this pastor knew of the massacres of Jews, just as he likely knew of the Allied bombing of German cities. According to the pastor, this suffering is a consequence of “falling away.”

And yet the pastor speaks of a promise that God, “the merciful father... will not leave us, nor destroy us, He cannot forget that he has made a covenant with us, when we were baptized into his name...”⁸¹⁵ This sermon offers a theological criticism of the German people for “falling away.” He does not state who specifically has fallen away – all the people, a segment of the people, the regime, the churches – or how they have fallen away, but he does offer hope that God is merciful and faithful to his covenant. It is impossible to tell from the sermon whether the pastor is criticizing the German people for any “sin” in particular – this vague reference must be interpreted by the congregant. At the same time the pastor connects the Germans and Jews together as people who have “fallen away,” thus having a similar history. Placing “Jews” and “Germans” in the same category as “fallen away” constitutes a criticism in itself. The Jews and Germans are two peoples whom the pastor believes – at some historical point – have fallen away from God, and in his way the two are connected in the history of God’s redemptive work. The pastor does not comment about whether or not the Jews are still a “fallen” people, but the important point here is that he recognizes that “God cannot forget that he has made a

Nazism (London, 1992); Hans Mommsen and Volker Ullrich, “Wir haben nichts gewusst’: Ein deutsches Trauma,” 1999 4 (1991): 11-46; Eric A. Johnson and Karl-Heinz Reuband, *What We Knew: Terror, Mass Murder, and Everyday Life in Nazi Germany, An Oral History* (Cambridge, MA: Basic Books, 2005); and Frank Bajohr and Dieter Pohl, *Der Holocaust als offenes Geheimnis: Die Deutschen, die NS-Führung und die Alliierten* (München: C.H. Beck, 2006).

⁸¹⁵ Anonymous, Sermon manuscript on Deuteronomy 4:25-31, 28-29 March 1942, EZA 50/424.

covenant with” his people. If this is true, the Christian must honor and respect God’s covenant and relationship with the Jewish people.

Just because an author asserts that the Jews are the people of God does not mean that their sermons remain free from anti-Judaic views. One interesting example is from Pastor Köster from Berlin. Sometime between 1937 and 1944, he preached on Luke 1:39-56, Mary’s visitation to Elizabeth and her subsequent song of praise to God. In this sermon Köster affirms that in Christ, God has kept his covenant with his “chosen people.” But history changed with the advent of Christ, Köster asserts: with Christ “salvation will go out to all peoples of the earth.”⁸¹⁶ His critique of the Jewish people starts here. Elizabeth is an older, barren wife who represents the “over-aged” and “unfruitful” people of Israel. She carries in her womb the last great prophet of the people, John the Baptist. Köster draws a parallel between the aged and barren Elizabeth and Israel, both of whom are about to give birth to new offspring that will carry the world into a new era. He argues that through Jesus God can breathe new life and the power of salvation into all people.⁸¹⁷ This interpretation of Luke’s gospel supports the perception of the Jews as the people of God but presents them as an infirm or even corrupted people. This may certainly be used to sustain a supersessionist view of Christianity over Judaism. This example demonstrates just how ambivalent and confusing some of these sermons may have sounded to congregants sitting in the pews.

⁸¹⁶ Pastor Köster (first name unknown), Sermon manuscript on Luke 1:39-56, Dated between 1937 and 1944, EZA 50/424.

⁸¹⁷ Pastor Köster (first name unknown), Sermon manuscript on Luke 1:39-56, Dated between 1937 and 1944, EZA 50/424.

Despite the anti-Judaic elements in these sermons, they reveal a common perception among Confessing Church pastors of the Jews as the people of God. And as we will see, this positive view of the Jews – that they are blessed and special – aroused the concern of the Nazi regime because it blatantly undermined Nazi racial ideology. It is incongruous to assert that the Jews are blessed and special and at the same time that they are a pernicious and destructive people. Even those sermons that speak of the Jews as a “fallen” people still connect them to God’s covenant as his people. At the very least this language of the Jews as God’s people would have associated them as God’s favored people, contrary to Nazi claims of Aryan superiority and chosen-ness.

Gestapo and SD reports give us insight into the Nazi regime’s reception of these public pronouncements by Confessing Church pastors that the Jews are the chosen people of God. A brief Gestapo report on January 17, 1934, tells of Pastor Preising from Helsen, who raised eyebrows in a Bible study saying, “All salvation comes from the Jews” (this sentence is underlined in the original report).⁸¹⁸ This assertion about the Jews is the only one recorded in this report and apparently, the main reason the Gestapo took notice of him. Pastor Preising publically affirmed the chosen-ness of the Jewish people and that they are a source of blessing, not destruction as the Nazis declare.

Another Gestapo report from Berlin on December 1, 1939, relates that a Confessing Church pastor by the name of Eberle in Hundsbach (in the district of Kreuznach) was arrested because he said this in a sermon:

⁸¹⁸ Gestapo Report on Pastor Preising: “Staatsfeindliches Verhalten evangelischer Geistlicher, v.a. der Bekennenden Kirche, 1934-1935,” Papers of the Reichssicherheitshauptamt, BA R58/5679.

The need and misery which the German people in this moment have to go through outwardly, does not at all compare with the need and the struggle that the Protestant Church has [to go through] to survive. The God of our Church is the Jewish God of Jacob, to whom I confess... In 1932, I stood in Saarbrücken together with 3000 faithful Protestants. Since that time, more and more are falling away from the Protestant faith.⁸¹⁹

This report is unique because it reports a rare instance, as far as I have been able to uncover, of the Nazi regime actually arresting a pastor solely due to the content of a sermon. But what is more, the “offensive” remarks were not about Hitler or the Nazi leadership per se; instead, the pastor was arrested for publicly acknowledging that the Christian God is the Jewish God and that Christianity is in decline in the Third Reich. The offense was in identifying the Jewish God as the Christian God, and that indeed Christianity owes much to Judaism. The assertion that Christians and Jews have the same God closely binds the two together as God’s people, and this contradicts Nazi racial ideology that denigrates Jews as inferior human beings.

In a final example, a Gestapo report from the city of Hannover on January 26, 1934, gives an account of a sermon by Pastor Grotjahn in the town of Hary, in which he asserted that the Jews were the special people of God and that Jesus must be understood in a Jewish context. But in asserting that the Jews are the chosen of God, he warns his fellow Germans that one must not “push racial idolization” like the Jews lest he face the same divine chastisement. The report quotes Grotjahn as saying,

The cradle of Jesus stood in the middle of the Jewish people; the Jewish people was highly regarded by God... It is not good when a people push racial idolization (*Rassenvergötzung*), because even the Jewish people

⁸¹⁹ Boberach, *Berichte des SD und der Gestapo*, 376.

have pushed racial idolization, and were therefore scattered by God to the four winds. The Nordic people [*Das noridsche Volk*] should not believe and think that they were preferred by God the Father, no, God is for all peoples the father and almighty.⁸²⁰

The example demonstrates the common occurrence of a pastor defending the Jewish foundation of Christianity and the Jewish-ness of Jesus, yet at the same time criticizing the Jews along anti-Judaic themes. In this case, the pastor criticizes the Jews for what he interprets as their racial exclusiveness, or in other words, their “chosen-ness,” and offers as “proof” of divine punishment in the Jewish diaspora. This alone likely did not catch the attention of the Gestapo, but rather the assertion that the “Nordic people” were not the favored, or “chosen,” of God, thus undermining the Nazi claim to the racial superiority of the “Aryan” race. Pastor Grotjahn remarkably uses an anti-Judaic trope (God’s punishment of the Jews) to criticize the Nazis for the same crime the Jews supposedly committed, and that is “racial idolization.”

This sense of religious connection, of a shared spiritual tradition, is particularly important in informing one’s moral choices. David Gushee’s *Righteous Gentiles of the Holocaust* argues that among those who rescued Jews during the Holocaust, the most commonly cited religious reason for intervention was “a strong sense of religious kinship with Jews as a people.”⁸²¹ He provides numerous examples of men and women who had

⁸²⁰ Gestapo Report on Pastor Grotjahn: “Staatsfeindliches Verhalten evangelischer Geistlicher, v.a. der Bekennenden Kirche, 1934-1935,” Papers of the Reichssicherheitshauptamt, BA R58/5679.

⁸²¹ Gushee, *Righteous Gentiles*, Kindle edition, location 2807. Gushee’s analysis relies on rescuer primary sources, such as autobiographies and letters, and also on rescuer research. See Lawrence Baron, “The Holocaust and Human Decency,” in *Humbolt Journal of Social Science*, vol. 13, no. ½, Humbolt University, 1986; Helen Fein, *Accounting for Genocide* (New York: Free Press, 1979); Donald Dietrich, *Catholic Citizens of the Third Reich* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1988); Samuel Oliner and Pearl Oliner, *The Altruistic Personality: Rescuers of Jews in Nazi Europe* (New York: Free Press, 1988); Peter Hellman, *Avenue of the Righteous*; Michael D. Ryan, ed. *Human Responses to the Holocaust* (New

been taught in their churches that Christians ought to have gratitude for the Jews as the people who gave the world Jesus Christ, his mother Mary, the apostles, and the all the prophets of Israel.⁸²² Thus, the Jewish people are integral to the story of Christianity from its very beginning. In one particular case, Dutch leaders of Protestant denominations protested the dismissal of Jewish civil servants based on the fact that Jesus was born of the Jewish people.⁸²³ In some churches, Jews were not called “Christ-killers”; they were not singled out in this way, because the sins of all humanity crucified Christ.⁸²⁴ No one people group is more responsible than another. At the same time, many Christians gave serious thought to what it meant to be the “chosen” people of God. If God chose them, they could not be “un-chosen” – God’s covenant with them must remain intact.⁸²⁵ This theme runs particularly strong in the Calvinist tradition, following the Frenchman John Calvin who argued that “God’s purpose of election” continues with the Jews, despite the “adoption” of Christians into God’s covenant.⁸²⁶ Unfortunately, these 40 sermons represent only 4.4% of the 910 Confessing Church sermons. Gushee’s research indicates that had this percentage been considerably higher, then perhaps many

York: Edwin Mellon Press, 1981); Andre Stein, *Quiet Heroes* (New York: New York University Press, 1988); Philip Hallie, *Lest Innocent Blood Be Shed* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979); and Gay Block and Malka Drucker, *Rescuers* (New York: Holmes & Meyer, 1992).

⁸²² Gushee, *Righteous Gentiles*, Kindle edition, location 2820.

⁸²³ Gushee, *Righteous Gentiles*, Kindle edition, location 2832.

⁸²⁴ Gushee, *Righteous Gentiles*, Kindle edition, location 2832; Michael, *Holy Hatred*, 17, 34.

⁸²⁵ Gushee, *Righteous Gentiles*, Kindle edition, location 2901.

⁸²⁶ See for example, Calvin’s commentary on Isaiah, which states, “But because God is continually mindful of his covenant, and ‘his gifts and calling are without repentance’ [from Romans 11:29], Paul justly concludes that it is impossible that they shall not at length be collected along with the Gentiles that out of both ‘there may be one fold under Christ’ [from John 10:16].” See John Calvin, “Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Isaiah,” in *Calvin’s Commentaries*, translation by W. Pringle (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1844-1856); reproduced Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 8:269. See also Gushee, *Righteous Gentiles*, Kindle edition, location 2901.

more Christians would have been willing to actively support and defend Jews during the Holocaust.

The autobiography of the Calvinist Corrie ten Boom illustrates this theme. She came from a family, all of whom participated in rescue efforts during World War II in the Netherlands. She writes that based on their readings of the Bible, the family believed the Jews were “the apple of God’s eye.”⁸²⁷ Gushee argues that there may be a connection between Calvinists like the ten Boom family and their understanding of Jews as the people of God. He writes, “Calvin found more continuity between the Old and the New Testament than have many other Christian theologians.”⁸²⁸ Keep in mind that the influence of Calvinism spread throughout western and central Europe as one of the main Protestant movements (alongside Lutheranism), manifesting as Reformed churches in Switzerland, France, the Netherlands, Germany, and in Scotland. According to Calvin, the Christian cannot dismiss the Hebrew Bible as irrelevant or antiquated because Christ is revealed in it and cannot properly be understood without it. This is not to say that all Calvinists felt a deep connection with the Jewish people, but that among some Christians, especially Calvinists, this theme proved significant in seeing Jews as spiritual cousins, a part of the same family.

This discussion of Calvinism leads us to the third but much less frequent theme in support of the Jews. A handful of sermons expressed the view that the Jews are equal among the nations. Only four occurrences among the 40 sermons in support of Jews made this striking assertion of support. One example is a sermon delivered on the second

⁸²⁷ Gushee, *Righteous Gentiles*, Kindle edition, location 2866.

⁸²⁸ Gushee, *Righteous Gentiles*, Kindle edition, location 2877.

Sunday after Epiphany, likely in 1935 or 1936, by Pastor Julius Sammetreuther. He preached on John 1:43-51, a text describing Jesus' selection of the disciple Philip, a devout Jew who becomes a follower of Jesus. Sammetreuther takes the opportunity to speak out about the Aryan Paragraph, legislation that would exclude Jews from the clergy, thus threatening the integrity of the Christian Church as an institution predicated upon the faith of its members. He argues that "God is not bound by a natural characteristic" – meaning race or ethnicity – and that this day "is the opportunity to talk about the Aryan Paragraph and to reject it."⁸²⁹ Sammetreuther emphasizes that like Philip, God is concerned with the personal characteristics of the individual, but not "natural" characteristics that one has no control over.

In another example, Paul Hinz preached a sermon on September 26, 1943, that told the story of the ten men Jesus cleansed of leprosy (Luke 17:11-19).⁸³⁰ In the thick of World War II, when things began to look terrible indeed for the Germans, and even worse for "non-Aryans," Hinz reflects on the divisions that separate human beings from one another. He reflects on Luke's story, and observes that the astonishing element is that nine of these men were Jews and one was a Samaritan; and in the social and religious context of ancient Palestine, these two groups did not inter-relate or commune together in any sense. And yet afflicted with leprosy, the ten men are able to overcome their differences and live together and, most importantly, find healing together. Hinz argues

⁸²⁹ Sammetreuther, *Predigtmeditationen*, 164.

⁸³⁰ Paul Hinz, Sermon manuscript on Luke 17:11-19, 26 September 1943, Collected Sermons of Paul Hinz, EZA 766/38.

the point of this text is that social and spiritual barriers can be overcome, even seemingly insurmountable ones.

The sermons unequivocally undermine Nazi racial ideology that the Jews are an inferior and pernicious people group. Nazi racial ideology makes physical or racial characteristics determinative of an individual's worth and moral and spiritual goodness. These sermons assert that race and ethnicity should not prevent community or serve as indicators of an individual's value or worth.

The fourth and last theme expressed in these Confessing Church sermons is the condemnation of Nazi persecution of the Jews. This theme only occurs nine times in these 910 sermons. We will begin by discussing examples and then consider why so few pastors spoke out when the Nazi regime deported and eventually murdered the Jewish population.

I have found just a couple cases pastors speaking about the persecution of Jews before World War II. After the death of his grandmother, Julie Bonhoeffer, Dietrich Bonhoeffer delivered her funeral oration in Berlin on January 15, 1936. He preached on Psalm 90, which speaks of God as "our dwelling place throughout all generations" and offers a prayer for comfort in the difficult days of life. While recalling fond memories of his grandmother, Bonhoeffer tells of how troubled she was that the principles of her youth – "the inflexibility of law, the free word of free men, the binding quality of the given word, plain and sober speech, honesty and simplicity in personal and public life" –

had been betrayed during the Nazi dictatorship.⁸³¹ She could not keep quiet amid this betrayal, he says.

Therefore her last years were deeply troubled by the great sorrow she bore for the suffering and fate of the Jews among our people. She sought to help and suffered with them. She stemmed from a different age, out of a different spiritual world. This world does not sink with her into the grave. The inheritance is our obligation and for this we thank her.⁸³²

Bonhoeffer emphasizes the strange-ness of Nazi values to the world in which his grandmother Julie lived. He presents her as a stranger living in a strange Nazi world.⁸³³ An incident that captures Julie's strength of character and depth of courage, yet one Bonhoeffer did not mention in his oration, is that at ninety years of age, she stridently defied the Nazi boycott of Jewish businesses on April 1, 1933. She went shopping on that day, and when the SA accosted her to keep her from entering a Jewish-owned store, she informed them that she'll shop where wishes and she proceeded to shop at the store.⁸³⁴ In fact, later that day she went to the best department store in Berlin, the Jewish-owned *Kaufhaus des Westens (das KaDeWe)*, and walked right through a cordon of SA Stormtroopers.⁸³⁵ While Bonhoeffer's sermon celebrates this courageous and principled woman, it is even more significant that he makes her a model for his family to emulate in

⁸³¹ *Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Christmas Sermons*, edited and translated by Edwin Robertson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 123.

⁸³² *Bonhoeffer's Christmas Sermons*, ed. Robinson, 123.

⁸³³ Of course, this is a play on Robert Heinlein's famous science-fiction novel of 1961, *Stranger in a Strange Land*.

⁸³⁴ Eric Metaxas. *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2010), 156.

⁸³⁵ Eberhard Bethge. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography, Revised Edition* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 267.

troubled times. He says that the inheritance that Julie gave his family – this strength of character and great courage – was in the form of an “obligation” to emulate her example as strangers in Nazi Germany.

One of the most remarkable sermons about the Nazi persecution of the Jews was in response to the nation-wide pogrom on the night of November 9-10, 1938. The sermon is from the Confessing Church pastor Julius von Jan (1897-1964), a pastor from the town of Oberlenningen.⁸³⁶ Jan came from a large family, the fourth of seven children, from the small town of Schweindorf, where his father was a pastor. When the First World War broke out, Jan volunteered and served from 1915 to 1917, when he was wounded by the British forces and taken prisoner. He remained in a prisoner of war camp until 1919.⁸³⁷ Upon his return to Germany, Jan began his theological studies at the University of Tübingen, and completed his theological examinations six years later in 1925. After eight years as pastor in the small town of Herrentierbach, he accepted the position as pastor at a church in Oberlenningen, “whose pastor, a Reverend Rheinwald, had died of a heart attack after confrontations with the local Nazi Party leader and the village police.”⁸³⁸

As a Confessing Church pastor, Jan felt duty-bound to inform his congregation on conflicts in the Church Struggle, and reportedly appraising his congregation especially

⁸³⁶ This biographical sketch is largely based on Stroud’s excellent profile of Julius von Jan in his recently published book, *Preaching under Hitler’s Shadow*, a collection of sermons and profiles of the pastors who delivered them. See Stroud, *Preaching under Hitler’s Shadow*, 118-120. For more on Jan, see Conway, *Nazi Persecution of the Churches*, 375-376; and Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 142.

⁸³⁷ Stroud, *Preaching under Hitler’s Shadow*, 118.

⁸³⁸ Stroud, *Preaching under Hitler’s Shadow*, 118.

when it concerned the Nazis' persecution of Christians and the Jews.⁸³⁹ Like his predecessor Rheinwald, Jan experienced recurring confrontations with local Nazis and "German Christians," though fortunately for him, his congregation supported their pastor.⁸⁴⁰

For Jan, the pogrom known as Kristallnacht marked a decisive moment in his career. He preached a sermon on 16 November 1938, in which he sought to expose the criminal behavior of his fellow Germans whose passions and hatred had run amok.⁸⁴¹ Over a week prior, on 7 November 1938, a 17-year-old Pole named Herschel Grynszpan shot and fatally wounded a junior official, Ernst vom Rath, of the German embassy in Paris. Grynszpan's grievance concerned another Nazi policy of persecution against the Jews, this time the deportation of foreign-born Jews living in Germany. The Polish government closed its borders to 8,000 of the 12,000 Polish refugees, and Grynszpan's parents were among those stranded at the border.⁸⁴² Ernst vom Rath died of his injuries in the afternoon on 9 November 1938, which gave the Nazi regime an opportunity for reprisal against the Jews of Germany. As one historian notes, "Hitler immediately issued instructions to Goebbels for a massive, co-ordinated, physical assault on Germany's Jews, coupled with the arrest of as many Jewish men as could be found and their incarceration in concentration camps."⁸⁴³ Within 24 hours, Nazi thugs destroyed 1000

⁸³⁹ Stroud, *Preaching under Hitler's Shadow*, 119.

⁸⁴⁰ Stroud, *Preaching under Hitler's Shadow*, 119.

⁸⁴¹ Conway, *Nazi Persecution of the Churches*, 375; and Stroud, *Preaching under Hitler's Shadow*, 123.

⁸⁴² Martin Gilbert, *Kristallnacht: Prelude to Destruction* (New York: HarperCollins, 2006), 23.

⁸⁴³ Richard Evans, *The Third Reich in Power* (New York: Penguin, 2005), 581; see also Gilbert, *Kristallnacht*, 28-29.

synagogues and over 7500 Jewish-owned businesses, filling the streets of Germany with broken glass.⁸⁴⁴ The best figures for the number of Jews arrested are approximately 30,000, an astounding number, marking the first time that Jews as Jews were arrested en masse and sent to concentration camps.⁸⁴⁵ While Nazi records indicate that 91 men died in the pogrom, another 300 Jews, at the depths of despair, committed suicide in its wake.⁸⁴⁶ In fact, the true figure of those murdered may run between one and two thousand.⁸⁴⁷

Most churches were silent about the pogrom the following week, revealing timidity and a concern only for their own.⁸⁴⁸ The Confessing Church made a statement only a few months after the incident saying, “We are bound together as brethren with all the believers in Christ of the Jewish race. We will not separate ourselves from them, and we ask them not to separate themselves from us. We exhort all members of our congregations to concern themselves with the material and spiritual distress of our Christian brothers and sisters of the Jewish race, and to intercede for them in their prayers to God.”⁸⁴⁹ This passage demonstrates a common but problematic theme in Confessing

⁸⁴⁴ See Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 139; and Gilbert, *Kristallnacht*, 118.

⁸⁴⁵ Evans, *Third Reich in Power*, 581.

⁸⁴⁶ Evans, *Third Reich in Power*, 590.

⁸⁴⁷ Evans, *Third Reich in Power*, 590.

⁸⁴⁸ Evans, *Third Reich in Power*, 581; and Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 142. The historical record does indicate a few pastors who spoke out, including one man named Hermann Seggel of Bayreuth. A report from the office of the district governor of Upper and Central Franconia documents an accusation against Pastor Seggel of violating the Law Against Treacherous Attacks Against the Party and the State by preaching a sermon on 16 November 1938 condemning the “acts of rage” of the Kristallnacht pogrom a week before, and further, stating that “A Christian did not do such things, these were subhumans.” The report does not indicate what if any measures were taken against Pastor Seggel. 446. See Kulka and Jäckel, *The Jews and the Secret Nazi Reports*, 445-446.

⁸⁴⁹ Friedlaender, *Nazi Germany and the Jews*, Vol. 2, 296-97.

Church resistance, that the church's main concern was limited in practice to the defense of Christian Jews, not to all Jews as such. The Church's main concern seemed to be the integrity and continued ministries of the church itself as well as the rights of the individual Christians, and not so much on the turmoil occurring outside its own walls. Most pastors simply kept silent about the pogrom.⁸⁵⁰

Nevertheless, a few Confessing Church pastors did speak out the next week in church services, Julius von Jan among them. His sermon was based on Jeremiah 22:2-9, which speaks of the prophet's role in proclaiming the law of God to his nation, king, and princes who have trampled up it.⁸⁵¹ There will come a reckoning, Jeremiah warns. Jan launches into a condemnation of the behavior of his fellow Germans. He looks around and asks, where are our prophets to tell us of the word of God? "God has sent us such men!"⁸⁵² Jan says. "They are today either in concentration camps or muzzled. But those who come to the houses of princes and there are able to do holy deeds are preachers of lies..."⁸⁵³ In the first few lines, Jan accuses the Nazi regime for jailing God's prophets, and also condemns the German-Christians as posers and liars. And then he proceeds to discuss the crimes of the past week. A crime has been committed in Paris,

Who could have thought that one crime in Paris could be followed by so many crimes in Germany? Here we see the price we are paying for the great falling away from God and Christ, for the organized anti-Christianity. Passions have been released, the laws of God jeered at, houses of God that were sacred to others have been burned to the ground, property belonging to the foreigner plundered or destroyed, men who

⁸⁵⁰ Gerlach, *And the Witnesses Were Silent*, 147.

⁸⁵¹ Stroud, *Preaching under Hitler's Shadow*, 121.

⁸⁵² Stroud, *Preaching under Hitler's Shadow*, 121-123.

⁸⁵³ Stroud, *Preaching under Hitler's Shadow*, 123.

faithfully served our nation (Volk) and who fulfilled their duty in good conscience have been thrown into concentration camps simply because they belong to another race, and all this without anyone being held accountable! Even if the authorities do not admit their hand in this injustice, the healthy sensitivity of the people (Volk) feels the truth without any doubt – including where people do not dare speak of this.⁸⁵⁴

Despite the Nazi regime targeting pastors who speak out, Jan speaks with boldness and clarity. Germans have lost their way and followed not simply a political religion, but an “organized anti-Christianity,” established by the state and administered by “German Christians.”⁸⁵⁵ Germans have burned “house of God” to the ground – note he does not say *Synagoge* but *Gotteshäuser* to bridge the distance some might see in the houses of worship of the two traditions.⁸⁵⁶ Just as Christians worship in the house of God, so also do Jews. Jan’s condemnation is sweeping: Germans have scoffed at God’s laws, burned God’s sacred houses, dishonored courageous veterans, and it was all at the instigation of the Nazi “authorities.” It is striking that Jan accuses the Nazi regime of orchestrating the pogrom, just days after its occurrence. He even turns a common Nazi phrase against the regime, a phrase often used to describe popular anti-Jewish sentiments: “*the healthy sensitivity of the people (Volk) feels truth without any doubt [emphasis added].*”⁸⁵⁷ And, he goes on to echo the prophet, that “God will not be ridiculed. What a person sows, he will reap!”⁸⁵⁸ The people know that God’s judgment is coming unless they repent of what they have done.

⁸⁵⁴ Stroud, *Preaching under Hitler’s Shadow*, 123.

⁸⁵⁵ Stroud, *Preaching under Hitler’s Shadow*, 123.

⁸⁵⁶ See notes in Stoud’s, *Preaching under Hitler’s Shadow*, 126.

⁸⁵⁷ Stoud, *Preaching under Hitler’s Shadow*, 124. Thanks to Frank Biess for this helpful insight.

⁸⁵⁸ Stoud, *Preaching under Hitler’s Shadow*, 124.

Jan must have known that his sermon would draw the ire of Nazis in Oberlenningen and the surrounding areas. Nearly two weeks later, on 25 November at 10:30 pm, a mob of 500 demonstrators who, according to accounts, were not from Oberlenningen but the nearby town of Nürtingen and environs, found Jan, beat him senseless, and took him to the Town Hall for an hour-long interrogation.⁸⁵⁹ Severely wounded, he listened to the accusations of the crowd – he was a “traitor to the people, and a slave of Judaism.”⁸⁶⁰ After it was over, they took him to the county prison at Kirchheim, Teck, where he remained for four months.⁸⁶¹ Jan was now targeted by the regime - the sermon following *Reichskristallnacht* initiated “a series of arrests, interrogations, and forced exile from his parish.”⁸⁶² One year later, on 15 November 1939, Jan was tried before the Nazi “special court” (*Sondergericht*) and condemned for “misusing the pulpit” and “treachery.”⁸⁶³ His sentence was 16 months. Jan was able to continue preaching after his release in May 1940, but was drafted into the Wehrmacht in 1943 and served on the Russian front.⁸⁶⁴ He survived the war and returned to his home church in Oberlenningen where he served until his retirement.⁸⁶⁵ Jan’s story illustrates the danger and costs the Confessing Church pastor faced if he decided to speak out boldly against Nazi persecution and in support of the Jews.

⁸⁵⁹ Gerlach, *And the Witnesses Were Silent*, 144.

⁸⁶⁰ Conway, *Nazi Persecution of the Churches*, 376.

⁸⁶¹ Conway, *Nazi Persecution of the Churches*, 376; and Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 142.

⁸⁶² Stroud, *Preaching under Hitler’s Shadow*, 119.

⁸⁶³ Stroud, *Preaching under Hitler’s Shadow*, 119.

⁸⁶⁴ Stroud, *Preaching under Hitler’s Shadow*, 119.

⁸⁶⁵ Stroud, *Preaching under Hitler’s Shadow*, 119.

Another remarkable sermon delivered immediately after Reichskristallnacht by Helmut Gollwitzer. Gollwitzer (1908-1993) was born in the town of Pappenheim in Bavaria, and studied theology at the universities in Munich, Erlangen, and Bonn, before studying for his doctorate under Karl Barth at the University of Basel. Gollwitzer joined the Confessing Church upon his graduation in 1937.⁸⁶⁶ After Martin Niemöller's arrest by the Gestapo, the up-and-coming pastor replaced the Confessing Church leader at his Berlin-Dahlem church in June 1937. Like Niemöller, Gollwitzer criticized the Nazi regime in his sermons, and by 3 September 1940 was expelled from Berlin and prohibited to speak publicly in Nazi Germany.⁸⁶⁷ Gollwitzer then volunteered to serve as a medic in the Wehrmacht during World War II, but as the war drew to a close he was captured by the Russian army and spent four years as a prisoner of war.⁸⁶⁸ In post-war West Germany, Gollwitzer taught at the University of Bonn and later the Free University of Berlin, where he continued to preach at his Berlin-Dahlem church. A vocal critic of the excesses of West German capitalism, the Vietnam War, and nuclear arms proliferation, Gollwitzer was a dynamic personality after the war, as much as before it.⁸⁶⁹

After the destruction of the November pogrom against Germany's Jews, Gollwitzer took to the pulpit on 16 November 1938, the Day of Penance in the liturgical calendar. He based his sermon on Luke 3:3-14, an appropriate passage that speaks of the

⁸⁶⁶ See Stroud, *Preaching under Hitler's Shadow*, 127.

⁸⁶⁷ Stroud, *Preaching under Hitler's Shadow*, 127. The Nazi regime imposed the *Reichsredeverbot* on Gollwitzer, the same as they had done to other Confessing Church pastors, such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer. See Helmut Gollwitzer and Eva Bildt, *Ich will Dir schnell sagen, dass ich lebe, Liebster: Briefe aus dem Krieg, 1940-1945*, herausgegeben von Friedrich Künzel und Ruth Pabst (Verlag C.H. Beck, 2008), 323.

⁸⁶⁸ Stroud, *Preaching under Hitler's Shadow*, 127.

⁸⁶⁹ Stroud, *Preaching under Hitler's Shadow*, 127.

inauguration of John the Baptist's ministry, when he begins to preach "the baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins." Just two months after the Munich Conference, when Neville Chamberlain and the Western nations of Europe agreed to hand the Sudetenland over to Hitler and Nazi Germany, Gollwitzer rhetorically asks, "What good has the great gift of peace done that we received with such joy just two months ago, so that today each of these Ten Commandments that we have just heard has struck us like a hammer blow right in the face and has knocked us to the ground?"⁸⁷⁰ Astoundingly, he asks what good it will do if he and the congregation piously sing hymns and read their Bibles and pray and confess and preach. As if with a sigh, he says, "Our impertinence and presumption must make him sick. Why don't we at least just keep our mouths shut?"⁸⁷¹ At least then, they will be better able to see God's judgment come quickly upon them. But, Gollwitzer laments, Germans have lost the ability to repent, and "the most vital thing linking people to each other lies broken and shattered..."⁸⁷²

The sermon is as much a call for repentance for the persecution of the Jews just days before, as it is a condemnation of how National Socialism has poisoned German society to make such destruction possible. "Surely we today," he says, "are familiar with the disgust we feel where evil is not simply evil but rather dresses itself up in a repulsive manner as morality, where base instincts, where hate and revenge, parade about as great and good things. No ditch seems to be deep enough to distance us from such evil."⁸⁷³

⁸⁷⁰ Stroud, *Preaching under Hitler's Shadow*, 130.

⁸⁷¹ Stroud, *Preaching under Hitler's Shadow*, 130.

⁸⁷² Stroud, *Preaching under Hitler's Shadow*, 131.

⁸⁷³ Stroud, *Preaching under Hitler's Shadow*, 134.

The *Reichskristallnacht* has exposed Germans' cowardice, laziness, apathy, caution, and "stupid hope" that everything will get better without "becom[ing] courageously involved ourselves."⁸⁷⁴ Though Gollwitzer does not say specifically how Germans should involve themselves or invite Germans to insurrection, this is the closest I have found to a pastor walking the fine line between opposition to Nazi policies and outright resistance in calling congregants to wake up and stand together. Like John the Baptist in his source text, Gollwitzer tells his audience to turn from their evil ways, to repent, or expect the judgment of God.

Continuing with our discussion of sermons on the Nazi persecution of the Jews, I have already mentioned the prayers by Karl Barth offered at the end of two sermons. One delivered after a sermon on the book of Lamentations given towards the end of World War II, from the safety of Switzerland, on October 29, 1944. He prayed, "We remember again and again your people Israel in its persecution and in the even greater need, that it will not recognize you."⁸⁷⁵ Despite the anti-Judaic expression of the hope for conversion, Barth's prayer specifically mentions the persecution of "your [God's] people Israel." This remarkable and very unique prayer not only affirms that Israel – that is, modern day Jews – is the special people of God and therefore the concern of Christians as spiritual cousins, but also because it refers to their "persecution." Barth does not say who is persecuting them or why or in what way. This could encourage the careful listener to pay closer attention to what is happening to the Jews of Europe, to ask questions, or even to risk taking actions to support or defend them. But again, this is another example of a

⁸⁷⁴ Stroud, *Preaching under Hitler's Shadow*, 134.

⁸⁷⁵ Barth, *Fürchte Dich nicht!* 284.

short but positive expression in support of the Jews that is immediately neutralized or perhaps even contradicted by an anti-Judaic statement of the Jews' rejection of Jesus.

Another illuminating example of a sermon that addresses the persecution of the Jews is a sermon by Paul Hinz delivered sometime between 1941 and 1943 in the city of Kolberg, on the famous passage in 1 John 4:16. The biblical text states in part, "God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them." Hinz observes that if we were to "look out into the world" at war, we would see chaos. "Peoples [Völker] are exterminated, races go into the abyss of destruction; a sea of blood and tears, inconsolable sorrow goes over the world."⁸⁷⁶ The language is striking and evocative. Hinz relies on imagery to express his concern: not just one people or race, but peoples are exterminated and races fall into the "abyss of destruction"; a turbulent "sea of blood and tears" overwhelms the peoples of the world. Admittedly, he does not tell us which "peoples" are exterminated or which "races" are destroyed – there is ambiguity here. But it seems clear that he is referring in part to the devastation on the battlefields of Europe among the nations at war. At the same time, it is possible and even likely that he is also referring to the Jewish people, the "race" at the center of Nazi hatred and policies of exclusion and extermination. Again, he uses very strong language here, "extermination" (*ausgerottet*) and "the abyss of destruction" (*den Abgrund des Unterganges*), which indicate a decimation of population most resembling that of Jews in Central and Eastern Europe during this time.

⁸⁷⁶ Paul Hinz, Sermon manuscript on I John 4:16, Dated 1941-1943, Collected Sermons of Paul Hinz, EZA 766/36.

These nine instances of Confessing Church pastors speaking up about the Nazi persecution of the Jews indicate that some German pastors were certainly aware of the persecution, though the extent of this knowledge is not certain, particularly regarding the details of the Holocaust. Strikingly, these nine cases represent .9% of the 910 sermons I have examined. In less than one percent of the sermons the pastors give an indication that the Jews are facing persecution. And even in these instances, the pastors do not give specifics about the persecution, nor do they name the persecutors, nor name the crimes being committed against the Jews.

My research presents a significant problem given the historiography of the German population's knowledge of the Nazi mass murder of European Jewry, which has been extensively examined.⁸⁷⁷ Conservative estimates are that by 1942 and 1943, approximately one-third of the German population had received news in one form or another of the mass murder of the Jews.⁸⁷⁸ If we exclude teenagers and children from this equation – those whose parents might have “shielded” them from such knowledge – less conservative estimates indicate that perhaps one-half of the population were aware of

⁸⁷⁷ Marlis Steinert, *Hitler's War and the Germans: Public Mood and Attitude during the Second World War*, translated by Thomas de Witt (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1977); Walter Laqueur, *The Terrible Secret: An Investigation into the Suppression of Information about Hitler's "Final Solution"* (London, 1980); Ian Kershaw, *Popular Opinion and Political Dissent in the Third Reich: Bavaria 1933-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983); Hans Mommsen, “What did the Germans Know about the Genocide of the Jews?” in Walter H. Pehle, ed., *November 1938: From 'Kristallnacht' to Genocide* (New York: Berg, 1991), 187-221; David Bankier, *The Germans and the Final Solution: Public Opinion Under Nazism* (London, 1992); Hans Mommsen and Volker Ullrich, “Wir haben nichts gewusst: Ein deutsches Trauma,” 1999 4 (1991): 11-46; Eric A. Johnson and Karl-Heinz Reuband, *What We Knew: Terror, Mass Murder, and Everyday Life in Nazi Germany, An Oral History* (Cambridge, MA: Basic Books, 2005); and Frank Bajohr and Dieter Pohl, *Der Holocaust als offenes Geheimnis: Die Deutschen, die NS-Führung und die Alliierten* (München: C.H. Beck, 2006).

⁸⁷⁸ Johnson and Reuband, *What We Knew*, 39. Also, Laqueur argues that “news of the ‘final solution’ had been received in 1942 *all over Europe*” (emphasis added), see *The Terrible Secret*, 196.

the atrocities.⁸⁷⁹ This would of course include Confessing Church pastors, and yet my findings indicate that less than one percent of them spoke out about the atrocities and persecutions in their sermons. The historiography indicates that millions of Germans knew that the Nazi regime was massacring Jews even as it was actually taking place.⁸⁸⁰ This knowledge spread to Germans of all socioeconomic and educational backgrounds through the reports of Wehrmacht soldiers from the east returning home after witnessing Einsatzgruppen mass murders of the Jews. At the same BBC broadcasts provided constant news updates of atrocities and mass murders.⁸⁸¹ In fact, SD reports and various other sources indicate that Allied broadcasts on Nazi mass murders “were widely listened to and discussed.”⁸⁸²

At the same time, we must also consider the impact of the Nazi propaganda machine on Germans throughout World War II. While the regime did not publish reports of massacres of Jews on the eastern front or figures of Jews murdered at extermination centers, the regime maintained a constant barrage of propaganda that blamed the Jews for instigating “a war to exterminate the Germans.”⁸⁸³ Through the propagandistic speeches of Hitler, Goebbels, among other Nazi leaders, broadcast across Germany, as well as wall posters strategically positioned throughout commuter and pedestrian traffic, the Nazi regime used unambiguous language to express their approach to the “Jewish menace”;

⁸⁷⁹ Johnson and Reuband, *What We Knew*, 392.

⁸⁸⁰ Johnson and Reuband, *What We Knew*, 396.

⁸⁸¹ Johnson and Reuband, *What We Knew*, 396-397; Mommsen, *What did the Germans Know?* 206; and Laqueur, *The Terrible Secret*, 201.

⁸⁸² Bankier, *The Germans and the Final Solution*, 113.

⁸⁸³ Jeffrey Herf, *The Jewish Enemy: Nazi Propaganda during World War II and the Holocaust* (Cambridge, MA: Bellknap Press, 2006), 267.

they used words such as *Vernichtung* (extermination) and *Ausrottung* (annihilation).⁸⁸⁴ And in so doing, the regime reached millions upon millions of Germans who could not help but be exposed to the pervasive propaganda and thereby become informed of the Nazi approach to the Jewish people. It has even been argued that by mid-1942, knowledge of “the mass crimes of the Nazis, and in particular the murder of the Jews, were an open secret in the Reich and among the Allies.”⁸⁸⁵ There was simply no possibility of keeping crimes so immense a secret hidden from Germans and the peoples of occupied Europe, not with the murders taking place throughout much of eastern Europe, the millions of victims, and the incredible inhumanity of the crimes.⁸⁸⁶ Many Confessing Church pastors, who were leaders in their religious communities and ministers to families with sons at war, “who kept their eyes and ears open,” would have known about the Nazi mass murder of the Jews.⁸⁸⁷

Again, the problem that my research presents is that, given the historiography, at least one-third to one-half of Confessing Church pastors, and perhaps even more, had knowledge of the Nazi atrocities against Jews, and yet less than one percent voiced any objection or concern from the pulpit. How might we account for this extraordinarily low percentage? A few factors might shed some light on this problem. First, we should keep in mind that for most Germans the war and its progress was of utmost concern, not the fate of the Jews.⁸⁸⁸ As Ian Kershaw writes, “Most people in fact probably thought little

⁸⁸⁴ Herf, *The Jewish Enemy*, 267.

⁸⁸⁵ Bajohr and Pohl, *Der Holocaust als offenes Geheimnis*, 128.

⁸⁸⁶ Bajohr and Pohl, *Der Holocaust als offenes Geheimnis*, 128.

⁸⁸⁷ Johnson and Reuband, *What We Knew*, 397.

⁸⁸⁸ Mommsen, “What did the Germans Know?” 192; and Kershaw, *Popular Opinion*, 360.

and asked less about what was happening to the Jews in the east. The Jews were out of sight and literally out of mind for most.”⁸⁸⁹ Second, we must consider the nature of the knowledge of Nazi atrocities among the German population. While millions of Germans knew of the Nazi massacres of Jews, most failed to put all the puzzle pieces together to see the full picture of the Holocaust.⁸⁹⁰ Many knew of Nazi mass murders of Jews, but they could not fathom the systematic extermination of all European Jewry.⁸⁹¹ In fact, none of the sermons mentions any kind of mass, systematic extermination of the Jewish people. The knowledge of the German people was fragmentary and most often based on second-hand information, albeit often from trusted sources (e.g. soldiers returning home). And many simply could not or would not believe the reports or rumors. Nevertheless, some Germans were able to put the pieces together and believed that the worst was true. For example, the White Rose group based in Munich started a leaflet campaign designed to inform the German public of Nazi massacres and lawlessness, even referring to the mass murder of hundreds of thousands of Jews in Poland.⁸⁹²

A third reason for the extraordinarily low percentage of Confessing Church pastors to speak out against Nazi atrocities against Jews was a sense of hopelessness and powerlessness that many must have felt living in a totalitarian society.⁸⁹³ The news of atrocities would have presented a challenge to pastors: ask more questions, investigate

⁸⁸⁹ Kershaw, *Popular Opinion and Political Dissent in the Third Reich*, 364.

⁸⁹⁰ Mommsen, “What did the Germans Know?” 206; and Bankier, *The Germans and the Final Solution*, 115.

⁸⁹¹ Mommsen, “What did the Germans Know?” 209

⁸⁹² Mommsen, “What did the Germans Know?” 213-214.

⁸⁹³ Mommsen, “What did the Germans Know?” 205; Bankier, *The Germans and the Final Solution*, 103; and Laqueur, *The Terrible Secret*, 208

the stories, speak out against the Nazi regime; or don't follow up, remain silent, and continue serving the congregation, hoping to outlive the Nazi regime. In the end, as the historian David Bankier writes, many Germans – and many pastors – “knew enough to know that it was better not to know more.”⁸⁹⁴ In their virtual silence the Confessing Church pastors behaved just like the vast majority of Germans, and this reflects several factors: a sense of resignation that there is nothing to be done but wait for the regime to topple; a significant degree of repression under the watchful eyes of the regime's police apparatus, the Gestapo agents and their networks of informers; and also the moral desensitization of nearly a decade witnessing the day-by-day, step-by-step, exclusion of the Jewish people from German public life.⁸⁹⁵

While these relatively few instances of Confessing Church pastors expressing concern about the persecution of Jews are important in and of themselves, the fact that there are so few from the rank and file of the “oppositional” faction of the German churches underscores the muted voice of Germany's pastors during the ghettoization, deportation, and extermination of European Jewry. Peter Fritzsche argues that in German society there was a “general silence” about the persecution and fate of the German Jews in Nazi Germany, a silence that filled the sanctuaries of German churches as well.⁸⁹⁶ He makes an interesting point that the fate of the Jews lay beyond the Germans' “limits on empathy” because they simply could not imagine being Jewish. While Germans (and Christians) debated the Nazi policy of euthanasia because they could actually imagine

⁸⁹⁴ Bankier, *The Germans and the Final Solution*, 115.

⁸⁹⁵ Mommsen, “What did the Germans Know?” 205; Bankier, *The Germans and the Final Solution*, 103; and Laqueur, *The Terrible Secret*, 208.

⁸⁹⁶ Peter Fritzsche, *Life and Death in the Third Reich* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 119.

this policy affecting their own families, at the same time “they could not imagine being Jewish” and being persecuted by the regime.⁸⁹⁷ To Fritzsche’s point, they had an impoverished imagination because they could not envision themselves as Jews adversely affected by Nazi persecution. But as all the sermons indicate, Christians had a wealth of concepts and principles that could (one might say should) have aided this imagination. Like the Jews, many Christians imagine themselves as the people of God. Christians share much of the same sacred history, the same sacred stories that inform and shape moral behavior and spiritual growth. The irony is that the practice of preaching might actually have helped Christians to imagine the world of ancient Israel (whether in the time of the patriarchs, prophets, or Jesus and the apostles) intersect with their own, to live a life informed by the values and principles that they believe God has revealed to his people – as the Christian understands them.⁸⁹⁸ Fritzsche is correct about the lack of imagination, and this is particularly an indictment of the German churches.

In these 40 sermons Confessing Church pastors opposed specific Nazi beliefs and policies that sought the exclusion of Jews and Judaism from German public life. While some challenged the Nazi view that the Jews were an evil and pernicious people by affirming their status as the children of God, many affirmed the need to appreciate Judaism as a foundation of the Christian faith and to defend the Hebrew Bible as a

⁸⁹⁷ Fritzsche, *Life and Death in the Third Reich*, 119.

⁸⁹⁸ This insight highlights the potential of the church to make connections between Jews and Christians, which might have strengthened the relationships between them and revealed the depth of the shared values, traditions, and biblical texts. Of course, the two-thousand year history of anti-Judaism reveals the exact opposite effect, the distancing of each group from the other by underscoring the differences, whether real or imagined.

nonnegotiable pillar of the Christian biblical texts. A few even appear to condemn the Nazi persecution of the Jewish people, though far fewer than we would hope.

Conclusions

We can draw several conclusions based on the evidence I have presented. The expressions of prejudice against Jews and Judaism revealed in these sermons can most appropriately be categorized as non-rational or anti-Judaic, meaning the prejudice is based on religious convictions founded in scripture and a Christian reading of history. I found no examples of pastors expressing irrational antisemitic prejudice; for example, they did not use Nazi racial terminology – such as *Untermenschen* (subhumans) – to denigrate the Jewish people. The anti-Judaic perspectives reflect six traditional tropes: the perception that the Jews are a stubborn or wayward people; that Christianity is superior because it emphasizes grace and freedom over Judaism's purported emphasis on law and works; the claim that the Jews are a stubborn people for rejecting Jesus, or that they are actually responsible for putting him to death (and thus, the charge of deicide); that God has or is currently punishing the Jews for the rejection of Jesus; the belief that upon the rejection of Jesus and the establishment of the Church, the Jews have ceased to be the people of God; and lastly, a generalized sentiment that hopes for the mass conversion of the Jews, reflecting a belief in the inferiority of Judaism and the lack of salvation for the Jewish people.

However, the expressions of anti-Judaism revealed in these sermons have the potential to overlap with Nazi racial antisemitism, and thereby possibly advancing the exclusion of Jews from German public life. If a pastor argues that God cursed the Jewish

people for putting Jesus to death, then the implications are potentially devastating. The congregant may generalize and perceive that the Jews as a people are evil, pernicious, and immoral; that they conspire to dominate, to destroy Christianity, and thus, that they cannot be trusted.⁸⁹⁹ While anti-Judaic tropes may originate in churches, we should expect these ideas to interact with other secular ideas outside church doors. In this sense, there is the likely potential for an overlap of anti-Judaic and Nazi antisemitic views. In particular, scholars have recently contributed much to understanding how religious anti-Judaism blended with antisemitism in academia.⁹⁰⁰

My analysis also reveals that Confessing Church pastors often used anti-Judaic expressions to criticize the Nazi regime and even the German people. They compared the ancient Jews and the Germans of their day as hard-hearted, as obsessed with race consciousness and racial purity of the people, as legalistic and weak, and as erroneously convinced of their own “superiority” and “chosen-ness.” Remarkably, Confessing Church pastors were able to utilize the traditional Christian anti-Judaism to oppose not only modern racial antisemitism, but also the Nazi regime, its nationalist ideology, and the regime’s supporters as well. Again, this demonstrates that anti-Judaic expressions were not often simply extemporaneous comments, or simply meant to denigrate Jews in Germany society, but that they were often employed purposefully to challenge the Nazi regime and its racial policies and ideology.

⁸⁹⁹ See Michael, *Holy Hatred*, 12. Michael points out the continuity between anti-Jewish ideas espoused by the Church Fathers and later medieval Christian writers and modern antisemitism.

⁹⁰⁰ See for example, Robert Ericksen’s *Theologians under Hitler* and *Complicity in the Holocaust: Gerhard Kittel, Paul Althaus, Emanuel Hirsch* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), and also Susannah Heschel’s *The Aryan Jesus: Christian Theologians and the Bible in Nazi Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

Another conclusion is that the sermons reveal evidence of a historic dilemma Christians have in relating to Jews and Judaism. On the one hand, Judaism plays a central role in the Christian tradition; from Jesus' ministry in a Jewish context to the inclusion of the Hebrew Bible in the Christian canon, Christianity affirms Jewish religious experience and God's covenant with Israel. On the other hand, elements of the Christian tradition stemming all the way back to its biblical texts present Jews as "Christ-killers" and as an accursed people.⁹⁰¹ The ambivalence is palpable.

The sermons in support of Jews and Judaism represent a missed opportunity to draw a connection between Christians and Jews in a shared religious tradition. Given the research on the motivations for Christian rescuers, the percentage of sermons that actually explicitly emphasize this connection is remarkably low. This may reflect social distance between the groups as well as anti-Judaism or antisemitism among Christians in Nazi Germany.

Also, the Gestapo and SD reports indicate the Nazi regime was indeed concerned about Confessing Church pastors not simply supporting and defending Jews, but developing connections between Christians and Jews based on their shared traditions and biblical texts. The evidence suggests that Confessing churches had the potential to become sites of support and sympathy for Jews in Nazi Germany, a place where Christians could develop their imagination – based on common theological concepts and stories – to place themselves in the situation of persecuted Jews. The mere fact that only

⁹⁰¹ Michael, *Holy Hatred*, 16-19.

4.6% of the sermons made pro-Jewish statements indicates that this was a missed opportunity to shape the imagination and behavior of Christians.

And lastly, an important aspect of these sermons that might go unnoticed is how frequently Confessing Church pastors engage the Hebrew Bible. Consistent with the new shift in homiletics under the leadership of Karl Barth, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and Wolfgang Trillhaas, among others, which sought to return preaching from a preacher-centric model of nineteenth century liberal theology to a scripture-centric model, Confessing Church pastors took their advice and preached frequently on the much-neglected Hebrew Bible.⁹⁰² In fact, 201 (22%) of the 910 sermons were based on the Hebrew Bible, and they were fairly evenly divided between the Pentateuch and histories (60), the Writings (71), and the Prophets (70). Of the 40 sermons that expressed positive views of Jews and Judaism, 19 of them were based on the Hebrew Bible. The Psalms and Isaiah were most often the Hebrew Bible books of choice in these sermons, and the theme most often concerned the Jews as the chosen people of God. Stories of the prophet Elijah (I Kings) came in a close third. This is significant when we consider that of the 40 sermons that expressed anti-Judaism, the pastors used the Hebrew Bible as the basis for only eight of them. This research suggests a link between the use of the Hebrew Bible in preaching and expressions of positive views of Jews and Judaism.

In this chapter we have seen how Confessing Church pastors often spoke about Jews and Judaism publicly from the pulpit – 7.5% of the 910 sermons I examined include

⁹⁰² See Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *Worldly Preaching*, translated by Clyde E. Fant (New York: Thomas Nelson, 1975). In this textbook he writes, "The Old Testament must once again be preached much more often. For Luther it was a relevant part of the Holy Scripture, although he saw the New Testament as the glad tidings of the fulfillment of the Scripture. Schleiermacher, on the other hand, refused to preach from the Old Testament" (page 131).

either positive or negative expressions, and sometimes both. And we have explored these perspectives, often seeing an ambivalence: even in criticisms of the Nazi regime or its racist policies, pastors all too quickly employ anti-Judaic tropes that reinforce Nazi antisemitism. Let us move on to explore the stories of German pastors of Jewish decent, who found themselves targeted by the Nazi regime while struggling to serve their communities of faith.

Acknowledgments

Chapter 5 contains material that is being prepared for publication in an article entitled, “Preaching to Nazi Germany: Sermons of the Confessing Church in the Second World War,” as a chapter in the book, *Outside the Foxhole: Religion and World War Two*, edited by John Corrigan and G. Kurt Piehler.

CHAPTER SIX

The Nazi Persecution of German Pastors of Jewish Descent

Look upon your first leader [*Führer*] and teacher in life, your parents! ... The right pastor preaches the gospel unwaveringly through the world; that is his end. The right church member pushes through the life undisturbed through the word of God; which is her end. The right fighter [*Streiter*] suffers with the Lord in all things; that is his end. The right worshiper bows before God until the last breath; that is his end.

—Pastor Hans Ehrenberg to his confirmation class, Easter Week, 1936⁹⁰³

The Nazi regime targeted and persecuted Christian pastors of Jewish descent, resulting in grave personal and professional hardships as they struggled to effectively minister to their congregations amid the racial prejudice and hostility of the Third Reich. The story of Bruno Benfey is a case in point. Born of Christian parents of Jewish descent, Benfey was baptized and raised a Christian with no other Jewish influence or connection to Judaism than his interaction with his extended family.⁹⁰⁴ He was ordained as a Lutheran in 1915 in Hanover, and at the outbreak of the First World War he was turned down for service due to medical reasons.⁹⁰⁵ He served in various Lutheran

⁹⁰³ Hans Ehrenberg, Sermon to Confirmation Class, Easter 1936, Papers of Hans Ehrenberg, Landeskirchliches Archiv der Evangelischen Kirche von Westfalen (LKA EKvW) W4891, Bielefeld, Germany.

⁹⁰⁴ Ericksen, *Complicity in the Holocaust*, 119; it was – and still is – customary for families in the Lutheran tradition (among many others) to baptize their children as newborns. Baptism is a Christian sacrament that serves to welcome the individual into the community of faith. For an in-depth treatment of Benfey's biography, see Gerhard Lindemann's "*Typisch jüdisch*": *Die Stellung der Ev.-luth. Landeskirche Hannovers zu Antijudaismus, Judenfeindschaft und Antisemitismus 1919-1949* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1998), 310-438.

⁹⁰⁵ Ericksen, *Complicity in the Holocaust*, 119.

churches in Hanover, Harburg, and Bremervörde, before receiving an appointment in 1927 as pastor at the Marienkirche in Göttingen. Unfortunately, he was not met with open arms by all in his congregation. A vocal minority of 100 of the 8,000 church members protested his appointment because of his Jewish ancestry.⁹⁰⁶ However, due to the Benfey family's good reputation and standing in the city – both the Jewish and Christian sides – the matter was resolved in favor of Pastor Benfey.⁹⁰⁷ But fears of losing employment rose again in the fall of 1933 when members of the German Christian movement in Hanover attempted but failed to enforce the “Aryan paragraph” in the regional church.⁹⁰⁸ By the middle of 1936 his situation had become untenable as pastor of the Marienkirche; pro-Nazi parishioners protested outside his services and advised others to stay away.⁹⁰⁹

On 8 November 1936, the harassment reached a new high. Again, protestors clamored for his removal, but as he began the service parishioners actually walked out in protest of his position in the church. As he and his wife exited the church and walked home, they were met by angry protestors shouting antisemitic slurs.⁹¹⁰ It was actually quite common for members of the German Christian movement to harass German pastors of Jewish descent and their families, and even their supporters.⁹¹¹ He received no support

⁹⁰⁶ Ericksen, *Complicity in the Holocaust*, 119; see also Lindemann, “*Typisch jüdisch*,” 106-107.

⁹⁰⁷ Ericksen, *Complicity in the Holocaust*, 120.

⁹⁰⁸ Ericksen, *Complicity in the Holocaust*, 120.

⁹⁰⁹ Ericksen, *Complicity in the Holocaust*, 120; see also Lindemann, “*Typisch jüdisch*,” 314-316.

⁹¹⁰ Ericksen, *Complicity in the Holocaust*, 120; see also Lindemann, “*Typisch jüdisch*,” 432-438.

⁹¹¹ Doris Bergman, “Antisemitism in the Nazi Era,” in Albert S. Lindemann and Richard S. Levy, *Antisemitism: A History* (New York: Oxford, 2010), Kindle location 4454. The authors argue that the German Christian “spokespeople and activists were obsessed with Christians of Jewish background, and further, that “in many congregations, German Christians organized campaigns, including physical assault, against pastors, members of church councils, musicians, and parishioners who had Jewish ancestors, were

from his bishop and his congregation did not stand up to the faction that sought his removal. Realizing his isolation and the lack of support, Benfey submitted his letter of resignation in 1937. We cannot conclude that the Nazi regime or the church dismissed Benfey for being Jewish, because neither the state nor the church took any official action against him. But we can conclude that his congregation forced him out simply because he was of Jewish descent. It must be said, however, that the congregational faction might never have succeeded were it not for the Nazi regime's promotion of antisemitic policies and the church's apathy and compliance. The case of Pastor Bruno Benfey illustrates the difficulties German pastors of Jewish descent faced trying to keep their careers as ministers under the Nazi dictatorship.

For the past twenty-five years, historians have attempted to identify "non-Aryan" pastors and to gain a better understanding of the persecution they experienced under the National Socialist state as well as their experiences in exile.⁹¹² In fact, 117 of 18,000 pastors found themselves the targets of a regime that challenged their Christian identity, imposed a Jewish identity upon them, and ultimately sought their exclusion from German public life. Though German pastors of Jewish descent were a relatively small group, they deserve our attention as individuals who faced unjust discrimination, and as clergy who,

married to Jews, or expressed empathy with the plight of Jews in Germany."

⁹¹² The most important studies on this subject include Marion Berghahn, *German-Jewish Refugees in England* (London: Macmillan, 1984); Cynthia Crane, *Divided Lives: The Untold Stories of Jewish-Christian Women in Nazi Germany* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000); Haim Genizi, *American Apathy: The Plight of Christian Refugees from Nazism* (Ramat-Gan, Israel: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1983); Lindemann, "Typisch jüdisch"; Lutherhaus Eisenach, *Wider Das Vergessen: Schicksale judenchristlicher Pfarrer in der Zeit von 1933-1945* (Herausgegeben vom Evangelischen Pfarrhausarchiv, 1989); James F. Tent, *In the Shadow of the Holocaust: Nazi Persecution of Jewish-Christian Germans* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2003); and Ronald D.E. Webster's "German 'Non-Aryan' Clergymen and the Anguish of Exile after 1933" in *The Journal of Religious History*, 22:1, February 1998.

in their unique roles, may have participated in acts of opposition against the Nazi regime. As we will see in the next chapter, surviving sermons indicate that some of them, like their fellow Confessing Church colleagues, opposed National Socialism as a divisive ideology in competition with traditional Christianity, contested the actions of the pro-Nazi German Christian movement to gain control of the German Protestant Churches, and spoke out against Adolf Hitler as a pseudo-savior.

In this chapter I will introduce this group of German pastors of Jewish descent and also explore the problems and dilemmas unique to this population, not least of which was their ability to freely serve Christian congregations in Nazi Germany. The present chapter begins with a brief discussion of the background of Jewish Christians in Nazi Germany, and then moves to an examination of the history of the exclusion of German pastors of Jewish descent from pastorates by the German Protestant churches and the Nazi regime. And finally, I have compiled a listing of German pastors of Jewish descent that contributes to the historiography by including previously unknown information about the affiliation of these pastors with the Confessing Church and also their racial categorization by the Nazi regime. I aim to provide a more complete picture than the existing historiography offers of the ministries and persecution of these pastors, particularly regarding their exclusion from German life (e.g. loss of employment, emigration, imprisonment, and even murder). Furthermore, this chapter provides the necessary context to understand the ministries and sermons of the three German pastors of Jewish descent I will examine in the next chapter: Hans Ehrenberg, Franz

Hildebrandt, and Friedrich Forell.⁹¹³ This study of German pastors of Jewish descent provides us with a unique window into the German Protestant churches in Nazi Germany. What we find are pastors who were denied the opportunity to live out their calling to minister to their communities of faith simply because many fellow Christians and countrymen perceived them as racially disqualified.

An Introduction to Jewish Christians in Nazi Germany

This subgroup of German pastors highlights an important problem that confronted German society under the Nazi dictatorship, that is, how to define “Jewish-ness.” Jews have historically identified themselves as a religious group, an ethnic group, an “historical continuum,” and even a “cultural group with peculiar racial traits.”⁹¹⁴ Religious faith and observance was widely considered essential to Jewish identity until the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, when the ideologies of socialism and nationalism emphasized the importance of language (Hebrew and Yiddish), a shared history and culture, and the conception of the homeland.⁹¹⁵ Thus, in the modern era, religious commitments were not essential to a Jewish identity. This shift occurred at the same time as racial ideology gained popularity among European intellectuals, such as Houston Stewart Chamberlain and Comte Arthur de Gobineau and their followers, who asserted “Jewish-ness” as a racial trait regardless of religion, nationality, or a shared history or

⁹¹³ All three were pastors who were ordained Lutherans who joined the cause of the Confessing Church, and yet each escaped Nazi Germany and went into exile due to their persecution as German pastors of Jewish descent.

⁹¹⁴ Zvi Gitelman, ed. *Religion or Ethnicity?: Jewish Identities in Evolution* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2009), 303.

⁹¹⁵ Gitelman, *Religion or Ethnicity?*, 303.

culture. By the 1920s, Hitler adopted this racial ideology, popularized it, and made it state policy upon becoming Chancellor of Germany.

Let us step back for a moment and consider the larger historical context of Jewish Christians in modern Germany. Deborah Hertz's research on conversion in late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century Berlin offers many insights into the costs of assimilation and why German Jews may have converted to Christianity.⁹¹⁶ Though the Prussian edict of emancipation in 1812 granted Jews new social and economic freedoms, they still faced discrimination which created barriers to upward mobility. Conversion to Christianity meant civic equality, acceptance in society, and a more promising future for oneself and one's children. At the same time, conversion threatened ties to one's parents' extended family, the larger Jewish community, and one's connection with the Jewish tradition. Hertz demonstrates that conversions increased considerably in the 1820s, despite the newfound freedoms of the edict of 1812, for a number of reasons.

The most obvious explanations, which of course are not at all exclusive, include the work of missionaries, the suppression of reform, the lure of a prestigious career, intermarriage, desire to feel more German, and changing socializing patterns allowing converts to remain intimate with Jewish family and friends.⁹¹⁷

Thus, conversion was not primarily a decision based solely on religious grounds, but most often it was a practical decision based on social and economic considerations. The history of Jewish conversion and assimilation in early nineteenth century Berlin is a story

⁹¹⁶ See Deborah Hertz, *How Jews Became Germans: The History of Conversion and Assimilation in Berlin* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007).

⁹¹⁷ Hertz, *How Jews Became Germans*, 195.

of self-creation, of men and women who wished to shape their own future and identities, and at the same time, it represents a period in which German Jewry lost some of its best and brightest.⁹¹⁸

Well into the twentieth century we find that the Nazi regime sought to undermine these stories of conversion by subverting the meaning of Christian identity through racial categorizations. In addition to the approximately 500,000 “full” Jews living in Nazi Germany, there was a sizable number of *Mischlinge*, a derogatory Nazi term meaning “half breed” or “mongrel,” referring to German citizens of mixed religious or ethnic ancestry.⁹¹⁹ The Nazi regime categorized an estimated 72,000 German citizens as “half-Jews” in 1939, and in addition, there were approximately 40,000 “quarter-Jews.”⁹²⁰ Another way of gaining perspective of the scope of the number of *Mischlinge* affected by Nazi racial laws, we can consider Ursula Büttner’s estimate that “apart from the Jews themselves, several hundreds of thousands of people, a number originally perhaps just short of 400,000, suffered as a result of the National Socialist racial lunacy because they were spouses, children or grandchildren of Jews.”⁹²¹

⁹¹⁸ Hertz, *How Jews Became Germans*, 220-222.

⁹¹⁹ See Doris Bergen, *War and Genocide: A Concise History of the Holocaust* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003), 60. Karl Schleunes reports the 1925 German census record of 568,000 Jews, “less than one percent of the total German population.” By 1933, the number drops to 503,000 Jews. See Karl Schleunes, *The Twisted Road to Auschwitz: Nazi Policy toward German Jews 1933-1939* (Chicago: University of Illinois, 1990), 37.

⁹²⁰ James F. Tent, *In the Shadow of the Holocaust: Nazi Persecution of Jewish-Christian Germans* (Lawrence, KA: University Press of Kansas, 2003), 2; see also Jeremy Noakes, “The Development of Nazi Policy towards the German-Jewish ‘Mischlinge’ 1933-1945,” in *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook*, vol. 34 (New York, 1989), 293. Noakes argues for a slightly higher number of 52,005 *Mischlinge* 1st degree and 32,669 *Mischlinge* 2nd degree.

⁹²¹ Quoted in Cynthia Crane, *Divided Lives: The Untold Stories of Jewish-Christian Women in Nazi Germany* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000), 26.

The Nazi persecution of Jewish Christian *Mischlinge* has too often been neglected by historians of the Nazi dictatorship and the Holocaust, which may be attributed to two primary reasons. First, most Jewish Christian *Mischlinge* survived the war, and thus they were generally not included in studies of the Holocaust; and second, their numbers were relatively small.⁹²² As a way of contextualizing the specific problems and dilemmas of German pastors of Jewish descent, we can more generally introduce the concerns confronting this much larger group of Christians of Jewish descent. First, the Nazi regime drafted employment laws with the intention of excluding “full” and “mixed” Jews from jobs and career opportunities.⁹²³ The Aryan paragraph of the Civil Service Law of April 7, 1933, excluded “full” Jews from the legal, medical, and civil service professions. But it was not long before the Nazis extended the Aryan paragraph into other career fields, such as journalism and private business.⁹²⁴ The Nazi exclusion of “full” Jews often translated in practice to the dismissal of *Mischlinge*. Local and regional party officials encouraged employers to refuse to “hire *Mischlinge* or to allow apprenticeships no matter what the Berlin-based ministries were ordaining.”⁹²⁵ The simple fact of being racially categorized often meant unstable employment and an uncertain career path.

A second theme we often see in the literature on Christians of Jewish descent is social exclusion. The basis of this exclusion was the Nuremberg decrees of 1935, which not only barred “full” Jews from intimate relations with “Aryans,” but also decreed that

⁹²² Tent, *In the Shadow of the Holocaust*, 6.

⁹²³ Tent, *In the Shadow of the Holocaust*, 62.

⁹²⁴ Tent, *In the Shadow of the Holocaust*, 62.

⁹²⁵ Tent, *In the Shadow of the Holocaust*, 63.

“*Mischlinge* first degree could marry only other half-Jews or foreigners but not *Deutschblütige* (i.e. Germans of full Christian descent).”⁹²⁶ In practice, Nazi authorities harassed *Mischlinge* caught in intimate relationships with “Aryan” Germans to the point of threatening imprisonment in a concentration camp.⁹²⁷ At the same time the Nuremberg decrees made *Mischlinge* “provisional citizens,” meaning that their citizenship could be revoked in the future, thereby making them second class citizens in German society.⁹²⁸ *Mischlinge* increasingly felt themselves separated from their Jewish family members (whom the Nazi regime targeted ruthlessly) and from the rest of German society.

This leads us to a third theme, the “divided lives” of Christians of Jewish descent: one is not fully “Aryan” or Jewish, but somewhere in between.⁹²⁹ The historian Cynthia Crane’s interviews with ten Jewish Christian women reveal considerable frustration and confusion in learning to adapt to the new reality of Nazi Germany. Crane tells of one woman, Ingeborg Hecht, who recalls her feelings about the exclusion Jewish Christians experienced:

⁹²⁶ Tent, *In the Shadow of the Holocaust*, 102-103. As Tent notes, “the decree did not explicitly bar *Mischlinge* first degree from having sexual relations with Aryan Germans the way it did for full Jews.” See also Noakes, “The Development of Nazi Policy towards the German-Jewish ‘Mischlinge,’ 1933-1945,” 313.

⁹²⁷ Tent, *In the Shadow of the Holocaust*, 103. Thus, while sexual relations between *Mischlinge* and “Aryan” Germans was not technically illegal, it was effectively forbidden. See Noakes, “The Development of Nazi Policy towards the German-Jewish ‘Mischlinge,’ 1933-1945,” 313.

⁹²⁸ Jeremy Noakes makes the important distinction in Nazi treatment of *Mischlinge* of the first and second classes: “The whole thrust of Nazi Party policy from the Nuremberg Laws onwards was to integrate the quarter-Jews [*Mischlinge* second degree] into the rest of the population and to consign the half-Jews [*Mischlinge* first degree] to the Jews.” See Noakes, “The Development of Nazi Policy towards the German-Jewish ‘Mischlinge,’ 1933-1945,” 337.

⁹²⁹ Crane, *Divided Lives*, 22.

My feelings about being an outsider in the Third Reich are mixed. I didn't feel like an outsider because I had so many friends... My brother had substantially bigger problems. He was excluded from the Hamburg sports club, where he had played soccer. He was fourteen years old. This was extremely troublesome for him because he wanted to play soccer and to hang out with his sports friends. He had many friends in the Christian community... He was later forced to move to a Jewish school, which only increased his feelings as an outsider *as we weren't Jewish* [emphasis in original].⁹³⁰

Like Hecht and her brother, Christians of Jewish descent (both partial and converted Jews) had to come to terms with their new status in Nazi Germany. Their experiences corresponded to those of “full” Jews who also had to come to terms with being declared “outsiders” in their own society. We must also keep in mind that one of the problems in analyzing the experiences of Christians of Jewish descent is that they could come from a variety of religious backgrounds, which might have impeded their access to faith-based support institutions (such as a church or church agency). They could either be devout Christians with connections to the church, or “cultural” Christians without ties to a church or synagogue, or they could also have a syncretic religious background, adhering to both Jewish and Christian traditions.⁹³¹ And as we will see with our discussion of German pastors of Jewish descent, when the Nazi regime and its fervent supporters among the German Christian movement labeled Christians as Jews, this often meant that their status in the church was threatened.

The diaries of Victor Klemperer provide us with a wealth of information about the experiences of Jewish Christians under the Nazi regime, and his experience illustrates the

⁹³⁰ Crane, *Divided Lives*, 55.

⁹³¹ Syncretism refers to the combination of at least two religious systems that determine one's religious beliefs and practices.

suffering many of them endured. Klemperer was a “full” Jew who was actually baptized twice, once in 1903 to become a reserve officer in the German military, and again in 1912, a few years after his marriage to Eva Schlemmer.⁹³² After the Nazis came to power they categorized his marriage as a “privileged mixed marriage,” one of 20,454 in Nazi Germany by 1939.⁹³³ The Nazi regime actually encouraged the “Aryan” partner to divorce his or her spouse by relaxing the conditions for divorce, granting the right of the “Aryan” spouse to keep most of the common property of the marriage, and discriminating against those who wished to remain married by excluding them from civic organizations or even dismissing them from employment.⁹³⁴ Not surprisingly, couples designated as a privileged mixed marriage “suffered financially as the breadwinners...steadily lost jobs and scrambled for other, less rewarding work.”⁹³⁵ This is precisely the case with Klemperer. Klemperer worked as a professor of literature at the Technical University of Dresden until the Nuremberg Laws of 1935 forced his dismissal, at which point he found what manual labor he could to survive. His wife’s Aryan status saved him from deportation and the concentration camps, yet he and his wife were forced to relocate in 1940 to a “Jews’ House” (*Judenhaus*) – or as he refers to his apartment, a “superior concentration camp” – where the conditions were cramped, noisy and chaotic.⁹³⁶ And he

⁹³² Jerry Schuchalter, *Poetry and Truth: Variations on Holocaust Testimony* (New York: Peter Lang, 2009), 183; as Schuchalter notes, it appears that Klemperer kept his initial conversion to Protestantism a secret.

⁹³³ Beate Meyer (Hrsg.), *Die Verfolgung und Ermordung der Hamburger Juden 1933-1945, Geschichte. Zeugnis. Erinnerung* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2006), 79.

⁹³⁴ Beate Meyer, “Juedische Mischlinge”: Rassenpolitik und Verfolgungserfahrung 1933-1945 (Hamburg: Doelling und Galitz, 2002), 68-72.

⁹³⁵ Tent, *In the Shadow of the Holocaust*, 21.

⁹³⁶ Victor Klemperer, *I Will Bear Witness, 1933-1941: A Diary of the Nazi Years* (New York: Modern Library, 1999), 343.

endured public humiliation when Nazi law required all Jews to wear the Star of David. He writes in his diary on the announcement of the law in September 1941, “I myself feel shattered, cannot compose myself.”⁹³⁷ A couple days later he comments on only walking the streets at nighttime: “I shall breathe in a little fresh air only under shelter of darkness.”⁹³⁸ Though Klemperer was “privileged” as the husband of an “Aryan” (and as a World War I combat veteran), yet he still suffered considerably under the Nazi regime as a Christian of Jewish ancestry.

The Exclusion of “Jewish” Pastors

Nazi racial policy placed Christian pastors of Jewish descent in a dilemma. They lived under a government that denied their own self-identity as Christians. It is important to note that these pastors were in every sense like their non-Jewish colleagues in Germany: all were ordained by their churches to be ministers, and in this sense, they were dedicated to their congregations and their pastorate. They, like their colleagues, were at the same time Germans, Christians, and the leaders of faith communities. Yet the Nazi regime categorized them as *nicht arischer Abstammung* (not of Aryan descent), or variously as *Volljude* or *Vollblutjude* (full Jew), *Halbjude* (half Jew), and *Mischlinge* (“half breed”).

Though it goes without saying that Christians do not always live up to the high standards of Christian ethics in practice, German pastors of Jewish descent might well have felt disappointed and betrayed, to say the least, that many Christians in Nazi

⁹³⁷ Klemperer, *I Will Bear Witness*, 429.

⁹³⁸ Klemperer, *I Will Bear Witness*, 433.

Germany excluded them because of race. At least in Christian theology, if not always in Christian practice, the gospel is for all peoples. In fact, this tenet is foundational to Jesus' "great commission" for all Christians: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations..."⁹³⁹ Thus, the Nazi categories were artificial and an imposition of an identity that the individual may not accept as legitimate for him- or herself. For many Christians, the Apostle Paul's teaching on inclusivity in the early Christian churches gave them guidance; the typical boundaries had faded away. Paul writes, "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus."⁹⁴⁰ By systematically separating Jews from their "Aryan" countrymen, the Nazis effectively divided the church and compelled not only those targeted for persecutions – Christians of Jewish descent – but also the German churches to respond to this violation of the Christian tradition.

Imagine for a moment the disorientation newly categorized "Jewish" pastors must have felt as the Nazi regime singled them out as "the other."⁹⁴¹ All of these pastors had been confirmed and baptized into the Church prior to ordination, either as children or adults. The married among them, the vast majority, were married in a Christian ceremony, by a pastor in a church with a Christian liturgy and among the Christian faithful. They not only participated in the rites and holidays of the Church, but led these activities in their communities of faith. These pastors identified as Christians, simply by

⁹³⁹ Matthew 28:19.

⁹⁴⁰ Galatians 3:28-29.

⁹⁴¹ See Berghahn's treatment of German-Jewish refugees in England and their recollections of the heartbreak and disorientation that resulted from the Nazis categorizing them as aliens, in *German-Jewish Refugees in England*, 47-53. See also Crane's *Divided Lives* and Tent's *In the Shadow of the Holocaust*.

virtue of their occupation, and for the Nazis to suddenly label them “Jewish” may have come as a shock, as it doubtless was for many Germans of Jewish or mixed ancestry.⁹⁴² Race now defined them. But as Christians of Jewish ancestry, what did “Jewish-ness” mean to them? Surely many were aware of their Jewish ancestry, given their family histories and surnames. German pastors of Jewish descent had to confront their newly acquired Jewish identity even as they tried to serve their congregations as best they could, given the circumstances.

One of the basic questions historians have attempted to answer is just how many German pastors of Jewish descent there were in Nazi Germany. The fragmentary and scattered nature of the historical record precludes a comprehensive listing of these men, and no historian who has produced such a list claims that their approach is exhaustive or complete. The first attempt to answer this question came from an article by Otto Fischer entitled, “*Arische Abstammung und evangelische Pfarrer,*” published in the *Deutsches Pfarrerblatt* on October 31, 1933. Fischer listed the names of 37 “full Jewish” pastors living in Nazi Germany, eight who had already retired.⁹⁴³ Out of a total of 18,000 German pastors, the 37 comprise just .002% of pastors. The problem with Fischer’s account is that the Nazis persecuted not only “full Jewish” pastors, but also pastors of mixed Jewish ancestry, thus widening the possibility of more pastors affected by Nazi

⁹⁴² Crane writes of the “betrayal” that many Mischlinge felt having a new Jewish identity thrust upon them by the Nazi regime: “This was a betrayal for the Mischlinge – being told they were members of a Jewish ‘race,’ but having little or no idea what being Jewish meant. This takeover of their identity was the beginning of their duality of Christian and Jew, German and Jew.” See Crane, *Divided Lives*, 24-25. See also Tent, *In the Shadow of the Holocaust*, 237. For specific examples of German pastors of Jewish descent identifying as Christian rather than as Jewish, see my discussion of Hans Ehrenberg, Franz Hildebrandt, and Friedrich Forell in the next chapter, Chapter 7.

⁹⁴³ Otto Fischer, “Arische Abstammung und Evangelische Pfarrer,” in *Deutsches Pfarrerblatt* (October 31, 1933), 607-610; see also Helmreich, *The German Churches under Hitler*, 148.

racial laws and thereby making them more willing to offer resistance or dissent in confrontation with Nazi regime. Fischer's numbers were standard in the historiography up until the mid-1980s when historians began to take another look.

The most complete and current listing of German pastors of Jewish descent was compiled in 1989 by the Lutherhaus in Eisenach, which created a list of 114 names published in *Wider Das Vergessen: Schicksale judenchristlicher Pfarrer in der Zeit von 1933-1945*.⁹⁴⁴ Lutherhaus based its compilation on three unpublished sources: the *Liste Mayer-Leonard* (no date), the *Liste Ehrenberg* (no date) and the list of the historian Hans Prolingheuer (1987).⁹⁴⁵ The Mayer-Leonard list includes 51 names organized by the country to which each emigrated. The Ehrenberg list has 39 names of Jewish-Christian pastors, presumably all at least one-quarter Jewish, plus an additional 15 names of pastors of undetermined, partial Jewish ancestry. And the Prolingheuer list contains 150 pastors, and includes the towns or cities in which they ministered. The historians of the Eisenach Lutherhaus collected these three lists, conducted their own research, and published a revised listing of 114 names of pastors affected by Nazi racial legislation.⁹⁴⁶ The presumption here is that these pastors were in fact of Jewish descent.⁹⁴⁷ But before

⁹⁴⁴ See Lutherhaus Eisenach, *Wider Das Vergessen*. Unfortunately, the records of Ehrenberg and Mayer-Leonard do not indicate any biographical information about the authors or the dates of compilation.

⁹⁴⁵ The lists are in varying formats. The Mayer-Leonard and Ehrenberg lists are simple, one-page listings of German pastors of Jewish descent. The lists are not dated and contain virtually no other commentary on the pastors or the methods of identifying them. The list by Hans Prolingheuer is quite different: the list is part of a formal letter, with official letterhead, dated 22 November 1987, from an address in Cologne, and addressed specifically to the Lutherhaus in Eisenach. His list is much more thorough, containing more information on the location, titles, and birthdates of the pastors, than is found in the other two lists.

⁹⁴⁶ The Lutherhaus Eisenach is a European Heritage Site and a cultural-historical museum that promotes the memory of the Reformation.

⁹⁴⁷ Lutherhaus Eisenach, *Wider Das Vergessen: Schicksale judenchristlicher Pfarrer in der Zeit von 1933-1945* (Herausgegeben vom Evangelischen Pfarrhausarchiv, April 1988 - April 1989). It is possible that a

presenting an updated listing of German pastors of Jewish descent, it is important to clarify how Nazis sought to exclude them from the German churches.

At the outset it is important to note that the Nazi regime itself did not directly enforce the dismissal of German pastors of Jewish descent. Nevertheless, the exclusion of German pastors of Jewish descent began with the Civil Service Law of April 7, 1933, and the so-called “Aryan paragraph,” which effectively prohibited Jews and socialists from national, state, and local civil service employment, including for example, school teachers, professors, and government officials and employees.⁹⁴⁸ The law had a profound effect on German society, as church historian Klaus Scholder writes,

The significance of this law for the policy of the Third Reich and especially for its policy towards the Jews can hardly be overestimated. It marked the first step in special legislation at the end of which stood the extermination of the Jews in Germany and Europe, and it was a clear indication that Hitler was determined to make volkish ideology the basis of the new state even in law.⁹⁴⁹

But the law did not extend to the churches because Hitler did not want to directly interfere in church affairs by dictating who could or could not serve as a clergyman.⁹⁵⁰ Nevertheless, this law immediately set Protestant churches against themselves and some churches against the state in a controversy about how to deal with Nazi policy.

pastor or pastors who were initially put on the list, could not or would not produce valid evidence of their ancestry so as to be taken off the list.

⁹⁴⁸ Kirk, *Nazi Germany*, 41-42.

⁹⁴⁹ Scholder, *Churches and the Third Reich*, vol. 1, 273.

⁹⁵⁰ Ericksen, *Complicity in the Holocaust*, 26.

Fervent German Christian movement pastors and lay leaders across Germany “worked towards the Führer” in instigating the process of “coordination” in the German Protestant churches, endeavoring to remove all Jews from the Church administration and the pastorate.⁹⁵¹ The German Christian movement passed the “Aryan paragraph” at the synod of the Evangelical Church of the Old Prussian Union on September 5-6, 1933. This meant that only clergymen of “Aryan” descent, and none married to Jewish wives, could remain clergymen or serve in Church government. This meant the effective retirement of German pastors of Jewish descent. This sparked outrage and protests in the German Protestant churches because it subverted the universality of the gospel, baptism, and Christianity as a matter of faith.⁹⁵²

This move instigated the formation of the Pastor’s Emergency League in late September 1933, which then greatly complicated how churches dealt with German pastors of Jewish descent.⁹⁵³ Churches administered by the leaders of the German Christian movement sought compliance with the “Aryan paragraph” and demanded proof of “Aryan” descent, while Confessing Church leaders did not. As Barnett argues, “The expectation that pastors and church workers would show proof of ‘Aryan’ identity became a matter of course in some churches, although the Confessing Church never

⁹⁵¹ In the words of Ian Kershaw, “working towards the Führer” meant that Hitler’s “presumed aims served to prompt, activate, or legitimate initiatives at different levels of the regime, driving on, consciously or unwittingly, the destructive dynamic of Nazi rule.” See Ian Kershaw, *Hitler: A Biography* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2008), Kindle edition, location 180. This inter-church struggle occurred at a point at which the Protestant church attempted to resist “coordination” (*Gleichschaltung*) with Nazi ideology and policies.

⁹⁵² Helmreich, *German Churches under Hitler* 146-147.

⁹⁵³ See Ericksen, *Complicity in the Holocaust*, 27; and Helmreich, *German Churches under Hitler*, 145.

asked for such proof.”⁹⁵⁴ This event demonstrates that even in the fall of 1933, pro-Nazi Christians pushed for the legal removal of all German pastors of Jewish descent. The nation, the church, and the people in the pews now began to turn against their “Jewish” pastors.

To further complicate the work of the Confessing Church movement, the far-reaching racial legislation of the Nuremberg Laws of September 1935 defined who was Jewish and also provided a basis for legal discrimination throughout the Nazi dictatorship.⁹⁵⁵ While supporters of the “Aryan paragraph” sought to exclude Jews from employment and membership in institutions and organizations throughout Nazi Germany, the Nuremberg Laws stripped Jews of citizenship, prohibited sexual relations and marriage with “Aryans,” and further restricted the rights of Jews, such as the prohibition of Jews to fly the German flag. The laws represent another step in the permanent exclusion of Jews from German public life. They were “at once transformed into social outsiders, and their legal status reverted to pre-emancipation days.”⁹⁵⁶ Since no racial distinctions can be found in blood, the Nazis relied on the religious identification of one’s grandparents to determine the degree of racial “Jewish-ness.”⁹⁵⁷ This is ironic given the Nazis’ veneration of race and ambivalence about religion.⁹⁵⁸ Those who had at least three grandparents of the Jewish faith were classified as “*Volljude*” or “full Jews.” Those

⁹⁵⁴ Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 129.

⁹⁵⁵ Helmreich, *German Churches under Hitler*, 190.

⁹⁵⁶ Gellately, *Backing Hitler*, Kindle edition, location 3134.

⁹⁵⁷ Noakes, “The Development of Nazi Party Policy towards the German-Jewish ‘Mischlinge,’ 1933-1945,” 298.

⁹⁵⁸ Ericksen, *Complicity in the Holocaust*, 118.

who had two grandparents of the Jewish faith were considered “Mischlinge” 1st Grade, and those with only one grandparent were “*Mischlinge*” 2nd Grade. In addition, persons of mixed ancestry who practiced Judaism or married someone categorized as Jewish, were counted as Jewish.⁹⁵⁹ Unfortunately, “there were, alas, no ringing denunciations of these measures from the church authorities at the time [either Catholic or Protestant]. They were absorbed with the problems of church organization, administration, and jurisdiction and apparently paid little attention to growing antisemitism, except as it affected [Christians of Jewish descent].”⁹⁶⁰

The Confessing Church ultimately did not succeed against the pro-Nazi push to oust German pastors of Jewish descent from their positions.⁹⁶¹ In fact, as Robert Ericksen argues, all German pastors of full Jewish descent lost their positions in the church by 1938.⁹⁶² To understand why this happened we must first consider the agents in the pastors’ dismissals and then the underlying antisemitism at work in the German Protestant churches that expedited their removal from the pastorate. In this effort, we will take a close look at the experiences of one Confessing Church pastor, Ernst Gordon.

Gordon relates his remarkable account in his unpublished autobiography *And I Will Walk at Liberty*.⁹⁶³ He was born in Berlin in 1909, and his father was a Christian of

⁹⁵⁹ Bergen, *War and Genocide*, 74-75.

⁹⁶⁰ Helmreich, *German Churches under Hitler*, 190.

⁹⁶¹ Ericksen, *Complicity in the Holocaust*, 94.

⁹⁶² Ericksen, *Complicity in the Holocaust*, 94.

⁹⁶³ Ernst Gordon, *And I Will Walk at Liberty*, Papers of Ernst Gordon. No date provided. Evangelisches Zentralarchiv (EZA) 600/107400, Berlin, Germany. I have searched historical monographs for any references to Pastor Ernst Gordon and have not found any additional information aside from that contained in the EZA archive files. However, his autobiography is a treasure trove of detailed information about his life and work in Nazi Germany. The autobiography does not provide a date of composition, but it was most likely produced sometime shortly after the Second World War in England.

Jewish descent. Gordon studied theology at the Universities of Berlin and Marburg, completed his examinations in 1932, and began his first assignment as a pastor in Forst (in the Old Prussian Union) on the eve of the Nazi dictatorship. Gordon's first encounter with pro-Nazi churchmen began even before 1933. He recalls the shock of one day hearing his superintendent, Paul Kriebel, claim in a children's class that Adolf Hitler was one of the great men of their time.⁹⁶⁴ His shock turned to dismay in 1933 when the leadership of the German Christian movement

passed a new measure concerning the legal status of the clergy and church officers which embodied the racial doctrines of the Nazi Party – the so-called 'Aryan paragraph' which excluded ministers of Jewish origin from holding office or candidates from being ordained. The same measure also decreed that 'clergymen and officials who by their actions show that they do not offer a guarantee that they would at any time...defend the national state and the German Evangelical Church may be retired.'⁹⁶⁵

Just starting out with a career in the ministry, Gordon faced the prospect of his immediate termination.

He writes that at the end of 1933 that "anyone in an official position who was of Jewish origin...[was] expelled [from office]," including pastors.⁹⁶⁶ He relates first-hand how he, like all Germans, had to prove "Aryan" descent by establishing through baptismal records that his parents and both sets of grandparents were baptized as infants. He concedes that the churches should not have complied and offered baptismal records to

⁹⁶⁴ Gordon, *And I Will Walk at Liberty*, EZA 600/107400. In the interest of full disclosure, I was astonished to learn during my research that the Superintendent Paul Kriebel mentioned by Gordon is my maternal great uncle. His younger brother Richard Kriebel is my great-grandfather.

⁹⁶⁵ Gordon, *And I Will Walk at Liberty*, EZA 600/107400.

⁹⁶⁶ Gordon, *And I Will Walk at Liberty*, EZA 600/107400.

determine “Aryan” descent, and it was to their shame that they did. But he contends that the Nazis would have simply seized the records anyway. From this point on Gordon threw his support to the Pastors’ Emergency League and would later join the Confessing Church.

At this same time, Gordon pursued his Second Theological Examination and ordination in the Old Prussian Union. He speaks with evident guilt of entering the room for the oral examination room and, compelled to give the Hitler salute, greeted the committee with a “Heil...” without naming Hitler.⁹⁶⁷ The provost and chairman of the examination, a member of the German Christian movement, said that Gordon could not become an ordained pastor because of his Jewish descent, but only a non-ordained pastor. This was simply not good enough for Gordon. He was dismissed from the roll of candidates for ordination, and he refused employment under the leadership of the German Christian movement. In a vague but illuminating and remarkable comment, he relates how he and his fellow students (he may have been the only German of Jewish descent among them) signed a declaration that if one were dismissed from ordination under the leadership of the German Christian movement, all would dismiss themselves. And this is apparently what they did.⁹⁶⁸

Gordon found support and a pastoral position with the newly formed Confessing Church. The Brotherhood Council for Berlin and Brandenburg, the leadership body of

⁹⁶⁷ Gordon, *And I Will Walk at Liberty*, EZA 600/107400.

⁹⁶⁸ Gordon, *And I Will Walk at Liberty*, EZA 600/107400. This is not to say that these colleagues gave up their careers, per se, but that they left the organizational structure of the Evangelical Church of the Old Prussian Union, an organization within the German Evangelical Church (and later, the Reich Church). They could still work as ordained pastors in the smaller “free” Protestant churches in Germany.

the Confessing Church in the Old Prussian Union, employed Gordon in a large parish of four churches on the east side of Berlin.⁹⁶⁹ At a ceremony at the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church on Berlin's famous Kurfürstendamm, Gordon achieved what he had so long worked for, ordination as a pastor in the church. The joy would not last long, however, as Gordon quickly met discrimination and confrontation in his Berlin parish. Only three months into his pastorate, a farmer in the parish made critical remarks of Hitler in a local bar, for which the unspecified "authorities" arrested this farmer, and only agreed to release him if "the Jew pastor" left the parish.⁹⁷⁰ Gordon resigned and the farmer was released.⁹⁷¹ It is not clear from Gordon's retelling just how or why the "authorities" had the influence to demand his resignation, but his case indicates police pressure on "purifying" the church of German pastors of Jewish descent.

Nevertheless, Gordon would not be discouraged from his calling as pastor. The Brotherhood Council helped him find a new job in March 1935 in Schneidemühl in western Prussia. But trouble erupted yet again. Shortly after his appointment in Schneidemühl, Gordon refused to sign a letter by the Nazi regime demanding that he and other pastors not read a Confessing Church declaration from the pulpit that warned parents of Nazis "poisoning" the minds of children.⁹⁷² Gordon writes that two police

⁹⁶⁹ Gordon, *And I Will Walk at Liberty*, EZA 600/107400.

⁹⁷⁰ Gordon, *And I Will Walk at Liberty*, EZA 600/107400.

⁹⁷¹ Gordon, *And I Will Walk at Liberty*, EZA 600/107400.

⁹⁷² Gordon, *And I Will Walk at Liberty*, EZA 600/107400. While Gordon does not specify the name of this document to be read in the pulpit by Confessing Church pastors, it is most likely the document written by Pastor Heinrich Vogel, among others, in March 1935 that condemned the Nazi regime's recommendation to use Alfred Rosenberg's *The Myth of the Twentieth Century* in classrooms. The Nazi regime arrested 700 pastors, among them Gordon, for reading this document from the pulpit. See Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 80.

officers, embarrassed at their task, arrested him and eight to ten of his colleagues and sent them all to jail for failing to sign the agreement.⁹⁷³ Despite a few days in jail, the police let them go. Shortly thereafter, he and the pastors read the pulpit declaration. He reports that members of the German Christian movement in his parish rallied opposition against him, and after a threat of physical violence the Brotherhood Council recalled him to Berlin for yet another assignment.

By this time the Nuremberg Laws came into effect and Gordon looked into the possibility of immigrating to Great Britain. He appealed to Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a fellow Berliner and Confessing Church pastor, who had spent the past two years serving a German congregation in London. Gordon appealed to Bonhoeffer to work with Bishop George Bell of England to facilitate an appointment for him, to which Bonhoeffer complied.⁹⁷⁴ This indicates that at least some German pastors of Jewish descent had a broad support structure in place, where Confessing Church colleagues could potentially help them relocate and find new positions in the church.

In the meantime, Gordon found a new position in Berlin-Schönwalde in 1935, but notes that the police had placed him under surveillance – how or by whose instigation he does not say.⁹⁷⁵ While at Schönwalde, he relates a few troubling episodes that resulted in his emigration. The first was when he and his newlywed wife Leonore Tiktin (also a Christian of Jewish descent) returned from their honeymoon to the warm welcome of

⁹⁷³ Gordon, *And I Will Walk at Liberty*, EZA 600/107400.

⁹⁷⁴ Gordon, *And I Will Walk at Liberty*, EZA 600/107400.

⁹⁷⁵ Gordon, *And I Will Walk at Liberty*, EZA 600/107400. Gordon does not specify the identity of this “police” unit, but it is likely that it was the Gestapo as they were known to surveil persons (either directly or most often through informants) suspected of activity detrimental to the Nazi state. See for example Gellately, *Backing Hitler*, Kindle edition, location 1913; and Evans, *Third Reich in Power*, 96-97.

their congregation, only to find that unidentified men took pictures of this celebration and published a story in a Nazi newspaper criticizing the congregation for welcoming a “Jew” as pastor.⁹⁷⁶ In another instance, Gordon recalls local Nazis recruited his confirmands to rehearse for a play during their confirmation classes, and even more, to perform the play on the very day of their confirmation.⁹⁷⁷ This meant that the confirmands would not study for confirmation, an ancient rite of passage in the church, and even more importantly, they would not be confirmed: they would then not profess their faith nor become full members of the congregation. Gordon admits with evident sadness that the parents refused to support him. Lastly, in a show of support for his colleague Martin Niemöller, Gordon and other local pastors gathered at Niemöller’s church, the Jesus Christus Kirche in Berlin-Dahlem, and protested his recent arrest by the Gestapo. In this show of support for a vocal critic of the Nazi regime, the Gestapo arrested Gordon also. The culmination of all these events, from his student days until his arrest, made him realize that he could not live out his calling as a pastor in Nazi Germany.⁹⁷⁸ He retired from the parish shortly thereafter. He emigrated from Germany to Switzerland in November 1937, and months later made his way to England. He would remain in England for the rest of his life, serving as a successful pastor. It would be here in

⁹⁷⁶ Gordon, *And I Will Walk at Liberty*, EZA 600/107400. Gordon’s perception of the event was that these “unidentified men” were protesting him as a pastor of an “Aryan” congregation.

⁹⁷⁷ Gordon, *And I Will Walk at Liberty*, EZA 600/107400. A “confirmand” is a teenager, usually 12 or 13 years old in the Protestant tradition, who is studying for confirmation in the church. Confirmation a rite of passage in which the youth studies the core teachings of the Christian faith (as interpreted by the specific denomination) and professes faith publicly before the congregation. Once a youth is confirmed, he or she can receive the Eucharist with the congregation. In the Catholic tradition, confirmation is one of the seven sacraments.

⁹⁷⁸ Gordon, *And I Will Walk at Liberty*, EZA 600/107400.

England, during much better times, when he would write his memoir, *And I Will Walk at Liberty*.⁹⁷⁹

Ernst Gordon's story illustrates the difficulties of a German pastor of Jewish descent in maintaining job stability, even with the support of the Confessing Church movement. Despite their best efforts to reassign Gordon, the leadership simply could not succeed against pro-Nazi attempts to exclude him as a "Jew" from the pastorate. At every turn Gordon met obstacles and discrimination, making his work as a parish pastor untenable. He suffered Superintendent Kriebel's praise of Hitler and all he represented, the University of Berlin's refusal to grant his ordination, the harassment and persecution of the Berlin police forcing him out of his pastorate in Berlin, the German Christian movement's harassment in his own Berlin parish, and his own parish's parents' lack of support for his work in the church. Though Gordon made the decision to retire from the ministry in the German Protestant church, all these individuals and institutions made it virtually impossible for him to serve as pastor of a congregation in Nazi Germany. They effectively excluded him from ministry under the Nazi regime. The church, the university, his community, and the local police all rejected him in their own way. Elements of Gordon's story echo the experiences of Bruno Benfey, whom we met at the opening of the chapter – harassment by congregants and the community, a lack of ecclesiastical support, and early retirement as a clergyman in the German churches. While it is unclear just how representative their stories are, they illustrate the various

⁹⁷⁹ Gordon, *And I Will Walk at Liberty*, EZA 600/107400. Gordon was one of many Germans of Jewish descent who made their way to England. As Berghahn notes, "it was...relatively easy for individuals who had achieved some reputation in their field to be granted a permit to live and work in Britain. Permission to enter, if not to work, was furthermore given 'to persons coming to the UK on business, for visits to friends, or for purposes of study.'" See Berghahn, *German-Jewish Refugees in England*, 77.

pressures on German pastors of Jewish descent working towards their exclusion from German public life.⁹⁸⁰

Antisemitic sentiments not only fractured relationships between pastors and their congregations, but also among the congregations themselves. Gellately's study of the attitudes of Germans throughout the Nazi period concerning the regime and its treatment of Jews reveals that many "ordinary" Christians supported Nazi measures, such as the decree of 15 September 1941 forcing Jews aged seven and older to wear the yellow star.⁹⁸¹ Gellately writes of the consternation of many Christians when the yellow star revealed just how many Christians of Jewish descent attended church services: "In some parts of the country, Protestant churchgoers were displeased to note how many (converted) Jews went to church, and demanded of their ministers that they should not be asked to take communion next to these Jews, whom they wanted forbidden to attend common services."⁹⁸² As we saw in the stories of Benfey and Gordon, sentiments such as these resulted in division among Christians, the loss of fellowship and mutual support, and the restriction of rites and sacraments, such as communion.

How did Confessing Church pastors respond to the persecution of Christians of Jewish descent? Barnett argues that most Christians, pastors included, tended to distance

⁹⁸⁰ Lindemann observes that in the cases of Benfey and Paul Leo, another German pastor of Jewish descent, local pro-Nazi activists within the Protestant church forced them out after the Nuremberg Laws of 1935, and that the church subsequently failed to protect them; see Lindemann, "Typisch jüdisch," 862. As we will see in our later discussion of Pastors Ehrenberg, Hildebrandt, and Forell, this observation holds true only for Ehrenberg.

⁹⁸¹ Gellately, *Backing Hitler*, Kindle edition, location 3387.

⁹⁸² Gellately, *Backing Hitler*, Kindle edition, location 3387. In addition, Helmreich reports that in 1939 "non-Aryan" Christians totaled about 14,000 people – the largest number being Lutheran at 10,461. Add to this number approximately 5,000 "Mischlinge," and the result is a small but significant group. See Helmreich, *German Churches under Hitler*, 329-330.

themselves from Jews, even Christians of Jewish descent.⁹⁸³ This caused many to feel abandoned by their colleagues, congregations, and church governments. As a result, Christians of Jewish descent began to form their own associations to foster a sense of community and to help those in need.⁹⁸⁴

Even at the start of Nazi persecution of the Jews in 1933, Christians of Jewish descent formed the Reich Association of Christian German Citizens of Non-Aryan or Non-Pure Aryan Descent.⁹⁸⁵ Just a few years later, in 1936, Nazi persecution led to unification of the Reich Association of Non-Aryan Christians (as it was commonly called) with other smaller regional organizations, boasting a combined membership approximating 80,000 people. This new organization was called the *Paulusbund*, named after the Apostle Paul, and directed by Dr. Richard Wolff and later by Dr. Heinrich Spiero.⁹⁸⁶ The organization combined a commitment to the Christian faith and a deep love for the German nation. As the Stuttgart branch leader Erwin Goldmann claimed in a Christmas address in 1936, each member of the *Paulusbund* was willing “to sacrifice for faith and homeland.”⁹⁸⁷ He declares, “In the new year, too, our German Christmas faith shall ever again let the two most important signs for the direction of our life shine brightly before us: The heavenly sign – Christ on the Cross; the earthly sign – Mother Germania over the German Rhine.”⁹⁸⁸ Targeted by the Reich Interior Ministry and the

⁹⁸³ Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 132.

⁹⁸⁴ Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 132.

⁹⁸⁵ Gerlach, *And the Witnesses Were Silent*, 122.

⁹⁸⁶ Gerlach, *And the Witnesses Were Silent*, 123.

⁹⁸⁷ Quoted in Gerlach, *And the Witnesses Were Silent*, 123.

⁹⁸⁸ Quoted in Gerlach, *And the Witnesses Were Silent*, 123.

Gestapo in 1937, the group fractured as the regime ordered “full and three-quarter Jews” immediately dismissed from membership, leaving only *Mischlinge* permitted as members.⁹⁸⁹ On the one hand, the association offered a special community and a sense of belonging for like-minded Christians of Jewish descent. But it also offered legal and educational advice to its members, as well as help finding employment.⁹⁹⁰

According to Gordon, the Gestapo closed down the *Paulusbund*, of which Gordon himself was a member, which then prompted Confessing Church member Pastor Heinrich Grüber to re-constitute the organization in Berlin as the Grüber Office, under the oversight of Superintendent Martin Albertz.⁹⁹¹ As the example of the Grüber Office shows, the Confessing Church did offer meaningful and substantive support to Christians of Jewish descent. The Grüber Office supported Christians of Jewish descent by providing pastoral care and legal aid, in facilitating emigration, as well as finding employment abroad, welfare aid, and education services for children.⁹⁹² Grüber established critical contacts with Bishop Bell of Chichester and Professor Keller in Switzerland, to help Christians of Jewish descent leave Nazi Germany and find work abroad. The Nazi regime actually tolerated the Grüber Office as an agency that cared for the needs of emigrants. As Gerlach argues, “State authorities were anxious not to furnish additional material for anti-German propaganda overseas by stopping emigration on

⁹⁸⁹ Gerlach, *And the Witnesses Were Silent*, 124; Jonathan Friedman, *The Lion and the Star: Gentile-Jewish Relations in Three Hessian Towns, 1919* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2015), 145.

⁹⁹⁰ Friedman, *Lion and the Star*, 145.

⁹⁹¹ Gordon, *And I Will Walk at Liberty*, EZA 600/107400.

⁹⁹² See Lutherhaus Eisenach. *Wider Das Vergessen*, 18-19; Helmreich, *German Churches under Hitler*, 329; and Christopher Probst, *Demonizing the Jews: Luther and the Protestant Church in Nazi Germany* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2012), 10.

principle, particularly after the Kristallnacht.”⁹⁹³ Such considerations would be moot after the start of World War II.⁹⁹⁴

A conservative estimate indicates that by 1940 the Grüber Office helped 1100 individuals to emigrate out of Nazi Germany.⁹⁹⁵ The work of the Grüber Office also illegally procured false passports to enable emigration.⁹⁹⁶ Unfortunately, the Gestapo arrested Grüber in 1940 and sent him to the concentration camp at Dachau, leaving his colleague Werner Sylten in charge. A year later the Gestapo arrested Sylten and deported him to Dachau, where he was eventually transferred to the concentration camp at Hartheim in Austria and murdered in 1942.⁹⁹⁷ The Grüber Office is the most well-known, but not the only agency established to help Christians of Jewish descent.⁹⁹⁸

In addition, Confessing Church pastors supported their colleagues by obstructing the implementation of antisemitic measures. On 8 May 1936 the Reich Church Committee requested that all regional church officials submit the names of “non-Aryan” pastors; Confessing Church leaders declined.⁹⁹⁹ Then again, on 13 May 1939 the head of the German church chancellery in Berlin ordered the regional churches to submit names,

⁹⁹³ Gerlach, *And the Witnesses Were Silent*, 155.

⁹⁹⁴ Gerlach, *And the Witnesses Were Silent*, 155.

⁹⁹⁵ Genizi, *American Apathy*, 29.

⁹⁹⁶ Lutherhaus Eisenach. *Wider Das Vergessen*, 19.

⁹⁹⁷ See Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews, 1939-1945*, 92.

⁹⁹⁸ Helmreich also points out that the Association for Furtherance of Christianity among the Jews “also sought to alleviate hardships,” but the Gestapo closed it down in January 1941; Helmreich, *German Churches under Hitler*, 329.

⁹⁹⁹ Helmreich, *German Churches under Hitler*, 328. The Reich Church Committee (*Reichskirchenausschuß*) was directed by Hanns Kerrl, a Hitler-appointed church leader tasked with restoring unity to the newly formed yet already fractured Reich Church. Each regional committee was tasked with instituting Kerrl’s orders for the individual regional churches. See also Green, *Lutherans against Hitler: The Untold Story* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2007), 372.

but this time in accordance with the January 1937 German law on officials (*Beamtengesetz*), which required information on spouses as well.¹⁰⁰⁰ The Confessing Church leadership in the Old Prussian Union and Westphalia requested that all pastors refuse to comply.¹⁰⁰¹ Enforcement was dependent upon the inclination of the local leadership and, moreover, many pastors – of Jewish ancestry or not – simply refused to prove their “Aryan” ancestry. Barnett relates the story of Ilse Härter, a *Vikarin* sent by the Confessing Church to an official parish in Berlin. The governing board asked for proof of her “Aryan” descent in the form of an “Aryan” identity card.¹⁰⁰² This is how she retells the story.

I then told Herr von S.: I’m not bringing an “Aryan” pass, because if I would do that, I would disgrace myself in practice from the Jews. In other words, I refused. The affair with the “Aryan” pass ended in that von S. said, “Now, we can just write down that you don’t look like a Jew” and that the Presbytery was convinced that I wasn’t Jewish. I told them that they couldn’t be so sure, because, during my studies in Tübingen, the Nazi student organization told me once that I looked Jewish, just because I had brown hair and brown eyes!¹⁰⁰³

It is significant that her reason for refusing to show her “Aryan” identity card was that in handing it over she would “disgrace” herself in relation to Jews she worked with or would minister to. Though she does not elaborate on why she would feel disgraced, it is most probable she meant that by affirming the Nazi demand for racial purity she would

¹⁰⁰⁰ Helmreich, *German Churches under Hitler*, 328.

¹⁰⁰¹ Helmreich, *German Churches under Hitler*, 328.

¹⁰⁰² A *Vikarin* (or *Vikar*) in the Lutheran tradition is a non-ordained minister, often an assistant to a parish pastor.

¹⁰⁰³ Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 129-130.

deny her fellow Christians of Jewish descent, her spiritual “brothers and sisters,” in effect deny the sacrament of baptism that insists in the equality of all people before the grace of God.

Not all such instances resulted in the turning of a blind eye by church officials. A letter dated 16 October 1939, from the Evangelical-Lutheran Regional Church Office of Saxony to the leader of the Office of the German Protestant Church, states that ten pastors and their wives have refused to submit documentation proving “Aryan” descent.¹⁰⁰⁴ Pastors Kühn, Fehlberg, Fochtman, Gotter, Riedel, Helm, Warneyer, Stock, Lau, and Kriebel all refused to submit documentation, one of them stating that their rationale was that the “Aryan questions” posed the problem of a “deliberate departure from the gospel.”¹⁰⁰⁵ The regional church recommended issuing an administrative penalty to the pastors.¹⁰⁰⁶ Unfortunately, the historical record does not indicate how this matter was resolved, whether the pastors were indeed disciplined, kept their jobs, or whether some eventually relented and provided the requested documentation. It is unknown just how often such refusals occurred. In any case, this example illustrates that some Confessing Church pastors felt deeply uncomfortable – spiritually conflicted – in acquiescing to the rules of the Nazi dictatorship, for this would have been a tacit admission in the validity of its racial policies and a betrayal of the gospel message.

¹⁰⁰⁴ Report of the Evangelisch-lutherisches Landeskirchenamt Sachsens, 16 Oktober 1939, Kirchenkampfarchiv, EZA 50 50/70, Berlin, Germany.

¹⁰⁰⁵ Report of the Evangelisch-lutherisches Landeskirchenamt Sachsens, 16 Oktober 1939, EZA 50 50/70. Again, in the interests of full disclosure, the Kriebel referenced here is Otto Kriebel, my maternal great-uncle. He is the brother of the Berlin pastor, Paul Kriebel, mentioned earlier in the chapter.

¹⁰⁰⁶ Report of the Evangelisch-lutherisches Landeskirchenamt Sachsens, 16 Oktober 1939, EZA 50 50/70.

The Ministries of German Pastors of Jewish Descent

As helpful as the Lutherhaus, Ehrenberg, Mayer-Leonhard, and Prolingheuer lists are, they do not indicate whether the pastors were Confessing Church members or provide information on how the Nazis categorized them as Jewish (e.g. *Volljude* or *Mischlinge*). In my list I have attempted to fill in some of the gaps, to correct some errors, and hopefully to provide additional information to enable other historians to further this research. I have entitled this list “German Pastors Affected by Nazi Racial Laws,” indicating not that all these men self-identified as Jews, or that they were actually descendants of Jews, but simply that the Nazi targeted them as Jews because of their inability to provide proof of “Aryan” ancestry.¹⁰⁰⁷ While I have confirmed in the historical record that thirteen were *Volljude*, or “full Jews,” and altogether nineteen were *Mischlinge*, or “half breed,” this leaves eighty-five of undetermined or “partial” Jewish ancestry. “Partial” Jewish ancestry could mean that one was *Mischling*, or it could mean that one was 1/8 Jewish, that is, had one Jewish great-grandparent, or simply that one had a distant Jewish ancestor, and in such a case, one might be of partial Jewish descent, but fall outside the Nazi categorizations. For these individuals, they had to take the time and effort to prove that they did not fall into the Nazi categorizations, and thus, save their careers as pastors or administrators in the German Evangelical Church.

¹⁰⁰⁷ In the following table, the designation “KZ” refers to concentration camp, and “EAA” refers to pastors who emigrated to either England, America, or Australia (following the usage of the Lutherhaus Eisenach and its *Wider das Vergessen*).

TABLE 2 – List of German Pastors Affected by Nazi Racial Laws

	Last Name	First Name	Location	Emigration	Confessing Church Member	Nazi Categorization	Died as a Result of Persecution
1	Achnich	Karl Theodor	Weinheim				
2	Achtnich	Max Theodor	Pzorzheim		X		
3	Arnold-Aronius	Heinz Helmut	Polkowitz/Glogau	EAA		Full Jew	
4	Augustat	Walter Dr.	Templin, Brandenburg				
5	Axenfeld	Gottfried	Lindau-Schachen				
6	Baer	Rudolf	Gondelsheim, Baden				
7	Baermann	Willi		EAA			
8	Balthasar	Karl	Proskau bei Oppeln		X		
9	Benfey	Bruno	Goettingen	Holland			
10	Berau	Walter		Switzerland			
11	Bergmann	Karl	Alt-Reichenau, Schlesien				
12	Bielenstein	Emil	Bad Rehburg				
13	Bielenstein	Max	Stettin				
14	Buesing	Wolfgang Paul	Finkenwalde	England	X		
15	Carlebach	T		EAA			
16	Citron	Bernhard		EAA			
17	Cohen	Julius	Azendorf, Bayern				
18	Cremer	Martin	Wittenberg				
19	Deutschhausen	Wilhelm		EAA			
20	Dewitz	Ludwig		Eng./Australia			
21	Dicke (junior)					1/8th Jewish	
22	Dicke (junior)						
23	Ehrenberg	Hans, Prof. Dr.	Bochum	England	X	Full Jew	
24	Ehrhardt	Arnold Dr.		EAA			
25	Ehrhardt	Rudolf		Surinam			

TABLE 2 – List of German Pastors Affected by Nazi Racial Laws, Continued

	Last Name	First Name	Location	Emigration	Confessing Church Member	Nazi Categorization	Died as a Result of Persecution
26	Ehrlich	Rudolf		EAA			
27	Emmerich	Kurt Dr.		EAA			
28	Erfurth	Paul Prof. D.	Elberfeld, Rheinland				
29	Finger					Half Jew 1 st Gr.	
30	Flatow	Ernst	Koeln			Full Jew	Warsaw Ghetto, 1942
31	Flemming	Friedrich	Steglitz-Berlin		X		
32	Forell	Friedrich		Sweden		Half Jew 1 st Gr.	
33	Frank	Arnold Dr.	Hamburg	EAA	X		
34	Fraenkel	Hans	Stettin				
35	Freundenberg	Adolf		EAA			
36	Freund-Zinnbaur	Alfred		EAA			
37	Friedberg	Rudolf	Schoenfeld				
38	Friedmann	Gerda		EAA			
39	Friess	Herbert		EAA			
40	Goermandt	Werner	Kopenhagen		X		
41	Goetze	Alfred				Half Jew 1 st Gr.	
42	Goetze					Half Jew 2 nd Gr.	
43	Goldschmidt	Bruno	Ricklingen, Baden				
44	Goltzen	Herbert	Kohlo bei Guben		X		
45	Golzen	Heinz Dr.		EAA			
46	Goosmann	Mase or Masi	Berlin		X		
47	Gordon	Ernest	Schoenwalde	EAA	X	Half Jew 1 st Gr.	

TABLE 2 – List of German Pastors Affected by Nazi Racial Laws, Continued

	Last Name	First Name	Location	Emigration	Confessing Church Member	Nazi Categorization	Died as a Result of Persecution
48	Gordon	Heinrich	Schoenwalde			Full Jew	
49	Gottlieb	Heinrich Rudolf	Dresden			Full Jew	
50	Gurland	Rudolf	Meine bei Gifhorn			Half Jew 1 st Gr.	
51	Hartwell	Herbert Dr.		EAA			
52	Henselmann		Rehbruecke				
53	Hildebrandt	Franz	Berlin-Dahlem	England	X	Half Jew	
54	Hoemiger	Thomas		EAA			
55	Horlbog	Ludwig		EAA			
56	Horwitz	Erwin	Hamburg		X		
57	Jacobi	Gerhard	Berlin		X		
58	Jellineck	Johannes		Sweden			
59	Josephson	Hermann	Middesen				
60	Karle	Wilhelm		EAA			
61	Katz	Peter Dr.	Neudorf bei Trier	EAA		Full Jew	
62	Kayser	August	Karlsruhe				
63	Keyssner	Friedrich	Thueringen		X		
64	Koschade	Daniel	Lehmin		X	Half Jew 1 st Gr.	
65	Kuehn	Karl Viktor	Auerbach		X		
66	Krebs	Walter Dr.		EAA			
67	Kurtz	Adolf	Berlin		X		
68	Langhoff	Hans		Switzerland			
69	Lasson	Adolph	Rotta bei Lemberg				
70	Lebrecht	Heinrich	Gross-Zimmern		X		
71	Lehmann	Kurt	Mannheim	Switzerland	X	Half Jew 1 st Gr.	

TABLE 2 – List of German Pastors Affected by Nazi Racial Laws, Continued

	Last Name	First Name	Location	Emigration	Confessing Church Member	Nazi Categorization	Died as a Result of Persecution
72	Lengerke	Hans von	Miehlen im Taunus		X		
73	Leo	Paul	Osnabrueck	America	X	Full Jew	
74	Lesser		Luckenwalde				
75	Lewek	Ernst	Leipzig		X	Half Jew 1 st Gr.	Died 1953 - result of KZ
76	Lewy	Werner	Witten, Westfalen		X		
77	Lommatzsch	Karl	Bad Schoenfluss, Brandenburg		X		
78	Lubowski		Schlesien				
79	Maas	Max Theodor	Altenkirchen			Full Jew	
80	Majut	Dr.		EAA			
81	Mannheimer	Franz		Switzerland			
82	Mannweiler	Walter	Pfalz	Switzerland	X		
83	Mendelson	Ernst	Carsdorf bei Freiburg				1936 suicide
84	Mendelson	Eugen	Schnarsleben		X	Half Jew 2 nd Gr.	
85	Mendelson	Paul	Berlin		X	Half Jew 2 nd Gr.	
86	Moffat	John		EAA			
87	Moser	Ernst Dr.	Hamburg	EAA			
88	Niemann	Albert	Gross-Stoeckheim				
89	Niemann		Muenster		X		
90	Noa	Theodor	Siegen, Nassar		X	Half Jew 2 nd Gr.	1938 murdered in Berlin
91	Oehlert	Gustav	Hannover			Half Jew 1 st Gr.	
92	Oelsner	Willi	Berlin	EAA	X	Half Jew 1 st Gr.	

TABLE 2 – List of German Pastors Affected by Nazi Racial Laws, Continued

	Last Name	First Name	Location	Emigration	Confessing Church Member	Nazi Categorization	Died as a Result of Persecution
93	Porns	Henry		EAA			
94	Regensburger	Karl	Wernigerode		X	Full Jew	
95	Rhode	Gottfried	Zinna bei Torgau		X	Half Jew 2 nd Gr.	
96	Rotta					Half Jew 1 st Gr.	
97	Rouselle	Martin	Ostpreussen				
98	Schloss	Erwin		Switzerland			
99	Schmaezle	Reinhold		Switzerland			
100	Schmidt	M.	Rosen, Oberschlesien		X		
101	Schwannecke	Otto	Gifhorn			Half Jew 1 st Gr.	
102	Schweitzer	Karl Dr.	Wustermark	EAA	X	Full Jew	
103	Simonson	Werner		EAA			
104	Stegmann	Erich	Thueringen		X		
105	Stein		Frankfurt/Main			Half Jew 1 st Gr.	
106	Steinhausen		Wernigerode				
107	Steinmetz	Julius	Kulmbach			Full Jew	
108	Stock	George Dr.		EAA			
109	Suderow		Berlin		X		
110	Suessbach	Willy	Briela u. Bralitz	EAA	X	Half Jew 1 st Gr.	
111	Sylten	Werner	Berlin		X	Half Jew 1 st Gr.	1942 - died in KZ
112	Wach	Hugo					
113	Wagner	Hans-Ludwig		EAA	X	Full Jew	
114	Walter	Otto		Sweden	X		
115	Weber	Max Rudolf		EAA	X		
116	Wedell			EAA			
117	Weissenstein		Emden				

After conducting my own research on the identity of German pastors of Jewish descent, I have removed certain individuals included in the lists of Lutherhaus, Ehrenberg, Mayer-Leonard, or Prolingheuer. The following individuals proved their “Aryan” descent with the German Protestant Church and thus resolved their precarious status as “Jewish”: Pastor Arnold of Emmerich (first name unknown); Erich Gross of Essen-Borbeck; Dr. Kurt Meschke of Danzig; and Karl Philipps of Kamen.¹⁰⁰⁸

Furthermore, I have added a few new names based on my research: a man named Alfred Goetze, and five individuals identified by last name only, Pastors Finger, Goetze, Rotta, and two brothers by the last name of Dicke.¹⁰⁰⁹

Based on this data we can make a few significant conclusions. The first conclusion is that according to the information available, at least 50 of the 117 German pastors of Jewish descent (43%) emigrated during the Nazi period, in most cases to Switzerland, England, the United States or Australia. More precisely, according to available data, 6 of the 12 of the known *Volljude* emigrated, while 6 of the 22 of the known *Mischlinge* emigrated. An important fact to keep in mind is that most of these 50

¹⁰⁰⁸ Report of the Evangelischen Oberkirchenrat in Berlin-Charlottenburg, 18 July 1938, Nichtarische Geistliche Kirchengemeindebeamte, Gemeindevertreter usw., Oktober 1933 bis Dezember 1952, EZA 7/1952; and Report of the Finanzabteilung beim Evangelischen Konsistorium der Provinz Pommern, 24 January 1942, Nichtarische Geistliche Kirchengemeindebeamte, Gemeindevertreter usw., Oktober 1933 bis Dezember 1952, EZA 7/1952.

¹⁰⁰⁹ Alfred Goetze, Statement to the Deutsche Evangelische Kirchenkanzlei, 24 January 1939, Kirchenkanzlei Akten betreffend: Nichtarische Studenten der Theologie und Pfarrer von Juni 1936 bis Dezember 1939, EZA 1/1321, Evangelisches Zentralarchiv; Report of the Evangelische Konsistorium der Province Sachsen, 27 September 1937, Nichtarische Geistliche Kirchengemeindebeamte, Gemeindevertreter usw., von Oktober 1933 bis Dezember 1952, EZA 7/1952; Report of the Evangelisches Konsistorium der Kirchenprovinz Westfalen, 15 July 1937, Nichtarische Geistliche Kirchengemeindebeamte, Gemeindevertreter usw., von Oktober 1933 bis Dezember 1952, EZA 7/1952; and Report of the Evangelisch-lutherisches Landeskirchenamt Sachsens, 16 Oktober 1939, Kirchenkampfangarchiv, EZA 50 50/70.

pastors were of “partial” Jewish descent, and thus not targeted or persecuted as “full Jews.”¹⁰¹⁰ Most often German pastors of Jewish descent who wished to emigrate would contact their provincial church council for assistance or even placement in a faith community outside of Germany. For example, Dr. Peter Katz of Düsseldorf petitioned the Evangelischen Oberkirchenrat in Berlin on December 28, 1938, for assistance to flee to England where he could continue his research on the Greek Old Testament.¹⁰¹¹ He even provided an itemized budget for the trip. The provincial church council approved his request on April 21, 1939, and he made his way to England.¹⁰¹²

To put these numbers into context, the best available data from the records of Jewish organizations indicates that by the end of 1938, approximately 231,000 of 500,000 Germans of the Jewish faith emigrated from Nazi Germany.¹⁰¹³ This number would grow considerably in the next year: on the eve of Germany’s invasion of Poland in September 1939, the number totaled 336,000.¹⁰¹⁴ This left 164,000 Germans of the

¹⁰¹⁰ See Noakes, *The Development of Nazi Party Policy towards German-Jewish ‘Mischlinge,’ 1933-1945,* 352-354.

¹⁰¹¹ Report of the Evangelischen Oberkirchenrat in Berlin, 28 December 1938, Nichtarische Geistliche Kirchengemeindebeamte, Gemeindevertreter usw., Oktober 1933 bis Dezember 1952, EZA 7/1952.

¹⁰¹² Report of the Finanzabteilung beim Evangelischen Oberkirchenrat, 3 May 1939, Nichtarische Geistliche Kirchengemeindebeamte, Gemeindevertreter usw., Oktober 1933 bis Dezember 1952, EZA 7/1952.

¹⁰¹³ Richard Evans, *The Third Reich in Power* (New York: Penguin, 2005), 599. See Debórah Dwork and Robert Jan van Pelt, *Holocaust: A History* (New York: Norton & Company, 2003), 121, 129. To enlarge the scope, Berghahn includes Austria and Bohemia in her figures. She writes, “During one year preceding the war, ‘nearly as many Jews left Germany as during the previous 5½ years.’ In terms of numbers this meant an exodus from Germany of about 150,000 between 1933 and the first half of 1938 and of about 120,000 in 1938/39 alone. To this number, another 140,000 or so refugees from Austria and Bohemia must be added. In other words: out of a total population of about 680,000 German and Austrian Jews, about 400,000 had been able to leave by October 1939”; see Berghahn, *German-Jewish Refugees in England*, 74. For comparable figures, see also Haim Genizi’s *American Apathy: The Plight of Christian Refugees from Nazism* (Bar-Ilan University Press, 1983), 19-20.

¹⁰¹⁴ Richard Evans, *The Third Reich in Power* (New York: Penguin, 2005), 599.

Jewish faith still in Nazi Germany by the start of World War II.¹⁰¹⁵ Using a racial definition of Jews, the Nazi census records of 1939 indicate a Jewish population of 233,646, and add to this figure 84,674 *Mischlinge* (52,005 first degree and 32,669 second degree).¹⁰¹⁶ My research on German pastors of Jewish descent likewise reveals the emigration of a significant number of “full Jews” and *Mischlinge* among the group, at least 43%, given the available data.

A second conclusion concerns the theological and ideological perspectives of the pastors, particularly concerning the Church Struggle and the German Christian movement. Determining these perspectives is extremely difficult given the scattered and incomplete state of the historical record. However, Confessing Church rosters indicate that at least 41 of 117 German pastors of Jewish descent were members.¹⁰¹⁷ But not all German pastors of Jewish descent supported the Confessing Church, or even remained neutral in the Church Struggle. For example, Pastor Heinrich Rudolf Gottlieb, a vicar in Prague (and later Bodenbach and Hohenelbe) supported the Nazi party (though he could not become a member as a “full Jew”) and the German Christian faction.¹⁰¹⁸ In 1938 the Nazis removed him from office because of his ancestry, but he still received pay from the Church. During the last years of the war he turned critical of the Nazis and the German Christian movement because they contradicted the Christian faith. He survived the Nazi

¹⁰¹⁵ Richard Evans, *The Third Reich in Power* (New York: Penguin, 2005), 599.

¹⁰¹⁶ Noakes, “The Development of Nazi Party Policy towards German-Jewish ‘Mischlinge,’” 1933-1945,” 293. Nazi estimates of *Mischlinge* in Germany vary considerably before the 1939 census records, and thus it is impossible to know how many emigrated before the start of World War II.

¹⁰¹⁷ To verify Confessing Church membership I matched first and last names with locations in roster documents; however, the records do not always indicate location or first name, making confirmation difficult.

¹⁰¹⁸ Lutherhaus Eisenach, *Wider Das Vergessen*, 12-13.

persecution and the war, but lost his home in the Allied bombing of Dresden. After the war he continued to serve as a pastor in Löbau and Bad Elster until his death in 1950.¹⁰¹⁹

Thirdly, this data also gives us some information about the persecution of these men, though admittedly not much. The Nazi regime murdered at least four of the 117 pastors, either in concentration or extermination camps, or as a result of injuries suffered in a camp. In addition, a pastor named Ernst Mendelson committed suicide in 1936, though it is not possible to verify his motivations. The story of Werner Sylten is illustrative of the persecution many German pastors of Jewish descent faced, even when it did not end in murder or exile. Pastor Werner Sylten was half-Jewish, born in 1893 in Switzerland, and began his theological studies in 1913 in Marburg prior to enlisting as a soldier in the First World War.¹⁰²⁰ He returned to Marburg and then completed his theological education at the University of Berlin in 1921. He then administered a girls' home Köstritz before the *Völkischen Beobachter* ran a smear story about him in 1936 that led to his dismissal. He then became the general manager of the Confessing Church office in the town of Gotha until 1938 when the Gestapo shut it down. At this point, as previously mentioned Sylten worked for the Grüber Office in Berlin, an agency that gave assistance to non-“Aryan” pastors. After the Gestapo arrested Heinrich Grüber in 1940, Sylten took over as manager of the office until 1941 when he was arrested and sent to the

¹⁰¹⁹ Lutherhaus Eisenach, *Wider Das Vergessen*, 12-13.

¹⁰²⁰ Lutherhaus Eisenach, *Wider Das Vergessen*, 16-17; see also Document of the Kirchliche Hilfsstelle für evangelische Nichtarier (Büro Pfarrer Grüber), 21 Dezember 1938, Kirchenkanzlei Akten betreffend: Nichtarische Studenten der Theologie und Pfarrer von Juni 1936 bis Dezember 1939, EZA 1/1321, Berlin, Germany.

concentration camp at Dachau. Sylten was then murdered near Hartheim Schloss near Linz in an invalid transport.¹⁰²¹

This chapter has set out to introduce this small group of German pastors of Jewish descent, and to explore some of the unique problems and dilemmas they faced as they tried to live out their calling as ministers in their communities of faith. This small but important group of German pastors gives us an illuminating glimpse into the German Protestant churches in Nazi Germany. Despite the pastors' commitment to Christianity and the German churches, many of their fellow Christians and Germans actively sought their exclusion from ministry and German public life because of their perceived racial difference. In the next chapter I will demonstrate how three of them responded through their sermons to the German population. Let us now move on to an analysis of the ministries and sermons of the three principal figures of the last chapter: Hans Ehrenberg, Franz Hildebrandt, and Friedrich Forell.

¹⁰²¹ Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews, 1939-1945*, 92.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Preaching from the Periphery: The Sermons of German Pastors of Jewish Descent

I have often wondered why the Lord led me from my mother church [in Germany] to this country [the USA]. I am like the Macedonian man [in Acts 16:9] – ‘And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: There was a man of Macedonia standing, beseeching him, and saying, Come over into Macedonia and help us.’”

– Friedrich Forell, New York City, 1944¹⁰²²

This chapter will offer a glimpse into the importance of the work of German pastors of Jewish descent with an in-depth analysis of 34 surviving sermons of three leading German pastors of Jewish descent: Hans Ehrenberg (16), Franz Hildebrandt (13), and Friedrich Forell (5).¹⁰²³ All three men were ordained Lutheran pastors who joined the Confessing Church early in its formation, and each left Germany for exile abroad due to their persecution as Germans of Jewish descent. I have chosen to examine the sermons of these three pastors for the simple reason that theirs are the only sermons of German pastors of Jewish descent that I have found in archives, libraries, and rare book stores. Of the 117 German pastors of Jewish descent, very few of their sermons are still in

¹⁰²² Friedrich Forell, “Church Life and Church World in Germany and America: A Contrast,” 1944, Papers of the Newcomers Christian Fellowship, University of Iowa Libraries, Special Collections, MSC 358, Iowa City, Iowa. Forell refers to an event in the New Testament text, The Acts of the Apostles, in which the Apostle Paul and his colleagues are in Asia Minor, uncertain where to go and minister. Clarity comes all of a sudden when Paul reportedly receives a vision in a dream of a Macedonian man pleading for help. As the war wages and Forell has made it safely to New York, he has the same moment of clarity to help Germans rebuild their spiritually corrupted nation.

¹⁰²³ In addition to these sermons, I will from time to time introduce other sources from these authors, including memoirs, speeches, interviews, and even post-war sermons – all clearly identified – to further elucidate the pastor’s views of Jews and Judaism (and their own self-identity as Christians of Jewish descent) as well as the Nazi regime and the Church Struggle.

existence. This scarcity doubtlessly resulted from the fact that many fled Germany into exile to find security abroad, taking their sermons far and wide, or leaving them behind altogether, thus making the search much more elusive. Furthermore, many sermons were lost in the war, either by bombing or displacement. This makes it all the more remarkable that we have the 34 sermons of these three pastors, all from the years 1933 to 1945, and which include sermons delivered in Germany and in exile.¹⁰²⁴ A thorough examination of their perspectives of Hitler, National Socialism, and more broadly, the German Church struggle will provide us with an understanding of how these three German pastors of Jewish descent viewed the great ideological threat of their time. Likewise, an in-depth analysis of their perspectives of Jews, Judaism, and their own persecution among the Jewish people will give us insight into possible anti-Judaic elements in their theology as well as their own self-identity as Christian pastors. I will also pay careful attention to any instruction the pastors give to act or protest in any way against the Nazi regime or in service of the Jewish people.

Historians have explored the personal histories of Ehrenberg and Hildebrandt – their persecutions in Nazi Germany, exiles abroad, and even contributions as active pastors before, during and after the war.¹⁰²⁵ Ehrenberg was a popular theologian and

¹⁰²⁴ Remarkably, I located only Ehrenberg's sermons in Germany (Bielefeld), while I found Hildebrandt's in the National Library of Scotland, and Forell's in the Special Collections of the University of Iowa Archive.

¹⁰²⁵ See Ehrenberg's autobiography, *Autobiography of a German Pastor* (London: Student Christian Movement Press, 1943); Lutherhaus Eisenach's *Wider Das Vergessen*; Günter Brakelmann, *Hans Ehrenberg: Ein judenchristliches Schicksal in Deutschland* (Spenner, 1999); Werner Licharz and Manfred Keller, eds., *Franz Rosenzweig und Hans Ehrenberg: Bericht einer Beziehung, Bd. 42* (Frankfurt am Main: Haag & Herschen, 1986); and Jens Murken and Manfred Keller, *Das Erbe des Theologen Hans Ehrenberg: Eine Zwischenbilanz* (Lit Verlag, 2010). On Hildebrandt, see Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography, Revised Edition* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000); Amos Cresswell and Maxwell Tow, *Dr. Franz Hildebrandt: Mr. Valiant-for-Truth* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2000); Holger Roggelin, *Franz Hildebrandt: Ein lutherischer Dissenter im Kirchenkampf und Exil* (Arbeiten zur Kirchlischen

pastor from Bochum, and an early and influential supporter of the Confessing Church. Hildebrandt was an early leader in the Confessing Church and also a close friend of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Yet the life and career of Forell has not yet received the same level of attention – only the outlines of his biography are known. I hope to elucidate his story in more detail here. But for all three men, there has yet to be an in-depth study of their sermons, and further, an investigation of how these sermons relate to their ministries in Nazi Germany and in exile; in fact, the content of their sermons is rarely mentioned at all. My analysis follows the work of historians such as Brakelmann, Cresswell, Roggelin, Tow, and Webster, that the Nazi regime’s antisemitic policies and activities targeted an extremely small group of Germans of Jewish descent, who up until 1933 enjoyed success and inclusion as clergymen in the Protestant churches; and yet, faced with this persecution, they did not receive support from the German churches sufficient to save their careers or their livelihoods in Nazi Germany. Yet, in focusing on their sermons I will contribute to the historiography a new dimension to our understanding of the lives and work of these three men.

Specifically, I will argue in this chapter that even though the Nazi state sought the exclusion of Ehrenberg, Hildebrandt, and Forell from German public life, and indeed, harassed them into exile, these three pastors publically demonstrated in sermons

Zeitgeschichte – Reihe B), (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999); *International Biographical Dictionary of Central European Emigrés, 1933-1945*, edited by Herbert Strauss and Werner Röder (New York: K.G. Saur, 1983), 508. And finally, on Forell, see EZA 1/3099 and 7/1952; Ronald Webster, “Eberhard Röhm und Jörg Thierfelder. Ein langer Weg von Breslau nach New York: Der Flüchtlingsseelsorger Friedrich Forell,” in *Studien zur Kirchlichen Zeitgeschichte. Festschrift für Carsten Nicolaisen*, ed. Joachim Mehlhausen (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1995), 315-22; Ronald D.E. Webster, “German ‘Non-Aryan’ Clergymen and the Anguish of Exile after 1933,” in *The Journal of Religious History*, 22:1, February 1998, 84-85; and also the biography at the Evangelisches Friedrich-Forell-Zentrum website at http://www.ekbo-wittichenau.de/forellzentrum/html/friedrich_forell.html.

great concern for the German churches, the German people, and for Germany itself as a nation. Each of them operated with the underlying assumption that the gospel message of Christianity was a life-affirming worldview capable of effectively countering what they considered to be a bankrupt and destructive Nazi ideology that had sown confusion and disunity in the German churches. And while never explicitly naming Hitler, or calling for his removal from office, each directly criticize him as a leader of a disastrous worldview based on exclusion and the debasing of human dignity. As German pastors of Jewish descent, they stood in stark contrast to members of the German Christian movement in their approach to Judaism. All three pastors maintained the foundational role of Judaism in the Christian religion, and the need to bring Jews and Christians closer together as peoples of Abrahamic faiths, with shared traditions, values and sacred texts. And yet, we do find evidence of anti-Judaic expressions, particularly in the sermons of Friedrich Forell, which, ironically, he meant to serve the best interests of Jews in Germany. Altogether, the sermons of Ehrenberg, Hildebrandt, and Forell reveal the concerns of German pastors of Jewish descent caught up in the maelstrom of Nazi persecution against Jews, and yet without identifying themselves as such.

Hans Philipp Ehrenberg was born on 4 June 1883 in the city of Altona, the oldest of three children to Jewish parents.¹⁰²⁶ He studied law, politics, and economics at the universities in Göttingen and Berlin, and earned his doctorate at the University of Munich in 1906, where he became a lecturer of philosophy. It was during this time that he

¹⁰²⁶ See especially Ehrenberg's autobiography, *Autobiography of a German Pastor*, 74-82; and Günter Brakelmann, *Hans Ehrenberg: Ein judenchristliches Schicksal in Deutschland*, 11-18.

experienced a religious awakening and became baptized as a Protestant.¹⁰²⁷ A little-known historical fact is that one of his distant relatives and his best childhood friend was Franz Rosenzweig, an influential philosopher of early twentieth-century Germany who himself flirted with conversion to Protestantism.¹⁰²⁸ At the outbreak of war in 1914 Ehrenberg became an officer on the front, and later an instructor at the field artillery school in Jüterbog.¹⁰²⁹ At the conclusion of the war Ehrenberg returned to Heidelberg as a professor of philosophy, and he also joined the Social Democratic Party (SPD).¹⁰³⁰ It was not until 1920 that he began his theological education, and took his theology exam at the University of Münster (where he befriended another student and future leader of the Confessing Church, Martin Niemöller).¹⁰³¹ He took his first pastorate as a Lutheran minister in 1925 at the Pauluskirche in Bochum-Altstadt, and continued serving this community of faith until the Nazi regime forced him out as a converted pastor in 1937. The Reichskristallnacht of 9-10 November 1938 was a turning point for Ehrenberg and

¹⁰²⁷ Ehrenberg, *Autobiography of a German Pastor*, 108-109; Brakelmann, *Hans Ehrenberg*, 42-47.

¹⁰²⁸ Ehrenberg, *Autobiography of a German Pastor*, 109; Nahum Glatzer, *Franz Rosenzweig: His Life and Thought, Third Edition* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1998), 23-25, and Wolfdietrich Schmied-Kowarzik, "Streiflichter zum Dialog zwischen Franz Rosenzweig und Hans Ehrenberg," in *Das Erbe des Theologen Hans Ehrenberg, Eine Zwischenbilanz*, edited by Manfred Keller and Jens Murken (Dotrning, Titelbild, 2009), 12-17.

¹⁰²⁹ Brakelmann, *Hans Ehrenberg: Ein judenchristliches Schicksal in Deutschland*, 47-51.

¹⁰³⁰ Shelley Baranowski argues that overwhelmingly Confessing Church pastors were conservative in their political outlook, yet it was not uncommon for pastors to have memberships in liberal or socialist political parties prior to the Nazi regime. For example, like Ehrenberg, Karl Barth – one of the key figures in the leadership of the Confessing Church – was a member of the SPD for years, finding consonance in the social justice elements of Christianity and socialism. See Shelley Baranowski, *The Confessing Church, Conservative Elites, and the Nazi State* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellon Press, 1986), 3-5; Shelley Baranowski, "The Confessing Church and Antisemitism," in *Betrayal: German Churches and the Holocaust*, edited by Robert P. Ericksen and Susannah Heschel (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 91; and also J.R.C. Wright, 'Above Parties,' *The Political Attitudes of the German Protestant Church Leadership, 1918-1933* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), 105-106.

¹⁰³¹ See Ehrenberg, *Autobiography of a German Pastor*, 89-107; and Brakelmann, *Hans Ehrenberg*, 149-170.

his family: his apartment was destroyed and he was arrested and sent to Sachsenhausen concentration camp.¹⁰³² The Nazi regime released Ehrenberg after several weeks at Sachsenhausen, whereupon he and his wife immigrated to England.¹⁰³³

Franz Hildebrandt was born on 20 February 1909 in Berlin.¹⁰³⁴ In contrast to Ehrenberg, who was born to two Jewish parents and who was baptized as an adult, Hildebrandt was half Jewish on his mother's side and was baptized nearly a year after his birth because it, in his words, was "the done thing."¹⁰³⁵ Also in contrast to Ehrenberg, who studied theology later in life, Hildebrandt embarked on theological studies from the start, attending the universities in Berlin, Marburg and Tübingen. He earned his doctorate in theology 1930, and immediately began his service to the church. He was ordained a Lutheran pastor in 1933. His tenure as a pastor in Germany came to a halt when the German Christian movement introduced the "Aryan paragraph" – a measure designed to exclude non-Aryan pastors from Church service – compelling him to resign in protest.¹⁰³⁶ Because his mother was Jewish the Nazis categorized him as a *Mischling*. Hildebrandt assisted Niemöller in the establishment of the Pastors' Emergency League,

¹⁰³² Gerlach, *And the Witnesses Were Silent*, 129.

¹⁰³³ Gerlach, *And the Witnesses Were Silent*, 129. While it is not clear how many German pastors of Jewish descent were arrested, how many times, or whether or not they were sent to a concentration camp, it was not uncommon. See my research in the previous chapter. For example, two the three main characters of this chapter – Ehrenberg and Hildebrandt – were arrested and incarcerated in a concentration camp for short periods before their release and subsequent exile. In addition, I have confirmed that several others had also been arrested and incarcerated, such as Werner Selten, Bruno Benfey, and also Ernst Lewek, who actually died in a concentration camp.

¹⁰³⁴ See especially Cresswell and Tow, *Dr. Franz Hildebrandt*; Roggelin, *Franz Hildebrandt*; and Strauss and Röder, eds., *International Biographical Dictionary of Central European Emigrés*, 508.

¹⁰³⁵ Cresswell and Tow, *Dr. Franz Hildebrandt*, 14-15. The date of Hildebrandt's baptism was 30 December 1909.

¹⁰³⁶ See *International Biographical Dictionary*, eds. Strauss and Röder, 508.

later to become the Confessing Church, and helped to raise funds for the nascent movement.¹⁰³⁷ In connection with these activities, he was arrested in 1937, and upon his release soon thereafter he went into exile to England where he served as pastor to a German congregation in Cambridge. But perhaps most interesting for our purposes is his work with the British Broadcasting Corporation delivering sermons over the radio to Germany.

Friedrich Forell is a lesser known figure than both Ehrenberg and Hildebrandt. He was born on September 15, 1888, in the German city of Glatz, near Breslau, to Christian parents (one of Jewish descent).¹⁰³⁸ He studied Protestant theology at the University of Breslau, and took his theological exams in the early years of the First World War. He was ordained in 1916 as a Lutheran pastor, and he served as a military chaplain from 1915-1917. After the war he was employed at the *Schlesische Frauenhilfe*, a social welfare organization for women. He served as a pastor in Germany for twenty years, until he was driven into exile by the Nazis in 1933 as a *Mischling*¹⁰³⁹ because of his anti-Nazi political views and his non-Aryan status.¹⁰⁴⁰ He found work in Vienna as

¹⁰³⁷ Webster, *German "Non-Aryan" Clergymen*, 91.

¹⁰³⁸ Ronald Webster, "Eberhard Röhm und Jörg Thierfelder. Ein langer Weg von Breslau nach New York: Der Flüchtlingsseelsorger Friedrich Forell," in *Studien zur Kirchlichen Zeitgeschichte. Festschrift für Carsten Nicolaisen*, ed. Joachim Mehlhausen (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1995), 315-22; Ronald D.E. Webster, "German 'Non-Aryan' Clergymen and the Anguish of Exile after 1933," in *The Journal of Religious History*, 22:1, February 1998, 84-85; lastly see his biography at the Evangelisches Friedrich-Forell-Zentrum website at http://www.ekbo-wittichenau.de/forellzentrum/html/friedrich_forell.html.

¹⁰³⁹ Friedrich Forell, "Interview with WQXK, New York Radio," January 21, 1945, Papers of the Newcomers Christian Fellowship, University of Iowa Libraries, Special Collections, MSC 358, Iowa City, Iowa. Forell's interlocutor gave this information as an introduction to Pastor Forell during a broadcast on 21 January 1945. Forell does not explain in detail how he was "driven into exile" or at whose instigation.

¹⁰⁴⁰ Webster, "German 'Non-Aryan' Clergymen," 85. Forell's son George contends that the first reason was the primary cause of his expulsion, while Forell's former bishop in Silesia contends the second cause was primary, though Webster does not discuss the agency or process of this expulsion.

the head of the Swedish Society for the Mission to Jews from 1934 to 1938, then worked with German refugees in Paris from 1938 to 1940. With the Nazi invasion of France, Forell eventually made his way to the United States.¹⁰⁴¹ He settled in New York City where he became a pastor and evangelist in the Presbyterian Church.

The Nazi-era sermons of Ehrenberg, Hildebrandt, and Forell give us a sense of how the pastors perceive themselves as Germans and as Christians of Jewish ancestry. I should preface these comments with the caveat that the pastors did not explain their views of their own self-identity in their sermons; nevertheless, we can glean a sense of how they understood their Jewish descent in their confrontation with Nazi ideology and their expressed theological views of the Jews and Judaism. It might be helpful to interpret their self-identities as reflected in their sermons through the lens of Gitelman's spectrum of twentieth century Jewish identities. In *Religion or Ethnicity?: Jewish Identities in Evolution*, he argues that five conceptions of Jewish identity were prevalent in the early twentieth century:

the traditional ethno-religious fusion; Reform Judaism's restriction of Jewishness to religion and denial of Jewish nationhood; Zionism's claim that Jews are a modern as well as ancient nation and hence deserve a state; secular Diaspora nationalism that justified the existence of a people but saw no need for a state; and assimilation, the idea that wherever Jews might have been in the past, their future was to merge into the peoples among whom they lived.¹⁰⁴²

¹⁰⁴¹ Webster, "German Non-Aryan Clergymen," 85; Webster, "Ein langer Weg von Breslau nach New York," 382-383.

¹⁰⁴² Gitelman, *Religion or Ethnicity?* 303.

None of these five identities suit Ehrenberg, Hildebrandt, or Forell well because they did not consider themselves Jews in what for them was the most important sense of the term, from a Christian point of view, that is, from a purely religious standpoint, irrespective of ethnicity, nationhood, statehood, nationalism, or assimilation. At first glance their views might resemble the Reform Jew's emphasis on religion and the assimilationist's perspective on merging with dominant cultures, yet the textual evidence simply does not support the conclusion that they all restricted Jewishness to religion and denied Jewish nationhood, or that they thought all Jews ought to assimilate wherever they are in the world.

Their sermons reveal men devoted to God and loyal to their homeland.

Ehrenberg, Hildebrandt, and Forell all express grief about how Germans have supported a regime based on an ideology of racial hate and division, and we can see how they have struggled to combat this ideology by calling Germans back to Christian values such as love of neighbor and the dignity of all people. Each unequivocally understands himself as German, as a member of the German people who has been unjustly expelled. But even more than their German identity, each understands himself as a Christian, as one committed to Jesus Christ and devoted to his teachings. Particularly with the sermons of Hildebrandt and Forell, we see men who seemingly have no trouble living and working alongside Christians abroad – whether in England or the United States – even though they hailed from an “enemy” nation. Lastly, while all acknowledge their Jewish descent, they do not express sentiments that indicate a deep attachment to their own Jewish identity (at

least as expressed in their sermons).¹⁰⁴³ This research affirms the findings of Berghan, who has examined German Jewish refugees in England and contends that “there are cases, such as those of converts, where the ethnic background is non-existent, but the [Christian] identity is held on to all the more fervently to make up for the missing background.”¹⁰⁴⁴

Ehrenberg, Hildebrandt, and Forell viewed themselves as Christians and Germans most of all. While Ehrenberg grew up in a non-religious Jewish household, both Hildebrandt and Forell were raised as Christians in racially-mixed households; yet for all three, “Jewishness” was primarily a matter of religion, not race or ethnicity. As Christians, they did not identify strongly as Jewish in a meaningful sense. However, as I will demonstrate, the sermons of Ehrenberg, Hildebrandt, and Forell express views favorable to Jews and Judaism 11 times in 34 sermons (33%), much more often than their non-Jewish Confessing Church colleagues (40 of 910, or 4.4%). This indicates that their experiences of persecution by the Nazi dictatorship may have encouraged them to speak out more often in defense of the Jews and Judaism; and their experiences may have encouraged them to identify with persecuted Jews.¹⁰⁴⁵ Yet this assertion must be mitigated by the fact that Hildebrandt and Forell both preached sermons outside Nazi

¹⁰⁴³ Berghahn, *German Jewish Refugees in England*, 17. We should remember, however, that Hildebrandt and Forell were half-Jewish, while Ehrenberg the only actual convert.

¹⁰⁴⁴ Berghan, *German Jewish Refugees in England*, 17.

¹⁰⁴⁵ It is important to note that I have not recovered any textual evidence from the works – in sermons or autobiographical information – that makes this link explicit between their own experiences of persecution and their willingness to speak out more often than their Confessing Church colleagues in favor of the Jews and Judaism. But the significant difference in the percentages of German pastors of Jewish descent expressing views favorable to Jews and Judaism is striking and illustrative of their concern for the Jews of Europe.

Germany (in Great Britain and the USA, respectively) with more freedom and candor than they could have enjoyed otherwise.

Thus, their sermons reveal men in anguish about leaving their German homeland, wishing to serve their fellow Germans back home by preaching the gospel. And as we will see, their sermons reveal non-rational anti-Judaic prejudices against Jews and Judaism based upon religious convictions, though we find no evidence of expressions of irrational antisemitism based upon racial prejudice. This said, Pastors Ehrenberg, Hildebrandt, and Forell each expressed favorable views of Jews and Judaism, particularly the common spiritual foundations of both religious traditions and also the value of the Hebrew Bible for Christians and the German churches.

The sermons of Ehrenberg, Hildebrandt, and Forell span the Nazi era from 1933 to 1945, and were delivered in locals as varied as Bochum to London to New York City. Ehrenberg's dated sermons were delivered from between 1933 to 1937, before his exile to England in 1939.¹⁰⁴⁶ The context of his undated sermons indicates they were delivered in Germany as well, before his exile. Seven of the 16 were unpublished, either handwritten or typed, and the remaining nine were all published in pamphlet form. Of the 16 sermons, Ehrenberg preached only three on the Hebrew Bible (one each on *Genesis*, the *Psalms*, and *Proverbs*). Seven of the 16 he preached on the New Testament gospels (*Mathew*, *Mark*, *Luke*, and *John*) or *The Acts of the Apostles*. Hildebrandt's 13 sermons are all from the latter years of the Second World War, from 1942 to 1945.¹⁰⁴⁷

¹⁰⁴⁶ Of the three pastors, Ehrenberg's sermons were the easiest to locate. These sermons are collected at the regional church archive center of North-Rhine Westphalia, the region in which Ehrenberg preached. The archive is the *Landeskirchliches Archiv der Evangelischen Kirche von Westfalen* in Bielefeld.

¹⁰⁴⁷ Hildebrandt's sermons were more difficult to track down. All of these sermons are collected at the National Library of Scotland. During the war years, Hildebrandt had the option of becoming a priest in the

He delivered 11 of the 13 sermons in London to German citizens via the British Broadcasting Network; over the radio he sought to reach Christians in Germany, to challenge their understanding of the Nazi regime and the war. The other two sermons he delivered to various congregations in London. Hildebrandt preached three sermons on the Hebrew Bible (one each on *Zachariah*, *Habakkuk*, and *2 Chronicles*), and only two on the Gospels (both on *Mark*); he preached all other sermons on the New Testament Epistles. Lastly, Forell's five sermons and speeches are all unpublished, and they were all delivered during the Second World War (with the possible exception of two which may have been preached immediately after the war).¹⁰⁴⁸ Of the sermons that indicate location, they were all preached in New York City. Forell preached almost exclusively on the New Testament – the one exception was on Jeremiah – but he often did not base his sermon on one specific biblical text.

German pastors of Jewish descent did not shy away from preaching on the contentious current events of their day. They preached not only the basic Christian tenets in their sermons – to love one's neighbor, to forgive those who sin against you, to care for those in need – but they confronted Nazism with insight and resolution. As I will

Church of England, yet Hildebrandt decided to become a minister in the Methodist Church after World War II, which brought him to lead a church in Cambridge and later in Edinburgh. Through twists and turns in the late 1960s, Hildebrandt left Methodism and joined the Church of Scotland (Presbyterian), where he served in Edinburgh as a pastor and chaplain until his death in 1985. Because of his great stature and reputation as a clergyman, the National Library of Scotland offered to preserve his personal papers and records for posterity.

¹⁰⁴⁸ Forell's sermons were the most difficult to locate. Though he lived in New York City after World War II, upon retirement in 1964 he and his wife moved to Iowa City, where his son, George Wolfgang Forell, was a faculty member (and later director) of the University of Iowa School of Religion. Through his son's connections at the University of Iowa, the University Archive agreed to preserve and maintain his personal papers and records, including his war-time sermons. See his obituary in *The Iowa City Press-Citizen*, 3 April 1968, page 34. <http://www.newspapers.com/newspage/23444074/>. Date accessed, 31 May 2015.

show, Ehrenberg, Hildebrandt, and Forell each unflinchingly addressed the challenges of the Church Struggle in Nazi Germany, the incompatibilities of National Socialism and Christianity as competing belief systems, and the problem of Hitler as a false messiah misleading the German people. And as I mentioned, they also expressed their complex perspectives of Judaism and Jews in relation to Christians. At times these remarks indicate support for the Jewish people as a faith community historically and spiritually connected to Christians and also an appreciation for the Hebrew Bible and Judaism. But at other times they express anti-Judaic theology, such as supersessionism (the belief that Christianity “completes” or “fulfills” Judaism and thus supersedes it) and also the need for Jewish conversion. I will present each author’s sermons together to give a better sense of their voice, tone, and the frequency of their expressions. I will then close with observations and conclusions from the evidence presented.

Hans Ehrenberg of Bochum

From the start Ehrenberg challenged the Nazi state’s assertions about the superiority of the “Aryan” German.¹⁰⁴⁹ Just months after all the banner waving and propaganda following Hitler’s ascension to Reich Chancellor on January 30, 1933, Ehrenberg preached a confirmation sermon entitled, “Banner of the People of God,” on 16 April 1933. He looks back to the history of the Jewish people, and preaches on Psalm 60:4-6, a text that figuratively asserts God has given a banner to rally those who fear God in times of oppression. This text is an encouragement for the Christians of Germany in

¹⁰⁴⁹ See Ehrenberg, *Autobiography of a German Pastor*; Lutherhaus Eisenach, *Wider Das Vergessen*; Brakelmann, *Hans Ehrenberg*; Licharz and Keller, *Franz Rosenzweig und Hans Ehrenberg*; and Murken and Keller, *Das Erbe des Theologen Hans Ehrenberg*; and Gerlach, *And the Witnesses Were Silent*, 24-25.

“dark days.” Amid Nazi jubilation he provides the stark contrast of Christian dedication for the students he has prepared for confirmation,

The man of today does not want to fear; he rules the earth and the powers; he is himself full of power and greatness [*er ist selbst voll Gewalt und Grosse*]. The mass stifles the faintest movement of the heart. The mass and the mass of the people do not know Gethsemane. The man of the masses [*Der Massenmensch*] is without respect, without the fear of God, and without fear and trembling. He knows no concern for salvation; he does not fear the judgment of God, thus he is also without fear of the consequences of his conduct.¹⁰⁵⁰

Ehrenberg contends the modern man has no fear of God, but in delusion waives a banner of German nationality and ethnic pride.¹⁰⁵¹ Christians of Germany must realize that they have their own banner to march under and their own weapons to defeat their enemies; but victory begins with the fear of God. Ehrenberg observes that the health of the German land is tied to the spiritual health of its people. He reminds them that they have a very different banner than the Nazis under which to march.

Ehrenberg almost never criticizes Hitler or the Nazis by name in his sermons, but he does implicitly express criticism of Hitler, National Socialism, and in particular, Christians who compromise their faith with “strange doctrines” of the day.¹⁰⁵² In a sermon to a graduating confirmation class during Passion Week 1936, Ehrenberg

¹⁰⁵⁰ See Hans Ehrenberg, „Panier des Gottesvolkstums,“ Okuli, 16 April 1933, Papers of Hans Ehrenberg, Landeskirchliches Archiv, Evangelische Kirche von Westfalen (LKA EKvW) W4891, Bielefeld, Germany.

¹⁰⁵¹ This image is in clear contrast to the pageantry and flag waiving of the German Christian movement; see Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 46-49, 170.

¹⁰⁵² Ehrenberg viewed National Socialism as diametrically opposed to Christianity, a conviction he came to very early in the Nazi regime. Traugott Jähnichen, “Von der ‘Schwärmerei’ zur ‘Gegenreligion,“” Die Auseinandersetzung Ehrenberg mit dem Nationalsozialismus als seiner ‘politischen Religion,“ in *Das Erbe des Theologen Hans Ehrenberg: Eine Zwischenbilanz*, edited by Manfred Keller and Jens Murken (Dortmund: Titelbild, 2009), 111-112.

encourages his students to rely on the ancient faith of their fathers and not on new and untested doctrines of the day. His text is the Epistle to the Hebrews 13:7-9 and 17, which asks Christians to “Remember your leaders, those who spoke the word of God to you, consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith... Don’t be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings.” He raises the question about spiritual leadership, to whom Christians should look upon to guide them. As Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever, he argues, so also should Christian doctrine remain constant through the ages. Though he does not explicitly mention the German Christian movement, the implication is there. To a Confessing Church member in Nazi Germany, the German Christian movement tops the list of those espousing “strange teachings” from within the churches.¹⁰⁵³ Despite appearances and propaganda to the contrary, teachings of the German Christian movement, such as notions of racial superiority, a German messiah, a volkish-infused Christianity, and a de-judaized scripture, made it “barely recognizable as Christian.”¹⁰⁵⁴ In opposition, Ehrenberg upholds the equality of all people before God, emphasizes the validity of the Hebrew Bible as a sacred text alongside the New Testament, and he also warns about the German Christian movement’s denial of Jesus’ Jewish-ness.¹⁰⁵⁵ Ehrenberg writes of these teachers of strange doctrines: “There will also be those of your religious teachers, who offer you no Bible, no Church, no religious

¹⁰⁵³ See Chapter 3 for a more in-depth discussion of the German Christian movement’s theology and teachings.

¹⁰⁵⁴ See Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 2.

¹⁰⁵⁵ Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 109, 154-157; for a superb treatment of the “Aryanization” of Jesus and de-judaization of Christianity in Germany through the Nazi-sponsored Institute for the Study and Eradication of Jewish Influence on German Religious Life, see Susannah Heschel’s *The Aryan Jesus: Christian Theologians and the Bible in Nazi Germany* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2008).

teaching. Do not take in these teachers, nor follow them, they bestow no memory [of the true Christian faith].”¹⁰⁵⁶ He argues that works follow faith, that is, good works follow a tried and tested faith, and bad works follow a shallow and newfangled faith. “Strange doctrines” unmoor character, leaving the individual directionless, and thus making the soul “old and weary.”¹⁰⁵⁷ He advises his young students to trust the witness of the historic Christian faith. But more than this, he offers his community advice to trust and rely upon each other, and that will help to preserve them in the difficult times ahead. He writes,

Look upon your first leader [*Führer*] and teacher in life, your parents! The right father protects his own against any enemy with a courageous resisting; that is his end. The right mother prays for her children until the last emergency; that is her end. The right pastor preaches the gospel unwaveringly through the world; that is his end. The right church member pushes through the life undisturbed through the word of God; which is her end. The right fighter [*Streiter*] suffers with the Lord in all things; that is his end. The right worshiper bows before God until the last breath; that is his end.¹⁰⁵⁸

Ehrenberg’s use of the term *Führer* is significant because he advocates that Christians look to other, more important leaders than Hitler in living a righteous life. He is reminding his audience of the roles of society’s leaders – the mother and father and the clergyman. And he is also reminding his audience of their goals – as the church and as

¹⁰⁵⁶ Hans Ehrenberg, Sermon on Hebrews 13:7-9, 17, Passion 1936, Papers of Hans Ehrenberg, LKA EKvW W4891. Ehrenberg’s conception of the “true” Church is one founded upon the Christian scriptures and the Protestant confessions of the Reformation. See E.H. Robertson’s discussion of this theme in the Barmen Declaration, the foundational text of the Confessing Church, in *Christians against Hitler* (London: SCM Press, 1962), 48.

¹⁰⁵⁷ Hans Ehrenberg, Sermon on Hebrews 13:7-9, 17, Passion 1936, Papers of Hans Ehrenberg, LKA EKvW W4891.

¹⁰⁵⁸ Hans Ehrenberg, Sermon on Hebrews 13:7-9 17, Passion 1936, Papers of Hans Ehrenberg, LKA EKvW W4891.

Christians. In effect, he is recalibrating their understanding of the meaning of leadership, the responsibilities of leadership: to protect against enemies, to love and nurture, and to live according to the gospel.

But such comments were very dangerous, even if Ehrenberg did not explicitly name Hitler. The Treachery Act of 1934 criminalized any potentially “harmful” statements against the government, or even the Nazi Party, whether in public or private, that undermined the prestige of Nazi leaders or the state.¹⁰⁵⁹ Ehrenberg was careful, yet still provocative in his discussion of leaders worthy of following. In this sermon Ehrenberg insightfully places the notion of *Führer* in context of the family, in particular, parents, who are the ones who care most about their children – as opposed to a political leader demanding devotion. Just as important, he provides guidance for each member of his faith community to persevere in their faith in the times in which they live, but he does not advise about specific actions. For example, he does not spell out what kind of “resisting” a father might engage in against an enemy, but a congregant could well imagine the Nazi intrusions into the lives of German children, whether this be in the school system, the Hitler Youth, or simply the constant barrage of propaganda that influences their children every day. Ehrenberg calls his congregants and confirmands in particular, to care for each other, to trust in God, and to persevere in the Christian faith of the fathers.

¹⁰⁵⁹ See Gellately, *Backing Hitler*, Kindle Edition, location 1323; Robert Gellately, “Denunciations in Twentieth Century Germany: Aspects of Self-Policing in the Third Reich and the German Democratic Republic,” in *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 68, No. 4, *Practices of Denunciation in Modern European History, 1789-1989* (Dec., 1996), pp. 939-940; Richard Evans, *The Third Reich in Power* (Penguin Press, 2005), 72; Louis Eltscher, *Traitors or Patriots? A Story of the German Anti-Nazi Resistance* (Bloomington, IN: iUniverse, 2013), 126;

In an undated sermon entitled “I am the Lord your God,” Ehrenberg does not preach on a specific text, but rather reflects on what has happened in Germany in recent years. He laments Germany’s submission to a madman, and from this basis reflects on the great differences between humanity and God, and the folly of man becoming his own god. The sorrow and distress is palpable:

As it comes upon us, how could all this happen, what has befallen Germany? In the very moment that God’s hand was put upon us all, so to speak, that God’s hand just in this moment, as the Word of God made a big offensive in German lands, just then the evil enemy came and wrested almost all that God had... Then the greatest disobedience broke out that human minds have ever devised. Then it tore the man about, so that he screamed: I myself am it, I, the man, I am God! Not you, God, but I, the man! You are nothing, I am everything... And so it happened... All the people should be falling into the hands of the living God, yet they are falling into the hands of Satan.¹⁰⁶⁰

Once again, Ehrenberg does not mention Hitler by name, but the context makes his meaning evident. He speaks of disobedience, megalomania, and of a man who “screams” as if from a podium in front of thousands, that he is a god, and all the people follow. The German people have fallen under the sway of Satan, he argues, and the consequences are sure to be disastrous. This is not to say that Ehrenberg equates Hitler with Satan, but that Hitler is somehow in league with Satan as an agent that leads people astray.¹⁰⁶¹ But note that Ehrenberg leaves the identification of this man ambiguous: it could mean Hitler, or

¹⁰⁶⁰ Hans Ehrenberg, „Ich bin der Herr, dein Gott,“ Undated, Papers of Hans Ehrenberg, LKA EKvW, Hans Ehrenberg, W4891.

¹⁰⁶¹ It seems clear that Ehrenberg has Hitler in mind, a man whom Ian Kershaw contends “lashed the Jews in the most vicious and barbaric language imaginable” from the very beginning of his political career onward, and that he advocated that “Germans should be ready to enter into a pact with the devil to eradicate the evil of Jewry”; see Kershaw, *Hitler*, Kindle Edition, location 2062.

Goebbels or Rosenberg for that matter, or it could mean the everyman walking down the street that denies God.¹⁰⁶² He ends the sermon affirming that Christ is the only one who can turn Germans back to the loving and merciful hands of the living God.

Ehrenberg again argues that the Church is being misled in an undated sermon published in pamphlet form in Bochum entitled “Why Christian, Why Protestant, Why Religious?”¹⁰⁶³ He contends that the recent decline in Christianity has led to the spiritual decline of Germany and all of Europe. His biblical text is a well-known verse from the Sermon on the Mount, “But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (Matthew 6:33). The selection of this text alone is significant because its meaning requires the attentive listener to judge one’s devotion to God and pursuit of God’s kingdom. He asks reflectively, what does one strive after most of all? Is it national or ethnic prosperity and dominance, or is it the kingdom of God? Ehrenberg’s main point in this sermon is to address the fundamental problem of his day, which he states thus,

The affairs of naked existence have become so overwhelming that one thinks only about the struggle and on the size and sublimity of this struggle. But one does not live by bread alone, not of existence alone, and not from the struggle for existence.

...

We live in a completely spiritual anarchy, everything has become questionable.¹⁰⁶⁴

¹⁰⁶² This ambiguity provides cover against charges of making anti-Hitler or ant-Nazi comments; see Gellately, *Backing Hitler*, Kindle Edition, location 1323.

¹⁰⁶³ Unfortunately, the only publication information available for this 4-page pamphlet is the name of the Bochum publisher, F.W. Fretlöh. It is unknown how many of these pamphlets were distributed or precisely when.

¹⁰⁶⁴ Hans Ehrenberg, „Warum christlich, warum evangelisch, warum kirchlich?“ Undated, Papers of Hans Ehrenberg, LKA EKvW W4891.

The German people do not know what is spiritually life-giving or death-making. They cannot judge the true prophet from the false, nor evaluate just behavior from unjust. They are spiritually lost and in critical need of guidance.¹⁰⁶⁵ Again, Ehrenberg does not mention Hitler as an anti-Christian charlatan or National Socialism as a corrupt ideology. But he clarifies why his congregants should rest secure in the Christian faith as a sure guide to a righteous life. Everyone needs salvation, Ehrenberg argues; the question is where to turn for it. For Ehrenberg, only Christianity offers a life-giving path that affirms a sacrificial dedication to justice and righteousness. Ehrenberg implicitly sets up Christianity against human philosophies and ideologies, such as National Socialism, and asks which one leads to a more just and righteous life. Only the kingdom of God promises redemption and mercy, not human kingdoms that can promise only earthly and corruptible rewards.

The Nazi-inspired “strange doctrines” and the “spiritual anarchy” of the day contributed to the disunity of the German Protestant churches, which Ehrenberg seeks to ameliorate through reflection on the history of the Church.¹⁰⁶⁶ In a remarkable pamphlet containing three Pentecost sermons of 1937, most likely delivered at his home church, the Lutheran Pauluskirche in Bochum-Altstadt, Ehrenberg emphasizes the significance of this holy day for Christians in Nazi Germany.¹⁰⁶⁷ In the first sermon delivered on 16

¹⁰⁶⁵ Detlev Peukert makes the argument that Germany from 1914 to 1945 experienced a “succession of events that marked this period... [and that] generated a deep-seated sense of unease and disorientation, an awareness that the conditions underlying everyday life and experience were in flux, and a questioning of many inherited assumptions, such as those concerning the relationships between the sexes and the generations. The hallmark of the period was uncertainty.” See Peukert, *The Weimar Republic*, translated by Richard Deveson (New York: Hill and Wang, 1989), 275.

¹⁰⁶⁶ Conway, *Nazi Persecution of the Churches, 133-1945*, 260.

¹⁰⁶⁷ In the Christian tradition, Pentecost is the commemoration day of the Holy Spirit descending upon the

May 1937, he preaches on the Acts of the Apostles 2:1-13, which in part states the following,

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.¹⁰⁶⁸

The passage comments on the bewilderment of on-lookers and their speculations about the cause and meaning of this strange event. They dismiss the experience of the early believers by calling them fools or drunkards, and relegating them to the crazy house (*Irrenhaus*). But in the Christian tradition ever since, Pentecost represents the power of God to break through into this world and to be a force of unity and love. Ehrenberg describes the meaning of Pentecost this way: “the breakthrough, a radical and total breakthrough from everything that is human and earthly!!! ... Whoever believes in such a breakthrough is either a fool or a dangerous man who sets himself in opposition to the orders of this world, which are also not without God.”¹⁰⁶⁹ Thus, for Ehrenberg and Christians listening to this message, belief in this “breakthrough” has the potential to be a vital force against the powers that oppress and victimize. He contends that Christians ought to oppose the powers and wake up the world with a prophetic voice, as he is doing

apostles and early Christians, after the ascension of Christ, uniting them as the Church. The word “Pentecost” refers to the fifty days after Easter on which this event is said to have taken place. A.T. Lincoln states, Pentecost produced not simply Spirit-filled individuals but a new community”; see “Pentecost” in the *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments*, eds. Ralph Martin and Peter Davids (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 902-906.

¹⁰⁶⁸ Hans Ehrenberg, Sermon on 16 Mai 1937, in *Drei Predigten* (Bochum: F.W. Fretlöv, 1937), 3.

¹⁰⁶⁹ Ehrenberg, *Drei Predigten*, 5.

with this very sermon. Ehrenberg calls upon Christians to live out the “foolishness” of Christianity to serve the weak, poor, and outcast, even though this road may lead to rejection and persecution. He ends this sermon with a final thought:

We are mad in this world because of him [Christ], so that this same world might be healthy and holy through him. That is why the Holy Spirit encountered the disciples... The Church and its servants have received the Holy Spirit. The word of the supposedly mentally ill and thus dangerous Christians is the word of eternal health, the word of eternal life, the word of eternal salvation, to the godless and the pious children of the world. The host of the redeemed, the communion of saints was born!¹⁰⁷⁰

This sermon paints a contrast between the wisdom of this world and the wisdom of God. Though the powers and philosophies of this world remain unnamed, Ehrenberg presents the undisclosed congregation with an opportunity to judge just how “foolish” and potentially dangerous Christianity is under a National Socialist state.

And just a week later, the first Sunday after Pentecost, 23 May 1937, Ehrenberg publicly speaks of the Nazi persecution of the German churches, but this time he is speaking on the basis of personal experience. The Nazis have pushed Ehrenberg out of his pastorate in Bochum as a “*Volljude*,” and his exile to England is imminent. His text is Romans 11:32-36, in which the Apostle Paul expresses wonder at God’s “unsearchable” ways and judgments, and encourages Christians to rest in his mercy. While he admits the end of his ministry in Bochum feels like a death. But for Ehrenberg this is not the end. He reminds his audience that at the bleakest of moments, after death on the cross and entombment, Christ resurrected from the grave. Yes, he admits, “My office shall die.

¹⁰⁷⁰ Ehrenberg, *Drei Predigten*, 7.

Very well, it dies, but it rises up again, and so we humble ourselves before the one who is the Victor over death.”¹⁰⁷¹ Furthermore, he admits that the Church is being persecuted and Christians are suffering. He continues,

Therefore, know this: this is not the true need, that the masses left the Church, but that the Church still does not believe that it in its impotence is stronger than the world...

Let us suffer together and resist together again!

Let us be sad together, do atonement together, and experience the victory of grace together.”¹⁰⁷²

Ehrenberg laments the disunity of the church, its despondency in terrible times, and its subsequent lack of vigor and dominance. He takes this opportunity to call his church to repentance, particularly for weakness of faith, and he encourages his congregation to lean upon each other and rely upon the strength that only God can provide in faith. Just as the Church came together by the power of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, so now the Church must unify in the grace and mercy of God in the midst of persecution. But he also argues that this unity, this standing together, requires a standing “against” as well: “Let us suffer together and resist together again!”¹⁰⁷³ While his call to suffer and resist together may sound vague, its meaning in the context of the sermon indicates that the church ought to stand together against those who seek its division and loss of influence. He speaks as an oppressed man forced to leave an oppressed institution, and his parting remarks are to encourage Christians to endure suffering and to resist together.

¹⁰⁷¹ Hans Ehrenberg, Sermon on 23 Mai 1937, in *Drei Predigten* (Bochum: F.W. Fretlöv, 1937), 15.

¹⁰⁷² Ehrenberg, *Drei Predigten*, 15.

¹⁰⁷³ Ehrenberg, *Drei Predigten*, 15.

Ehrenberg seeks to not only unify his church and criticize those individuals and ideologies that undermine it, but he presents an alternative ideology to combat them. The most vivid and authoritative example is an undated sermon on Luke 10:23-37, the parable of the Good Samaritan: a Jewish man is traveling along the road to Jericho and is accosted by robbers, who take all he has and beat him, leaving him to die by the roadside. Two highly respected Jewish men pass him by without helping: a priest and a Levite. Then a Samaritan happens by – considerable animosity existed between the Jews and Samaritans in this time the Jews.¹⁰⁷⁴ The Samaritan acts as the good neighbor, caring for the man, taking him to an inn, bandaging his wounds, and paying for his recuperation. To the astonishment of his audience, Jesus’ holds up the Samaritan as the good neighbor, challenging preconceived notions about what being a neighbor means and to whom we owe kindness and consideration.

Through the moral and spiritual confusion that for him characterized Nazi Germany, he asks Jesus’ simple question, who is my neighbor? And in providing an answer, he demonstrates how theology in a sermon can be used to challenge the prevailing ideology, and to encourage congregants to alter their treatment of those around them, Christian or Jew. Ehrenberg argues that the “neighbor question” is deeply relevant for Germans who have in the past few decades experienced trying times and who, in trying to survive, may have forgotten the Christian meaning of the word “neighbor.” He

¹⁰⁷⁴ The Jews of Jesus’ day perceived the Samaritans’ religion as syncretistic, as the Samaritan people were the descendants of those “whom the king of Assyria transported to the Northern Kingdom of Israel to replace the exiled native population after the fall of Samaria”; see *The Bible Dictionary, Second Edition* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1982), 1062. See also Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity, Second Edition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 378-379. In Jesus’ parable of the Good Samaritan, the point is that this man from Samaria, not the “good and respectable” of Jewish society, looked upon the beaten Jewish man on the side of the road as a neighbor.

begins by highlighting the nature of the tension between Jews and Samaritans in the context of Jesus' day:

A double hostility existed between the Samaritans and the Jews: ethnic and religious. The Samaritans were twice despised by the Jews, as a mixed people and as a heretical [*unrechte*] church... No one should probably have had more reason to pass over the Jews as the Samaritan. And no one should have had more decency and commitment to devote himself to him as the priest and the Levite!¹⁰⁷⁵

In exploring this ancient parable of Second Temple Palestine, Ehrenberg identifies the nature of the problem of racial hostility in Nazi Germany. The problem is a myopic perspective that prizes belonging to a certain group in terms of race, ethnicity, religion, above the dignity of the individual as a child of God.¹⁰⁷⁶ Jesus provides a new perspective to help break through hostility to serve any human being in need. Ehrenberg emphasizes that Jesus' parable of the unexpected hero should compel us to reconsider the boundaries and markers that we believe are so consequential but yet divide us. He continues:

As one says in annoyance: I want nothing more to do with these people; and see, it flies by in no time, here this man stands in severe distress before me and is without; even against my will he has become my neighbor. In the most beautiful and happiest love the hour must come at which those who love [*Liebenden*] – man and wife, parents and children, friend and friend – as strangers face one another before they will ever be true neighbors. The neighbor is always on the other side of the ditch, and I stand on this side, and I must cross over... The Samaritan forgot as he

¹⁰⁷⁵ Hans Ehrenberg, Predigt über Lukas 10:23-37, Undated, Papers of Hans Ehrenberg, LKA EKvW W4891.

¹⁰⁷⁶ This insight of the parable of the Good Samaritan has been shown to be considerably influential in inspiring rescuers of Jews in Nazi Germany; see David Gushee's *Righteous Gentiles of the Holocaust: Genocide and Moral Obligation, Second Edition* (St. Paul, MN: Paragon House, 2003), Kindle Edition, location 3186.

had the need before his eyes, who was there; he saw in the bleeding fellow no enemy, no stranger, only one brother.

...

And therefore, [one acts] contrary to the world, contrary to kings and prophets in the world, about what a neighbor is. They want to love, but according to specified plan, or an existing order. After some status or race, after some attitude or religion. Whoever sets any limit to his love, remains without neighbors and has not really loved. *It resists the world; its exalted orders, nationality, state, family do not definitively determine who is our neighbor* [Emphasis added].¹⁰⁷⁷

Ehrenberg beautifully describes the transition one experiences, according to the Christian religion, in recognizing neighbors. The Samaritan demonstrates an open mind to question the meaning of neighbor and an open heart to love a man in need. Even the most strange of strangers is a neighbor in the sense that Jesus describes. As Ehrenberg notes, one cannot enter the kingdom of God alone, but must always walk two by two, a man and his neighbor. For the attentive and discerning listener, this discussion of the meaning of neighbor has the potential to undermine Nazi conceptions of the hierarchy of races, the idolization of nation, and the aggressive posture in demanding *lebensraum* from eastern neighbors.¹⁰⁷⁸

Now we turn to Ehrenberg's brief discussions in his sermons about Jews and Judaism. In a sermon delivered in the middle of October 1933, Ehrenberg boldly preaches from Ephesians 6:19-20, the "mystery of the gospel" and the fruits it will produce in faithful Christians.¹⁰⁷⁹ Just as Paul asked for prayers amid persecution, so Ehrenberg petitions his congregation to pray for him as the days are becoming

¹⁰⁷⁷ Hans Ehrenberg, Sermon on Luke 10:23-37, LKA EKvW W4891.

¹⁰⁷⁸ Gushee, *Righteous Gentiles of the Holocaust*, Kindle Edition, location 3419.

¹⁰⁷⁹ Hans Ehrenberg, Sermon on Ephesians 6:19-20, October 1933, Papers of Hans Ehrenberg, LKA EKvW, W4891.

increasingly difficult for the German churches and its pastors. In this sermon he clarifies his perspective of the relationship between Jews and Christians as equal before a God who saves both. He writes,

God charges the peoples [of the world], including the Germans, to believe the savior of the world as Jews. But he charges the Jews, who appear to have a privilege, to learn that the savior born in their blood was from this same blood crucified.

So that nobody has a privilege on earth, so that no one can boast, so that everyone may be humble, so that everyone can only look to the mercy [of God], so God has the people unevenly divided into two:

Israel and the nations, and both brought against one another that they meet each other again and again:

The Germans met with Christians from Israel in the nationality and blood of his German savior; and the Christian from Israel encountered in his German brother, his German sister, the ancestors of the crucified Son of the living God.

For in every brother on earth we meet Christ.

This is the “mystery of the gospel!”¹⁰⁸⁰

Ehrenberg affirms that Jesus was Jewish, in contrast to the views of those in the German Christian movement who were then wresting the leadership of the churches from neutral and oppositional pastors.¹⁰⁸¹ But he repeats the traditional anti-Judaic charge that “the Jews” crucified Christ, and he uses this as a way to humble a people formerly honored, thus leveling their relationship to other nations. Ehrenberg places the Jews and the

¹⁰⁸⁰ Hans Ehrenberg, Sermon on Ephesians 6:19-20, LKA EKvW, W4891.

¹⁰⁸¹ Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 109, 154-157. As I discuss in Chapter 3, pastors who “opposed” Nazi infringement in ecclesiastical affairs did not necessarily oppose all Nazi policies of National Socialism, especially in the early years of the Nazi regime. In fact, there were even some Confessing Church pastors who were members of the Nazi Party. See Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 5.

peoples of other nations on an equal footing, all alike dependent upon the mercy of God. But Ehrenberg drives home the point that the Christian, no matter ethnicity or nationality or race or whatever other classification human society devises, is a representative of Christ on earth. The clear implication, according to Ehrenberg, is that brothers and sisters in Christ should act as such to one another.

Hans Ehrenberg speaks directly to the question of the persecution of the German Churches in a sermon delivered on March 14, 1937, entitled “From Christ-believing Sacrifices” and in doing so, comments on the value of the Jewish tradition, despite his traditional anti-Judaism. As we will see, German pastors of Jewish descent expressed traditional anti-Judaic prejudices, just like their Confessing Church colleagues throughout Germany. And yet also like their colleagues, they did not express racial antisemitism in their sermons (as least as far as Ehrenberg, Hildebrandt, and Forell indicate). In other words, while we see non-rational religious prejudice, we do not find irrational racial prejudice. We should not interpret the anti-Judaic expressions of either the German pastors of Jewish descent or their Confessing Church colleagues as a way to ingratiate themselves with their congregations or the Nazi regime itself, because these anti-Judaic expressions – in theological literature and sermons alike – are evident throughout the history of the universal Church.¹⁰⁸²

¹⁰⁸² See James Carroll, *Constantine's Sword: The Church and the Jews* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2001), 22-3; Daniel Goldhagen, *A Moral Reckoning: the Role of the Catholic Church in the Holocaust and its Unfulfilled Duty of Repair* (New York: Knopf, 2002), 78-87; Léon Poliakov, *The History of Anti-Semitism, Vol. 1, From the Time of Christ to the Court of the Jews*, trans. by Richard Howard (New York: Vanguard, 1965); Dan Cohn-Sherbok, *The Crucified Jew: Twenty Centuries of Christian Anti-Semitism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997); and James D.G. Dunn, ed., *Jews and Christians: The Parting of the Ways, A.D. 70 to 135*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999); Paula Fredriksen, *From Jesus to Christ: The Origins of the New Testament Images of Jesus*, Kindle Edition (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008); and Geza Vermes, *Christian Beginnings: From Nazareth to Nicea* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014).

Now getting back to Ehrenberg's sermon "From Christ-believing Sacrifices, he argues that the question is not whether the Christian will suffer, but how much one is willing to sacrifice in suffering. Ehrenberg examines two texts: the first is Genesis 22:9-14a, on Abraham's test of faith in attempting to sacrifice Isaac; and the second is II Corinthians 6:1-10, in which Paul recounts the suffering and perseverance of Christians in the early churches. A short segment of the latter passage is illustrative of the hardship the early Christians endured and the connection Ehrenberg wishes to draw to Christians of his own day:

We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet are well known; as dying, and see – we are alive; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, and yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything.¹⁰⁸³

Significantly, Ehrenberg does not specify who is doing the persecuting here, but the implication is clear. Just as the empire persecuted Paul and the early Christian communities, so the Nazi dictatorship is persecuting Ehrenberg and the Christians of Germany who have refused to adapt Christianity to National Socialist principles. In these "hard times" Ehrenberg points his congregants to two great Jewish models of faith and sacrifice: Abraham and Jesus.¹⁰⁸⁴ He extols the astonishing faith of "Father" Abraham, who is ready at God's command to sacrifice that which God had previously promised him: his son, his progeny. And Jesus, the second great model of faithfulness, submitted to the will of God, enduring persecution and even execution at the hands of the Romans.

¹⁰⁸³ Hans Ehrenberg, „Vom christusgläubigen Opfer,“ 14 März 1937, Papers of Hans Ehrenberg, LKA EKvW W4891.

¹⁰⁸⁴ Hans Ehrenberg, „Vom christusgläubigen Opfer,“ LKA EKvW W4891.

In this sermon Ehrenberg connects Abraham, traditionally understood by Christians to be the father of the Jewish faith, with Jesus the founder of the Christian faith. Though he does not assert the equality of these two men, he demonstrates for the Christian layman the benefits of studying the life of Abraham and learning from his extraordinary faith as a man of God. Furthermore, he affirms the Hebrew Bible as a source of revelation and moral authority – as opposed to the German Christian faction.¹⁰⁸⁵ In a day in which the Church has forgotten its identity, forgotten its tradition, and so has become morally unmoored, he advises his congregants to remember its teachers: “The Christian community has almost completely forgotten its teachers, who one and all confess, that our life be a single witness for the crucified Christ.”¹⁰⁸⁶ Ehrenberg does not wish to purge all Jewish elements from the Christian tradition, but instead to highlight them and hold up heroes of the faith for emulation.

In another example Ehrenberg preaches on Peter’s sermon in Jerusalem at Pentecost, in the Acts of the Apostles 2:29-41. Though the date is unspecified, the sermon indicates that Ehrenberg delivered it on Pentecost Monday, a meditation on the meaning of Pentecost for Christians in his day.¹⁰⁸⁷ Significantly, he argues that the Christian Church, as a community of faith, emerged out of Judaism, thus connecting the two faiths in one sacred history. He testifies,

¹⁰⁸⁵ Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 143-154; Heschel, *Aryan Jesus*, 13 and 26.

¹⁰⁸⁶ Hans Ehrenberg, „Vom christusgläubigen Opfer,“ LKA EKvW W4891.

¹⁰⁸⁷ Again, the Christian holiday of Pentecost (otherwise known as Whit Sunday) celebrates the day, forty days after Easter, in which the early followers of Jesus gathered for the Jewish holy day of Shavuot, and the Holy Spirit descended upon them and inspired them to spread the gospel (see Acts 1:15 ff.). Pentecost Monday is the day after Pentecost (which is celebrated on a Sunday).

The specific New Testament proclamation, which the Pentecost sermon of the Apostle should be the model of all Christian proclamation of the word, has two roots, the salvation history of the entire Bible and the Appearance, the incarnation of the Word in 'this' Jesus.¹⁰⁸⁸

Ehrenberg emphasizes that Christian preaching must start with these two roots. To deny the history of salvation as described in the Hebrew Bible through the New Testament is to misunderstand God and the history of the Jews. He states, "The throne of David is the material for God's promise. David is the 'anointed' messianic King, and Jesus is the anointed messianic Priest."¹⁰⁸⁹ David and Jesus are united here in the same story of God's anointing and blessing of his people. We can only surmise what the congregant heard or felt when listening to this sermon, but at the very least he or she was reminded of the inextricable connection between Jews and Christians, their common link in the history of salvation. Forgetting this connection has often led to misunderstanding, condescension, and outright persecution in the history of Christianity.¹⁰⁹⁰ In this way, the two are not separated or pitted against each other, but both chosen beneficiaries of God's mercy and grace.

Ehrenberg's sermons reveal a man deeply concerned with a spiritually confused and disordered church in Nazi Germany, as well as active in confronting Nazi ideology that he considered hostile or at least incompatible with Christian theology. He encouraged his Protestant congregants to turn from Hitler as a false messiah, and instead to follow its true savior, Jesus Christ. And he encouraged the Protestants to remain

¹⁰⁸⁸ Hans Ehrenberg, Sermon meditation on Acts 2:29-41, Pfingstmontag, Undated, Papers of Hans Ehrenberg, LKA EKvW W4891.

¹⁰⁸⁹ Ehrenberg, Sermon meditation on Act 2:29-41, LKA EKvW W4891.

¹⁰⁹⁰ See Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 292.

dedicated to the tenets of Christianity – as elucidated in the creeds of the Church and the Reformation confessions – as the only way for German society to rebuild. At the same time he offered brief but informative discussions on Jews and Judaism: he emphasizes the close religious connections between Christians and Jews, and affirms that Christians must maintain its spiritual and historical traditions with Judaism for a more authentic and life-affirming faith.

Ehrenberg spent the war years in England, initially receiving a commission from the World Council of Churches to spread the word about the problems and persecution of the Confessing Church.¹⁰⁹¹ Due to the outbreak of World War II and British war policy, Ehrenberg was interned at Huyton along with other German refugees and subjects from June to September 1940. Throughout the war Ehrenberg ministered to German congregations in Manchester and the North-West of England, as well as to the Christian Fellowship in War-Time, a fellowship of British and German Christians.¹⁰⁹²

Unfortunately, I have been unable to locate any existing sermons from this period in his life. It was also during the war that Ehrenberg published his autobiography, at the bequest of William Greer of the Student Christian Movement, to inform Christians in Britain of the dire circumstances of the German churches under the Nazi regime.¹⁰⁹³

After the war, at the age of 64, Ehrenberg returned to Germany along with his wife Else and children Juliane and Andres, and began working in 1947 as a minister at the Bethel

¹⁰⁹¹ Ehrenberg, *Autobiography of a German Pastor*, 6.

¹⁰⁹² Ehrenberg, *Autobiography of a German Pastor*, 6.

¹⁰⁹³ Ehrenberg, *Autobiography of a German Pastor*, 11.

Institution in the city Bielefeld. He retired to Heidelberg in 1953, where he died a few years later in 1958.

Let us now turn our attention to our second German pastor of Jewish descent, Franz Hildebrandt, a Lutheran pastor from Berlin-Dahlem who fled Nazi Germany for exile in Great Britain.

Franz Hildebrandt of Berlin-Dahlem

Franz Hildebrandt's sermon collection is distinctive among this group because he preached many of them anonymously in London over BBC radio to a Christian audience in Germany.¹⁰⁹⁴ While it is not entirely clear why Hildebrandt was chosen to deliver on-air sermons, he was close friends with Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who served a German congregation in London from 1933-1935, and also had close ties to Bishop George Bell of Chichester, and another German Lutheran pastor named Julius Rieger, who served the parish of St. George in East London since 1929.¹⁰⁹⁵ Through these connections Hildebrandt started out in early 1939 serving the Anglican ordination candidates at the theological college, Ridley Hall, Cambridge, and at the same time serving as preacher for new German congregation at the same institution (the congregation would later move to Holy Trinity Church in Cambridge).¹⁰⁹⁶ In the months following the outbreak of World War Two, Great Britain issued an order of interment for German aliens, which included refugees such as Hildebrandt. He was interned together with Julius Rieger and others

¹⁰⁹⁴ Cresswell and Tow, *Dr. Franz Hildebrandt*, 105.

¹⁰⁹⁵ Cresswell and Tow, *Dr. Franz Hildebrandt*, 84; Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 56, 327-328; and Gerlach, *And the Witnesses Were Silent*, 153.

¹⁰⁹⁶ Cresswell and Tow, *Dr. Franz Hildebrandt*, 87.

from his Cambridge circle, at the Isle of Man along with thousands of other Germans. Hildebrandt was even chosen Camp Leader to represent the Germans in his building. He was released at the end of 1940, whereupon he returned to Cambridge. After his internment, Bishop Bell chose Hildebrandt along with other German pastors to convey the seriousness of the German Struggle and the work of the Confessing Church to Anglican pastors. Hildebrandt was also chosen by the Ecumenical Council at around the same time to be a representative of the Church of England, as a way to support German pastors during wartime.¹⁰⁹⁷

In short, by wartime Hildebrandt was a well-connected and well-respected pastor in England, who had first-hand experience of the Nazi persecutions of the Confessing Church in Germany, as well as Nazi anti-Jewish measures. He was in many ways a logical choice to preach over the BBC airwaves to Nazi Germany. Lest any object to listening to Franz Hildebrandt over the radio – a known German pastor of Jewish descent and a pacifist – his sermons were delivered anonymously over the BBC.¹⁰⁹⁸ The sermons were a part of a fifteen minute service every Wednesday morning.¹⁰⁹⁹

Hildebrandt's sense of Christian unity traversed the national boundaries of Great Britain and Germany. He hoped to convince his fellow Christians that the Church must transcend national boundaries, and that together they must turn against Hitler and the National Socialist regime to hasten the end of the war. But what is most remarkable about Hildebrandt's sermons is that he actually hoped and counted on Germans to break

¹⁰⁹⁷ Cresswell and Tow, *Dr. Franz Hildebrandt*, 102. According to Cresswell and Tow, Hildebrandt earned £250 a year.

¹⁰⁹⁸ Cresswell and Tow, *Dr. Franz Hildebrandt*, 105.

¹⁰⁹⁹ Cresswell and Tow, *Dr. Franz Hildebrandt*, 105.

the law just to listen to him over the radio. As the historian Richard Evans points out, Germans listened to foreign radio programming at great risk to themselves and their families:

The moment the war broke out, tuning in to foreign stations was made a criminal offence punishable by death. It was all too easy, in apartment blocks poorly insulated for sound, for listeners to face denunciation to the authorities by fanatical or ill-intentioned neighbors who overheard the sonorous tones of BBC newsreaders coming through the walls. Some 4,000 people were arrested and prosecuted for ‘radio crime’ in the first year of the law’s operation, and the first execution of an offender came in 1941.¹¹⁰⁰

For a German to risk such a consequence for himself and his family obviously meant that he or she considered that information exceedingly important.¹¹⁰¹ In the case of Hildebrandt’s work, this information was not news on reports or updates on the war’s progress, but the gospel message which he hoped would give peace and assurance to Germans weary of war and also a new perspective with which to judge Hitler and the Nazi regime. As religious programming was censored by the Nazi state in April 1939, these sermons of the BBC provided German listeners with new opportunity to listen to German pastors preach, outside the narrow limits of Nazi radio, and yet from across the Channel on enemy land.¹¹⁰² Hildebrandt’s sermons provided a unique opportunity to

¹¹⁰⁰ Richard Evans, *The Third Reich at War* (New York: Penguin Press, 2009), 576-77.

¹¹⁰¹ Gellately writes how Germans listened to the BBC and later Radio Moscow to learn of the progress of the war and hear the names of captured German soldiers. He argues that “It is difficult to know either how many Germans listened in secretly, and impossible to guess how much they believed of what they heard; see Gellately, *Backing Hitler*, Kindle Edition, location 4646.

¹¹⁰² Cresswell and Tow assert that religious programming was actually proscribed by the Nazi regime, though I have not been able to corroborate this with other sources; Cresswell and Tow, *Dr. Franz Hildebrandt*, 105. For discussion of the Nazi control of radio broadcasts, see Carolyn Birdsall, *Nazi Soundscapes: Sound, Technology and Urban Space in Germany, 1933-1945* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012), 54-59, 75-82, and 135-136. See also Horst J.P. Bergmeier and Rainer E. Lotz,

undermine the Nazi conception of the “Volk community” by offering an alternative voice about who belongs and about the Nazi system that controls it.¹¹⁰³

It is important to note that preaching from the safety and security of the BBC in London does not compare to preaching under the watchful eye of the Nazi police state. In the sermons he delivered over the radio he did not need to worry about his listeners (both sympathetic and critical) informing on him for anti-Nazi or pro-Jewish statements, and thus such statements require less courage and determination than those given on Nazi German soil. But at the same time, Hildebrandt understood that in making such comments he was speaking against his home nation – even in wartime – and thus risked not only social and professional ostracization if he ever returned home, but also prosecution for aiding an enemy nation. The fact that he remained in Great Britain after the war may be indicative of these burned social and professional bridges.

Furthermore, the interaction between the preacher and congregant (or listener) is also quite different over the radio compared to a church setting. The listener cannot see the physical cues that indicate or emphasize meaning, such as hand gestures, facial features, and body movements that indicate ranges of emotion from compassion, anger, and sadness, for example. All the information the listener has is what is conveyed

Hitler's Airwaves: The Inside Story of Nazi Radio Broadcasting and Propaganda Swing (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997), 4-9; and Roger Tidy, *Hitler's Radio War* (London: Robert Hale, 2011),

¹¹⁰³ Birdwell argues that the Nazi regime used various forms of sound, including radio, to unite the “Volk community.” She writes, “the criteria for acceptable membership [in the “Volk community”] required attentive listening to *Sondermeldungen* and speeches, refraining from tuning into foreign stations, and accepting related wartime discourses of obedience and sacrifice. This broader model of community belonging based on (listening) habits became more exclusive, revealing the hardening divisions between members of the community (*Volksgemeinschaft*) and ‘community aliens’ (*Gemeinschaftsfremde*”); See Birdwell, *Nazi Soundscapes*, 136. In this sense, Hildebrandt’s sermons over the BBC contributed to “hardening divisions” between the wartime “Volk community” and the “community aliens.”

through the voice, and thus, the message may not be as clear, unambiguous, or even persuasive as one conveyed in person. At the same time, the pastor cannot “read” his audience to interpret how they are grasping the message, whether they are sympathetic, or if he should elaborate or give an example to clarify a point. The furrowed brow of a congregant may signal the pastor to lighten his tone or repeat his main point. Yet on the radio the pastor must do without these cues. Thus, the medium of radio is a convenient means for Hildebrandt to spread his message to the continent, but much is lost along the way.

Turning now to Hildebrandt’s sermons, he echoes Ehrenberg’s concerns about disunity in the German churches. From a studio in London, he took to the BBC airwaves and preached on the theme of Christian unity during a Whit Sunday service on May 24, 1942.¹¹⁰⁴ The text is the well-known Pentecost passage of Acts 2:1-13, the same that Ehrenberg preached on 16 May 1937. The scene is of the gathered Christian community in Jerusalem:

And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting... All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability... And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each (vs. 2-5).

This great moment in the story of the early Church represents a reversal of the Tower of Babel, a reunification of humanity after an era of division, misunderstanding, and

¹¹⁰⁴ Franz Hildebrandt, Sermon on Acts 2:1-13, 24 May 1942, Papers of Franz Hildebrandt, National Library of Scotland (NLS) 9251.53/54.

struggle. In the Christian tradition, Pentecost is a celebration of the unity of the Church. Hildebrandt is concerned that Christians fight each other, caught up in the struggle of nations against nations in World War II. Rather, he argues, Christians ought to enjoy harmony together. He reminds his German audience that Christians in Germany and England are members of the same Church, regardless of confessional differences. The implications of this assertion are profound, meaning that their relationship should be characterized by love, mercy and forgiveness, and not enmity. Hildebrandt reflects,

We think of our brothers in the persecuted churches in Germany, Holland and Norway that are not silent, but have opened their mouths, and we know how serious it is that they began to preach as the Spirit gave them utterance. It is the exact counterpart to the scene of Babel: what the human spirit has divided in its arrogance, God's Spirit, which descended upon us, has united and reconciled.¹¹⁰⁵

The German listener of this sermon is confronted with a reality contrary to that propagated by the Nazi regime: according to Hildebrandt, the bond between a people is not based upon race, ethnicity, class, or geography, but upon God the creator. Yet, as in war and even peace, the Nazi regime wishes to divide. As discussed in previous chapters, by the spring of 1942 the German churches had been badgered and persecuted for not toeing the line to Nazi racist ideology – the arrests and imprisonment of clergymen, the closure of Confessing Church seminaries, the absorption of church youth groups into the Nazi Youth, and the drafting of clergymen to the war front. But Hildebrandt is also concerned to remind his listeners of the similar persecutions the churches in Holland and Norway have experienced in only two years since the invasions of Nazi Germany. While

¹¹⁰⁵ Franz Hildebrandt, Sermon on Acts 2:1-13, NLS 9251.53/54.

Hildebrandt does not explicitly name these persecutions, his listeners might have heard of other clergymen in the occupied territories, like their German “brothers” who had been persecuted. Just at the *Priesterblock* at the Dachau concentration camp, for example, records indicate 63 Dutch clergymen were prisoners throughout the war years, and this was among a total of 2720 clergymen throughout the existence of the camp.¹¹⁰⁶ Among this total were 156 French clergymen, 109 Czechoslovakian, 46 Belgian, 5 Danes, 1 Norwegian, and an astounding 1780 Poles.¹¹⁰⁷ Among the more famous of the persecuted clergymen in Holland was the Catholic priest Titus Brandsma, who was arrested for speaking out against the Nazi invasion and against National Socialism, and was eventually murdered by lethal injection in the Dachau concentration camp in July 1942.¹¹⁰⁸

Hildebrandt revisits the theme of unity on Wednesday, November 4, 1942, in celebration of Reformation Day.¹¹⁰⁹ He bases his sermon on 2 Timothy 3:10–4:2, a passage in which the Apostle Paul encourages Timothy to endure persecution and, most importantly, to preach the gospel message in good times and in bad. His major theme is that Christians in all lands are bound together as disciples of Christ, and as such, are charged with the common task of preaching the good news of God. For the Christian, the

¹¹⁰⁶ Paul Berben, *Dachau: The Official History, 1933-1945* (London: Norfolk Press, 1975), 276-277.

¹¹⁰⁷ Paul Berben, *Dachau*, 276-277.

¹¹⁰⁸ Joseph Rees, *Titus Brandsma: A Modern Martyr* (Sidgwick and Jackson, 1971), 163-179; see also Louis de Jong, *The Netherlands and Nazi Germany* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990).

¹¹⁰⁹ Reformation Day is October 31, and it is a holiday celebrated by Lutheran and some reformed churches. The holiday commemorates the start of the Protestant Reformation. On October 31, 1517, the priest and professor Martin Luther nailed his *95 Theses* on the Castle Church door in the German town of Wittenberg. Luther posted his *95 Theses* in an effort to encourage discussion or debate about perceived abuses of the Roman Catholic Church. This date is the symbolic start of the Protestant Reformation.

scriptures provide the answers in dark times, in times of suffering and persecution. Thus, persecution compels Christians to affirm their identity as Christians, to stand fast and preach the gospel to the world.¹¹¹⁰ Hildebrandt considers the flip side of persecution: “the Church begins to learn anew: preach the word; [the Church] is put under the fire, and one of those who are most affected has recently declared: Thank God that the Church is burning again!”¹¹¹¹ It is not clear who exactly Hildebrandt references here, but he agrees that a period of persecution could be a great time of unity and rejuvenation for the Church, a time of reformation, to preach the gospel uncompromised by other agendas or ideologies.

In the same sermon Hildebrandt appeals directly to the German people – those who are breaking Nazi law in simply listening to his sermon over the BBC airwaves – to unite, persevere, and grow stronger day by day that they might become a bulwark against the powers that oppose the gospel. Hildebrandt says,

We give you the message back, we strengthen you with our prayers, we cry out to you: preach the word, persist, whether it be at the right time or the wrong time! That is the intention with the short church services that we will hold today and at this hour every week over the radio, and we want to create a bond between all Protestant German-speaking Christians, wherever they are in the world.

...

But the fact remains that wherever we are and whoever we are, preacher or hearer, German or English, the same exhortation and promise binds us as Christians: preach the word, persist, whether it be at the right time or the wrong time. Amen.¹¹¹²

¹¹¹⁰ See Old, *Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures*, Vol. 6, 759.

¹¹¹¹ Franz Hildebrandt, Sermon on 2 Timothy 3:10–4:2, 4 November 1942, Papers of Franz Hildebrandt, NLS 9251.53/54.

¹¹¹² Hildebrandt, Sermon on 2 Timothy 3:10–4:2, NLS 9251.53/54.

In a world at war Hildebrandt seeks to find a common ground, not only in terms of belief and devotion, but also in purpose. He is calling Christians to affirm their commitment of faith, a faith that takes precedence over any political, national, or racial allegiance, in an effort to build Protestant unity across borders. Though preaching from the safety of London, Hildebrandt's call for unity directly conflicts with Nazi racial and imperial practice, and thus constitutes a form of opposition against the Nazi dictatorship.¹¹¹³

Later in the war, Hildebrandt publicly recounts the trial of his dear friend and colleague, the famous Pastor Martin Niemöller of Dahlem, in a moving sermon in solidarity with the persecuted and imprisoned. On 1 March 1944, over the airwaves of the German Broadcast Service, Hildebrandt preached on Hebrews 6:6, a powerful line that reads simply: "on their own they are crucifying again the Son of God and are holding him up to contempt." The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews argues that the work of Christian apostates is a grievous sin against Christ, and Hildebrandt makes the connection that apostates in Nazi Germany will be held to the same judgment.¹¹¹⁴

The sermon begins with a description of Niemöller's arrest in 1937, his acquittal, immediate re-arrest by the Gestapo in 1938, and subsequent imprisonment as Hitler's "personal prisoner" at the concentration camps at Sachsenhausen and later Dachau.¹¹¹⁵

Hildebrandt says that since Niemöller's imprisonment, he and a group of students at an

¹¹¹³ In other words, Hildebrandt's call for unity undermines the ideology and policies of the Nazi regime without directly conspiring for its overthrow. Kershaw, *The Nazi Dictatorship*, 170.

¹¹¹⁴ An apostate is someone who has renounced their religious beliefs. The term itself is used from the perspective of the community whose faith has been renounced. Thus, in this context, a Christian apostate is someone who has renounced Christian belief.

¹¹¹⁵ See also Bently, *Martin Niemöller*, 128-129, 140-142; Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 90-92; Conway, *Nazi Persecution of the Churches*, 209-213; and Gutteridge, *German Evangelical Church*, 100-104.

English university, likely Cambridge, marked that date in remembrance every year in solidarity with Niemöller, his family, and all persecuted Christians in Nazi Germany.

According to Hildebrandt, Niemöller was a man who preached incessantly about

the [Nazi] struggle against the Son of God himself, against the Lord and the Head of the Church... And the battle is run by those who themselves once, as it says in our text, have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the future world; not by unbelievers, but by Christians who have fallen away and make it seriously doubtful for the author whether it is possible, on the earth that carries thorns and thistles, can ever again bear useful vegetation.¹¹¹⁶

This sermon is a judgment against these modern-day apostates, who remain unnamed, but the attentive listener could not but think of members of the German Christian movement who twisted Christian values to address their political and social concerns – to love neither neighbors nor enemies, but only Volksgenossen, fellow “Aryan” Germans.¹¹¹⁷

According to Hildebrandt, the German churches have been corrupted and fragmented by those who have dishonored the faith, and this sermon is an example of the Church fighting back. Like the parable of the sower, Hildebrandt is now scattering the seeds of the gospel all over Germany hoping that, indeed, a renewed Christian faith will sprout again. This was Niemöller’s mission, and it has now become Hildebrandt’s as well.

This sermon in March 1944 is not just a condemnation of certain Christians who have embraced National Socialism and twisted the gospel, but a condemnation of the

¹¹¹⁶ Franz Hildebrandt, Sermon on Hebrews 6:6, 1 March 1944, Papers of Franz Hildebrandt, NLS 9251.53/54.

¹¹¹⁷ See Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 3-4; Gutteridge, *German Evangelical Church*, 93-94; and Heschel, *Aryan Jesus*, 195-196.

German churches themselves – Protestant and Catholic alike.¹¹¹⁸ He argues, “The betrayal of Christ by the churches will be written in a book of a contemporary writer; none among us is innocent in this betrayal, no one who has not a hundred times, knowing or unknowing, crucified the Son of God again and held him up to ridicule.”¹¹¹⁹ Hildebrandt’s comments assume a theology that Jesus carried the sins of humanity on the cross, that as God’s Son he bore humanity’s burden of sin, to make possible humanity’s salvation. Hildebrandt underscores how terribly ironic it is for Christians to betray the Christ that gave them salvation. With remarkable insight Hildebrandt argues that Christians in Germany are guilty of betraying Christ – perhaps in not standing up for the gospel with courage or conviction, or in supporting a political order that gave lip service to religious toleration but consistently undermined the Church, or simply in not loving their neighbors. In this sense, “none among [them] is innocent,” he writes, and he includes himself in this indictment.¹¹²⁰ He is asking everyone to evaluate their own actions and ideals, and to consider where they have come up short. Hildebrandt confronts his audience with the spiritual reality of a compromised faith.

In addition to Hildebrandt’s outspokenness about the shortcomings of the German churches, he also, like Ehrenberg, sought to expose the false ideologies that challenged Christianity and undermined the Church’s mission of preaching.¹¹²¹ In a sermon broadcast from England on February 23, 1944, Hildebrandt preached a short sermon on

¹¹¹⁸ Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 3-4.

¹¹¹⁹ Hildebrandt, Sermon on Hebrews 6:6, NLS 9251.53/54.

¹¹²⁰ Hildebrandt, Sermon on Hebrews 6:6, NLS 9251.53/54.

¹¹²¹ Redles, *Hitler’s Millennial Reich*, 187-189.

Galatians 3:1 – in which Paul harshly confronts the churches of Galatia, in Asia Minor, for forsaking the gospel and following “strange” doctrines. Paul writes, “You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly exhibited as crucified!” If we read between the lines it becomes apparent that Hildebrandt used scripture as a way to confront the German people about the corrupt Nazi regime and its practices. Hildebrandt draws a parallel between the time of the Galatians and their apostasy with his own time and the apostasy of Christians in Nazi Germany. He writes,

It is not the first time in history and will not be the last time that Christian communities are exposed to such an assault, and that the Church must pay attention to the warning of the Apostle. How many commentaries on the Epistle to Galatians have been written in these years!¹¹²²

Apostasy is not an uncommon phenomenon in the history of Christianity; as in Galatia so also in Germany, apostates have corrupted the gospel message to exclude others and serve the interests of those in power. Hildebrandt reminds his listeners of Paul’s solution to envision Christ “crucified among us,” bearing the sins of the world.¹¹²³ Thus, Jesus Christ is not supporting the authorities and excluding others, but siding with the excluded, the persecuted, in the spirit of love and peace.¹¹²⁴

In another example, Hildebrandt took to the airwaves on Wednesday, July 12, 1944, to preach on I Peter 2:6-10, a text that has particular resonance in Nazi

¹¹²² Franz Hildebrandt, Sermon on Galatians 3:1, 23 February 1944, Papers of Franz Hildebrandt, NLS 9251.53/54.

¹¹²³ NLS 9251.53/54.

¹¹²⁴ See Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 76

Germany.¹¹²⁵ First Peter is a pastoral letter circulated to the churches of Asia Minor in the late first century, and it discusses how Christians ought to live as a marginalized and persecuted people.¹¹²⁶ The author writes, “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (v.9). Hildebrandt works from this basis and delivers a sermon that juxtaposes Christian chosen-ness and Nazi racial exclusion. He directly challenges the National Socialist view of the Germans as the chosen people, contrasting it to the Christian view. He writes,

In fact there is an element in the gospel that to the untrained ear sounds like nothing but just arrogance; and therefore it is necessary to immediately avert the misunderstanding, as if it were here for a new form of the old myth of the master race, a race, caste or sect, the arrogant making themselves the crown of creation.

No – we are the stones in the buildings of God, not master builders.

...

That is, if one may use the word, the specific weight of the Church: to form a people not from the unity of race and blood, history and culture, and not from the opposition against a common enemy, but from the election and grace of God.¹¹²⁷

This understanding follows the Protestant principle of faith through grace and not works: what matters for salvation is not the activity of the individual, or his ancestry, life’s

¹¹²⁵ Just a week earlier, Hildebrandt preached on the previous five verses. He argued that the people of God who, though persecuted and discarded by the world, are now being saved and built up by God “to be a holy priesthood.” In a tone of encouragement and solidarity, he said that in a world that is being destroyed right before their eyes, Christians in Germany must remember that they are the “living stones” with which God will rebuild society.

¹¹²⁶ *The New Oxford Annotated Bible, Third Edition* (Oxford University Press, 2001), *New Testament* 395.

¹¹²⁷ Franz Hildebrandt, Sermon on I Peter 2:6-10, 12 July 1944, Papers of Franz Hildebrandt, NLS 9251.53/54.

production, or personal characteristics, whether inherent or developed; what matters is God's grace upon the individual. This emphasis precludes any boasting in one's "chosen-ness." Hildebrandt offers a clear and unambiguous challenge the National Socialist ideology of human worth and dignity dependent upon race.

The passage in I Peter provides the basis for an understanding for the priesthood of all believers. Hildebrandt underscores that all Christians have a duty to serve as priests before God and the world. All Christians are to "offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ," and this means serving God and others in a spirit of loving self-sacrifice. Again we see that for Hildebrandt, Christianity, like National Socialism, asks for the commitment, the allegiance, of the whole person.¹¹²⁸ Thus, at least for anti-Nazi pastors there is a necessary contradiction between the two belief systems.¹¹²⁹ According to Hildebrandt, the individual is compelled to make a choice between two; there cannot be any compromise between the two competing ideologies. Wherever Christians are and whatever they are doing, Hildebrandt argues, Christians "can make it

¹¹²⁸ Burleigh, *The Third Reich*, 253-255. This idea that Nazism is a political religion that directly conflicts with Christianity goes back to the Nazi period itself with a report by a man named Eric Voegelin, dated 4 April 1937. As Burleigh concludes, "the report likened Nazism to a religion, in a sense demanding of its adherents total submission of their consciences and surrender of their souls" (253). See also Emilio Gentile, "Fascism, Totalitarianism and Political Religion: Definitions and Critical Reflections on Criticism of an Interpretation," translated by Natalia Belozentseva, in *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* (Vol. 5, No. 3, Winter 2004), 362. Lastly, see my discussions on Nazism as a political religion in Chapters 2 and 4.

¹¹²⁹ See Littell, *German Phoenix*, 3; and John S. Conway, "The German Church Struggle: Its Making and Meaning," in *The Church Confronts the Nazis: Barmen Then and Now*, ed. by Hubert Locke (New York: The Edwin Mellon Press, 1984), 135; and Siegfried Hermle, "Predigt an der Front: Zur Tätigkeit der Kriegspfarrer im Zweiten Weltkrieg," in *Blätter für württembergische Kirchengeschichte* (Verlag Chr. Schleufele in Stuttgart, 2002), 145, 155; Robertson, *Christians against Hitler*, 118.

known who is our king. We can call on his name and call out, we can confess him before men.”¹¹³⁰ He continues,

In Germany one knows it better than anywhere else in the world, what that means today. And when free speech is denied, when bans on speaking occur, when the confession with mouth becomes impossible, then it must be that the silence, the exile, the prison bears witness to the virtues of him who had called us out of the darkness into his wonderful light.¹¹³¹

Christians have a duty to bear witness before men, even when the Nazis force Christians to be silent, to flee their homeland – as Hildebrandt himself did only years before – or to be imprisoned or worse.¹¹³² Whatever the circumstance, Hildebrandt encourages his Christian listeners to act as priests in a world that desperately needs acts of mercy and service.

Another recurring theme in Hildebrandt’s Nazi-era sermons is the need for Christians to prioritize their allegiances to God and country. In a BBC radio sermon delivered in German on a Wednesday morning on July 19, 1944, Hildebrandt addresses a burning question of the day: How is our faith in Jesus Christ prioritized in the hustle and bustle of our daily lives? Hildebrandt continues his discussion from the week prior of I Peter, this time addressing 2:11-17. The biblical text reads:

Beloved, I urge you as aliens and exiles to abstain from the desires of the flesh that wage war against the soul. Conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles, so that, though they malign you as evildoers, they may see your honorable deeds and glorify God when he comes to judge.

¹¹³⁰ Hildebrandt, Sermon on I Peter 2:6-10, NLS 9251.53/54.

¹¹³¹ Hildebrandt, Sermon on I Peter 2:6-10, NLS 9251.53/54.

¹¹³² For numerous examples of Nazi persecution of German Pastors of Jewish descent, see Lutherhaus Eisenach, *Wider Das Vergessen*.

For the Lord's sake accept the authority of every human institution, whether of the emperor as supreme, or of the governors, as sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to praise those who do right. For it is God's will that by doing right you should silence the ignorance of the foolish. As servants of God, live as free people; yet do not use your freedom as a pretext for evil. Honor everyone. Love the family of believers. Fear God. Honor the emperor.

After reading the text and reciting the Apostle's Creed, Hildebrandt begins his sermon. He contends that the scriptures can help to orient Christians struggling in a period in which the church and state seem at odds. Christians cannot simply avoid the world or hide from persecutions. Hildebrandt is concerned with how Christians in his day understand the admonition to "Honor the emperor," and he challenges them to remember that their primary identity is not as citizens or as members of an ethnic group, but as members in the body of Christ.¹¹³³ As such, the Christian must first "Fear God" and only then "Honor the emperor. As he says, "Fear God, and honor the King – and not the other way around!"¹¹³⁴ He continues in a manner reminiscent of Luther's paradox of the free man enslaved to love,

We know that a Christian is a free lord in all things in faith and subject to no one; and in turn a slave in all things in love and subject to everyone.¹¹³⁵ As strangers and pilgrims we want to stay subject to every human ordinance for the Lord, praying, acting and suffering, until all flesh turns to him, to the glory of God in the highest and peace on earth and good will to men. Amen.¹¹³⁶

¹¹³³ This motivation for serving those in need was relatively uncommon in the Nazi dictatorship. Citing various studies Gushee reports that between 12-27% of rescuers reported religion as their primary reason for action. See Gushee, *Righteous Gentiles*, Kindle Edition, location 2652.

¹¹³⁴ Franz Hildebrandt, Sermon on I Peter 2:11-17, 19 July 1944, Papers of Franz Hildebrandt, NLS 9251.53/54.

¹¹³⁵ The manuscript shows "Libe," but the context suggests he means "Liebe," as I have translated here.

¹¹³⁶ Hildebrandt, Sermon on I Peter 2:11-17, NLS 9251.53/54. This discussion is reminiscent of Martin Luther's Reformation text, *The Freedom of a Christian*, in which he states, "A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all." See Luther,

Hildebrandt invokes a hot-button scripture and clarifies what it means for the Christian living in Germany late in the war. He asks, ought one to honor Hitler as a ruler? Yes, he says, in accordance with the biblical text. But one must first fear God.¹¹³⁷ The obvious question is what happens when one's obligations to the state and God contradict.

Hildebrandt helps the Christian solve this dilemma by underscoring the importance of Christian love, a self-sacrificing love that seeks the best for others, not oneself. It is no coincidence that the same German word is used to refer to how we should treat everyone and how we should treat the emperor – the key verb is *ehren*, “to honor.” He admits that the consequences for this kind of love will be suffering, but this must be expected and endured, as Jesus modeled.

In addition, Hildebrandt points out a certain absurdity that Christians too often accept uncritically, that they can proclaim Christ and fellowship in the Christian community of faith, but then at the same time consider themselves first and foremost citizens of our respective nations: “we want to be first German, English, French, and then Christians.”¹¹³⁸ If Christians wish to live first as Germans or English, then it should come as no shock when their nations go to war and Christians kill each other on the battlefield. For Hildebrandt, this is something of a scandal.

“The Freedom of a Christian,” in *Three Treatises* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 277.

¹¹³⁷ The “fear of God” is a central theological element that is expressed throughout the Hebrew and Christian scriptures and throughout the Christian tradition. It means a reverential or holy fear that “enable[es] men to reverence God’s authority, obey his commandments and hate and shun all form of evil.” J.D. Douglas, et. al., eds, *New Bible Dictionary*, Second Edition (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1962), 373. See also Jeremiah 32:40; Genesis 22:12; and Hebrews 5:7.

¹¹³⁸ Hildebrandt, Sermon on I Peter 2:11-17, NLS 9251.53/54.

A week after this sermon, on July 26, 1944, Hildebrandt took to the BBC airwaves again and addressed the next segment in the epistle, I Peter 2:18-25. This text emphasizes that Christ is the example for the innocent suffering at the hands of persecutors. Hildebrandt reiterates that the Church has always existed in conflict and that sacrifice is part and parcel to the Christian experience. This is “not the exception but the rule in the Church.”¹¹³⁹ As a Christian, one must expect to be treated as Christ was treated. Hildebrandt offers his fellow Germans a word of encouragement, to endure persecution in imitation of Christ.

In neither of these three sermons on I Peter does Hildebrandt mention Hitler or the Nazis by name as the perpetrators of human suffering. We may find a reason for this in the “new school” of homiletics that emerged after World War I, as discussed at length in Chapter 2. To summarize, Confessing Church pastors struggled to base their sermons upon the Christian scriptures, and not their own political and social convictions, even though we still find expressions critical of Hitler and the Nazi regime. They trusted the gospel message to change hearts and minds in Nazi Germany, not their own personal opinions. “One of the reasons without doubt that caused the Church to be so reluctant to protest,” writes one historian, “was the anxiety not to impair the purity and strength of witness to scriptural and doctrinal truth by running the risk of her becoming entangled in what could be regarded as secular as opposed to specific religious issues.”¹¹⁴⁰ At the same time, to openly criticize or condemn Hitler and the Nazis in a time of war could

¹¹³⁹ Franz Hildebrandt, Sermon on I Peter 2: 18-25, 26 July 1944, Papers of Franz Hildebrandt, NLS 9251.53/54. Hildebrandt is referring to the church in a general sense, the “universal” Church.

¹¹⁴⁰ Gutteridge, *German Evangelical Church*, 129.

have been interpreted by many within Germany as treasonous and thus, at the very least counter-productive from his position in England. Nevertheless, it is clear by implication that he means to criticize them. He is speaking in the German language to his fellow Germans about on-going persecution, even at the hands of an “emperor” to whom Christians are bound to honor. These sermons thus represent not only an attempt at encouraging Christians in Germany, but also a criticism of Hitler and the National Socialist regime for persecuting Christians.

Later that same year Hildebrandt delivered Christmas sermons over the BBC. In a sermon dated 20 December 1944, based on Mark 1:14-20, he asks his listeners to consider the meaning of *Reich* (kingdom or empire). It is significant that this text is not an advent text, as one might expect just five days before Christmas day, but rather it describes the beginning of Jesus’ ministry when he calls his disciples to make them fishers of men.¹¹⁴¹ Instead of drawing the imagination of the listener to the stable, the wise men and shepherds, Mary and Joseph, and the baby Jesus, Hildebrandt dwells upon the meaning of Jesus’ coming, revealed in his famous mission declaration: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.” Though Germans live in the time of the Third Reich, Hildebrandt reminds his German listeners that Christmas is a time to remember that Jesus inaugurated a new kingdom, the kingdom of God, *das Reich Gottes*. It is the end of an era and the beginning of a new one. Hildebrandt writes,

¹¹⁴¹ The season of advent refers to the four weeks preceding Christmas, the first season in the liturgical calendar. In the Christian tradition, typically advent sermons address biblical texts that explore the arrival of the second person of the Trinity.

The time is fulfilled: here the end to the Old Testament and forever an end to the restlessness of waiting. Who so speaks, knows, what he says; he presents himself in the center, he claims to be meant for the promises of God; as in Luke, and explained in the Bible, in the Synagogue: “today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.” This is clearly enough for friend and enemy, and at the same moment begins the conversion of one and the persecution of the other; congregation, people and world are divided into two groups.

He [God] directs the preparation, not us, and the whole Old Testament describes his divine plan; we can do nothing more for the reorganization of the world but to acknowledge it was his kingdom and his Messiah.¹¹⁴²

Hildebrandt mentions a crucial theological concept that serves as a political criticism of Hitler and the Third Reich. In the Christian tradition, the ministry of Jesus inaugurates the “kingdom” of God, a kingdom that advances principles at odds with the kingdoms of this world, specifically, the Roman Empire. Jesus reveals these principles throughout the gospels (e.g. love your neighbor; leadership means servanthood, and forgiveness is essential to spiritual health). In a sentence, the political meaning of this crucial concept is that it posits a vision of life in this world if God were the king, rather than the rulers of our day.¹¹⁴³ Hildebrandt holds up this vision and asks us to compare it with the reality of Nazi Germany, and by doing so his listeners can see just how poorly the Third Reich and its “messiah” measure up. This advent sermon is a wake-up call for Germans to ask themselves which kingdom they are serving.¹¹⁴⁴

¹¹⁴² Franz Hildebrandt, Sermon on Mark 1:14-20, 20 December 1944, Papers of Franz Hildebrandt, NLS 9251.53/54.

¹¹⁴³ Borg, *The Heart of Christianity*, 132.

¹¹⁴⁴ It is debatable whether Hildebrandt’s Advent sermons evinces anti-Judaic or supersessionist ideas. On the one hand, his comment that Jesus’ ministry represents an end to the Hebrew Bible and the beginning of a new era may appear to indicate that Christianity represents a more complete or fulfilled religion than Judaism, and thus that it is better. On the other hand, he clearly links Judaism and Christianity in the same narrative, that God saves and speaks to his people, and the New Testament merely represents the next chapter. Hildebrandt’s comments here on Judaism are too scant to make a judgment.

In another Advent sermon Hildebrandt preached via the BBC occurred on Wednesday, December 27, 1944, on the nativity text in Matthew 1:18-25.¹¹⁴⁵ In this dense passage, the gospel writer recounts Mary's betrothal to Joseph, his subsequent dream informing him about the conception, and lastly, naming the newborn child Jesus. Hildebrandt emphasizes this last point, the importance of the name. In the Hebrew and Christian scriptures a child's name was often a sign of his or her nature, identity, and also of who he or she would one day become.¹¹⁴⁶ As the gospel writer contends, Jesus is God with us, humanity's help in time of great need.¹¹⁴⁷ For Hildebrandt, Christ is the true savior, liberator, and redeemer of humanity; implicit is a criticism of all impostors who present themselves as such, leading men and women astray. Hildebrandt proclaims,

“For he will save his people from their sins”: that is his office and his whole being; he is the Savior, because he heals, the Redeemer, because he redeems, and in his Name Jesus...unites all the great titles that are given by the Prophet Isaiah: he is called Wonderful Counselor, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

And because they [Jesus' contemporaries] did not understand his name, that is why they are angry at him, they expect a prince of this world, a miracle worker and magician, a political and social reformer, a god after their own image, who had answered with one stroke all their questions... But are we better at it? *Have we learned from their mistakes?* [emphasis added] Are we ready to honor his name and to accept him, as he is: the Savior of his people, the deliverer from our sins, the man whose first and last work is to redeem us from ourselves?¹¹⁴⁸

¹¹⁴⁵ The nativity narratives in the New Testament tell stories about the birth of Jesus of Nazareth, such as, for example, Mary and Joseph's journey to Bethlehem, the angel's appearance to the shepherds, and the visitation of the magi.

¹¹⁴⁶ The name Jesus is the Greek form of the Hebrew name Joshua, which means, “The Lord saves/helps. This highlights the mission and purpose of the child. See the notes for Matthew 1:18-25 in *The New Oxford Annotated Bible, With Apocrypha, Third Edition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), New Testament, 9.

¹¹⁴⁷ Borg, *The Heart of Christianity*, 97.

¹¹⁴⁸ Franz Hildebrandt, Sermon on Matthew 1:18-25, 27 December 1944, Papers of Franz Hildebrandt, NLS

The key question Hildebrandt asks is, “Have we learned from their mistakes?” Can the German people distinguish the true from the false saviors? Thus, Hildebrandt provides a contrast in two saviors: Jesus who saves, redeems, heals, and unites; and the imposter who condemns, corrupts and sows discord. He points the finger and identifies the false “prince of this world” – “a god after their own image.” And he asks Germans to turn their loyalty to Christ. Hildebrandt is asking the German people in his own day to look to Christ as the true savior in that Advent season. Only then, he argues, will the German people find peace and freedom.

Aside from his work with the BBC, we have two sermons Hildebrandt preached for Christmas Eve services in 1944 at the Anglican Church of the Holy Trinity in Cambridge, England. In an extraordinary symbolic gesture of Christian unity, Hildebrandt and his pastoral staff presented a German-English carol service that, aside from the sermons themselves, mixed together some of the most beloved Christmas carols of both languages.¹¹⁴⁹ Before discussing the sermons themselves, we might well consider how remarkable it is that Holy Trinity Church would hold a German-English carol service in the first place.¹¹⁵⁰ The liturgy indicates that a German member of the congregation read passages from the Hebrew Bible (Isaiah 9:2, 6-7, and Micah 5:2-4),

9251.53/54.

¹¹⁴⁹ Holy Trinity Church, “A German-English Carol Service,” 24 December 1944, Papers of Franz Hildebrandt, NLS 9251.53/54. A few of the most well-known carols include *Silent Night*, *While the Shepherds Watched*, *It Came upon the Midnight Clear*.

¹¹⁵⁰ It is unclear how often services such as this took place in nations opposing Germany in the Second World War, that is, when German and English (or American, French, etc.) congregants gathered together to celebrate or worship. One may be reminded of the remarkable Christmas Truce of the First World War, compellingly recounted in Stanley Weintraub’s *Silent Night: The Story of the World War I Christmas Truce* (New York: Plume 2002).

and a German elder read the Gospel of Luke's nativity narrative. Also a German pastor (perhaps Hildebrandt himself) read the Gospel of Matthew's nativity narrative. These readings were intermingled with readings by English churchmen as well as German and English carols. After singing "Silent Night," the famous German Christmas hymn, the congregation sang "While Shepherds Watched," a beautiful Old English carol, both written centuries ago, long before Germany and Great Britain were at war.¹¹⁵¹ In a time of great suffering and war, Holy Trinity Church made a gesture of peace: Germans and Britons together as one congregation worshipping God, a testimony to the unity of the Church.¹¹⁵²

The two sermons preached (likely at two separate services on the same day) provide fascinating insight into Hildebrandt's understanding about how the message of Christianity can provide a basis for peace and mutual respect in a world devastated by war. The first Christmas sermon took as its biblical text the Second Epistle to the Thessalonians 3:16, which is a benediction that has become a fixture in liturgies even until today: "Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in all ways." Hildebrandt begins by voicing a common desire at Christmas time, the longing for peace and harmony, when the strife and struggle in the world fade away as people forget their own selfish interests, to consider the gospel story of the incarnation. The way to peace, Hildebrandt argues, is not through a sentimental wishing for the best, but to

¹¹⁵¹ Holy Trinity Church, "A German-English Carol Service," NLS 9251.53/54.

¹¹⁵² To illustrate the meaning and significance of a joint German-English service in wartime, the Archbishop of Canterbury William Temple commented on another joint German-English service on 28 June 1942, stating that it was "one of the most effective testimonies that have been given to the reality of our fellowship in Christ during these days of war." Cresswell and Tow, *Dr. Franz Hildebrandt*, 104.

come before God in prayer and invoke his name as the “Lord of Peace,” to acknowledge that true and lasting peace comes from him and no other.¹¹⁵³ Hildebrandt takes a moment to reflect on the possibility that peoples from two warring nations could worship the same God together, the Lord of peace:

Therefore, to us is opened up the possibility to worship together, as members of two warring nations and hostile governments in the middle of war; the Lord, to whom we call, and the peace which he gives, is everywhere, is bigger than anything that separates us...

...

“The Lord of Peace give you peace”: the Church is valid in all nations for which we pray, that it would want to find its way back to the one flock under the one shepherd... How else than through Christianity should a new Germany, England, and Europe be formed? How else should there be peace on earth if not through God, to whom be glory in the highest?¹¹⁵⁴

Hildebrandt does not trust the machinery of war to guarantee peace, or for that matter the politicians or generals, or the overwhelming truth of any one political ideology. He trusts the “Lord of Peace” alone, and he asks his congregation to join with him in invoking God to bring lasting peace to Europe. One might interpret Hildebrandt as intentionally turning away from the political sphere when perhaps a more explicit political commitment would have been effective in influencing his listeners.

In the second sermon preached at the German-English carol service at Holy Trinity Church on Christmas Eve 1944, Hildebrandt discusses Jesus’ parable of the Good

¹¹⁵³ Hildebrandt may be highlighting an objective understanding of the peace of God available to all people (despite the war and destruction that surrounds them) as if to emphasize the Christians’ failure to live up to this transforming and forgiving peace. See S.E. Porter’s article “Peace, Reconciliation,” in the *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 699.

¹¹⁵⁴ Franz Hildebrandt, Sermon on 2 Thessalonians 3:16, 24 December 1944, Papers of Franz Hildebrandt, NLS 9251.53/54.

Samaritan found in Luke 10:25-37, a story that Ehrenberg also preached on. In this story, robbers attack a man on a roadside and leave him for dead; while the religiously devout of the day – a priest and scribe – pass him by without compassion, a Samaritan outsider takes pity and cares for him. This parable provides the platform for Jesus and Hildebrandt both to ask a profound question of their day, who is my neighbor? Hildebrandt follows Jesus and argues that God calls all Christians to help those in need, without excuse or qualification. Everyone is a neighbor. The Good Samaritan does not care about race, ideology, or common values; rather, he had mercy and compassion on this man as a neighbor who needs deliverance.¹¹⁵⁵ He acknowledges his dependence upon God and his brotherhood with all people. Hildebrandt reflects,

His eyes are opened to the need of his neighbor, who lies before him on the road, and who is, exactly as himself, dependent upon the mercy of God. And therefore he must act in the way that he does, the Samaritan to the Jew, the man who comes from a distance, to the members of a foreign race.

...

The Samaritan is only an example for the work of Jesus Christ... Here is the special and unique message which the Church has to proclaim to the World in this moment.¹¹⁵⁶

Hildebrandt argues that Christ is our Good Samaritan, our example in a world full bandits and bystanders. At mid-point through the sermon Hildebrandt unequivocally criticizes National Socialist ideology, though he does not name the ideology or condemn Hitler

¹¹⁵⁵ See Glen Stassen and David Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003, 333-339.

¹¹⁵⁶ Franz Hildebrandt, Sermon on Luke 10:25-37, 24 December 1944, Papers on Franz Hildebrandt, NLS 9251.53/54.

explicitly. We must be suspicious, he says, when some want to restrict the meaning of the term “neighbor” to include only members of one’s own community:

We have it now literally in front of our eyes, where it leads if people seek to justify themselves with this question [who is my neighbor?], and if the concept of the neighbor will be restricted further and further so that only the national comrade [*Volksgenosse*], the man of the same race [*Rassengenosse*] and finally the fellow party mate [*Parteigenosse*] is my neighbor.¹¹⁵⁷

Hildebrandt’s language and intent is unmistakable. This is perhaps the clearest example of Hildebrandt using a scriptural basis to argue against National Socialism and policies of hate and division. The question then for Hildebrandt is not necessarily who is my neighbor, for all people are neighbors. The question is how are we to treat our neighbors?¹¹⁵⁸ What are our ethical obligations to our neighbors? The answer is surprisingly simple: to show mercy to those in need, to take pity on those who suffer, lying unnoticed by the side of the road. Hildebrandt advocates that his listeners take pity on those who have fallen among murderers. He ends by reminding his audience that together they have more than enough work to do in a time of war and in the middle of a refugee crisis.

Like Ehrenberg, Hildebrandt did not often preach specifically about the Jews or their plight as a persecuted people in Nazi Germany. In one of the few times in this collection that Hildebrandt preached on the Old Testament, he took to the BBC airwaves

¹¹⁵⁷ Hildebrandt, Sermon on Luke 10:25-37, NLS 9251.53/54.

¹¹⁵⁸ Hildebrandt, Sermon on Luke 10:25-37, NLS 9251.53/54.

on 7 April 1943 and testified about the injustice of the Nazi persecution of the Jews and its aggressive war in Europe. The text is from Zachariah 13:7-10, which reads:

“Awake, O Sword, against my shepherd,
 against the man who is my associate,”
 says the Lord of hosts.
 Strike the shepherd, that the sheep may be scattered;
 I will turn my hand against the little ones.
 In the whole land, says the Lord,
 two-thirds shall be cut off and perish,
 and one-third shall be left alive.
 And I will put this third into the fire,
 refine them as one refines silver,
 and test them as gold is tested.
 They will call on my name,
 and I will answer them.
 I will say, “They are my people”;
 and they will say, “The Lord is our God.”

This is a rather enigmatic passage about an attack on a community leader, the trial of the community itself, and their later restoration.¹¹⁵⁹ Hildebrandt emphasizes the deliverance of Israel from its enemies (according to Christian theology, his use of “Israel” could refer to either the Jewish people or the persecuted Church).¹¹⁶⁰ The people of Israel will suffer, the prophet says, but then God will defeat its enemies. He begins straight away by affirming the value of the Hebrew Scriptures for Christians:

The times are past when we thought we can flip through the pages of the Old Testament with a gesture... The prophecy of Zachariah must sound anew to our ears as if it were written in these days: Extermination [*Ausrottung*] – the word is not a fantasy anymore and no exaggeration; it occurs every day before our eyes and in a degree we never imagined.

¹¹⁵⁹ See the notes for these verses in the *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 1369.

¹¹⁶⁰ For more on the traditional meaning of “Israel” in Christian theology, see John Goldingay’s article “Israel” in the *New Dictionary of Theology*, eds. Sinclair Ferguson, David Wright, and J.I. Packer (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1988), 345.

Millions die there, and all nations lay waste: thus the prophet has spoken, and thus it has been fulfilled.¹¹⁶¹

The destruction of the Second World War mirrors Zachariah's description, but it is open to debate whether Hildebrandt means "extinction" in terms of the Nazi mass extermination of the Jews or simply as a way to refer to the vast numbers of soldiers and citizens killed in the war (including Jews), as well as the displacement of many more and the utter destruction of cities. Significantly, he does not refer to the Jews once in this sermon, but given the connection with Zachariah's passage about the suffering of Israel and his reference to "millions dy[ing] away," indicates his concern may be about the persecution of the Jews in Europe.

As discussed in Chapter 4, historians have estimated that by 1942 and 1943 perhaps one-half of the adult population – from all socioeconomic and educational backgrounds – had received news in one form or another of the mass murder of the Jews as the Holocaust was taking place.¹¹⁶² Hildebrandt kept himself apprised of conditions in Nazi Germany, especially as they pertained to the German Churches; he was well-connected among English clergymen and German refugees; and he worked with the BBC

¹¹⁶¹ Franz Hildebrandt, Sermon on Zachariah 13:7-10, 7 April 1943, Papers of Franz Hildebrandt, NLS 9251.53/54.

¹¹⁶² Marlis Steinert, *Hitler's War and the Germans: Public Mood and Attitude during the Second World War*, translated by Thomas de Witt (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1977); Walter Laqueur, *The Terrible Secret: An Investigation into the Suppression of Information about Hitler's "Final Solution"* (London, 1980); Ian Kershaw, *Popular Opinion and Political Dissent in the Third Reich: Bavaria 1933-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983); Hans Mommsen, "What did the Germans Know about the Genocide of the Jews?" in Walter H. Pehle, ed., *November 1938: From 'Kristallnacht' to Genocide* (New York: Berg, 1991), 187-221; David Bankier, *The Germans and the Final Solution: Public Opinion Under Nazism* (London, 1992); Hans Mommsen and Volker Ullrich, "Wir haben nichts gewusst: Ein deutsches Trauma," 1999 4 (1991): 11-46; and Eric A. Johnson and Karl-Heinz Reuband, *What We Knew: Terror, Mass Murder, and Everyday Life in Nazi Germany, An Oral History* (Cambridge, MA: Basic Books, 2005); and Frank Bajohr and Dieter Pohl, *Der Holocaust als offenes Geheimnis: Die Deutschen, die NS-Führung und die Alliierten* (München: C.H. Beck, 2006).

– one of the chief sources of information regarding Nazi massacres of Jews. Hildebrandt knew of the atrocities and mass murders. He even co-authored an open letter with Hans Ehrenberg, along with other German refugee pastors – W. Buesing, W. Deutschhausen, H. Kramm, J. Rieger, and C. Schweitzer – in *The Times* of London on 2 January 1943, in which they called for “solemn prayer and intercession for the Jewish people in their unparalleled sufferings.”¹¹⁶³

Given Hildebrandt’s knowledge of the atrocities and mass murders, it is likely that his reference to the Zechariah passage of the suffering of Israel and the “millions dy[ing] away” is a public acknowledgement of Nazi crimes against the Jewish people. But his main point in this sermon on 7 April 1943 is that: “Here, under fire, a new people will be born... Beneath the cross of their shepherd they will be gathered again.”¹¹⁶⁴ The ambiguity about the identity of this new people, whether Jews or the Church, is difficult to resolve, which Hildebrandt may indeed intend. Regardless, this is an astounding sermon of trust and encouragement in the middle of a hellish reality; in short, Hildebrandt wishes to reaffirm that God is among his people even amid the destruction of war.

I will end this discussion of Hildebrandt’s sermons with a fascinating example of a prayer that underscores several of the themes that we have seen so far. While not delivered during the Nazi regime, and thus not categorized among the 910 sermons examined in this dissertation, Hildebrandt’s Day of Repentance (or Penance) prayer of November 1945 is an extraordinary, albeit somewhat vague, confession for the sins of the

¹¹⁶³ W. Buesing, W. Deutschhausen, H. Ehrenberg, F. Hildebrandt, H. Kramm, J. Rieger, C. Schweitzer, “Letter to the Editor,” *The Times* (London, Saturday, 02 January 1943, Issue 49433); see also Cresswell and Tow, *Dr. Franz Hildebrandt*, 109-110.

¹¹⁶⁴ Hildebrandt, Sermon on Zachariah 13:7-10, NLS 9251.53/54.

German people.¹¹⁶⁵ The prayer follows shortly after the Evangelical Church of Germany acknowledged its moral failures during the Nazi era in the Stuttgart Declaration of Guilt of October 1945, in which the leadership, speaking for the church, “accuse[ses themselves] for not witnessing more courageously, for not praying more faithfully, for not believing more joyously, and for not loving more ardently.”¹¹⁶⁶ As with the Stuttgart Declaration of Guilt, Hildebrandt’s prayer is short on specific of wrongs committed, yet reveals an acknowledgement that Christians in Germany have morally failed their neighbors and must not only seek forgiveness, but change for the better.

Hildebrandt begins by praying to God to help the German people in their misery, which is itself an extraordinary prayer given that Nazi Germany had driven him into exile. Hildebrandt demonstrates remarkable forgiveness and leadership. Hildebrandt prays:

Look upon the plight of the hungry and the freezing, the homeless and the refugee and the homeless, the widow and the orphan. Look upon the pain of uncertainty and homesickness, the shame of the dishonored and the challenge of the disenfranchised. Look upon the needs of the expellees, the dispossessed and outcast! ... Who will hear us, if not you alone, who are greater than all our suffering and guilt!¹¹⁶⁷

¹¹⁶⁵ It is unclear if Hildebrandt authored this prayer. It is possible this prayer was given to him by the German Protestant Church to deliver on the Day of Repentance. Nevertheless, this prayer supports Matthew Hockenos’ thesis that Germans, particularly the German churches, began to come to terms with the Nazi past immediately after the Second World War. See Hockenos’ *A Church Divided: German Protestants Confront the Nazi Past* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004) 2, 13-14.

¹¹⁶⁶ Evangelical Church of Germany, “Stuttgart Declaration of Guilt,” in Hockenos, *A Church Divided*, 187.

¹¹⁶⁷ Franz Hildebrandt, “Berliner Kirchengebet zum Busstag 1945,” Undated, Papers of Franz Hildebrandt, NLS 9251.53/54.

Hildebrandt's emphasis on German suffering was quite common among post-war German leaders, especially church leaders, who argued for the victimization of Germans under the Nazi dictatorship and also the Allied conquest of Germany, thus casting themselves as survivors.¹¹⁶⁸

He prays for God's mercy, and then on behalf of the German people he acknowledges their guilt. He includes himself in this prayer, remarkably, confessing that together they have no answer for their sins, only confession.

We, we have sinned and are disobedient; therefore you have not spared us cheaply, but have showered us with anger, and pursued and strangled without mercy. You have made us into excrement and filth among the nations. We receive what our deeds are worth and you must confess that the nations have not yet dealt with us according to the sins our people have committed against Israel.¹¹⁶⁹

The prayer is evidence that members of the German churches were beginning to come to terms with the crimes against the Jews – even perhaps their own crimes against Jews – and an acknowledgement that Germany is reaping what it has long sown.¹¹⁷⁰ Repentance is the first step in rebuilding. Repentance is the need of the day: “Awaken us to repentance!” This is a day for the people of Germany to acknowledge their sins and to

¹¹⁶⁸ See also the Stuttgart Declaration of Guilt, October 1945, just a month before Hildebrandt's prayer. This document drawn up by the Council of the Evangelical Church in Germany refers to the German people as a “Gemeinschaft der Leiden,” a “community of suffering.” See Hockenos, *A Church Divided*, 46-47, 187; Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 210-11; Spotts, *Churches and Politics*, 62-69; and Bill Niven, ed., *Germans as Victims: Remembering the Past in Contemporary Germany* (New York: Palgrave, 2006), 1-21; Robert G. Moeller, *War Stories: The Search for a Usable Past in the Federal Republic of Germany* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001), 3-4, 44-48; and Steven M. Schroeder, *To Forget It All and Begin Anew: Reconciliation in Occupied Germany, 1944-1954* (Lincoln, NE: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 9, 40-44.

¹¹⁶⁹ Franz Hildebrandt, “Berliner Kirchengebet zum Busstag 1945,” NLS 9251.53/ 54.

¹¹⁷⁰ Hockenos, *Church Divided*, 2.

turn (after the Greek word for “repent”) from the evil that led them down the road to Auschwitz, and toward the mercy seat of God.¹¹⁷¹ He prays, “Let us heal on the steps of your altar through the word of the cross and from the forgiveness of all our sins!”¹¹⁷² He prays for a way forward to healing and reconciliation, that God “keep us even from the demons of hatred and despair.”¹¹⁷³

Hildebrandt’s prayer is forthright in its acceptance of God’s punishment for the sins of the German people. He argues that the war and the crimes against the Jews – the denial of freedom and human dignity – sowed the seeds of destruction that he interprets as God’s righteous judgment. But note that Hildebrandt does not specifically name the sins of the German people. He speaks of the sins committed against Israel, but he does not name these sins. Perhaps the guilt was too raw to name each sin by name – the betrayal of a neighbor, the stealing of private property, wrongful imprisonment, the denial of human dignity, all culminating in mass extermination of the Jews. Confession, let alone forgiveness, demands an acknowledgment – a confrontation – of specific wrongs committed.¹¹⁷⁴ Nevertheless, this prayer is an early indication that the German churches had begun the process of coming to terms with the past.¹¹⁷⁵

In sum, Hildebrandt shares Ehrenberg’s concern for a spiritually confused and conflicted church, and he too asks Christians in Germany to reconsider their priorities and

¹¹⁷¹ Franz Hildebrandt, “Berliner Kirchengebet zum Busstag 1945,” NLS 9251.53/54.

¹¹⁷² Franz Hildebrandt, “Berliner Kirchengebet zum Busstag 1945,” NLS 9251.53/54.

¹¹⁷³ Franz Hildebrandt, “Berliner Kirchengebet zum Busstag 1945,” NLS 9251.53/54.

¹¹⁷⁴ Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 119-125.

¹¹⁷⁵ See Hockenos, *Church Divided*, 13-14.

mission as “kingdom people.” He tackles the false ideologies that challenge Christianity and admonishes his listeners to stay true to the gospel message that eschews national and racial distinctions. From the safety of London, Hildebrandt’s language is more confrontational than Ehrenberg’s and, in the midst of war, more outspoken about the need for perseverance and trust in a time of suffering.

After World War II, Hildebrandt had a successful career as a pastor and theologian. Hoping to pursue an academic post in addition to a pastorate, Hildebrandt enrolled at the University of Cambridge and earned a Doctorate in Theology in 1941. He also met a young woman by the name of Nancy Hope Wright, and married her in 1943; the two would have three children, David, Ruth and Esther. One of the continuing questions that would follow him throughout his career was whether he should accept ordination in the Church of England, which his close friends and colleagues, such as Bishop Bell, hoped he would undertake. Yet, Hildebrandt consistently argued that undertaking re-ordination would be an acknowledgement that his Lutheran ordination was invalid (as a sacred rite like confirmation or marriage, ordination can only be undertaken once unless the first is acknowledged as invalid). Rather than denying the validity of his Lutheran ordination, which he considered a sacred oath, he accepted a pastorate with the Methodist Church, which acknowledged his ordination, and he became a Methodist pastor in 1946 in Romsey Town, near Cambridge. As was the custom in the Methodist Church, pastorates are of short duration in any single locale, and so he was assigned to another pastorate in Edinburgh, Scotland, where he remained until 1953. At this time, Hildebrandt accepted a position as a professor of Biblical Theology at Drew University, a Methodist university in Madison, New Jersey, where he would stay until

1967. As a leading figure in Methodism, Hildebrandt was honored to attend the Second Vatican Council, in the capacity of an observer, as an official representative of the World Methodist Council. Despite many years of service in the Methodist Church, Hildebrandt would close out his career as a Presbyterian in the Church of Scotland – the issue of re-ordination reemerged as the Methodist Church reached new union agreements with the Church of England, which would have forced him to become re-ordained. Instead Hildebrandt served as a pastor and chaplain in Scotland from 1968 until his death in 1985.

We now move on to consider our third and final German pastor of Jewish descent, Friedrich Forell, a Lutheran pastor from Breslau who made his way through the persecution of the Nazi regime to the United States, where he would found the Newcomers Christian Fellowship, an organization to help refugees in New York City.

Friedrich Forell of Breslau

The sermons of Friedrich Forell, a Lutheran pastor from Breslau, offer a fascinating glimpse at a man who spoke out boldly against National Socialism, and who became emboldened to serve the Church in a time of extraordinary crisis. Forell preached most of these sermons late in the Second World War, and mostly in or around New York City. But unlike Ehrenberg and Hildebrandt, who served as pastors of local congregations in Germany and in England, Forell served as a guest preacher, visiting various congregations and ministries. In exile Forell devoted himself to two causes he felt passionately about: the preservation and advance of Protestantism in the West and the conversion of the Jews to Christianity.

A brief word about the discursive context of Forell's sermons is necessary.

Unlike Ehrenberg, Forell preached as a guest speaker in a context that was decidedly sympathetic; he was after all invited to preach. By all indications, all the sermons were delivered in the United States to audiences interested in Forell's unique perspective as a pastor from Germany – especially given his Jewish ancestry. Thus, he most likely did not fear any repercussions for making comments critical of Hitler or the Nazi regime, nor for making comments in support of the conversion of Jews to Christianity. While preaching these sermons did not require the same degree of courage as if he had delivered them in a church in Nazi Germany, they indicate his genuine concerns about the Jews in Europe and the spiritual condition of men and women in Nazi Germany.

Let us now move on to Forell's public criticisms of Adolf Hitler and National Socialism. In a sermon entitled, "What is the meaning of Christmas for us Today?" most likely delivered sometime in December 1944 and in New York City, Forell speaks candidly about the work and meaning of Jesus. He draws on the nativity narratives of the gospels and directly ties the war-torn world of 1944 to the world in which Jesus was born – a Palestine torn by national, religious and ideological conflicts. Forell's Christmas-time sermon vividly contrasts, on the one hand, Jesus as the true messiah and the benefits of the universal message of Christianity with, on the other hand, Hitler as a false messiah espousing a divisive and dehumanizing National Socialist ideology. Forell argues that Jesus challenged nationalism and the notion that any one nation is chosen to rule; at the same time, he also combatted empire as an oppressive and despotic political system that subsumes the value of the individual to that of the realm. Forell contends that Jesus

brought unity and brotherhood to a world divided, a message that resonated in late 1944.

He writes,

Today again we witness appalling conflicts. The main problem arising is: whether Right has to rule the world or Might. Since no nation is chosen to rule other nations of the world on the ground of its superiority of blood or on ground of its superior social structure /Communism/ [sic], no one has the right to claim the privilege of ruling other nations. The claim for this privilege is entirely incompatible with the doctrine of Christ. It is a false “messianism” that claims a monopoly for leading humanity by force to a compulsory “felicity.”¹¹⁷⁶

For Forell, Christmas is a time to draw clear distinctions between Christianity and false ideologies. He wishes to emphasize a central aspect of Jesus’ message, that “The only real value of a human being is that, all men are equally children of God.”¹¹⁷⁷ Thus, for Forell, the basis of human rights and our ethical obligations to one another rest in the conviction that “all men are equally children of God,” and thus deserving of dignity. While Forell may be idealizing the potential of Christianity to form a perfectly just and equitable society, he juxtaposes the values of Jesus as a messiah against the values of Hitler as a false messiah as a way to highlight the injustices and inequities of the Nazi regime, based as it is upon convictions of the superiority of “Aryan” blood and the use of violence to construct a society.

In the same sermon Forell discusses the implications of Jesus’ emphasis on human dignity and equality for Jews, in his time and ours. One of the central themes in

¹¹⁷⁶ Friedrich Forell, “What is the Meaning of Christmas for Us Today?” The date is uncertain, but most likely in December 1944, Papers of the Newcomers Christian Fellowship, University of Iowa Libraries, Special Collections, MSC 358, Iowa City, Iowa.

¹¹⁷⁷ Forell, “What is the Meaning of Christmas for Us Today?” UIL MSC 358.

this sermon is that “all men are equally children of God”; “Jesus Christ did not come to save any nation, but to save ‘The Man’ as a being.”¹¹⁷⁸ It seems that for Forell, Jesus’ message of the brotherhood of all peoples necessitates a rethinking of notions of equality: “between nations, classes and sexes.”¹¹⁷⁹ Of course, Christianity as practiced throughout its history has maintained systems of inequality between nations, classes, and sexes, yet Forell’s point reflects a conviction that no one nation is “chosen” by God to dominate its neighbors; no one nation is deserving of more rights or privileges than any other. While he contends that the Jews are “chosen” in the sense that God has given this people a mission to make God known in the world, they have no rights or privileges above others. Moreover, he argues, any nation that considers itself special or divinely favored poses a great danger – as Nazi Germany exemplifies – because they can claim rights and privileges that do not belong to it, such as *lebensraum*, the exclusion of “the other” from the community, and a complete revaluation of the ethical standards developed in the Christian scriptures.

This emphasis on the equality of all people is in fact a protest against all ideologies that claim special status for one particular group. Forell implicitly condemns the Nazis who proclaim themselves “Aryan” and set apart, who have anointed their own messiah, announced their own racial and spiritual superiority, and even attempted to dominate the world.¹¹⁸⁰ As previously mentioned, Forell preaches against this false

¹¹⁷⁸ Forell, “What is the Meaning of Christmas for Us Today?” UIL MSC 358.

¹¹⁷⁹ Forell, “What is the Meaning of Christmas for Us Today?” UIL MSC 358.

¹¹⁸⁰ Forell is concerned about the religious implications of Nazi ideology that make claims contrary to the Christian faith. For a clear discussion of the religious components of Nazi ideology see Redles, *Hitler’s Millennial Reich*, particularly 187-189.

messianism that wars against the world to construct a millennial kingdom. This sermon is an effort to apply biblical insights, principles, and authority against Nazi truth claims, and thus is a statement against Hitler and Nazi Germany. It also represents an effort by Forell to demonstrate that not all Germans, or Christians for that matter, align themselves with Hitler's ideology. According to Forell, Christmas is a time when all Christians are compelled to acknowledge its true meaning, that through Jesus Christ all are equal and have profound dignity.

Forell also emphasizes that all people are equal in God's eyes, and this extends to women as well: "Jesus elevated also the woman to human dignity. Women became equal to men, their equality manifested by their activity in apostleship."¹¹⁸¹ Thus, for Forell, in Jesus Christ "There are also no more differences between nations, classes and sexes. The human being received the right to appeal directly to God, the source of Supreme Justice."¹¹⁸² This speech directly reflects Paul's statement in his Epistle to the Galatians that in Christ there are no distinctions between peoples and nationalities, between different economic groups, or genders, in stark contrast to Nazi ideology.¹¹⁸³ Thus, no one group can claim superiority or chosen-ness.

To elucidate Forell's views of Jews and Judaism, and to better understand his own self-identity as a Christian of Jewish ancestry, I would like to pause for a moment and consider a speech Forell gave immediately after World War II, in August 1945, in which

¹¹⁸¹ Forell, "What is the Meaning of Christmas for Us Today?" UIL MSC 358.

¹¹⁸² Forell, "What is the Meaning of Christmas for Us Today?" UIL MSC 358.

¹¹⁸³ For a good summation of Nazi ideology in reference to distinctions between specific people groups, see Doris Bergen, *War and Genocide: A Concise History of the Holocaust* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 36-40.

he addresses the rise of antisemitism to the St. Stephen Society, based in New York City. Forell and his wife Madeleine co-founded this religious society as an outreach ministry dedicated to converting Jews to Christianity, named after the first Jewish-Christian martyr in the New Testament.¹¹⁸⁴ The speech is entitled, “The Future of Christianity among the Germans and the Jews.”

In the speech, Forell addresses three critical topics in a post-war world: the spiritual condition of post-war Germany; the subsequent task for missionaries to serve there; and the desperate need for the Church to reexamine “the ever-present problem” of the Christian approach to the Jewish people.¹¹⁸⁵ He begins with the startling assertion that Germans and Jews are really quite similar as people groups, “Both are our Lord’s problem children.” They are both blessed by God and hated by mankind. On the one hand, both people are blessed, he writes,

Both are especially blest; to the Jews belongs the blessing which was given to Abraham: they are the people of the Bible, of Moses and the Prophets; they are the people of our Lord and Savior, and of His Apostles, and the founders of our Christian church. The body of Christ is called in the New Testament the “Israel of God.” No doubt, the Jews are especially blessed.

The Germans, on the other hand, are the people of Martin Luther and the Reformation; from them come the great church hymns. They are the people of Johann Sebastian Bach, of the first evangelistic revival in the Pietism of Spener and Franke; and from these Germans came Count Zinzendorf and the beginning of the modern missionary movement. We must not forget that the first protestant missionaries were Germans, neither must we overlook the fact to what a great extent the Germans were the theological teachers of the world. Until August, 1945, the German church was the largest protestant church body in the world. Until her destruction,

¹¹⁸⁴ Webster, “German ‘Non-Aryan’ Clergymen,” 85.

¹¹⁸⁵ Friedrich Forell, “The Future of Christianity among the Germans and the Jews,” August 1945, Papers of the Newcomers Christian Fellowship, UIL MSC 358.

in that year, the Prussian Established Church numbered twenty million souls. The Germans were an especially blest people.¹¹⁸⁶

Forell highlights the contributions both peoples have made to religion and spiritual devotion, particularly in the model figures throughout the ages. The influence of both peoples has extended across their borders to shape the religious experience of all nations. Note the asymmetry in Forell's description of each group. On the one hand, the Jews are the people of God's blessing; the people who transmitted the Bible through the ages; the people of the prophets, the apostles, and Jesus of Nazareth; and they are the model for the Christian Church. On the other hand, the Germans are a people of great cultural and religious achievements, of spiritual revivals, and missionary movements. There is a distinct lack of parity in his description. At the same time, it is interesting that Forell mentions the destruction of Protestantism in Germany at the hands of the Nazis, but fails to mention the devastation of German Jewry in the Holocaust. This focus reflects his primary identity and perspective as a minister of the Protestant church who wishes for the revival of an institution he believes can help save souls, rather than just the body.

And he then proceeds to discuss how both the Jews and Germans are hated. He writes,

The Jews, the most hated minority in the world, have been persecuted through the centuries, and even now we realize that anti-Semitism is growing. In the liberated countries of Europe, even in Holland and France, where the resistance movement has protected the Jews, rises resentment against them. The Jewish papers are enthusiastic in writing about the victory of Labor in England, feeling their friends there will help to found a Jewish state in Palestine, but no election will eliminate the Arab problem in the Near East, and the Zionistic hope may end in the greatest

¹¹⁸⁶ Forell, "The Future of Christianity among the Germans and the Jews," UIL MSC 358.

pogrom in Palestine the world has ever seen. Here, in America, anti-Semitism is growing rapidly.

There is no need to mention the hate against the Germans. It is necessary only to bring to mind the two world wars in the last twenty-five years. The stories of the atrocities perpetrated by them are doubtless true, and show the relapse of the German people to paganism and barbarism. The point is, the Germans as a nation are extremists because of their thoroughness, which to a degree may be distinctly in their favor, but which may also become a boomerang. They took the Reformation very seriously, and while the great theologians and preachers of that time merit our admiration, still the consequence of that thoroughness resulted in a religious war which almost completely destroyed German culture three hundred years ago.¹¹⁸⁷

This connection in the suffering of Germans and Jews would be a common trope in Germany during the immediate postwar years, as German refugees were expelled from eastern lands and German POWs languished in Soviet camp: both groups sharing experiences of persecution and great loss.¹¹⁸⁸ In this sermon Forell merely states that the Jews are hated without giving a reason, but he provides one for the world's hatred of Germans, their "thoroughness." Antisemitism remains a mystery to him, an irrational ideology that threatens Jews from all corners of the globe, even after the crimes of the Nazi regime began to come to light.

Despite these similarities, Forell considers the differences in the spiritual life between the Jews and Germans (note his use of the term "Germans" rather than "Protestants" or "Christians" more generally). He argues that while Judaism is concerned

¹¹⁸⁷ Forell, "The Future of Christianity among the Germans and the Jews," UIL MSC 358.

¹¹⁸⁸ See Moeller, *War Stories*, 32-34. It is important to note that Forell does not downplay Jewish suffering in order to emphasize German suffering, as was common in the postwar years; indeed, his purpose was to highlight a common experience that would elicit empathy for both. See also Schroeder, *To Forget It All and Begin Anew*, 32-33.

with the survival of the Jewish people as a nation and thus neglects the salvation of the individual, German Protestantism is solely concerned with the salvation of the individual and is “not at all concerned about the wrong doing of the nation as a nation.”¹¹⁸⁹ He contends that both Jews and “Germans” (i.e. Christians) need to learn from each other.¹¹⁹⁰ Jews need more concern for personal salvation, the kind that Christianity advances, and at the same time “Germans” need to have a greater consciousness of their own accountability and stewardship over their nation.

He ends this speech with a call to “a new theological understanding of the Jewish question.”¹¹⁹¹ Forell puts the problem this way: “If Christ is, as we believe, the King of the Jews and the Lord of the Church, what is the relation between Israel and the Church, the old Covenant and the new Covenant?” His answer is striking for its audaciousness and its implications for Jewish-Christian relations. He writes,

By very carefully studying this question, we come to some very important findings, viz., that the Church is the Israel of God, the new Zion, and there is no other solution of the Jewish question other than to bring as many Jews as possible into the Israel of God and the new Zion. The Church must proclaim that she brings not only salvation to the individual Jew, but that she, and she only, is the answer to the Jewish question. This has not been done as yet. We stand silently while the Jews develop their worldly, nationalistic, geographically determined Zionism. We do not tell them what real Zionism means.¹¹⁹²

¹¹⁸⁹ Forell, “The Future of Christianity among the Germans and the Jews,” UIL MSC 358.

¹¹⁹⁰ The communal/individual distinction between Jews and Christians is a common one. For a much more subtle argument that supports inter-faith dialogue and works toward mutual support between peoples of faith, see Martin Buber’s *Two Types of Faith*, translated by Norman Goldhawk (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1961).

¹¹⁹¹ Forell, “The Future of Christianity among the Germans and the Jews,” UIL MSC 358.

¹¹⁹² Forell, “The Future of Christianity among the Germans and the Jews,” UIL MSC 358.

Forell offers one controversial solution, especially in the aftermath of the Holocaust: the conversion of all Jews.¹¹⁹³ While Zionism may offer a political salvation of sorts, he argues, personal salvation lies only in Christ. Christians must now make this argument to bring Jews into the Church, to befriend Jews and “win” them over to the Church. And he singles out the St. Stephen Society as a devoted missionary society that trains ministers and lay leaders to minister to the Jewish population of the United States. This missionary approach does not accept Judaism in itself as a valuable means of religious expression, at least in relation to Christianity. It is anti-Judaic in asserting that Christianity is the only “solution” to the “Jewish question.” Equally problematic, it recommends interacting with Jews for the purpose of converting them, yet not to engage as equals for mutual benefit. In such a situation, sincere friendship and mutuality is impossible.

Forell gave this speech when few in Germany, let alone the US, addressed the subject of anti-Judaism and antisemitism in the churches.¹¹⁹⁴ Even after the war as Jewish displaced persons and refugees began making their way west into the American occupied zone in 1946 and 1947, antisemitism and indifference among church leaders were barriers to Christian missionary and aid services.¹¹⁹⁵ Forell’s conception of missionary work among Jews was consonant with prevailing views among missionaries in Germany, “that the religious beliefs of the Jewish people were simply wrong and that

¹¹⁹³ After World War II, after the Nazis had forced an end to proselytizing Jews, a renewed interest in Jewish missions led to the growth of new missionary activities and institutions, as Hockenos writes, despite the awareness among some of the insensitivity “given the church’s abandonment of Jews and neglect for Jewish Christians during the Third Reich.” Though the interests of the missions was still to convert Jews, the largely unsuccessful post-war efforts of the Jewish missions emphasized studying Judaism and establishing strong relationships between Jews and Christians. See Hockenos, *A Church Divided*, 157-160.

¹¹⁹⁴ Hockenos, *A Divided Church*, 137; see also Michael Brenner, *After the Holocaust: Rebuilding Jewish Lives in Postwar Germany* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997), 51-77.

¹¹⁹⁵ Hockenos, *A Divided Church*, 138-139.

conversion to Christianity was the way to salvation.”¹¹⁹⁶ In Forell’s thinking, Christianity was the superior religion to Judaism, and as such, Jews would do well to convert. But for Forell, conversion was also an answer to the persecution that European Jewry recently suffered at the hands of the Nazis.

Elements of Forell’s argument for Jewish conversion are evident in an undated sermon entitled, “Christmas Letter.” The precise dating of this sermon is unclear, with no explicit date given and no reference to historical events such as the end of World War II or the opening of concentration camps throughout Europe. There is also no mention of his postwar foundation, St. Stephen Society, whose mission was to convert Jews to Christianity. The vague historical context of the sermon, and its silence on his new ministry to the Jews, St. Stephen Society, suggests that it was likely delivered during the end and shortly after World War II. It appears to be an “open” sermon of sorts, delivered to various gatherings and congregations to garner support for Forell’s mission to the Jews. This Advent sermon is a meditation on the Magnificat, Mary’s prayer of joy and trust upon hearing of her child’s conception:

He hath helped his servant Israel,
 in remembrance of his mercy,
 according to the promise he made to our ancestors,
 to Abraham and to his descendants forever. (Luke 1:54)

In a world still reeling after the devastation of war, Forell connects past and present by affirming that “God today still is the one who puts down the mighty from their seats,”

¹¹⁹⁶ Hockenos, *A Divided Church*, 139.

lifting up the humble and outcast.¹¹⁹⁷ Forell uses this New Testament message to preach for the conversion of the Jews in the modern day – Christ is God’s help to Israel. He expresses consternation that many of his friends and colleagues do not consider a mission to the Jews a priority. Why proselytize the Jews, they ask, when they already believe in God? In this sermon, Forell addresses this commonly held view and presents his case for the mission to the Jews.

Forell refers to two Israels: the New Testament “Israel of God” and the true (or original) Israel that stands outside of God’s fellowship, and which “does not believe in him, who is God’s and Mary’s son.”¹¹⁹⁸ He concludes that Jews are not monolithic in culture or beliefs, and yet they all share a common interest in religion:

But one generalization is possible. Even the modern Jews, who have little or no connection with the faith of their fathers, show some kind of interest for religious questions. The conviction that beyond the visible world there is a God, or, as the moderns like to say, “a deity,” “something godlike,” has not even the left the “enlightenment” Jews of our day.

But they have lost the personal connection with the living God because they no longer can believe in a personal God. To them, God is a philosophic thought which they think, but not a living, wishing, loving reality with whom we can maintain a connection as can the child with the father, the friend with the friend, the disciples with the master.¹¹⁹⁹

Some of his generalizations are problematic and inaccurate. Not all Jews have an interest in religion, just as not all “cultural” Christians concern themselves with the Christian religion. But what is more concerning is his assertion that Jews have “lost the personal

¹¹⁹⁷ Friedrich Forell, “Christmas Letter,” No Date, Papers of the Newcomers Christian Fellowship, UIL MSC 358.

¹¹⁹⁸ Forell, “Christmas Letter,” UIL MSC 358.

¹¹⁹⁹ Forell, “Christmas Letter,” UIL MSC 358.

connection with the living God.”¹²⁰⁰ This view is condescending, measuring one people group’s faith according to the standard of one’s own, and thus rendering inadequate or meaningless the varieties of spiritual orientations among modern Jews (and non-Jews for that matter).¹²⁰¹ The mission to the Jews, he argues, underscores the difference between religion and faith: “Religion is the comprehension of the eternal, the conviction that there is a power higher than all earthly powers and forces. Faith is the connection with the personal God who has revealed himself to us in this world.”¹²⁰² Forell’s rhetoric aims to appeal to the Christian faithful, to point out a “dire” problem that they are uniquely suited to solve as the true “insiders” with God. In this sermon he asks for prayer and support in the Church’s mission to Israel.¹²⁰³

In a Good Friday sermon delivered on March 30, 1945, to a German-speaking audience, Forell preached on the passion narrative in Matthew 28:46, in which he connects the suffering of Christ with the suffering of the “persecuted, expelled, tortured and murdered,” most likely a reference to the Jews of Europe in the Second World

¹²⁰⁰ Forell, “Christmas Letter,” UIL MSC 358.

¹²⁰¹ I am reminded of Edward Said’s classic *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1994), and his argument that “there is a difference between knowledge of other people and other times that is the result of understanding, compassion, careful study and analysis for their own sakes, and on the other hand knowledge—if that is what it is—that is part of an overall campaign of self-affirmation, belligerency, and outright war.” Though for Forell the campaign is for conversion (xix).

¹²⁰² Forell, “Christmas Letter,” UIL MSC 358.

¹²⁰³ Forell is working towards an approach to the Jewish people that will eliminate conflict between them and the nations of the world. Of course, any approach to Jews in Germany – either towards the end of the war or in the postwar period – must confront the issue of antisemitism. But there were other issues in the immediate postwar period. Hockenos argues that postwar missionary activity in Germany was controversial because of the perception among many Germans that the remaining Jews received preferential treatment. He even notes that “Parishioners across Germany were so resentful toward remaining Jews... that they contested an annual Sunday collection devoted to aid offices for Christians of Jewish descent and Protestant missions that focused on proselytizing among Jews.” Hockenos, *A Divided Church*, 137, 138-152. See also Gutteridge, *German Evangelical Church and the Jews*, 299-305.

War.¹²⁰⁴ Thus, he seeks to understand Jewish suffering in a distinctly Christian framework. He contemplates the wounds of Christ and the injustice of an innocent man condemned, and then asks why this happened. Drawing on the Suffering Servant passage in Isaiah 53, Forell affirms that in Christ's suffering we are healed. And at this point he connects present tragedy with the passion narrative. He writes,

Recently a woman went to me in consultation hours, whose elderly mother was deported to Poland, where she died. The woman was inconsolable. The worst part for her was not the thought of the sad fate of the mother. The worst part was the remorse that she, as the daughter of the elderly mother, when it was still possible, has not given enough love. Time and again she says, "I had not been thankful, not patient, not loving enough to my good elderly mother."¹²⁰⁵

There are times when we can never make amends. This woman's opportunity to reconcile with her mother was sadly cut short due to the Holocaust. Forell's condemnation of this persecution is passive, leaving the perpetrators unidentified – which was actually common formulation in postwar Germany to acknowledge suffering and yet leave the question of culpability unanswered.¹²⁰⁶

Clearly addressing the devastation of the Second World War and the Holocaust, he continues,

¹²⁰⁴ Friedrich Forell, "Charfreitag-Ansprache," 30 March 1945, Papers of the Newcomers Christian Fellowship, UIL MSC 358.

¹²⁰⁵ Forell, "Charfreitag-Ansprache," UIL MSC 358.

¹²⁰⁶ Moeller, *War Stories*, 25-26. While in Germany passive statements on the suffering of Jews would have served to distance the German people from their own potential culpability in the Holocaust, Forell's use of passive statements like these, delivered in New York City, might have another purpose. Given the context of the sermon, it is conceivable that Forell wished to emphasize the solution to Jewish persecution – which he envisioned as conversion – rather than the details of the persecution itself. See also Schroeder, *To Forget It All and Begin Anew*, 43-46.

There is so much devilish injustice done, there was so much terrible hatred sown:

Only on the cross, on which we find forgiveness, we receive the strength of God to forgive those who have persecuted, expelled, tortured and murdered our loved ones.

On the cross Jesus prayed for his murderers, "Father, forgive them." On the cross we learn to pray for our enemies, only on the cross, only on the cross.¹²⁰⁷

True peace, he argues, cannot be attained through political parties or peace conferences, but only by the way of Jesus on the cross at Golgotha. This passage does not mention Hitler or the Nazis by name, nor does it refer explicitly to the Jews or their suffering and persecution. The sermon is a condemnation of the war and Nazi atrocities: he decries the deportations of people to Poland, the "devilish injustice" in war, the terrible hatred, and the persecutions, expulsions, tortures, and the murder of loved ones. Perhaps it is likely that his audience included Christians of Jewish extraction. In any case, his point is that there is a love and a grace capable of dealing with the horrors of what they had all experienced.

From his perspective, the Christian message of grace, mercy, and forgiveness can help Jews confront and work through their experiences during Nazi Germany and the Holocaust. One might interpret this as a self-serving suggestion because he and fellow Christians would be the recipients of this forgiveness. Yet this sermon supports his argument for the mission to the Jews. He asks the Christian community of faith to look

¹²⁰⁷ Forell, "Charfreitag-Ansprache," UIL MSC 358.

upon Christ as an exemplar of a man persevering through hell on earth, and overcoming in the end.

Like Ehrenberg and Hildebrandt, Forell challenges his audience to judge Nazi ideology by the standard of the Christian faith, asking them to consider concepts such as equality and fraternity in the Christian tradition, as well as the insufficient and corrupting bonds of nationality and race in Nazism. But his assertions take on a more politically charged tone, condemning Zionism as a false path to salvation and actively proselytizing Jews as an answer to Jewish suffering. In the final section of this chapter we will consider the three pastors together in their messages about Hitler, National Socialism, the Jews, and Judaism.

After World War II, Friedrich Forell and his wife Madeleine, along with their two children, George Wolfgang and Johannes Gotthold, remained in New York City and ministered at the Newcomers Christian Fellowship, an organization they founded during the war to minister to refugees. He would work for this organization for 24 years until his retirement in 1964. And as previously mentioned, Forell and his wife also started the St. Stephen Society in New York City, an organization devoted to missionary activity among Jews. Forell maintained church contacts in the two Germanys after the war, and returned several times; in fact, an Inner Mission organization in Görlitz, near the Polish and Czech borders, renamed itself in the 1980s, the Friedrich-Forell-Zentrum in the neighborhood of Wittichenau. For his life's work, Bishop Otto Dibelius awarded Forell an honorary Doctorate of Theology degree in 1948 at the University of Mainz, and the

Federal Republic of Germany awarded him the Great Cross of Merit in 1955.¹²⁰⁸ Upon his retirement in 1964, Forell and his wife Madeleine moved to Iowa City, Iowa, where their son George Forell was a well-respected professor of religion at the University of Iowa. Friedrich Forell passed away on 3 April 1968, at the age of 79.

Conclusions

Ehrenberg, Hildebrandt, and Forell were pastors deeply committed to their calling of preaching the gospel and caring for souls. Even though Germany turned against them and forced them into exile, they demonstrated a great concern for the German churches, German citizens, and for Germany itself as a nation. Each struggled in their own way to help their fellow citizens who had either suffered at the hand of the Nazi state, or who had fallen away from the Christian faith to follow a destructive ideology. For example, in the speech “Church Life and Church Work in Germany and America – A Contrast,” delivered most likely in 1944 in New York City, Forell expresses a self-understanding that I think applies to Ehrenberg and Hildebrandt as well. He recalls a biblical text in which the Apostle Paul is waiting for guidance from the Holy Spirit about where to preach the gospel. Forell reflects,

I have often wondered why the Lord led me from my mother church [in Germany] to this country [USA]. Now I know – I am like the Macedonian

¹²⁰⁸ See Ronald Webster, “Eberhard Röhm und Jörg Thierfelder. Ein langer Weg von Breslau nach New York: Der Flüchtlingsseelsorger Friedrich Forell,” in *Studien zur Kirchlichen Zeitgeschichte. Festschrift für Carsten Nicolaisen*, ed. Joachim Mehlhausen (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1995), 315-22; Ronald D.E. Webster, “German ‘Non-Aryan’ Clergymen and the Anguish of Exile after 1933,” in *The Journal of Religious History*, 22:1, February 1998, 84-85; Iowa City Press-Citizen, Iowa City, Iowa, April 3, 1968, page 34, at <http://www.newspapers.com/newspage/23444074/>; and also his biography at the website for the Evangelische Friedrich-Forell-Zentrum Wittichenau at http://www.ekbo-wittichenau.de/forellzentrum/html/friedrich_forell.html

man – you know the passage in Acts 16, Verse 9: ‘And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: There was a man of Macedonia standing, beseeching him, and saying, Come over into Macedonia and help us.’”¹²⁰⁹

In this speech he beseeches American pastors for help in preaching, what is for him, the redemptive and life-giving gospel to the German people.¹²¹⁰ Forell acknowledges not only his own vulnerability, but also that of his fellow citizens in Germany. As pastors, they are all in a unique position to, at the very least, spiritually minister the people of Germany – to serve not only the persecuted, but to spiritually reorient bystanders. Forell, like Ehrenberg and Hildebrandt, has not forsaken Germany or the German people, but in this time of war he actively tries to help his country (which in the past several years has proven itself morally and spiritually bankrupt) regain its spiritual moorings.

The underlying assumption that Ehrenberg, Hildebrandt and Forell all share is that the gospel was a life-affirming worldview that is capable of effectively countering a destructive Nazi ideology. In Nazi Germany, and subsequently in exile, the most pressing question for the pastors was how to solve the problem of a totalitarian political system that imposed its racial ideology on every individual in society. As pastors and committed Christians, the best answer they found was to confront this system and its ideology with the gospel, a message that undermined National Socialism’s emphasis on racial superiority, living space, and its messianism and millennialism. In other words,

¹²⁰⁹ Forell, “Church Life and Church Work in Germany and America: A Contrast,” UIL MSC 358.

¹²¹⁰ Forell and his Confessing Church colleagues were not political, military, or cultural figures, but clergymen with a distinctive “arsenal” for combating the evils of National Socialism. In their estimation, the gospel was the weapon of choice. Gushee speaks of rescuers’ reference to meeting Nazi terror with “weapons of the Spirit,” embodied in the gospel message. See Gushee, *Righteous Gentiles*, Kindle Edition, location 3162.

they combated Nazi falsehood with what they considered to be the Christian truth.¹²¹¹

One might argue that Protestant faith is an inadequate belief system to combat Nazism, given its history of anti-Judaism and antisemitism, yet Ehrenberg, Hildebrandt, and Forell each found ways to undermine Nazism through their use of the gospel message.

As such, it would be a mistake to view these sermons as merely of religious or moral value, for these themes are the basis for a distinctive approach to the problems of Nazi Germany. Through these sermons we can better understand how German pastors of Jewish descent spoke out against an oppressive regime, from within Germany and without, and how they served their Church in an era of exclusion and war. They reveal evidence that within the Church pastors opposed the Nazi regime.

Before drawing conclusions about what the pastors preached, it is worth pointing out what they did not preach. They did not explicitly call for Hitler's removal from office or the overthrow of the National Socialist government. They did not call for Germans to sabotage or otherwise fight against the German military or police state (though Hildebrandt called for Germans and the English to unite as one in the body of Christ). Also, they did not explicitly discuss the systematic mass murder of the Jews, though Forell makes general references to the deportation, torture, and murder of Jews.¹²¹² Nor do we find explicit calls for Christians to defy Nazi laws to come to the aid of the persecuted Jews. In other words, some may reasonably conclude that the pastors

¹²¹¹ As discussed in chapter two, Bonhoeffer argues in his seminary homiletics lectures that "Every sermon must overcome Satan. Every sermon fights a battle"; see Fant, *Worldly Preaching*, 107. See also David Redles, *Hitler's Millennial Reich: Apocalyptic Belief and the Search for Salvation* (New York: New York University, 2005), 12, 45; Ian Kershaw, *Hitler: Hubris*, Kindle Edition, location 2301, 8997; and Claus-Ekkehard Bärsch, *Die Politische Religion des Nationalsozialismus* (Munich: W. Fink, 1998), 136-178.

¹²¹² See Forell, "Charfreitag-Ansprache," UIL MSC 358.

did not go far enough in resisting the Nazi regime – especially as men who preached to a captive audience week after week – by discussing specific and concrete ways to undermine the Nazi regime and seeks its eventual destruction.¹²¹³

Nevertheless, in a language rich in Christian theology and tradition, Pastors Ehrenberg, Hildebrandt, and Forell preached against Adolf Hitler and National Socialism. Admittedly, they very rarely explicitly mention Hitler or National Socialism; yet the targets of their criticisms could not be misunderstood. Concerning Hitler, the pastors do not criticize him as a politician for his policies or leadership style, but as a leader of – in their view – a disastrous worldview based on exclusion and the debasing of human dignity. Ehrenberg emphasizes the importance of leaders who guide men and women in the Christian faith, juxtaposing them with leaders who inspire and mislead with “strange doctrines” (implying Hitler).¹²¹⁴ Hildebrandt argues that Christians ought to obey the emperor, but only when this obedience honors God; after all, he argues, Christians must openly profess who their true king is.¹²¹⁵ Forell criticizes Hitler as a false messiah that has turned upside-down Christianity’s teachings on loving one’s neighbor and “chosen-ness.”¹²¹⁶ Altogether, I have counted seven direct or indirect references to Hitler in these 34 sermons (21%), all critical and all in specific reference to his ideology as a challenge to Christianity.

¹²¹³ Gerlach, *And the Witnesses Were Silent*, vii-viii.

¹²¹⁴ Ehrenberg, Sermon on Hebrews 13:7-9, 17, LKA EKvW W4891; see also Redles, *Hitler’s Millennial Reich*, 158-159.

¹²¹⁵ See Hildebrandt, Sermon on I Peter 2:6-10, NLS 9251.53/54; and Hildebrandt, Sermon on I Peter 2: 18-25, NLS 9251.53/54.

¹²¹⁶ See Forell, “What is the Meaning of Christmas for us Today?” UIL MSC 358.

They also staunchly condemn National Socialism and the German Christian movement's Nazi-infused theology that has sown confusion and disunity in the German churches. Ehrenberg calls this ideology a newfangled "strange doctrine" that has crept up in recent years to lead men and women away from God.¹²¹⁷ Hildebrandt contends that Christians must oppose any leaders or ideology that defines one's neighbor in terms of national, racial, or party membership.¹²¹⁸ Forell outright condemns National Socialism as a dehumanizing ideology that asserts the salvation of blood and soil for a people.¹²¹⁹ Thus, Ehrenberg, Hildebrandt, and Forell share the perspective of their Confessing Church colleagues: while they may express non-rational prejudice against the Jews and Judaism themselves, all three condemned the irrational prejudices of National Socialism and the German Christian movement. They were unequivocal in their condemnation of racial prejudice and of the fact that it had taken root in the German churches.

All made these criticisms in defense of their faith and in the care of souls in their charge as pastors. Taken together I have counted 13 references in these 34 sermons (38%) to National Socialism and, more generally, the Nazi state. Throughout the sermons we can see men who witnessed Christians falling away from their faith to serve Hitler and his ideology of exclusion and hate, dividing and confusing the German churches. This was a battle of ideologies and the pastors summoned their rhetorical skills just as Nazi propagandists did themselves. Their concern was to revitalize and reorient

¹²¹⁷ Ehrenberg, Sermon on Hebrews 13:7-9, 17, LKA EKvW W4891.

¹²¹⁸ Ehrenberg, Sermon on Hebrews 13:7-9, 17, LKA EKvW W4891; and see also Hildebrandt, Sermon on Luke 10:25-37, 24 December 1944, NLS 9251.53/54.

¹²¹⁹ See Forell, "What is the Meaning of Christmas for us Today?" UIL MSC 358.

Christians in Germany to abandon a false ideology and a false messiah, to return to the Christian faith.

In the sermons we find a deep concern for the disunity of the German Protestant churches, which directly resulted from of the controversial demands of the German Christian movement to adapt Christianity to the modern racial ideology of National Socialism as well as from Nazi intrusion into church affairs.¹²²⁰ Realizing the fragmented and contentious state of the German Protestant churches, Ehrenberg, Hildebrandt, and Forell all argue that the Church must unite if it is to remain the Church, that is, the body of Christ with the given mandate to preach the gospel. If pretenders wish to lead the Church astray, they must be exposed and expelled from fellowship. Disunity undermines the Church's *raison d'être*: preaching the kingdom of God and repentance for salvation.

On the themes of Judaism and the Jews, the pastors have a wider variety of perspectives. Regarding Judaism, Ehrenberg argues that Christians cannot understand Jesus apart from his Jewish context; thus, Ehrenberg stood in stark contrast to members of the German Christian movement who wished to “Aryanize” Jesus and the Christian tradition.¹²²¹ At the same time he affirmed that God is the God of both the Jews and Christians, and indeed all humanity – all are dependent upon the mercy of God.¹²²² Ehrenberg draws Jews and Christians together as members of the Abrahamic faiths with shared values and traditions. In his sermon on Acts 2:29-41, he contends that the gospel

¹²²⁰ Conway, *Nazi Persecution of the Churches, 133-139*, 260.

¹²²¹ Hans Ehrenberg, „Lieber Sechster Bezirk!“ Mitte Oktober 1933, Papers of Hans Ehrenberg, in LKA EKvW W4891.

¹²²² Ehrenberg, „Lieber Sechster Bezirk!“ LKA EKvW W4891; also see Susannah Heschel's *The Aryan Jesus* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008).

has two roots: the salvation history as told in the “entire Bible” and in Jesus Christ.¹²²³ The gospel message would be meaningless without one of the two roots. Significantly, each pastor affirms the value and necessity of the Old Testament in the Christian cannon.

Altogether, they preached seven of the 34 sermons on the Hebrew Bible (21%).¹²²⁴ Unlike members of the German Christian movement, who were willing to abandon the Hebrew Bible as inferior to the New Testament and obsolete in light of Christianity’s supersession of the Jewish faith, they pulled from its rich store of affirmations of faith and love to serve their communities.¹²²⁵ Furthermore, among the sermons of Ehrenberg and Hildebrandt I could find only one example of an anti-Judaic message, an ambivalent message coming from Ehrenberg about the same “blood” that produced humanity’s savior being the same that crucified him.¹²²⁶ On the one hand, Ehrenberg plays into the same prejudices that lead Christians to racial hate, and on the other, he attempts to draw Jews and the peoples of the world together in their purported need to receive Christ. As for Hildebrandt, his sermons contain no evidence of any anti-Judaic messages.

Friedrich Forell presents a more complicated view of the Jews and Judaism. On the one hand, he argues that they are “especially blessed” as the people of the prophets, Jesus Christ, and the scriptures. On the other hand, during and after the Second World

¹²²³ Ehrenberg, Sermon on Acts 2:29-41, LKA EKvW W4891.

¹²²⁴ This percentage is significant given the advice of Karl Barth, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and Wolfgang Trillhaas in their respective homiletics lectures and textbooks, to counter the prevailing lack of use of the Hebrew Bible because, in the view of many 20th century Christians, the Hebrew Bible has been understood to be superseded by the New Testament, that it is obsolete. See Barth’s *Homiletics*, Bonhoeffer’s *Worldly Preaching*, and Trillhaas’ *Evangelische Predigtlehre*.

¹²²⁵ Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 143.

¹²²⁶ Ehrenberg, „Lieber Sechster Bezirk!, LKA EKvW W4891.

War he actively engaged in the proselytizing of the Jewish people to Christianity in Europe and in the United States. He advances the cause of proselytism in the three principal texts, “The Future of Christianity among the Germans and the Jews,” “The Christmas Letter,” and “New People of God and the Mission among the Jews.” This invitation to spiritually and financially support the conversion of the Jews is particularly problematic in the context of the Holocaust and the post-war era because the mission to the Jews essentially calls for the diminishment of the Jewish community, not through deportation or extermination, but through conversion. It means the end of the Jewish community as such, and it means the loss of Jewish identity and the full acculturation of Jews into the Christian community. The mission to the Jews seeks an encounter with Jews for the purpose of conversion, not primarily as an effort to engage them in their own terms or to minister and meet their needs without expectation.

In an effort to explain, not excuse, Forell’s motivations, it might be instructive to consider his unique perspective. Forell’s emphasis on the mission to the Jews reflects his belief that Christ literally saves peoples’ souls, and that sharing this “pearl of great price” is the greatest and most worthwhile pursuit one can undertake. A minister who has devoted his life to the service of God and the Church will spread this message to all and sundry, including Jews. In Christian parlance, he has a heart for the Jewish people, he feels a connection with them, which no doubt was strengthened as the Nazis labeled him a Jew and expelled him from Germany. For Forell, the Jews are his fellow-sufferers, and it makes sense that he would desire to share with them what he considered to be the greatest source of love and grace.

The pastors spoke less frequently about the Nazi persecution of the Jews. In Ehrenberg's case, the last sermon we have for him in this period is from 1937, before the war and the systematic mass murder of the Jews. Though he openly speaks of his unjust dismissal from his pastorate in his sermon on 23 May 1937, he does not give the reason why; yet his congregants certainly knew the reason for his removal.¹²²⁷ In an undated sermon on Matthew 23:34-39, he argues that "The Jewish people is a scapegoat for everything, past and present, as a spiritual, not as a political community."¹²²⁸ He does not elaborate on this point, though his comment reflects a judgment about the past and the history of the Jews, that they have been a persecuted people, unfairly treated by their neighbors, and that their unity as a community has primarily been spiritual in nature rather than political. Hildebrandt spends much less time discussing the persecution of the Jews in his sermons; yet one example is his sermon on 7 April 1943, when he turns to the Hebrew Bible prophet Zachariah to underscore God's eventual vindication and blessing of his people after a period of persecution.¹²²⁹ Ehrenberg and Hildebrandt were concerned about the persecution of the Jews, but their main concern was to combat the Nazi persecution of the German churches and their indoctrination of Christians as citizens of the National Socialist state.

Altogether, the pastors referenced the Jews or Judaism a total of 11 times in the 34 sermons (32%), indicating the degree of their concern about the Jewish people and their perspective of the depth of connection in faith and tradition between the Jews and

¹²²⁷ Ehrenberg, Sermon on 23 May 1937, LKA EKvW W4891.

¹²²⁸ Hans Ehrenberg, Sermon on Matthew 23:34-39, Undated, Papers of Hans Ehrenberg, LKA EKvW W4891.

¹²²⁹ See Hildebrandt, Sermon on Zachariah 13:7-10, NLS 9251.53/54.

Christians. All of them contain messages supportive of Jews and Judaism. This is in striking contrast to the 4.6% of the sermons from the larger pool of Confessing Church pastors. Hildebrandt refers to the Jews twice, but not specifically to Judaism; Ehrenberg refers to the Jews three times and to Judaism twice; and Forell expresses concern for the Jews three times and Judaism once.

One might well ask, what prevented the German pastors of Jewish descent from doing more to speak out against Hitler and in defense of the Jews? These sermons provide a fascinating insight into this question. As discussed in detail in chapters three and four, several factors mitigated against the resistance, opposition, and dissent of all Germans living under the Nazi dictatorship.¹²³⁰ First, the Nazi regime was a terroristic, totalitarian regime that threatened harassment, imprisonment, and even death for such acts. Second, it became clear to many after 1933 that the only real chance of a coup d'état relied upon gaining control of the most powerful (and most well-armed) institution in Germany, the army. And third, all German institutions besides the churches were “coordinated” with Nazi aims and policies, and thus there were no other social or cultural institutions capable of organized and sustained popular resistance. On this last point, all German pastors of Jewish descent we have discussed eventually left the German Protestant churches, either willingly or unwillingly, due to social or ecclesiastical or congregational pressures, thereby rendering untenable their work of resistance or opposition within the church. But also we cannot forget that German pastors were often reluctant to publicly protest Nazi persecution of Jews, Christians, and German citizens at

¹²³⁰ Kershaw, *The Nazi Dictatorship*, 171-172.

large because of an underlying anxiety of seeming antagonistic to the state, and in so doing overstepping their mandate as ministers of the church to obey the governing authorities. In this way, they would make the churches vulnerable to criticism.¹²³¹

To pursue this line of inquiry further, we might recall the experiences of Ehrenberg, Hildebrandt, Forell, as well as Benfey and Gordon – all men who were virtually expelled from their churches (by the police, their congregations, the church leadership, or simply through continual harassment) because of their Jewish descent. They may not have been more confrontational or vocal in their sermons (at least those delivered in Nazi Germany), first, for fear of arrest and imprisonment simply because of their Jewish descent. The historical record indicates that Ehrenberg, Hildebrandt, and Gordon were all arrested in their service as pastors. In fact, Gordon was arrested twice, once for preparing to read an anti-Nazi declaration from the pulpit and again for supporting his friend Martin Niemöller after his arrest.¹²³²

Not only did these men fear arrest, but they also feared the loss of their jobs. With the passage of the Civil Service Law of 1933 and the Nuremberg Laws of 1935, pastors of Jewish descent could not but realize that the Nazi regime was pushing Jews out of German public life. For example, Benfey feared that he would either not be hired or that he would be fired simply because he was a Christian of Jewish descent.¹²³³ As for

¹²³¹ Gutteridge comments, “There was continuous concern to avoid being accused of hostility to the State, interference in politics, harbouring politically discontented elements within her religious organization, and of furnishing increased material for criticism and condemnation from abroad of the Nazi regime.” The underlying concern is “not to impair the purity and strength of witness to scriptural and doctrinal truth” by becoming entangled in secular controversies. See Gutteridge, *German Evangelical Church*, 129.

¹²³² Gordon, *And I Will Walk at Liberty*, EZA 600/107400.

¹²³³ Ericksen, *Complicity in the Holocaust*, 119.

Gordon, the official regional church refused him ordination; then while working with the Confessing Church movement the local police strong-armed him out of one pastorate; and later a faction of his own congregation contributed to his final decision to flee Germany.¹²³⁴ And in a move that demonstrates considerable courage, Hildebrandt resigned his position as a pastor in the Old Prussian Union in protest when the German Christian movement passed the “Aryan paragraph.”¹²³⁵

For German pastors of Jewish descent in Germany (and not in exile) we must add another reason for their reluctance to speak out more explicitly against the Nazi regime. In addition to the fear of arrest and the loss of employment is also the fear of being singled out as “other.” Gordon expresses shock and sadness as the local police demanded he resign his pastorate as a “Jew,” a rejection of his society’s ability to accept his own self-fashioned identity as a Christian man. The Nazi regime categorized each of the pastors discussed as either Jewish or partially Jewish, and thus not “Aryan,” meaning not a full member of the German national community.¹²³⁶ Forell is an interesting example in that he might have come to terms with all these fears earlier than most as he fled Nazi Germany in 1933.¹²³⁷

In regards to the sermons preached in Nazi Germany, each of these fears – arrest, loss of a job, and the designation as “other” – might have contributed to a less confrontational sermon style or relative silence on matters that might have roused greater

¹²³⁴ Gordon, *And I Will Walk at Liberty*, EZA 600/107400.

¹²³⁵ See *International Biographical Dictionary*, eds. Strauss and Röder, 508.

¹²³⁶ Burleigh, *The Third Reich*, 92-93, and 294-296.

¹²³⁷ See Forell, “Interview with WQXK,” New York Radio, UIL MSC 358.

persecution against them (such as a defense of the Jewish people). Unfortunately, the evidence we have from these pastors is inconclusive because we do not have sufficient pre- and post-exile sermons from each to determine a clear shift in approach in speaking about Hitler, National Socialism, the Jews, or Judaism.

In the end, these sermons demonstrate that not all in the German churches remained silent about the dangers of National Socialist ideology or the Nazi persecutions of the Jewish people. Ehrenberg, Hildebrandt, and Forell challenge specific points of Nazi ideology (notably racial ideology and messianism) by presenting the gospel message at home and abroad. At the same time they express sympathy for Jews being persecuted by the Nazi regime, as well as undermine racial hate by emphasizing Christian love and service to those in need. We cannot categorize the preaching of these messages as acts of resistance – as they were not part of an organized attempt to undermine the regime or plan for its demise. Yet they certainly qualify as acts of opposition that aimed at challenging the dominance of the Nazi state, from pulpits inside and outside Germany, particularly in the spheres of religion and society.¹²³⁸ As such, these sermons offer a unique insight into how individual pastors of the German churches approached the ideological and racial problems that Nazi Germany posed to the conscientious individual.

The Confessing Church pastors Ehrenberg, Hildebrandt, and Forell offer us a window into the lives of one hundred and seventeen German pastors of Jewish descent, all of them targeted by the Nazi regime as inferior to their fellow citizens and, perhaps most hurtful, to their fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. Their sermons express what

¹²³⁸ Kershaw, *The Nazi Dictatorship*, 170.

was most important for them to say to their congregants about the relevance of the gospel message for their very troubled time. Though their own nation challenged their self-identity as Christians and Germans and forced them into exile, they continued to struggle in the service of the gospel of Christ to convince their fellow Germans of the bankruptcy of National Socialism and to gracefully meet their obligations to their neighbors in need.

Unfortunately, in a dissertation on the sermons of the Confessing Church we can spend only so much time and space on this fascinating and revealing group of pastors. My hope in this chapter was to open the door and shed some light on these individuals, and hopefully, to inspire other historians to try and learn more about these men: where they lived and worked, how they served their communities, how their experiences resemble those of their Confessing Church colleagues, and of course, what happened to them after the end of the Second World War.

Acknowledgments

Chapter 7 contains material that is being prepared for publication in an article entitled, “Preaching to Nazi Germany: Sermons of the Confessing Church in the Second World War,” as a chapter in the book, *Outside the Foxhole: Religion and World War Two*, edited by John Corrigan and G. Kurt Piehler.

Conclusion

I set out in this dissertation to address a gap in the historiography about the German Church Struggle, specifically lack of attention to the sermons of the Confessing Church as a valuable and unique historical resource. I explored the variety of messages that Confessing Church members preached from the pulpit under the Nazi dictatorship – the messages about the Nazi regime, its leadership and ideology, as well as about the Jews and Judaism. After examining 910 sermons from 95 preachers, I have provided a new perspective on the broad spectrum of Confessing Church members’ responses to the Nazi regime, its ideology, and its persecutions, ranging from acceptance, to silence, passive dissent, and active opposition. And at the same time, I have illuminated the nature of Confessing Church members’ perspectives of and attitudes towards Jews and Judaism, allowing us to gain a new and valuable perspective on how religious anti-Judaism relates to modern antisemitism in Nazi Germany.

Through the influence of theologians such as Karl Barth and Wolfgang Trillhaas, the Confessing Church developed a philosophy of preaching that emphasized the principle that religious truth must be dependent upon the Christian scriptures alone – as the primary source of revelation – rather than other sources of knowledge such as a providential interpretation history, scientific theory, or more recently in European historical thought, racial theory. In this way, the “new school” of homiletics helped the Confessing Church break from the tradition of German liberal Protestantism and its emphasis on natural theology as a source of knowledge. In the end, many Confessing Church pastors maintained the focus of their sermons on the gospel message, and not the

political agenda or their own personal inclinations. The approach of the “new school” of homiletics resolved one problem of limiting a pastors’ utilization of the gospel to serve political and personal interests, but at the same time created a new problem of discouraging pastors from using the biblical text to judge political and social developments, in particular, the morally and ethically corrupt nature of the Nazi regime, its ideology, and policies of persecution against the Jews.

After analyzing 910 sermons from 95 Confessing Church pastors, I have demonstrated that while some may have occasionally protested the Nazi regime, or criticized its policies, most rarely spoke out from the pulpit. And when they did, it was most often in passive or indirect language to moderate the aggressive tone of the criticism. Yet, my research demonstrates that Confessing Church pastors indeed had the freedom, at least for a time, to criticize the Nazi regime and, especially, the members of the German Christian movement. In this way, my research supports the works of such historians as Barnett and Scholder in arguing that the German churches were institutions in Nazi Germany in which one could voice public criticism against the regime and its ideology. My analysis contributes to the historiography in demonstrating that Confessing Church sermons on occasion criticized Hitler, the Nazi leadership, claims of “Aryan” racial superiority; undermined the Nazi regime as unjust persecutors of Christians and the German churches; and condemned Nazism as morally corrupt. And yet, at the same time, given the passivity and infrequency of the comments, the sermons reveal criticism from a position of obedience and subservience to the Nazi state.

Confessing Church pastors also expressed their view of Jews and Judaism from the pulpit. I have found 70 sermons in the collection of 910 that informed and perhaps

influenced their congregations' views about Jews and Judaism in Germany. The numbers were evenly divided between sermons that preached views supporting the Jews and Judaism, and those that expressed anti-Judaic views. These sermons reveal not only ambivalence among Confessing Church pastors about Judaism and the Jewish people, but also a millennia-long ingrained prejudice that often came to the surface. Even when a pastor wished to support the Jewish people and affirm the value of Judaism as a foundation of Christianity, we still find expressions of anti-Judaic theology present that often confused what could be a clearer message to the Christian faithful in Nazi Germany.

But more surprising, we often find Confessing Church pastors use anti-Judaic tropes to critique or challenge the antisemitism of the Nazi regime, the German Christian movement, or Germans generally. Even Confessing Church "heroes" such as Niemöller, Bonhoeffer, and Hinz, for example, argue that both the Jews of ancient Israel and the Germans (and more specifically Nazis) of their own day have hardened their hearts; both are race conscious and emphasize racial purity; both are assured of their "chosen-ness" and divinely-bestowed superiority. This demonstrates that anti-Judaic expressions were not often simply extemporaneous comments, or simply meant to denigrate Jews in Germany society, but that they were often utilized purposefully to criticize the Nazi regime, and its ideology and racial policies. As far as I understand, no other historian has investigated this phenomenon in the historical record of the Confessing Church.

My dissertation also reveals the problems and dilemmas unique to German pastors of Jewish descent. The stories of pastors like Bruno Benfey and Ernst Gordon underscore the precarious living and working circumstances of men who have dedicated

their careers to the spiritual life in service of their communities. German pastors of Jewish descent often experienced harassment and rejection by their communities, which included pro-Nazi advocates, whether formally affiliated with the German Christian movement or not. Even with the help of supportive Confessing Church colleagues, these pastors were often compelled to leave one assignment and another, even suffering arrest or imprisonment, until, unfortunately, exile seemed the only viable alternative to continue their public ministries as Christian clergymen. My analysis demonstrates that this group of German clergymen – singled out by the Nazi regime as “Jews” – were deprived of the opportunity to live out their calling to minister to their communities of faith in Nazi Germany because many of their neighbors and fellow Christians perceived them as racially ineligible.

Lastly, I concluded the dissertation with a discussion of three German pastors of Jewish descent, Hans Ehrenberg, Franz Hildebrandt, and Friedrich Forell. Though Nazis sought their exclusion from German public life, and indeed, harassed them into exile, these three pastors demonstrated great concern for the German churches, the German people, and for Germany itself as a nation. All of them ministered to their communities with the fundamental belief that the gospel message of Christianity could effectually challenge what they believed to be a corrupt and destructive Nazi ideology that had plunged the German churches into conflict and disorder. And while never explicitly naming Hitler, or calling for his removal from office, each directly criticize him as a leader of a disastrous worldview based on exclusion and the debasing of human dignity. As persecuted pastors of Jewish descent, Ehrenberg, Hildebrandt, and Forell each stood in stark contrast to German-Christians in their valuation of Judaism in the

traditions of the Christian churches. Each pastors maintained the foundational role of Judaism in the Christian religion, and attempted to bring Jews and Christians together as spiritual cousins with shared traditions, values and sacred texts. At the same time, evidence of anti-Judaic expressions, particularly in the sermons of Friedrich Forell, may be found to align with the ambivalence about the Jews and Judaism revealed in the sermons of their Confessing Church colleagues. Altogether, the sermons of Ehrenberg, Hildebrandt, and Forell reveal the concerns of pastors caught up in the maelstrom of Nazi persecution against Jews, without identifying themselves as such.

I hope with this research that I have cracked open the door to further explorations of the sermons of the Nazi era so that we might better understand the work of the German churches and their impact on society. Fresh opportunities for research abound. First, an examination of Protestant sermons in the imperial and Weimar periods would help us to understand just how different in tone and frequency were pastors' anti-Judaic expressions, as well as expressions in support of Jews. Do the Protestant sermons of the Nazi era differ significantly than in previous eras? Second, a study of sermons in the decades prior to 1933 will also serve to shed light on the frequency of pastors' critical comments about their state or its leadership. It may well be that the sermons of the Nazi era do not differ markedly from previous eras in voicing criticism of the government.

In terms of further research in the Nazi era, much more work needs to be done on the sermons of Catholic pastors, and also the pastors of the German Christian movement. In fact, to this date no historian has produced a comprehensive analysis of the sermons of either church organization. This research would serve to provide a true basis of comparison between the Confessing Church, the Catholic Church, and the German

Christian movement, in terms of the frequency and tone of sermons antagonistic to and supportive of the Jews and Judaism, as well as the Nazi regime and its leadership.

Lastly, one of the challenges throughout my research was locating sermons by women and confirming their affiliation with the Confessing Church. Unfortunately, I was not able to find any sermons that met my criteria for inclusion in this study. This does not mean that such sermons do not exist. While the number of women Confessing Church preachers is unknown, it is clear that women preached sermons as vicars – or non-ordained pastors – especially as the Second World War began and women began to replace pastors called out to the front.¹²³⁹ An examination of the contributions of women preachers would add considerably to our understanding of the work of the German churches, especially in wartime.

I will end with a quote from the Confessing Church pastor Hans Asmussen, given in 1935, that reflects the frustration, disunity, and inaction that characterized many in the Church Struggle in the Nazi state.

One shouts “Confession,” but plays the role of tactician... One calls himself “Brother,” but denies the mutuality of risk. One shouts “heresy” against Ludwig Müller when this proves to be useful as propaganda, but says nothing if it is not opportune. I cannot go along with this... I don’t consider such a game to be right...

What ought to be done? “Speak the Word, whether timely or inopportune!” God has bound us to serve Him so that we should only witness to His Word, which tolerates no compromise.¹²⁴⁰

¹²³⁹ Theodore Thomas, *Women against Hitler: Christian Resistance in the Third Reich* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1995), 115-116.

¹²⁴⁰ Quoted in Wolfgang Gerlach, *And the Witnesses Were Silent: The Confessing Church and the Persecution of the Jews* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska, 2000), 233.

In this Church Struggle, Confessing Church pastors relied upon the weapon they knew best, the Christian scriptures, and yet for the most part failed to speak out boldly, directly, and with moral incisiveness.

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