

**“THE HOLY REICH”:
RELIGIOUS DIMENSIONS OF NAZI IDEOLOGY, 1919-1945**

Richard Steigmann-Gall

**A Thesis submitted in conformity with the requirement for the Degree of Doctor of
Philosophy, Graduate Department of History, in the University of Toronto**

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Abstract

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Richard Steigmann-Gall

This dissertation explores the religious views of the leadership of the Nazi movement. It combines archival source materials with theories of ideology and secularization to evaluate the ways in which members of the Nazi elite inscribed their movement with religious meaning. This study demonstrates that many leading Nazis, contrary to the scholarly consensus, considered themselves Christian or understood their movement within a Christian frame of reference. Often employing the concept of “positive Christianity,” these Nazis suggested that the contours of their ideology were predicated on a Christian understanding of Germany’s ills and their cure. A program usually regarded as secular in conception — the creation of a cross-class “peoples’ community” embracing antisemitism, anti-marxism and anti-liberalism — was for these Nazis understood in explicitly Christian terms. Far from viewing their movement as a substitute religion, positive Christians believed they were defending a faith menaced by the forces of moral and physical degeneracy.

This study also unveils a struggle over religious identities in the movement. In this contest, “positive Christians” waged a struggle against the party’s “paganists.” The paganists were determined to create a new religion that would move its spiritual center from Jerusalem or Rome to Germany, and would introduce new objects of worship to the *Volk*. However, even as these paganists professed a rejection of Christianity and its dogmas, they esteemed Jesus as someone whose personal “struggle” against the Jews served as inspiration for their own struggle. Paganists cast Luther as both a great national hero and religious reformer, whose struggle against Rome inspired their religious battles. Convinced that they had successfully outlined a new religious belief system, paganists frequently salvaged key aspects of Christian belief for their new, un-Christian faith.

Lastly, this dissertation examines key social and political dimensions of Christianity in Germany between 1919 and 1945. It maps out the rise of a particular variety of religion, “positive Christianity,” and its dissipation. It reveals the contested nature of religious meaning in Nazism — a contest that spanned nearly the entire period of the party’s history — and reveals how this influenced larger contests within the movement about ideology. It demonstrates that while the Nazi party as a whole became increasingly hostile to church institutions, this hostility was not always synonymous with an attack on Christianity.

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1 “The Death of God”: Rethinking Some Debates

Nazism owes nothing to any part of the Western tradition, be it German or not, Catholic or Protestant, Christian.... — Hannah Arendt¹

We will not ... be capable of ‘thinking the Shoah,’ albeit inadequately, if we divorce its genesis and its radical enormity from theological origins. — George Steiner²

The 450th anniversary of Luther’s birth fell only a few months after the Nazi seizure of power in 1933. The celebrations were conducted on a grand scale, on behalf of both the Protestant churches and the Nazi party. One particular celebration took place in Königsberg, the provincial capital of East Prussia. Present for this event were the region’s two highest representatives of the sacred and the secular: *Landesbischof* Friedrich Kessel and *Gauleiter* Erich Koch. Kessel was prominent in the Protestant church struggle, on the pro-Nazi “German Christian” side.³ Koch spoke on the propitious circumstances surrounding Luther’s birthday. He implied that the Nazi seizure of power was an act of divine will, since it so closely preceded this special anniversary. He explicitly compared Hitler and Luther, claiming that both struggled in the name of belief, that both had the love and support of the German nation, and that the Nazis fought with Luther’s spirit.⁴ Given the occasion, one might consider such a speech to be entirely predictable, especially since Nazis were eager to elicit support from a very sizable church-going population in Germany. One might therefore disregard the speech as mere propaganda.

We might pay this occasion no further attention were it not for one important fact: in

¹ “Approaches to the German Problem,” *Partisan Review* 12 (Winter 1945), 96.

² “Through that Glass Darkly,” reprinted in *No Passion Spent: Essays 1978-1996* (London, 1996), 336.

³ Klaus Scholder, *The Churches and the Third Reich*, 2 vols. (London, 1987-88), 1: 213.

⁴ “Luther-Kundgebung im Schloßhof,” *Königsberg-Hartungsche Zeitung*, 20/11/33 (in Bundesarchiv Potsdam [hereafter BAP] R5101/23189/83).

addition to being *Gauleiter* of East Prussia, Koch was also the elected president of the provincial Protestant church synod. Such a position confirmed one's credentials as a good Christian as much as Koch's record in the NSDAP confirmed his Nazism. Yet a question arises: might an exploration of Koch's church career reveal part of a larger Nazi "fifth column" against the clerical establishment, an infiltration of Christian institutions in order to destroy them from within? On the same occasion, Koch made clear his preference for the German Christians, a group long considered an offshoot of the Nazi party who were intent on suffusing Protestant Christianity with the anti-Christian tenets of its parent movement. However, church historians regard Koch as a *bona fide* Christian who had attained his position through a genuine commitment to Protestantism and its institutions. As the leading historian of the churches in the Third Reich put it: "Koch was undoubtedly expressing his own views when he said: 'Outwardly, much has changed. But in our church the Word of Christ according to the doctrine of Luther remains. ... Righteousness, truth and love should guide us here, not merely at the level of charity but also in the joyful and active struggles for our Evangelical confession of faith'."⁵

Contemporaries of Koch as well as historians drew similar conclusions regarding the sincerity of his Christian feelings. According to a prominent Königsberg theologian and leader of the East Prussian Confessing Church, Koch spoke "with the deepest understanding of our church": he consistently dealt with "the central themes of Christianity."⁶

By the end of the war, Koch had gained tremendous notoriety as the Reich Commissar of Ukraine, where he established his credentials as a brutal, ruthless Nazi of the first order. Indeed, he personified Nazi barbarity in the east, playing a leading role in the murder of thousands of Jews and partisans, their deportation to camps, the destruction of their villages, and the virtual

⁵ Scholder, *Churches*, 1: 467.

⁶ Quoted in *ibid.*

enslavement of the remaining Slavic population.⁷ By then he was no longer president of his provincial church synod: in fact he had officially resigned his church membership by 1943. Nonetheless, in his post-war testimony, taken by a public prosecutor in Bielefeld in 1949, Koch would insist: “I held the view that the Nazi idea had to develop from a basic Prussian-Protestant attitude [*Grundhaltung*] and from Luther’s unfinished Reformation.”⁸

In a movement like Nazism, with hundreds of thousands of members and even more supporters, it may not be especially shocking to discover the occasional isolated individual who could embrace two ideological systems long supposed to be polar opposites. Anomalous situations are found in all political movements. It is one thing for such isolated individuals to exist; it is quite another, however, for them reach a position of power and dominance within their milieu, indeed to achieve elite status in that milieu. Such was the case with Koch, whose well-known identity as a Christian in no way hindered his career as a Nazi. Indeed, Koch grew more powerful as German society became more nazified. And so the questions multiply: was Koch an exception? Did other Nazis explain their allegiance and conceive of their goals in specifically Christian terms? And if so, what might this say about the nature of Nazism itself, a movement long believed to be either unrelated to Christianity, or as anti-Christian as it was antisemitic or anticommunist?

Nearly all aspects of Nazism have come under revisionist scrutiny in the last twenty years. Paradigm shifts repeatedly challenge our understanding of its nature. Debates persist as to whether Nazism was modern or anti-modern, progressive or reactionary, capitalist or socialist,

⁷ The magnitude of Koch’s brutality is detailed in Alexander Dallin, *German Rule in Russia: A Study of Occupation Policies* (New York, 1957); Gerald Fleming, *Hitler and the Final Solution* (Berkeley, 1984), 120-34.

⁸ Institut für Zeitgeschichte (hereafter IfZ) MC 1 (15 July 1949).

middle-class or cross-class. Even the centrality of antisemitism to the movement has been questioned. However, one important aspect of our understanding of Nazism and its ideology has remained uncontested: the belief that, by definition, Nazism was unrelated or indeed hostile to Christianity. In this study, I reconsider the nature of this relationship. Through an examination of the religious views of the Nazi party elite, including those commonly referred to as “pagans,” I advance the proposition that the Nazi movement and its ideology contained a strong Christian dimension. This study examines the ways in which many party members drew on certain Christian traditions, as cultural producers of meanings and values, to articulate their vision of Nazism. Taking issue with the prevailing consensus that this was solely a political strategy, I demonstrate that many leading Nazis considered themselves Christian (among other things) and understood their movement (among other ways) within a Christian frame of reference. This study also unveils a struggle over religious meanings in the movement that was part of a larger debate about Nazi ideology itself.

Nazism and church histories

Current scholarship on this question is almost nonexistent. There is, of course, an immense literature on the churches in Nazi Germany, which touches on this issue peripherally by examining clerical views of Nazism. Early works on church and state in this period, while generally painting a picture of ecclesiastical resistance to the “paganism” and anticlericalism of the movement, parenthetically drew a picture of nearly unqualified Nazi opposition to Christian institutions and, by association, to Christian teachings.⁹ Such a view was in part a result of the

⁹ The most prominent works in this vein are John Conway, *The Nazi Persecution of the Churches* (London, 1968) and Hans Buchheim, *Glaubenskrise im Dritten Reich: Drei Kapitel nationalsozialistischer Religionspolitik* (Stuttgart, 1953).

war: the histories of the churches during the Third Reich tended to emphasize those clergymen who opposed the Nazi regime. The flood of books on the Confessing Church (*Bekennende Kirche*) led to the impression that the position of the churches (and their ideologies) toward the Nazi state was one of resistance or opposition.¹⁰ This view was reinforced by the dominance of totalitarianism theory in the immediate post-war period. With the suggestion that Nazism was totalitarian — that it made a “total claim” on the society it ruled and forbade “institutional space for any alternative”¹¹ — church histories presented a picture of Christian resistance by virtue of simple existence. In fact, among the strongest supporters of totalitarianism theory were church historians, who saw in this theory an explanation for the general lack of resistance by the churches regarding Nazi activity outside the direct sphere of the church. Klaus Scholder, the dean of German church historians, makes this argument plainly: “[T]he church struggle was exclusively concerned with the confession and church order. The Confessing Church had never left any doubt that otherwise it had [sic] unconditional political loyalty to Führer and Reich.” Yet Scholder goes on to state that “the church could not have attacked National Socialism as a religion more effectively.... [T]he struggle for the freedom and purity of the proclamation of the gospel was at the same time a political battle against the forces which supported National Socialist rule.”¹² The use of totalitarianism theory also meant that church histories eschewed any ideological comparison of Nazism and elements of Christian thought. By definition totalitarianism theory looks to style instead of substance, to the form of Nazism rather than its social basis or ideological content.

¹⁰ Besides the works cited above, there is Hubert Locke (ed.), *The Church Confronts the Nazis: Barmen then and now* (New York, 1984) and more recently Theodore Thomas, *Women Against Hitler: Christian Resistance in the Third Reich* (Westport CT, 1995).

¹¹ Ian Kershaw, “Totalitarianism Revisited: Nazism and Stalinism in Comparative Perspective,” *Tel Aviver Jahrbuch für deutsche Geschichte* 23 (1994), 32.

¹² Klaus Scholder, “The Church Struggle,” in idem., *A Requiem for Hitler and Other New Perspectives on the German Church Struggle* (London, 1989), 103-04.

Despite attempts since the end of the Cold War to resuscitate totalitarianism theory, it has been convincingly overturned by more recent social histories of Nazi Germany. Several studies have pointed to the Nazis' deep concern with public opinion and (at least partial) consensus building as a precondition for their activities.¹³ Robert Gellately has demonstrated how the Gestapo, perhaps the most infamous symbol of totalitarianism in the popular imagination, was in fact heavily dependent on public participation for its success.¹⁴ Detlev Peukert and Nathan Stoltzfus have shown that it was possible to mount popular resistance in Nazi Germany, thereby emphasizing how rarely such resistance actually occurred.¹⁵ Significantly, some of the first studies to question the totalitarian quality of Nazi rule were examinations of churches written by non-church historians.¹⁶ By pointing to instances where Christians successfully challenged the Nazi state, such scholarship problematized the standard arguments for inactivity on other occasions.

Such studies, in turn, have had an impact on church historians. With the passing of time, more critical works have emerged examining churches and prominent theologians who were supportive of the Nazi movement.¹⁷ Several scholars have demonstrated the ambivalent and

¹³ Pathbreaking in this direction is Ian Kershaw's *Popular Opinion and Political Dissent in the Third Reich: Bavaria, 1933-1945* (Oxford, 1983). In addition, see Nathan Stoltzfus, *Resistance of the Heart: Inter-marriage and the Rosenstrasse Protest in Nazi Germany* (New York, 1996).

¹⁴ Robert Gellately, *The Gestapo and German Society: Enforcing Racial Policy 1933-1945* (Oxford, 1990).

¹⁵ Detlev Peukert, *Inside Nazi Germany: Conformity, Opposition, and Racism in Everyday Life* (New Haven, 1987); Stoltzfus, *Resistance*.

¹⁶ Examples include Jeremy Noakes, "The Oldenburg Crucifix Struggle of November 1936: A Case of Opposition in the Third Reich," in Peter Stachura (ed.), *The Shaping of the Nazi State* (London, 1978); Ian Kershaw, *Popular Opinion*.

¹⁷ See, for instance, Robert Ericksen, *Theologians under Hitler: Gerhard Kittel, Paul Althaus and Emmanuel Hirsch* (New Haven, 1985); Ernst Klee, *'Die SA Jesu Christi': Die Kirche im Banne Hitlers* (Frankfurt a.M., 1989); Nikolaus Preradovich and Joseph Stingle (eds.), *'Gott segne den Führer': Die Kirchen im Dritten Reich* (Leoni, 1986); J.R.C. Wright, *'Above Parties': The Political Attitudes of the German Protestant Church Leadership 1918-1933* (Oxford, 1974). An excellent overview can be found in Robert Ericksen and Susannah Heschel, "The German Churches Face Hitler," *Tel Aviver Jahrbuch für deutsche Geschichte* 23 (1994): 433-459.

often positive stand that even the Confessing Church took toward the regime.¹⁸ But however penetrating these works have been, they are all in agreement that, no matter how pro-Nazi certain Christians may have been, Nazism itself remained firmly anti-Christian. Scholars attempting to explain this disjuncture generally put forward one of two hypotheses: either such Christians deceived themselves, or they were not truly Christian. The works of Klaus Scholder and John Conway illustrate the first approach. Assessing the fact that the Confessing Church made frequent declarations of loyalty to Hitler, Scholder suggests that “the great majority of the churches persistently refused to see the consequences.”¹⁹ Conway similarly argues for “the almost incredible blindness of churchmen to the spread of Nazi totalitarianism.”²⁰ Doris Bergen typifies the second approach. As one of the few to examine seriously the views of the German Christians (*Deutsche Christen*), Bergen has demonstrated that her subjects were not part of a cynical Nazi strategy, as is often assumed, but were sincere adherents of their church. She writes that the German Christians “were less radically removed from the mainstream of German Protestant thought than is often suggested. ... [T]hey were concerned about ritual practice, spiritual meaning, the church.” However, in the next paragraph Bergen claims: “[T]hey created a new religion, based on fundamentally non-Christian and anti-Christian tenets.”²¹ These two components of Bergen’s argument are highly problematic or even irreconcilable: how much false consciousness is required for millions of sincere Christians to create a movement so thoroughly

¹⁸ Shelley Baranowski, *The Confessing Church, Conservative Elites, and the Nazi State* (Lewiston NY, 1986); Victoria Barnett, *For the Soul of the People: Protestant Protest Against Hitler* (New York, 1992) (title notwithstanding); Wolfgang Gerlach, *Als die Zeugen schwiegen: Bekennende Kirche und die Juden* (Berlin, 1987).

¹⁹ Scholder, *Requiem*, 109.

²⁰ Conway, *Persecution*, 14.

²¹ Doris Bergen, “One Reich, One People, One Church: The German Christian Movement and the People’s Church, 1932-1945” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of North Carolina, 1991), 38. While this passage is not included in her subsequent book, *Twisted Cross: The German Christian Movement in the Third Reich* (Chapel Hill, 1996), the argument it makes is present throughout: for instance, in her view that the German Christian Church was “ultimately non-Christian” (192).

anti-Christian? But Bergen's argument does reflect a wider assumption about the German Christians, and by extension about prominent Nazis like Koch who were active in church life: that even while they adhered to all the requisite criteria for Christian religiosity — church attendance, baptism, communion, etc. — they still served to destroy Christianity, whether they actually knew it or not.

Other questions about an ideological relationship between Nazism and certain Christian traditions concern the historical roots of Nazi antisemitism. Here again we again find a vast literature and a debate that shows no sign of subsiding.²² Church historians traditionally have said little on this subject,²³ although some have suggested that a “final solution” was in store for Christians as well as Jews. When describing Nazi anticlericalism, Scholder explicitly refers to a “final solution” awaiting Christians.²⁴ John Conway, without employing the same phrase, makes a similar argument, pointing to the killing of Polish clergy or the Nazi “tabula rasa” of the Warthegau to suggest that a similar fate was awaiting Christians in Germany, without considering that Polish clergy may have been killed as members of the Polish elite, not as clergy.²⁵ Conway cites “failure of brotherly love towards the Jews,” rather than active contribution to antisemitism, as the churches' greatest failure: theirs was a sin of omission, not

²² Just a few of the many important works include Hermann Greive, *Geschichte des modernen Antisemitismus in Deutschland* (Darmstadt, 1983); Jacob Katz, *From Prejudice to Destruction: Anti-Semitism, 1700-1933* (Cambridge MA, 1980); Peter Pulzer, *The Rise of Political Anti-Semitism in Germany and Austria*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge MA, 1988); Reinhard Rürup, *Emancipation und Antisemitismus: Studien zur 'Judenfrage' in der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft* (Göttingen, 1975); Uriel Tal, *Christians and Jews in Germany: Religion, Politics and Ideology in the Second Reich 1870-1914* (Ithaca, 1975).

²³ Aside from the works cited above, see the recent issue of *Central European History*, entirely devoted to the subject: James Harris et al., “Symposium: Christian Religion and Anti-Semitism in Modern German History,” *Central European History* 27 (1994). Doris Bergen, who contributes an article to this issue, stands out as a contemporary church historian very concerned with antisemitism.

²⁴ Scholder, *Requiem*, 112, 116. This interpretation finds its advocates outside church history as well. Daniel Goldhagen maintains, *a la* Scholder, that the Nazis hated Christianity as much, if not more, than they hated the Jews: “[T]he climax of this apocalyptic enterprise [was] the eradication of the Christian churches.” Daniel Goldhagen, “False Witness,” *New Republic* (17 April 1989), 40.

²⁵ Conway, *Persecution*, 175, 291-327.

commission.²⁶

Susannah Heschel argues against the notion of a Nazi “final solution” for Christianity. She writes: “Such conclusions are possible only when disconfirming data is ignored ... a problem that has plagued the field of church history until recently, particularly in Germany.”²⁷ Whereas some church historians remain convinced that the Nazis were as anti-Christian as they were antisemitic, others take a dissenting position. One is the theologian Franklin Littell, who rejects the view of the churches as victims of Nazism, instead showing how they contributed to the prevalent antisemitism of the period: “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.”²⁸ Littell casts a critical eye on the churches, but finds it difficult to cast his gaze on the belief system they represented: “The conduct of the masses of baptized Christians covered the scale from enthusiastic apostasy to accommodation.”²⁹ In other words, had these Christians remained Christian, their eyes would have been open to the evils of Nazism. Such a position does not impugn Littell’s commitment to fighting antisemitism within and without the church. It is, however, reflective of a hesitance among church historians to consider the origins of Nazi antisemitism in their faiths, by suggesting that Christians on the “wrong side of the history books” were, in effect, not truly Christian.

²⁶ Ibid., 261-67. This thesis was affirmed by Conway thirty years later, when he persuasively critiqued the “hagiographical” impulse in much church writing while simultaneously defending the churches’ silence regarding the Jews: “[A]ny such call for solidarity and sympathy with the oppressed Jews would probably only have revealed how ineffective was the churches’ ability to mobilize their following in such a disputed cause.” See John Conway, “Coming to Terms with the Past: Interpreting the German Church Struggles 1933-1990,” *German History* 16 (1998), 388. Here Conway emphasizes the “weakness” of the churches in the face of Nazi totalitarianism. (ibid.) However, Nathan Stoltzfus and Ian Kershaw (n. 13 above) have both demonstrated that weak churches and even weaker wives of Jews could effectively counter Nazi terror under seemingly impossible circumstances.

²⁷ Susannah Heschel, “When Jesus was an Aryan: The Protestant Church and Antisemitic Propaganda,” in Susannah Heschel and Robert Ericksen (eds.), *German Churches and the Holocaust*, forthcoming (Philadelphia, 1999). My thanks to Professor Heschel for making the entire manuscript available to me.

²⁸ Franklin Littell, *The Crucifixion of the Jews* (New York, 1962), 45.

²⁹ Ibid.

Scholars of antisemitism proper have, on the whole, been more interested in pointing to the influence of particular strands of Christian thought, though there has been broad disagreement on how essential it was to later racial antisemitism. However, a growing number of scholars are beginning to rethink earlier assumptions that religious antisemitism played no part in the formation of its racialist counterpart. For instance, Peter Pulzer writes in the introduction to his revised classic on antisemitism: “I am more strongly convinced than I was when I wrote the book that a tradition of religiously-inspired Jew hatred ... was a necessary condition for the success of anti-Semitic propaganda, even when expressed in non-religious terms and absorbed by those no longer religiously observant.”³⁰ Some, like Gavin Langmuir, have even suggested that antisemitism (as opposed to anti-Judaism) began in the Christian Middle Ages, not in the “secular” nineteenth century.³¹ One of the most prominent voices arguing in this direction is Jacob Katz, who observes: “[M]odern anti-Semitism turned out to be a continuation of the premodern rejection of Judaism by Christianity, even when it renounced any claim to be legitimized by it or even professed to be antagonistic to Christianity.”³² Saul Friedländer sees Katz’s argumentation as “excessive,” but nonetheless agrees with him that Christian antisemitism played a central role in shaping Nazi antisemitism. Citing the chimerical nature of the Nazis’ antisemitism, its ascription of demonic and supernatural powers to the Jews, Friedländer argues: “The centrality of the Jews in this phantasmic universe can be explained only

³⁰ Pulzer, *Political Anti-Semitism*, xxii. Pulzer also points out that “Religious roots were not only Catholic; indeed in Germany active and aggressive anti-Semitism was commoner among Protestants” (xxii).

³¹ Gavin Langmuir, *Toward a Definition of Antisemitism* (Berkeley, 1990); idem., *History, Religion and Antisemitism* (Berkeley, 1990). Jerome Friedman makes a somewhat similar argument, positing the Spanish Inquisition as the originating moment: see his “Jewish Conversion, Spanish Pure Blood Laws and Reformation: A Revisionist View of Racial and Religious Antisemitism,” *Sixteenth Century Journal* 18 (1987): 3–29.

³² Katz, *Prejudice*, 319.

by its roots in the Christian tradition.”³³

Such views are gaining wider acceptance, but historians have not taken the extra step to examine other components of Nazi ideology — antimarxism and antiliberalism most conspicuously — and their possible links with different varieties of Christianity. While the findings of these studies may be regarded as parts of a larger picture, illustrating a broader relationship between Nazism and Christian traditions, such a connection has been overlooked by mainstream German historiography.

Scholarship on Nazism itself has similarly overlooked this question. The most important reason for this in the immediate post-war period is what Ian Kershaw calls the “moral dimension” in Nazi historiography.³⁴ Personified by historians like Gerhard Ritter and Friedrich Meinecke, this school of thought regarded Nazism as a “moral disease,” the result of a Nietzschean “Death of God” brought about by European secularization and the ensuing atomization of society. Such an interpretation, rooted in a moralist historical philosophy, also served an immediate social purpose. The diagnosis of Nazism as moral crisis meant that the prognosis for German society’s post-war recovery could be as simple as a “return” to Christian values.³⁵ This argument also obviated the need to seek the social roots of Nazism’s popularity — thereby refuting suggestions that Hitler was more than an aberration in the course of German history. By pointing to instances of Christian resistance to Nazism, such scholarship provided a potent symbol of national regeneration, the *Stunde Null* — thereby refuting historians of the victorious powers and their claims that Nazism was a disease encompassing *all* Germans.

³³ Saul Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews: The Years of Persecution, 1933-1939* (New York, 1997), 85.

³⁴ Ian Kershaw, *The Nazi Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives of Interpretation*, 2nd ed. (London, 1989), 14-17.

³⁵ This view was not limited to a few historians, but rather reflected a much larger trend among conservative Germans, both Protestant and Catholic. See Maria Mitchell, “Materialism and Secularism: CDU Politicians and National Socialism, 1945-1949,” *Journal of Modern History* 67 (1995): 278-308.

This was a popular argument outside the historical guild as well. Some of this century's most prominent philosophers made it part of the intellectual landscape of the post-war period. Hannah Arendt, the "philosophical counterpart" to Gerhard Ritter,³⁶ allowed for no ambiguity when she argued: "Nazism owes nothing to any part of the Western tradition, be it German or not, Catholic or Protestant, Christian, Greek or Roman. ... Ideologically speaking, Nazism begins with no traditional basis at all, and it would be better to realize the danger of this radical negation of any tradition, which was the main feature of Nazism from the beginning."³⁷ The immediate post-war context for this "moral dimension" has disappeared, but its enduring popularity is still in evidence today. For instance, the social critic Roger Scruton argues that Nazism was entirely predicated on a "Death of God" brought about by thinkers as different as Nietzsche and Marx: "God is an illusion; so too is the divine spark in man... [T]he machine which is established for the efficient production of Utopia has total license to kill. Nothing is sacred. ... Such is the liturgical language of the religion of the Antichrist."³⁸

Historical scholarship has challenged most aspects of the "moralist" paradigm. Nevertheless, this paradigm has retained much of its currency in contemporary analysis. Paradoxically, one of the most innovative scholars of Nazism, Detlev Peukert, reflects this situation perfectly. Renowned for his unique contributions to German historiography and refusal to tow party lines, Peukert has written: "[W]e view the roots of modern racism as lying in the problem of legitimation in a secularized world. A secularized world no longer provided final

³⁶ Steven Aschheim, "Hannah Arendt and Karl Jaspers: Friendship, Catastrophe and the Possibilities of German-Jewish Dialogue," in idem., *Culture and Catastrophe: Germans and Jewish Confrontations with National Socialism and Other Crises* (New York, 1996), 112.

³⁷ Hannah Arendt, "Approaches to the German Problem," quoted in Aschheim, *Catastrophe*, 112. As Aschheim points out, Arendt dismissed any thoughts of arguing the contrary: "[O]nly the experts with their fondness for the spoken or written word and incomprehension of political realities have taken these utterances of the Nazis at face and interpreted them as the consequence of certain German or European traditions." (ibid.)

³⁸ Quoted in Steven Aschheim, *The Nietzsche Legacy in Germany, 1890-1990* (Berkeley, 1992), 322. Aschheim briefly surveys other philosophers who adhere to this line: Aschheim describes Scruton as a "conservative Christian"

answers: it had no way of pointing beyond itself. Once the facade of nontranscendent everyday mythology had been shattered by crisis, the search was on for ‘final solutions’.”³⁹ Of course Peukert’s conceptualization of German history ran directly contrary to Ritter’s. But as a subscriber to Weber’s definition of modernity, Peukert also adhered to the classic Weberian insistence on the hostility between modernity and religion. Nazism’s rejection of religion therefore became an *a priori* assumption.

In emphasizing the modern, revolutionary character of the movement, some of the most recent scholarship restates the earlier view that Nazism was secular, at best unrelated to Christianity.⁴⁰ Scholars who address the modernity of Nazism pay little attention to the mysticism of a few party ideologues, whose anti-Christian credentials were based on attempts to imbue their party with a recrudescing Nordic paganism. They instead emphasize the dynamic modernity of the Nazi “new right” (or “fascist aesthetic”), situating it against the traditional, aristocratic, reactionary and — most importantly — religious quality of the “old right.” Again, Nazism is thought to bear no relation to Christianity.⁴¹ Regardless of how one arrives at this assumption — either through Ritter’s moralist, Peukert’s functionalist or Zitelmann’s modernist approach — many of the theoretical premises underpinning this view are in need of a critical reassessment.

(bid, 321).

³⁹ Detlev Peukert, “The Genesis of the ‘Final Solution’ from the Spirit of Science,” in Thomas Childers and Jane Caplan (eds.), *Reevaluating the Third Reich* (New York, 1993), 247.

⁴⁰ A useful introduction to this latest departure is Michael Prinz and Rainer Zitelmann (eds.), *Nationalsozialismus und Modernisierung*, 2nd ed. (Darmstadt, 1994). One of the best critiques of the new emphasis on modernity is Norbert Frei, “Wie modern war der Nationalsozialismus?,” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 19 (1993): 367-387. For an attempt to synthesize this modern/anti-modern dialectic — even before the debate really took off — see Jeffrey Herf, *Reactionary Modernism: Technology, Culture and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich* (Cambridge, 1984).

⁴¹ Indirectly, the recent spate of works on the eugenics and euthanasia programs reinforces this view, since, unlike the destruction of labor unions or the parliamentary system, the introduction of eugenics legislation was not a reactive negation of previous gains made under Weimar. The best English-language introduction is Michael Burleigh, *Death and Deliverance: ‘Euthanasia’ in Germany, 1900 to 1945* (Cambridge, 1994).

Secularization and nationalism

The most obvious theory in need of rethinking is the secularization thesis, or rather that variant of it which suggests that, through the twin advent of democratization and industrialization, Christianity gradually lost its significance for modern western societies, to be replaced by new objects of worship such as the nation, science, or even sport.⁴² However, due in part to the current resurgence in religious beliefs and practices, scholars are beginning to reassess their presumptions about the historical irrelevance of religion, recognizing its formative power in past societies.⁴³ The coexistence of a “premodern” ideology like Christianity with such modern forms as the assembly line or science has proven quite durable in recent years. Contemporary scholars are not only proving that modernity and religion are compatible; they are now arguing that religion has actually been a vital ingredient of modernity. Bryan Turner, a leading sociologist of religion, has rethought his long-standing assumption about this relationship, specifically as it concerns Protestantism: “I adopted a fairly strong version of the secularisation thesis, arguing that indeed religious symbols had lost their force.... I would now take a rather different position on this problem. ... I believe that we should regard Protestantism as not only one source of modernisation, but also its defence ... as the cultural seedbed of modernity.”⁴⁴

Returning to Peukert, we can certainly recognize the essentially modern nature of the Nazis’ goals. Scientific and industrial advance, as well as Nazi coordination of the state

⁴² Typical examples of this school of thought are Owen Chadwick, *The Secularization of the European Mind in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1975) and Bryan Wilson, *Religion in Secular Society* (London, 1966).

⁴³ James Beckford, *Religion and Advanced Industrial Society* (London, 1989); Steve Bruce (ed.), *Religion and Modernization: Sociologists and Historians Debate the Secularization Thesis* (Oxford, 1992); José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago, 1994).

⁴⁴ Bryan Turner, *Religion and Social Theory*, 2nd ed. (London, 1991), xvi-xvii.

apparatus, were obvious prerequisites to genocide on a mass scale. But this new emphasis on the modernity of Nazism too often leads to a neglect of the preexisting ideologies and belief systems through which Germans perceived the crisis of Weimar. Unless Nazism is to be interpreted as a generic response to the universal problems besetting all modern societies, we must consider the inherited “ways of seeing” through which historical subjects mediated material reality.⁴⁵ Positing the modernity of the Nazi movement, in other words, does not preclude the possible role played by religion.

Secularization theory always played a very explicit role in studies of nationalism, for Germany more than any other European nation.⁴⁶ George Mosse, among others, has specifically described Nazism as a “political religion,” one in which the secularist wine of personal charisma and racialism filled the old bottles of piety and spirituality left empty by Germany’s apostasy.⁴⁷ Fritz Stern’s study of three proto-Nazi intellectuals argues that apostate academics created a Germanic religion “which hid beneath pious allusions to ... the Bible a most thoroughgoing secularization. The religious *tone* remained, even after the religious faith and the religious canons had disappeared.”⁴⁸ According to this argument, the Nazis’ use of physical space and prophetic language was consciously derived from religious sources. Indeed, Hitler quite freely admitted that the idea for Nazi night rallies came from his own Catholic upbringing.⁴⁹ Yet the

⁴⁵ A point also made by Mark Roseman in his “National Socialism and Modernisation,” in Richard Bessel (ed.), *Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany: Comparisons and Contrasts* (Cambridge, 1996), 219-20.

⁴⁶ Some prominent examples of this view include Carlton Hayes, *Nationalism: A Religion* (New York, 1960) and Hans Kohn, *The Idea of Nationalism* (New York, 1967).

⁴⁷ George Mosse, *The Nationalization of the Masses* (New York, 1975). Mosse has by no means been alone in seeing Nazism as a surrogate religion. See Robert Pois, *National Socialism and the Religion of Nature* (London, 1985); James Rhodes, *The Hitler Movement: A Modern Millenarian Revolution* (Stanford, 1980); Klaus Vondung, *Magie und Manipulation: Ideologischer Kult und politische Religion des Nationalsozialismus* (Göttingen, 1971).

⁴⁸ Fritz Stern, *The Politics of Cultural Despair: A Study in the Rise of the Germanic Ideology* (Berkeley, 1974), xxv (emphasis in the original). While Stern’s conventional intellectual approach came under attack from a later generation of social historians, the secularization theory underpinning it went unchallenged.

⁴⁹ Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, trans. Ralph Manheim (Boston, 1962), 475.

focus on its ability to mimic a religion gives too much priority to the *form* of Nazi politics, thereby precluding any need to examine what Nazism actually stood for. Such a focus also ignores the findings of social historians who in the last twenty years have provided very detailed analyses of who did and did not join (or vote for) the Nazi party. As David Blackbourn has argued, Nazi ritual was a successful only when it played to an audience receptive to the message — that is, “where it went with the grain of particular experiences and interests.”⁵⁰

Not all studies of radical nationalism in pre-Nazi Germany have aligned themselves with the “political religion” concept. However, whereas some have alluded to the role played by certain Christian traditions, most do not address the issue head-on. The Protestant court chaplain Adolf Stöcker, creator of the Christian Social Party and famous Kaiserreich antisemite, has frequently been cited as a Nazi antecedent: his was the first antisemitic political party, as well as the first party to harness the growing political resentment of the lower middle class.⁵¹ George Mosse points out that, like the Nazis, Stöcker “also started out as a social reformer interested in bettering the lot of the working man within the framework of a national socialism.” In Stöcker’s message, “anti-Semitism predominated and his call for reform (including the abolition of the Stock Exchange) made its appeal to the lower bourgeois.”⁵² No existing study of Stöcker, perhaps because of limitations inherent in the genre of biography, broadens its analysis to explore a possible relationship between his *religion* and Nazism.

⁵⁰ David Blackbourn, “The Politics of Demagogy in Imperial Germany,” reprinted in idem., *Populists and Patricians: Essays in Modern German History* (London, 1987), 218. David Welsh makes a similar argument vis-à-vis Nazi propaganda: it only worked among those already converted. See his *The Third Reich: Politics and Propaganda* (London, 1993).

⁵¹ See, for example, Herman Lebovics, *Social Conservatism and the Middle Classes in Germany, 1914-1933* (Princeton, 1969); Pulzer, *Political Anti-Semitism*, 83-119; Kurt Sontheimer, *Antidemokratisches Denken in der Weimarer Republik* (Munich, 1968); Walter Struve, *Elites Against Democracy: Leadership Ideals in Bourgeois Political Thought in Germany, 1890-1933* (Princeton, 1973), 78-85.

⁵² George Mosse, *Germans and Jews: The Right, the Left, and the Search for a ‘Third Force’ in Pre-Nazi Germany* (New York, 1970), 142.

In his study of the radical nationalist Pan-German League (*Alldeutscher Verband*), Roger Chickering comes closer than many to positing an ideological relationship between Nazism and a variety of Christianity. At one point, he argues: “In its *ideology* as well as in its composition, the Pan-German League was, protests to the contrary notwithstanding, a distinctly Protestant phenomenon.” Later Chickering asserts: “The Pan-German League anticipated the Nazis in much of its program and rhetoric. ... The conflicts between the Pan-Germans and the Nazis revolved less around ideological matters than they did around questions of authority and style.”⁵³ But Chickering does not offer any wider conceptualization of the relationship between religion and nationalism. Only with the work of Wolfgang Altgeld and Helmut Walser Smith has religion firmly been brought back into the picture of German nationalism.⁵⁴ These authors have successfully shown that German nationalism, usually regarded as a purely secular affair, was in fact infused with Protestant meaning. A nationalism aimed against religious minorities (Catholics, and also Jews in Altgeld’s study) is reconnected with the religion of the majority. Altgeld and Smith have also demonstrated that nationalism can be quite compatible with Christianity: contrary to the view of nationalism superseding religion, religion continued its influence and gave shape to nationalist movements.⁵⁵ Their work illuminates the potential for addressing the same issue for the Nazi movement, which was similarly aimed against ultramontane Catholics and Jews and similarly based on a disproportionate Protestant membership and electorate.

⁵³ Roger Chickering, *We Men Who Feel Most German: A Cultural Study of the Pan-German League, 1886-1914* (London, 1984), 138 (emphasis added), 185, 300.

⁵⁴ Wolfgang Altgeld, *Katholizismus, Protestantismus, Judentum: Über religiös begründete Gegensätze und nationalreligiöse Ideen in der Geschichte des deutschen Nationalismus* (Mainz, 1992); Helmut Walser Smith, *German Nationalism and Religious Conflict: Culture, Ideology, Politics, 1870-1914* (Princeton, 1995).

⁵⁵ For a very incisive deconstruction of the “political religion” concept of nationalism, see Peter Walkenhorst, “Nationalismus als ‘Politische Religion?’ Zur religiösen Dimension nationalistischer Ideologie im Kaiserreich,” in Olaf Blaschke and Frank-Michael Kuhlemann (eds.), *Religion im Kaiserreich: Milieus — Mentalitäten — Krisen* (Gütersloh, 1996).

In other settings, scholars have readily observed how nationalism has had a great deal to do with organized religion.⁵⁶ As Pedro Ramet argues in the east European context: “[W]hen a religious organization becomes involved in nationalism, there is a strong tendency to ‘spiritualize’ the concept of national destiny and to infuse the preservation of ethnic culture with intrinsic value.”⁵⁷ This observation seems self-evident, but its underlying premise has long been overlooked in the German case. One can point to two reasons for this oversight. First, because of the neo-Weberian functionalism dominant in the German historical profession in the last thirty years — itself a product of the American post-war reconstruction of German universities — religion had largely been omitted from the mainstream of German historiography, especially when compared with English or French historiographies.⁵⁸ This has had less to do with the religious predisposition of German society than with the theoretical predisposition of German academics (Thomas Nipperdey being a notable exception).⁵⁹ Of course there have been many works dealing with German religion, but until recently these have remained confined to journals dedicated to church history or theology.

This brings us to the second reason for the neglect of religion: the nature of religious studies in Germany. Some years ago Wolfgang Schieder observed that “the history of religion

⁵⁶ Pedro Ramet (ed.), *Religion and Nationalism in Soviet and East European Politics* (Durham NC, 1989); William Hutchison and Hartmut Lehmann (eds.), *Many are Chosen: Divine Election and Western Nationalism* (Minneapolis, 1994).

⁵⁷ Ramet, *Religion*, 7.

⁵⁸ The boom of religious studies in mainstream French historiography is especially noteworthy, and points to a growing trend of “bringing religion back in” to French history at large. See the review article by Caroline Ford, “Religion and Popular Culture in Modern Europe,” *Journal of Modern History* 65 (1993): 152-175. For English historiography, religion always was, and remains to this day, a central concern. See the following reviews: Hugh McLeod, “Recent Studies in Victorian Religious History,” *Victorian Studies* 21 (1978): 245-255; idem., “Varieties of Victorian Belief,” *Journal of Modern History* 64 (1992): 321-337.

⁵⁹ See Nipperdey’s *Deutsche Geschichte 1866-1918*, 2 vols. (Munich, 1990-92), in which religion is “brought back in” to the mainstream of his grand master narrative. Compare with Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte*, 3 vols. (Munich, 1987-95), where there is an almost total absence of religion.

has become the specialist preserve of traditional ecclesiastical history, which, as a branch of theology, is based in the theological faculties of German universities. These theological faculties are to a far greater extent than their counterparts in Great Britain closely tied to the Christian churches, indeed to a large degree controlled by them.”⁶⁰ In other words, the very structure of religious studies departments in Germany has served to prevent the same type of scholarship that has flourished in other European contexts.

Schieder’s recommendation for rectifying this situation is prescient: “The question of the relationship between social history and the history of religion, therefore, is not one of introducing social-historical perspectives into ecclesiastical history and the sociology of religion, but rather the reverse, of incorporating religion into modern social history’s area of study. ... [S]ocial history cannot limit itself to the study of the institutionalized forms of religion alone.”⁶¹ Schieder himself can take much of the credit for the progress that has been made since he issued his call for a social history of German religion.⁶² This field has lately turned into a growth industry: David Blackbourn’s work on Marian apparitions in Catholic Germany provides great insight into the endurance of religious attachment,⁶³ whereas Lucian Hölscher’s work on the Hanoverian bourgeoisie and Gangolf Hübinger’s work on the Protestant roots of German liberalism have proven that in Protestant Germany this was no “straightforwardly secular age.”⁶⁴ This trend is

⁶⁰ Wolfgang Schieder, “Religion in the Social History of the Modern World: A German Perspective,” *European Studies Review* 12 (1982), 290.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 293-295.

⁶² Most obviously by editing two important volumes on religion and society: Wolfgang Schieder (ed.), *Volksreligiosität in der modernen Sozialgeschichte* (Göttingen, 1986); *idem.*, *Religion und Gesellschaft im 19. Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart, 1993).

⁶³ David Blackbourn, *Marpingen: Apparitions of the Virgin Mary in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Oxford, 1993).

⁶⁴ David Blackbourn, “The Catholic Church in Europe since the French Revolution: A Review Article,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 33 (1991), 779. See Lucian Hölscher, “Die Religion des Bürgers: Bürgerliche Frömmigkeit und protestantische Kirche im 19. Jahrhundert,” *Historische Zeitschrift* 250 (1990): 595-630; *idem.*, “Bürgerliche Religiosität im protestantischen Deutschland des 19. Jahrhunderts,” in Wolfgang Schieder

due in part to the influence of anthropology, which has helped redefine religion, moving away from the conventional focus on institutions (i.e., the church), toward an understanding of religion as culture.⁶⁵ Uncoupling religious history from church history has also led to the revised view of anticlericalism as a struggle against religious establishments rather than religious beliefs.⁶⁶

This is not to say that secularization is a myth. In what follows, secularization theory is not rejected out of hand. But neither is it accepted without reservation. Rather, it is viewed as a *partial* phenomenon, whereby differences in class, gender, geography and region all serve to impede and even block the loss of religious feeling. The current tendency to deconstruct secularization theory has led to some important insights, not least that there is no single way of measuring religiosity. (For instance, just as church-going is often more a secular than a sacred event, in which the social function may outweigh the stated spiritual purpose, a drop in church attendance can also be a secular event in which social context, not a loss of religious feeling, is the operative factor.) Nevertheless, whereas the predictions of religion's demise are now seen to have been premature, in some instances religious feeling has dropped. Returning to the example of Germany, we need not subscribe to Owen Chadwick's notion of a blanket secularization to recognize that the Protestant organized working classes were very secular, both in the institutional sense — lack of church attendance — and in the ideological sense — adoption of a new, Marxist *Weltanschauung* with a tendency to atheism.⁶⁷

(ed.), *Religion und Gesellschaft*; Gangolf Hübinger, *Kulturprotestantismus und Politik: Zum Verhältnis von Liberalismus und Protestantismus im wilhelminischen Deutschland* (Tübingen, 1993). For a social history of Protestant pastors, see Oliver Janz, *Bürger besonderer Art: Evangelischer Pfarrer in Preussen 1850-1914* (Berlin, 1994); on Protestant and Catholic milieus, see Blaschke and Kuhlemann (eds.), *Religion im Kaiserreich*.

⁶⁵ Most influential has been Clifford Geertz: see his "Religion as a Cultural System" and "Ideology as a Cultural System," both in idem., *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York, 1973). Ford, "Religion and Popular Culture" demonstrate that interest in the non-institutional forms of Christianity in Europe is growing.

⁶⁶ Hugh McLeod, *Religion and the People of Western Europe 1789-1970* (Oxford, 1990). Recent work on anticlericalism heavily emphasizes this point: see especially René Rémond (ed.), "Special Issue: Anticlericalism," *European Studies Review* 13 (1983).

⁶⁷ See the standard work by Vernon Lidtke, "Social Class and Secularisation in Imperial Germany: The Working

Nazi ideology: bricolage or coherent system?

In addition to reevaluating secularization, another theoretical premise of this study is that ideology must be taken seriously. On balance, ideology has been downplayed in most of the literature on Nazism. Early literature on the origins of Nazism tended to treat ideology in a teleological fashion, lending support to the view that Nazism was inevitable.⁶⁸ Indeed, some of the very first attempts to find the roots of Nazism looked back to Martin Luther himself, ascribing to Luther's erastian "Two Kingdoms" doctrine the ease with which the Nazis seized and held on to power.⁶⁹ The teleological tone of these studies not only resulted in a subsequent hesitance to take Nazi ideology seriously, but also turned scholars away from any attempt to examine the role religious traditions may have played within it. Another reaction was to seek the roots of Nazism in social and economic change, as a way of concentrating on material causalities instead of the hazy concept of the "German mind." However, this has resulted in the current tendency to regard Nazi ideology as an assembly of dissociated ideas or an opportunistic sleight of hand meant to dupe the German people.

Each of these views is accommodated in the functionalist school of Nazi historiography, which tends to emphasize Nazi party factionalism and infighting. The idea that the Nazi party was a jumble of competing offices and bureaucracies has become a cornerstone of even the more

Classes," *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 25 (1980): 21-40. See also the comparative work of Hugh McLeod, *Piety and Poverty: Working-Class Religion in Berlin, London and New York 1870-1914* (New York, 1996).

⁶⁸ Most often cited as examples in this regard are George Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology: Intellectual Origins of the Third Reich* (London, 1964) and Stern, *Cultural Despair*.

⁶⁹ Some typical titles include William McGovern, *From Luther to Hitler: The History of Fascist-Nazi Political Philosophy* (Boston, 1941) and Rohan Butler, *The Roots of National Socialism* (New York, 1942).

convincing analyses of the Third Reich; but it has also become something of a cliché.⁷⁰ The current tendency to emphasize rivalries within the Nazi regime leaves the reader wondering how the Nazis were ever able to coordinate efforts long enough to unleash war and genocide. What kind of countervailing centripetal forces could have outweighed the centrifugal ones to bring Nazis together on such major policy decisions? The most compelling answer is ideology.⁷¹ Nazi officials fought with each other over the various domains of Nazi conquest, but these intrigues were not the result of ideological difference so much as the quest for personal power.⁷² Directly addressing the functionalist claim that Nazi “henchmen” were driven by little more than opportunism, Ian Kershaw points out that “opportunists prepared to go to any lengths in ‘working towards’ a leader to attain power, wealth and status arguably exist in all dictatorships. But ‘cumulative radicalisation’ ... was peculiar to National Socialism. This in itself suggests that the particular ideological direction involved in ‘working towards the Führer’ was what counted, that the specific ideological drive of National Socialism ... was decisive to the process of ‘cumulative radicalisation’.”⁷³

⁷⁰ Tim Mason set the stage for the still-current “Functionalist-Intentionalist” debate in his essay “Intention and Explanation: A Current Controversy about the Interpretation of National Socialism,” in Gerhard Hirschfeld and Lothar Kettenacker (eds.), *Der “Führerstaat”: Mythos und Realität* (Stuttgart, 1981). Notions of Nazi polycracy were initially laid out in Martin Broszat, *The Hitler State* (London, 1981 [orig. 1969]) and Peter Hüttenberger, “Nationalsozialistische Polykratie,” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 2 (1976): 417-442.

⁷¹ As Terry Eagleton puts it, “Nobody has yet come up with a single adequate definition of ideology.” See his *Ideology: An Introduction* (London, 1991), 1. Nonetheless, in what follows, I understand ideology to mean a set of values and beliefs that both shape and are shaped by material practices. Ideology not only mediates material practice, but, more importantly for this investigation, acts as an agent upon material practice. An ideological movement is one that seeks to alter society in accord with certain precepts. Nazism, concerned primarily with altering the material practices of German society, was in this sense an ideological movement, one that, we might add, was very much concerned with the primacy of worldview (*Weltanschauung*).

⁷² Peter Black persuasively demonstrates the non-ideological nature of bureaucratic polycracy in the case of Ernst Kaltenbrunner: “Ribbentrop and Kaltenbrunner fought over nothing more than the right to hand Hitler intelligence reports, which Hitler rarely read.” See his excellent biography *Ernst Kaltenbrunner: Ideological Soldier of the Third Reich* (Princeton, 1984), 215.

⁷³ Ian Kershaw, “‘Cumulative Radicalisation’ and the Uniqueness of National Socialism,” in Christian Jansen et al. (eds.), *Von der Aufgabe der Freiheit: Politische Verantwortung und bürgerliche Gesellschaft im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Berlin, 1995), 333.

How, then, do we proceed to reexamine the bases of Nazi ideology? Studies emphasizing party polycracy have led to the very popular, though unproven, assumption that Nazi ideology was a jumble of unrelated parts: socialism here, capitalism there, corporatism elsewhere. Hans Mommsen, for example, has argued that the intentionalist focus on Hitler's *Weltanschauung* presumes "an inner coherence of the system that did not exist."⁷⁴ A study of philosophers under Nazism reaches a similar conclusion: the Nazi worldview "was not comprehensive, but a hodgepodge of accidentally assembled convictions."⁷⁵ It is even suggested that there was simply no such thing as Nazi ideology. As one scholar put it: "[The] veil of ideology should not deceive us. ... One is almost tempted to believe that the ideology was simply an effort to mislead people deliberately."⁷⁶ This view has been particularly widespread concerning the Nazis' public discourse on Christianity. As a leading authority on European Fascism has argued, "this was sheer opportunism aimed at the winning and consolidation of power."⁷⁷ Much functionalist scholarship has reinforced this trend, analyzing the policy making of the Third Reich to argue that Nazi actions, most notably the Final Solution, were not the product of long-planned, meticulously laid out designs coming to fruition, but rather responses to contingencies.⁷⁸

The functionalist argument for the shifting nature of Nazi policy leaves the impression that Nazi ideology was similarly flexible, bending with the wind as political expediency dictated. But by arguing that the Nazi decision-making process was *ad hoc*, such an argument tends to

⁷⁴ Hans Mommsen, "Reflections on the Position of Hitler and Göring in the Third Reich," in Childers and Caplan, *Reevaluating*, 87.

⁷⁵ Hans Sluga, *Heidegger's Crisis: Philosophy and Politics in Nazi Germany* (Cambridge MA, 1993), 192.

⁷⁶ Ralf Dahrendorf, *Society and Democracy in Germany* (New York, 1966), 381, 386. One of the few to take Nazi ideology seriously, Eberhard Jäckel, points out that much of this "opportunist" view of Hitler, including the works of Alan Bullock and Eva Reichmann, is based on Hermann Rauschning's unreliable books of the war period. See Eberhard Jäckel, *Hitler's Worldview: A Blueprint for Power* (Cambridge MA, 1972), 15-17.

⁷⁷ Stanley Payne, *A History of Fascism, 1914-1945* (Madison, 1995), 200.

⁷⁸ See especially Götz Aly et al., *Sozialpolitik und Judenvernichtung: Gibt es eine Ökonomie der Endlösung?* (Berlin, 1987).

overlook the possibility that the ideological parameters for Nazi practice could have already been established. As Steven Aschheim puts it in his assessment of the functionalist paradigm: “They do not address the underlying motivational factors, the level of ideology.... [S]uch accounts paid only lip service to the broader background, the larger contextual and mental structures that *shaped the choices made.*”⁷⁹

This does not mean that attempts to reevaluate Nazi ideology should read backward from the death camps or Operation Barbarossa. Whereas the death camps may serve as a useful metaphor for the primacy of ideology in the Nazi state, the emphasis on ideology need not lead to the conclusion that the Holocaust was inevitable.⁸⁰ As with any other political movement, the Nazis were limited in their actions by situational factors. At the same time, a preexisting ideological impulse conditioned certain responses and made them more likely than others to be implemented.

The emphasis on ideology in this study is not an attempt to recast Rosenberg’s or Himmler’s ideas as the sole locus of the Nazi *Weltanschauung*. Nor do I subscribe to the view that Hitler himself somehow ranks as a *bona fide* intellectual, a man of any singular ideological innovation. Hans Mommsen has rightly argued against the intentionalists’ “Hitlercentric” interpretation of Nazism, thereby rejecting post-war efforts to off-load as much responsibility on as few people as possible. But the baby of an ideological investigation need not be thrown out with the bath water of resting total blame on Hitler alone. As with the rank-and-file of the Nazi party, Hitler’s own *Weltanschauung* was not created in a void, but rather was the product of a particular socio-cultural context, one shared with a great many other party leaders. Therefore an

⁷⁹ Steven Aschheim, “Small Forays, Grand Theories and Deep Origins: Current Trends in the Historiography of the Holocaust,” reprinted in *idem.*, *Culture*, 120 (emphasis in the original).

⁸⁰ Much of the “functionalist-intentionalist” debate revolves around this issue. See Kershaw, *Dictatorship*, Ch. 5 (“Hitler and the Holocaust”), for a cogent assessment of the debate.

inquiry into Nazi ideology need not return us to an “*exegetical* focus on Hitler’s and other Nazi leaders’ immediate ideas.”⁸¹

This work goes beyond past practices of concentrating solely on designated “high priests” of Nazism to incorporate a broader range of party opinion. At the same time, however, it is essential to concentrate on those Nazis whose ideological credentials were beyond dispute. Whereas zealous Nazis existed in all ranks of the party, only those who displayed ideological commitment by “working towards the Führer” could achieve elite status. For this reason I focus chiefly on Reichsleiter (National Leaders), Gauleiter (District Leaders), and those operating in specifically ideological or educational organizations within the party. In this way we can rectify what Jane Caplan has termed the “massive imbalance between the intensive, almost obsessive rereading [of selected Nazi ideologues] on the one hand, and the neglect of their alleged ideological confrères on the other.”⁸² This study does not ascribe the *invention* of Nazi ideology to the party leadership, but rather the articulation.

Plan of the Study

This work proceeds in seven substantive chapters. Chapters Two through Four each deal with a particular theme in the “time of struggle” (*Kampfzeit*), the period before the NSDAP came to power in 1933. Chapters Five through Eight deal with particular themes and address transformations over time in the period of the Third Reich. In Chapter Two I examine the surprisingly broad section of the party elite who subscribed to certain traditions within Christianity and who believed that these traditions contributed to the party’s identity and shaped

⁸¹ Geoff Eley, “What is Cultural History?,” *New German Critique* 65 (1995), 34.

⁸² Jane Caplan, “Postmodernism, Poststructuralism, and Deconstruction: Notes for Historians,” *Central European History* 22 (1989), 275-76.

its value system. While public speeches and published works are consulted, more important are personal papers, private correspondence, and diaries. Special attention is paid to what the Nazis referred to as “positive Christianity,” which was advocated as part of the nationalist dream of a *Volksgemeinschaft* (People’s Community) uniting all Germans. Arising amid the radical dislocations of Weimar, this was a Christianity that sought to bridge the sectarian gap between Protestant and Catholic members of the *Volk* through a renunciation of “confessionalism” and an emphasis on an integrative social ethic and antisemitism. This development is explored through Nazi conceptions of Jesus, the Bible, and Germany’s religious past. Whereas many Nazis upheld a purely syncretic vision of positive Christianity, claiming no preference for one confession over the other, others displayed a clear affinity for certain traditions within German Protestantism. This is demonstrated not only through their own confessional affiliation, but also in their appropriation of the leading signifiers of Protestantism such as Luther and the Reformation. In addition to analyzing Nazi discourse, the involvement of both high- and low-ranking party members in ecclesiastical and educational debates is discussed. Erich Koch was not an anomaly: others in the party were involved in church bodies and Christian organizations.

Chapter Three examines those Nazi leaders who professed that their movement bore no relation to any form of Christianity. Referred to as the party’s “paganists,” these leaders — Erich Ludendorff and Alfred Rosenberg, most notably — attempted to create a new mystical faith of blood and soil. Whereas their anti-Christian ideas are commonly regarded as hegemonic in the party, I demonstrate that their religious agenda brought them into conflict with many in the party’s leadership, which led in Ludendorff’s case to expulsion. These conflicts arose not only over questions of strategy and electoral tactics, but also over the most basic ideas Nazism claimed to represent. As well as surveying their relations with others in the party, this chapter also examines the religious ideas of the paganists. Through a close reading of their major works, including Rosenberg’s “Myth of the Twentieth Century,” I argue that their detachment from

Christianity was partial and ambiguous. Whereas Christian doctrines such as Original Sin and the Immaculate Conception were rejected unequivocally, paganist attitudes toward the social dimensions of Christian thought could be much more positive. As in Chapter Two, these positions are uncovered through paganist views on Jesus, the Bible, Martin Luther and the Reformation. On the one hand, paganists launched a generalized assault on Christian dogma; on the other, they displayed a more consistently positive attitude towards Protestantism than even the party's Christians. Their belief system certainly gave primacy to race. They nonetheless repeatedly displayed admiration for "Protestantism" and its historical development as an index of "Germanness."

Chapter Four measures the validity of the Nazis' claims to be a Christian movement against the preexisting varieties of German Christianity. This is done by examining the political views of the Christian establishment and laity during the Weimar Republic. There was a variety of Christianities in Germany — Catholic, Calvinist, Lutheran, liberal, orthodox — each with its own impact on German politics. Whereas political Catholicism in Weimar had an exclusive organ in the Center party, political Protestantism had many political valences. At the same time, Protestantism was not politically indeterminate. There were numerous examples of Protestant opposition, and later resistance, to Nazism. Others in the Protestant churches attempted to remain neutral towards the movement. However, growing numbers of Protestants expressed favor for Nazism; the relation of their ideologies with those of the Nazis is explored. Particularly important in this regard is the theology of the "orders of creation" (*Schöpfungsglaube*), a Lutheran construct which predated Nazism and elevated the *Volk* as a divine order. By the time of Weimar's "years of crisis," some of the most prominent voices in German Protestantism proclaimed that the Nazi party was a national renewal on a Christian foundation, and that the duty of the Protestant was to support and even join the movement. The nationalism, antisemitism, anticommunism and antiliberalism found in Nazi ideology found a receptive

audience among those pastors and theologians who could point to comparable views within their own traditions. As is shown, these pastors' prescriptions for the social, economic and political ills of German society overlapped with the Nazis' on a wide range of issues. Rather than suggesting that this was coincidental, I demonstrate that the Nazis' "positive Christianity" brought together many of the secular beliefs and practices of confessional Lutheranism on the one hand, and the dogmatics and ecclesiology of liberal Protestantism on the other. This chapter also examines the growing scholarship on the social history of Nazism. Exploring this literature from the perspective of religion, I show how common ideological tenets found among Protestant elites were replicated at the level of the laity. Through an analysis of class, region, geography and gender, this chapter explores elements of a positive correlation between Protestant religiosity and a tendency to vote National Socialist.

In Chapter Five I examine the actual policy decisions that were made in the first years of the Third Reich, as well as Nazi conceptions of how their major policies fit within a Christian framework. Christian and anti-Christian themes, as well as ongoing party member activity within religious bodies, are examined to delineate lines of continuity and change, to determine how widespread Christian and paganist identities within the party remained. In addition, I explore the question of religious practice within Nazi organizations, where a mounting contest emerged between Christians and paganists. Church organizations were often attacked as "reactionary," but the continued presence of observing Christians within Nazi groups was systematically defended throughout the party. This practice is further explored through institutional relations with the German Faith Movement (*Deutsche Glaubensbewegung*). Like the German Christians, this movement wished to be nothing less than the official religious expression of Nazism. As we shall see, however, this ambition was never fulfilled.

Chapter Six deals with church-state relations in the Third Reich. Although Nazi discourse could be strongly anticlerical, a particular affinity for certain varieties of Protestantism

impelled Nazis to forge links with its institutions. Whereas the Catholic Church remained an autonomous organization with its own insulated structure, the Protestant churches in Germany, with an historically closer relationship to the state, became a site of contestation where Nazis argued among themselves about the role of religion in a “totalitarian” regime. Most notable in this regard was the attempt to establish a Protestant Reich Church that would unite the splintered state churches under the authority of a Reich Bishop. Through an analysis of their involvement in the building of the Reich Church, I demonstrate that leading Nazis — most importantly Hitler — put great stock in the strengthening of institutional Protestantism, above all as a “bulwark” against the Catholic Church. Far from attempting to destroy Protestantism from within, the party leadership hoped to bridge the many gaps that existed between the German Christians and their theological opponents, the Confessing Church, and end the “Church Struggle.” In the process, it allowed the Confessing Church a freedom of expression that existed almost nowhere else in the Reich — a voice to criticize not only the German Christians, but often the Nazis as well. Only with the total split of Protestantism in 1937 as a result of the Church Struggle did the Nazis finally give up on their hopes of a Reich Church, thereby abandoning institutional Protestantism. It was only after this breakdown that the Nazi regime turned its anticlerical gaze, long fixed on institutional Catholicism, on Protestantism as well.

Chapter Seven explores the Nazis’ claims that a variety of Christian ethic guided them in defining their social policies. In doing so it explores the ideological and institutional relationships between the churches’ and the Nazis’ social networks. Three areas of social policy important to both Nazis and Christians are explored here: eugenics, women and youth. Whereas the Catholic Church rejected racial science, many Protestant voices predating Nazism, including those of the later Confessing Church, advocated it. I analyze how the Inner Mission, the main exponent of “social Protestantism” in Germany, promoted racial science, and extend this analysis to a smaller Protestant organization, the Research Center for the Study of Worldview.

Institutional relations between Christian organizations and their Nazi counterparts are addressed in relation to women's and youth groups as well. As the process of "coordination" progressed, a strong rivalry grew between church and state over the domain of "practical Christianity." In contrast to accounts that portray this rivalry exclusively as an ideological *conflict*, I show that these rivalries were due in large measure to a web of ideological affinities — this is, to an overlap of certain Nazi conceptions with particular elements of social Protestantism.

Chapter Eight provides an examination of the Nazis' religious views and policies from 1937 on. As I demonstrate, the heightened anticlericalism of the regime was not the final unleashing of a long-suppressed antagonism to traditional religion, but was — at least in the case of Protestantism — attributable to the collapse of institutional relations. In its wake came a wave of measures aimed at church affiliation in the party. This chapter examines the growth of church-leaving (*Kirchenaustritt*) by party members and the attempted expulsion of pastors from the party. It is shown that whereas those who had a prior antagonism to Christianity promptly took leave of church membership, so too did those who made clear their continuing affinity for Christian traditions. This chapter also looks at the pivotal role played by leading anti-Christians in their attempt to expunge Christian influence from Nazism. The polycratic infighting that took place over the policing of Nazi ideology is particularly revealing in this regard. Whereas Rosenberg's Office of Ideological Information adopted a consistently negative attitude on continued Christian expression within the party, rival offices headed by Goebbels and Philipp Bouhler displayed an essentially positive attitude; they successfully sought to wrest control of ideology from Rosenberg precisely over the question of religion. Special attention is also paid to Martin Bormann, perhaps the most powerful anti-Christian in the later years of Nazism. As is shown, many of the anti-Christian sentiments for which Nazism is famous were actually authored by him. As his relations with other party leaders reveal, Bormann continually advocated a position that took him beyond the pale even of paganist thought. A broad range of

top Nazis attempted repeatedly, and often successfully, to blunt his extremist policies. Finally, Hitler's pivotal "secret conversations" of the war years are examined. I show that Hitler's later statements about Christianity, often taken as unambiguously hostile, were inconsistent and even contradictory. His anger against the churches was never greater. More than this, however, his religious feelings were freighted with a criticism and anger new to him. Nonetheless, they revealed sufficient tension and ambivalence to question just how complete Hitler's apostasy was. Whereas his wrath against both Christianity and the churches reached new heights after 1937, Hitler was not unambiguously anti-Christian.

This study attempts a critical rethinking of the nature of Nazi ideology, and seeks to uncover a dimension of it previously overlooked by scholars of the period. Both the Nazis and their historians have viewed the movement through many frames of reference. I seek to add an additional layer of interpretation rather than replace or reject previous interpretations. Among the many ways Nazis identified themselves and their movement — nationalist, socialist, scientific, racialist, and so on — many attached the label of Christian as well. While this study is deeply concerned with the political dimensions of Christianity in Germany between 1919 and 1945, it is primarily concerned with society and ideology, not with church institutions. And while it charts the personal religious views of Nazi leaders, it seeks foremost to explore the ways in which Nazis claimed their movement was related or unrelated to different strands of Christian thought. It maps out the rise of a particular variety of religion — "positive Christianity" — and its dissipation. It reveals the contested nature of religious meaning in the Nazi movement, one that spanned nearly the entire period of the party's history, and reveals how this impacted on larger questions of ideology. It concludes by suggesting that Nazism was not the result of a "Death of God" in secularized society, but rather a radicalized and particularly horrific attempt to preserve God *against* secularized society.

Translation and Citation

I have translated *Konfession* as “confession,” rather than the more standard “denomination.” In Germany, where religion nominally remains an obligatory state affair and not voluntaristic, there are no denominations in the strict sense of the word. Its use in the German context incorrectly suggests an American-style religious “marketplace” and attendant separation of church and state.

Similarly, I have translated *evangelisch* as “Protestant,” except when “Evangelical” is used in cited secondary literature. For North American readers the more traditional translation of “Evangelical” implies a particular type of religious activity not necessarily tied to any one church. By contrast, the German *evangelisch* carries a definite theological-institutional determinacy. To maintain the distinction made between *Volk* and *Nation* in the German language, *Volk* has been translated as “people” or, more commonly, left untranslated.

Documents are cited as follows: “archive, holding/file/page (date: place).” For instance, “BAP R5101/23135/152-153 (21 February 1938: Berlin),” means the document is in the Bundesarchiv Potsdam (BAP), holding R5101 (Reich Ministry for Church Affairs), file 23135 (correspondence with *Forschungsheim für Weltanschauungskunde*), folios 152-153, is dated 21 February 1938, and originated in Berlin. For files with no pagination, page numbers are omitted.

With the on-going changes still taking place in the German Federal Archive system, many of the archival citations used here will have changed. During research, plans were being made to phase out the Bundesarchiv Berlin-Zehlendorf (BAZ), formally known as the Berlin Document Center, and transfer its holdings to the new Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde location. Similar plans were being made for the Bundesarchiv Potsdam (BAP). In addition, several files that were at these locations have now moved back to the Bundesarchiv Koblenz. I have therefore chosen to retain the original citations since the exact location of the holdings remains in a state of flux.

2 “Positive Christianity”: The Doctrine of the Time of Struggle

The struggle we are now waging today until victory or the bitter end is, in its deepest sense, a struggle between Christ and Marx. — Joseph Goebbels¹

The narrative of the early history of Nazism is well enough known: The trauma of defeat in the First World War, the guilt clause of the Versailles Treaty and the domestic upheaval of the failed November Revolution all conspired to produce a cacophony of rightist fringe groups determined to overthrow the newly-created Weimar Republic. While distinct in style and organization, all these groups advocated a radical *völkisch* nationalism that embraced antisemitism, antimarxism, antiliberalism and anticatholicism to varying degrees. By positing the primacy of race, these groups, and the National Socialists in particular, seemed to represent a radical departure from the norms of the party-political right, which up to that time remained within the parameters of traditional, monarchist conservatism. The turbulence created by events unleashed a movement that, while having ideological roots in the pre-war period, had been previously unable to enter the political mainstream. The tumult of Weimar, and seeming triumph of the left, provided the opportunity to seize the initiative.²

There was initially little aspiration for parliamentary success on the extremist right. Up until Hitler's failed putsch of November 1923, the Nazis did not take political pragmatism into consideration. Less concerned with garnering an electorate than with forcing through their immediate goals, the party in this period articulated their vision without concern for campaign strategy or electoral posturing. Indeed, post-war Bavaria was particularly noteworthy for its

¹ *Michael* (New York, 1987 [orig. 1929]), 66.

² On the founding of the NSDAP and its early history, see *inter alia* Reginald Phelps, “Hitler and the *Deutsche Arbeiterpartei*,” in Henry A. Turner (ed.), *Nazism and the Third Reich* (New York, 1972); Werner Maser, *Die Frühgeschichte der NSDAP: Hitlers Weg bis 1924* (Frankfurt a.M., 1965); Jeremy Noakes and Geoffrey Pridham (eds.), *Nazism 1919-1945: A Documentary Reader*, 3 vols. (Exeter, 1983-88), 1: 7-35.

singular disdain of parliamentary principles, being the site of considerable revolutionary activity and numerous attempted coups. In such an extremist environment, a tiny party like the National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP) felt little need to tone down its message for the sake of public relations. There was nothing to be lost in a frank expression of the movement's ideology. Hence we can reasonably expect that Nazi speeches, writings and other public expressions from this period provide insight into their untempered ideas, especially compared with the period after 1925, when the party's choice of a legal path to power brought issues of tactical and political expediency into the equation.

Much is already known about the Nazi's public stance toward Christianity. Point 24 of the NSDAP Party Program of 1920, commonly accredited to Gottfried Feder, reads:

We demand freedom for all religious confessions in the state, insofar as they do not endanger its existence or conflict with the customs and moral sentiments of the Germanic race.

The party as such represents the standpoint of a positive Christianity, without tying itself to a particular confession. It fights the spirit of Jewish materialism within us and without us, and is convinced that a lasting recovery of our *Volk* can only take place from within, on the basis of the principle: public need comes before private greed [*Gemeinnutz geht vor Eigennutz*].³

After it applied the litmus test of compatibility with the "Germanic race," which is given ontological priority over all else, the party claimed to uphold a *type* of Christianity. Whereas the party program is usually regarded as a true reflection of the Nazis' goals at that time, this passage is commonly regarded as a product of caution, meant to allay fears among the religious by posing as essentially favorable to Christianity. The expression "positive Christianity" in particular is commonly regarded as a tactical measure, "cleverly" left undefined in order to

³ As printed in Alfred Rosenberg, *Das Parteiprogramm: Wesen, Grundsätze und Ziele der NSDAP* (Munich, 1922), 15ff, 57f. Jeremy Noakes and Geoffrey Pridham suggest that Hitler and Anton Drexler wrote most of this program, and not Feder: *Reader*, 1: 14. Albrecht Tyrell, in his biographical sketch of Feder, also suggests that he did not directly participate in writing the party program: Albrecht Tyrell, "Gottfried Feder: the Failed Policymaker," in Ronald Smelser and Rainer Zitelmann (eds.), *The Nazi Elite*, trans. Mary Fischer (New York, 1993), 33.

accommodate a broad range of meanings.⁴ However, the wording of Point 24 readily provides us with three key ideas where Nazis claimed their movement was Christian in outlook: the spiritual struggle against the Jews; the promulgation of a type of Christian social ethic; and the supersession of confessionism in the name of the *Volk*. Each of these three components will be analyzed below. Through a survey of some of the leading figures of the Nazi movement, I will demonstrate (a) that “positive Christianity” was more than a political ploy for winning votes and (b) that it was not a loose, unarticulated construct, but instead adhered to an inner logic.

German and Jew, Christ and Antichrist

Chapter One briefly surveyed the scholarship on antisemitism, particularly that school which sees an enduring presence of Christian antisemitism in “modern” racist antisemitism. Many historians argue that the Nazis relied on a preexisting religious antagonism against the Jew, but they usually do not take the Nazis’ own statements into account, since these are regarded as antireligious. Rather than presenting direct empirical evidence of a connection, they confine themselves to a homology: “[M]odern anti-Semitism turned out to be a continuation of the premodern rejection of Judaism by Christianity, even when it renounced any claim to be legitimized by it or even professed to be antagonistic to Christianity.”⁵ However, a close examination of the evidence renders this approach unnecessary: leaders of the Nazi movement themselves made a direct connection to certain traditions of Christian Jew-hatred.

Dietrich Eckart, arguably the most important ideologue in the young Nazi movement, is a

⁴ Franz Feige, *The Varieties of Protestantism in Nazi Germany: Five Theopolitical Positions* (Lewiston NY, 1990), 126. See also Conway, *The Nazi Persecution of the Churches* (London, 1968), 5; George Denzler and Volker Fabricius, *Christen und Nationalsozialisten: Darstellung und Dokumente* (Frankfurt a.M., 1993), 16-20; Kurt Meier, *Kreuz und Hakenkreuz: Die evangelische Kirche im Dritten Reich* (Munich, 1992), 11.

⁵ Jacob Katz, *From Prejudice to Destruction: Anti-Semitism, 1700-1933* (Cambridge MA, 1980), 319.

case in point. It was he who coined the phrase “Jewish materialist spirit within us and without us,” an expression which implied a religious element in the Nazi typology and suggested the Jewish “problem” was not solely racial.⁶ Among other accomplishments, Eckart entered “Third Reich” into the Nazi vocabulary and composed the party song “Germany, awake!” Eckart became something of a mentor to Hitler, introducing him to Munich’s extremist milieu and strengthening his basic beliefs. Twenty years later, Hitler acknowledged his ideological indebtedness to Eckart, stating that: “At the time, I was intellectually a child still on the bottle.”⁷ Hitler felt so indebted to Eckart he ended *Mein Kampf* with a tribute to him: “And among [our heroes] I want also to count that man, one of the best, who devoted his life to the awakening of his — our — people, in his writings and his thoughts and finally in his deeds: Dietrich Eckart.”⁸

One of the earliest works of Nazi ideology was Eckart’s *Der Bolschewismus von Moses bis Lenin: Zweigespräche zwischen Adolf Hitler und mir* (“Bolshevism from Moses to Lenin: a conversation between Adolf Hitler and myself”), written shortly before his death in 1923. Scholars have generally overlooked the strong religious overtones of this book. One of the few to acknowledge this aspect nonetheless describes it as a kind of “catechism” of paganism.⁹ It is most likely that Hitler in fact held no such conversation with Eckart.¹⁰ But it still remains a firm indication of the latter’s views: “Christ stands never otherwise than erect, never otherwise than upright ... eyes flashing in the midst of the creeping Jewish rabble ... and the words fall like

⁶ Dietrich Eckart, “Das Judentum in und außer uns,” *Auf gut deutsch* 1 (1919).

⁷ Adolf Hitler, *Hitler’s Table Talk 1941-1944: His Private Conversations*, trans. Norman Cameron and R. H. Stevens, intro. by Hugh Trevor-Roper (London, 1953), 217.

⁸ Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, trans. Ralph Manheim (Boston, 1962), 687.

⁹ Ernst Nolte, “Eine frühe Quelle zu Hitlers Antisemitismus,” *Historische Zeitschrift* 192 (1961): 585-606; Barbara Miller Lane, “Nazi Ideology: Some Unfinished Business,” *Central European History* 7 (1974): 3-30; Barbara Miller Lane and Leila Rupp (eds.), *Nazi Ideology before 1933: A Documentation* (Austin, 1978); Klaus Scholder, *The Churches and the Third Reich*, 2 vols. (London, 1987-88), 1: 90. Lane and Rupp draw extensively from Eckart’s works in their study of early Nazi ideology, but curiously overlook the many references Eckart made to Christianity, and how he regarded it as the antithesis of Judaism.

¹⁰ Margarete Plewnia, *Auf dem Weg zu Hitler: Der ‘völkische’ Publizist Dietrich Eckart* (Bremen, 1970), 94-112.

lashes of the whip: ‘Your father is the devil’ (John 8:44).”¹¹ Far from advocating a paganist or anti-Christian religion, Eckart held that Christ was a leader to be emulated: “In Christ, the embodiment of all manliness, we find all that we need. And if we occasionally speak of Baldur, our words always contain some joy, some satisfaction, that our pagan ancestors were already so Christian as to have indications of Christ in this ideal figure.”¹² The book, published posthumously, ended with an afterword by the publishers: Eckart’s death “prevented the completion of this highly significant work showing the Christian approach to the *völkisch* movement.”¹³

Eckart maintained in 1919 that the trope “Third Reich” was innately religious:

Wonders never cease; from the deluge is born a new world, while the Pharisees whine about their miserable pennies! The liberation of humanity from the curse of gold stands before us! But for that our collapse, but for that our Golgotha! As we seek it still, so shall salvation — not misery and need — befall us Germans. Nowhere on Earth is there a people more capable, more able, to bring about the Third Reich than we! Veni Creator spiritus!¹⁴

The antisemitism implicit in the use of such phrases as “Pharisees” and “curse of gold” is made more explicit on other occasions:

[The] Jewish conception of God is of no interest to us Germans! We seek God nowhere but in ourselves. For us the soul is divine, of which the Jew, on the other hand, knows nothing: “The Kingdom of Heaven is within you” (Luke 17:21), thus God also, who belongs to the Kingdom of Heaven. We feel our soul is immortal, eternal from the beginning, and therefore we refuse to be told that we are created from nothingness.... So has the Aryan spirit long taught, even before Christ embraced the light of the world like a mirror.¹⁵

¹¹ Dietrich Eckart, *Der Bolschewismus von Moses bis Lenin: Zweigespräche zwischen Adolf Hitler und mir* (Munich, 1924), 18.

¹² *Ibid.*, 36.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 50.

¹⁴ *Auf gut deutsch* 3 (1919), 297.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 38.

Jews, on the other hand, did originate “out of nothingness.”¹⁶ We see in Eckart’s antisemitism a clear racial element: Christ is cast as the representative of a preexisting Aryan spirit. Still, this antisemitism was not founded on a pure biologism, but on a dualism based on a belief in Christ’s rejection of the Jews. This is further revealed in one of Eckart’s poems, “The Riddle”: “The New Testament broke away from the Old/ as you once released yourself from the world/ And as you are freed from your past delusions/ so did Jesus Christ reject his Jewishness.”¹⁷ The antithesis of the Jew was not only the German, but the Christian: “In light of the indisputable facts, together with Rosenberg I showed the anti-German or rather anti-Christian, or — what amounts to the same thing — Jewish character of Freemasonry.”¹⁸ Eckart’s overlapping of racial and religious categories was further revealed when he maintained: “To be an Aryan and to sense transcendence are one and the same thing.”¹⁹

This dualism, conceived in a specifically Christian language, guided Eckart’s thinking on other subjects as well. On the First World War he wrote: “This war was a religious war, finally one sees that clearly. A war between light and darkness, truth and falsehood, Christ and Antichrist.”²⁰ This religious dualism achieved apocalyptic dimensions: “The moment of truth has arrived: humanity once again has the choice between appearance and reality, between Germandom and Jewry, between the all and the nothing, between truth and falsehood, between within and without, between right and despotism, between intelligence and madness, between

¹⁶ *Auf gut deutsch* 1 (1919), 199.

¹⁷ Quoted in Alfred Rosenberg, *Dietrich Eckart: Ein Vermächtnis* (Munich, 1935), 112.

¹⁸ *Auf gut deutsch* 3 (1919), 36.

¹⁹ Plewnia, *Eckart*, 46.

²⁰ *Auf gut deutsch* 2 (1919), 23.

goodness and death.”²¹ Eckart believed in an ultimate confrontation between these forces:

“When light comes to blows with darkness, no pacts are made! There is only struggle for life and death, until the destruction of one or the other. And that is why world war is the only apparent end.”²²

Certainly this duality was not limited to Eckart. As Klaus Scholder has suggested, “the German *Volk* had been called to this end and was capable of deciding this battle for the world in favour of the principle of the good. This was the common basic conviction of the entire *völkisch* movement. ... No one can understand the power which National Socialism achieved without realizing that behind it stood the claim and the conviction to be fighting on the side of good against evil.”²³ Eckart was by no means the only Nazi to subscribe to a dualism of Christian/Aryan and Jew/Semite. This tendency was personified as well in Arthur Dinter, a leading figure in the movement’s early history and one of its most vituperous antisemites.

Although Dinter had the distinction in 1928 of being the first Nazi leader to be expelled from the party, he nonetheless was an important figure in the early history of the movement. He was the proud bearer of party membership number 5. Unlike Ludendorff or Gregor Strasser, he remained faithful to Hitler during his imprisonment, and was one of the few party leaders present at the refounding of the NSDAP in February 1925. He could count Julius Streicher among his close friends and joined Streicher when the latter founded the *Grossdeutsche Volksgemeinschaft* (GDVG), an offshoot of the NSDAP claiming a monopoly on loyalty to Hitler.²⁴ Known primarily as an ideologue, he also displayed considerable organizational abilities. As Gauleiter

²¹ Rosenberg, *Eckart*, 86.

²² *Ibid.*, 84.

²³ Scholder, *Churches*, 1: 75.

²⁴ On Dinter’s political career and his relevance for the NSDAP’s early gains, see Donald Tracey, “The Development of the National Socialist Party in Thuringia, 1924-1930,” *Central European History* 8 (1975), 26-34; Dietrich Orlow, *The History of the Nazi Party: 1919-1933* (Pittsburgh, 1969), 90-91.

of Thuringia he was instrumental to the party's early success in that area, marshaling the various *völkisch* splinter groups behind the Nazis. According to one specialist, "[t]he district was one of the first and most successful examples of party expansion outside of Bavaria," party membership having doubled in 1927 alone.²⁵ The selection of Weimar as the site of the 1926 *Reichsparteitag* (national party congress), the first to be held after the party's refounding, affirmed the importance of Dinter's Gau to the party during this period.

Dinter's significance for the history of Nazism nonetheless rests more in his ideas. Inspired by Houston Stewart Chamberlain's *Foundations of the Nineteenth Century*, which he maintained led to his "total spiritual rebirth," Dinter turned from a career in the theater to writing novels. His most famous novel, *Die Sünde wider das Blut* ("the sin against the blood"), was published in 1918 and sold 235,000 copies by 1927, making it the most popular work of National Socialist fiction.²⁶ This work perfected the Nazis' racialist topos, and "stood at the summit of an enormous production of antisemitic publication."²⁷ The protagonist of the novel, Hermann Kämpfer, marries a half-Jew who is torn between the "noble and profound" influence of her mother's German blood and the "licentious, pleasure seeking" influence of her father's Jewish blood, and hence personifies the "curse of the sin against the blood to which she owes her existence."²⁸ They have a child, whose appearance represents the triumph of her father's inheritance. Outraged, Kämpfer commits himself to the antisemitic cause, founding a society for "race research and hygiene," which is restricted to those who can prove Aryan status up to three

²⁵ Tracey, "Thuringia," 34, 38. This work also provides a useful overview of the internecine warfare between the competing far-right parties.

²⁶ *Die Sünde wider den Geist* (1921), his second novel, sold 100,000 copies in the first year, whereas the third, *Die Sünde wider die Liebe* (1922), sold 30,000 copies by 1928 (Tracey, "Thuringia," 26 n.13). A projected fourth novel on Jesus was never completed: George Kren and Rodler Morris, "Race and Spirituality: Arthur Dinter's Theosophical Antisemitism," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 6 (1991), 238.

²⁷ Uwe Lohalm, *Völkischer Radikalismus: Die Geschichte des deutschvölkischen Schutz- und Trutz-Bundes, 1919-1923* (Hamburg, 1970), 126.

²⁸ Arthur Dinter, *Die Sünde wider das Blut* (Leipzig, 1918), 187.

generations.²⁹ Awakened to the malignance of Jewish blood, he remarries, this time to a fully Aryan woman. But amazingly, their child is born with fully Jewish features. As Kämpfer later discovers, his second wife had permanently contaminated herself by having had a child fathered by a Jew years before. Though fully Aryan herself, this one encounter with Jewish blood was enough to destroy her racial purity. Outraged at this act of blood defilement, Kämpfer kills the Jewish seducer. He is tried for murder, and proclaims before the court: “To lead the spirit to victory over matter, and struggling humanity to its divine destiny: that was the goal God created for himself when he created the Germans! ... [I]n the Jewish race are found, since time immemorial, those hellish powers which lead man away from God.”³⁰ The jury acquits Kämpfer. In subsequent works Dinter fully anticipated the eugenicism of the Nazi state, as well as the racial definitions employed in the Nuremberg Laws. In *Die Sünde wider die Liebe* (“the sin against love”), Dinter set out an explicit program: the Jewish religion ceases to be a legal entity; Jews are prohibited from the civil service and teaching posts; sexual relations between Jew and German are forbidden; Jews cannot buy land; Jewish immigration is banned; and those who entered Germany after 1914 are expelled.³¹

Just as with Eckart, however, for Dinter the question of the German-Jewish duality was as much religious as it was racial. The struggle between Christ and Antichrist was the archetype of the eternal battle between the Aryan and the Jew, between good and evil.³² Indeed, Jesus was the perfect Aryan, who was born among the Jews only to emphasize their polar opposition. Dinter followed Chamberlain’s argument that Galilee was inhabited by Aryans, and that Jesus

²⁹ Ibid., 296.

³⁰ Ibid., 369.

³¹ Arthur Dinter, *Die Sünde wider die Liebe* (Leipzig, 1922), 81-86.

³² Ibid., 169.

could not have been racially Jewish (similarly, all the apostles save Judas were Aryan).³³ As a result, “Jesus is the only spirit created by God and incarnated on earth who never misused his free will to sin.”³⁴ Dinter also suggested the removal of the Old Testament from the Christian canon: it was too “materialistic” for Christians, a monument to “the religious thinking of the Jews, which is based upon lies and betrayal, business and profit.”³⁵ Dinter conceived the expurgation of the Old Testament not only as a Christian act — bringing about a “return” to the unadulterated teachings of Jesus — but as the ultimate *völkisch* act.³⁶

Another Nazi with literary pretensions in the “Time of Struggle” (*Kampfzeit*) was Joseph Goebbels. Of course, after 1933 Goebbels became perhaps the most important figure in the dissemination of Nazi ideology, both as the Reich Minister for Peoples’ Enlightenment and Propaganda and as the President of the Reich Chamber of Culture. Unlike many “Old Fighters” (*alte Kämpfer*), whose influence waned after the Nazis came to power, Goebbels was able to retain his hold on power from the beginning to the very end, contributing more than anyone to the omnipotence of the Führer myth and never losing his place in Hitler’s inner circle.³⁷ He was also one of the most prolific writers of the movement, both in number of published works and quantity of unpublished, private material. Innumerable scholars have drawn on his writings to gain insight into the nature of Nazism.

Goebbels, as the chief architect of the infamous *Kristallnacht* of 1938, was also an

³³ Dinter, *Blut*, 172.

³⁴ Arthur Dinter, *Die Sünde wider den Geist* (Leipzig, 1921), 60.

³⁵ As quoted in Kren and Morris, “Spirituality,” 242.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 243.

³⁷ See, *inter alia*, Helmut Heiber, *Joseph Goebbels* (Munich, 1988); Ulrich Höver, *Joseph Goebbels — ein nationaler Sozialist* (Bonn, 1992); Ulrich Nill, *Die ‘geniale Vereinfachung’: Anti-Intellektualismus in Ideologie und Sprachgebrauch bei Joseph Goebbels* (Frankfurt a.M., 1991); Ralf Georg Reuth, *Goebbels* (Munich, 1990). None of these works address Goebbels’ Christian preoccupations: the only one not to overlook this is Claus-Ekkehard Bärsch, *Erlösung und Vernichtung — Joseph Goebbels: Zur Psyche und Ideologie eines jungen Nationalsozialisten* (Munich, 1987). See also the very important collection of Goebbels’ diaries: Elke Fröhlich (ed.), *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels: Sämtliche Fragmente* (Munich, 1987).

antisemite of the highest order. However, given his role as the Nazis' supreme propagandist, there is a tendency in scholarship to regard him as ideologically lax or even mendacious. Indeed, his role in *Kristallnacht* is attributed to his extramarital affairs as much as to a committed antisemitism.³⁸ But Goebbels' writings before 1933, both public and private, reveal a committed and consistent ideologue. His antisemitism revealed the dualistic racial thinking evident among the Nazis already surveyed: "Money is the power of evil and the Jew its servant. Aryan, Semite, positive, negative, constructive, destructive. The Jew has his fateful mission to once more dominate the sick Aryan race. Our salvation or our ruin is dependent upon us."³⁹ Such religious imagery ("salvation," "mission") was not simply detached from its originating context. The eternal quality of the fight against Judaism was intimately connected with God and with Hitler as "an instrument of divine will shaped by history.... Nothing exists outside of God."⁴⁰ For Goebbels, the struggle against Jewry was innately religious; it was a struggle against the Devil himself: "Whoever cannot hate the Devil cannot love God. Whoever loves his *Volk* must hate the destroyer of his *Volk*, hate him from the depths of his soul."⁴¹

But as was true with Eckart and Dinter, this antisemitism constructed a polar opposition not only between Aryan and Semite, but also between Christian and Jew. Like Dinter, Goebbels created a fictional protagonist, Michael Vormann, through whom he voiced this view:

Christ is the genius of love, as such the most diametrical opposite of Judaism, which is the incarnation of hate. The Jew is a non-race among the races of the earth. ... Christ is the first great enemy of the Jews. 'You shall devour all nations!' He declared war

³⁸ For instance, Elke Fröhlich, "Joseph Goebbels: The Propagandist," in Smelser and Zitelmann, *Elite*, 57-58.

³⁹ Fröhlich (ed.), *Tagebücher*, entry for 6/8/24.

⁴⁰ Joseph Goebbels, "Die Revolution as Ding an sich," in idem., *Wege ins Dritte Reich: Briefe und Aufsätze für Zeitgenossen* (Munich, 1927), 48.

⁴¹ Joseph Goebbels, *Michael: Ein deutsches Schicksal in Tagebuchblättern* (Munich, 1929) (English translation hereafter: *Michael: a Novel*, trans. Joachim Neugroschel (New York, 1987), 45). Helmut Heiber for one believes that the manuscript was written as early as 1923. It went through seventeen editions by 1945.

against that. That is why Judaism had to get rid of him. For he was shaking the very foundations of its future international power.

The Jew is the lie personified. When he crucified Christ, he crucified everlasting truth for the first time in history.⁴²

In his reference to Jews as a “non-race,” Goebbels seems to question the scientific or biological nature of the struggle. This is also brought out in his reference to Jesus, whom Goebbels insisted was not Jewish: “Christ cannot have been a Jew. I do not need to prove this with *science* or scholarship. It is so!”⁴³ More than just an appropriation of Jesus, meant to dignify antisemitism with pious allusions to the Bible, Goebbels’ fascination with the person of Christ borders on a type of evangelism: “I converse with Christ. I believed I had overcome him, but I have only overcome his idolatrous priests and false servants. Christ is harsh and relentless. He drives the Jewish money-changers out of the temple. A declaration of war against money. If a man said that today, he would wind up in prison or a madhouse.”⁴⁴ This reference to John 2:15 was to appear repeatedly in the Nazis’ antisemitic discourse. As Julius Streicher’s GDVG insisted in 1924: “[We] relentlessly fight the shady mixing of religion and Jewish party politics, and fight to keep religion pure, as did the Lord when he threw the hagglers and usurers out of the Temple.”⁴⁵

In *Michael* we can also see clear and repeated professions of antisemitism and antimarxism, both genuine components of the Nazis’ ideological package. We see as well the unmistakable presence of anticlericalism (“false servants”), but not one rooted in opposition to Christianity itself. Rather, Goebbels suggests that contemporary Christianity is ossified, and must be renewed and revitalized by removing it from its institutional shackles: “The various churches have failed. Completely. They are no longer in the front lines, they have long since

⁴² Ibid., 65.

⁴³ Ibid., 45 (emphasis added).

⁴⁴ Ibid., 38-39.

⁴⁵ “Kulturkampf!” (Flugblatt): IfZ MA 740 (10 March 1924: Munich).

retreated to the rear guard. From that position, their resentment terrorizes any formation of a new religious will. Millions of people are waiting for this new formation, and their yearnings remain unfulfilled.”⁴⁶ As a consequence of this anticlerical attack, Goebbels also demonstrates the sincerity of his attitude toward Christianity. Had *Michael* been meant only for public consumption, as an effort to be “all things to all people” typical of the Nazis’ opportunism, such an attack on the clergy would have constituted a strategic blunder.

Despite his rejection of Christian institutions, in *Michael* Goebbels repeatedly affirms Christian belief: “Christianity is not a religion for the majority, much less for all. Cultivated by the few and translated into deeds, it is one of the most beautiful blossoms that the soul of a culture has ever borne.”⁴⁷ Goebbels displays a positive attitude toward the Bible as well: “I take the Bible, and all evening long I read the simplest and greatest sermon that has ever been given to mankind: The Sermon on the Mount! ‘Blessed are they who suffer persecution for the sake of justice, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven!’”⁴⁸ Goebbels’ anticlericalism is justified as a preservation of religion, not an attack on it: “Today’s youth is not against God, we are only against his cowardly religious menials, who try to commercialize him as they do everything else. We have to square off against them if we want to square ourselves with God.”⁴⁹

Dietrich Klagges, a friend of Goebbels in the party, almost exactly duplicated these themes. Klagges had the distinction of being one of the first Nazis to attain ministerial office, being appointed State Interior and Education Minister in Braunschweig in 1931. He gained notoriety for providing Hitler with his German citizenship (by making him an official in the

⁴⁶ Goebbels, *Michael*, 120.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 120, 44.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 12-13.

Braunschweig government), thereby allowing him to run in the presidential elections of 1932.⁵⁰ Klagges published widely and was known for his contribution to Nazi educational philosophy during the Third Reich, having edited and contributed to the enormous four-volume work, “*Volk and Führer: German History for Schools*.”⁵¹ He also published many articles on Nazi economic thinking, and was considered qualified enough in this area to be appointed head of the Department for the Science of Economics within the party, commissioned “to explore and determine the scientific foundations of National Socialist economic principles.”⁵²

Klagges also turned his attention to Christianity. As a member of the German-Christian Working Group, a precursor to the German Christians, he wrote a work entitled *Das Urevangelium Jesu* (“The Original Gospel of Jesus”), in which he expounded on the meaning of Christ to the Nazi movement. Goebbels took note of the book, writing in his diary, “Klagges’ ‘The original gospel of Jesus’, perhaps an epoch-making book. ... A fabulous book.”⁵³ Closely following the pattern laid out by Eckart, Dinter and Goebbels, Klagges upheld a dualism between Christian and Jew: “Christianity — Judaism, creation — destruction, good — evil, God — Satan, and in the last consequence, redemption — annihilation.”⁵⁴ According to Klagges, the Jews were not only a harmful race; they were also contaminated by a “satanic spirit” which sought to control the world. And in Christ they found their greatest enemy.⁵⁵ Christ was an Aryan, and despite having belonged to the Jewish “faith-community,” was never a Jew inwardly. Christ

⁵⁰ Holger Germann, *Die politische Religion des Nationalsozialisten Dietrich Klagges: Ein Beitrag zur Phänomenologie der NS-Ideologie* (Frankfurt a.M., 1995), 16.

⁵¹ Dietrich Klagges (ed.), *Volk und Führer: Deutsche Geschichte für Schulen*, 4 vols. (Frankfurt a.M., 1937-43). Klagges was also a member of the NSLB.

⁵² Avraham Barkai, *Nazi Economics: Ideology, Theory, and Policy* (New Haven, 1990), 33.

⁵³ Fröhlich (ed.) *Tagebücher*, entry for 29/5/26.

⁵⁴ Dietrich Klagges, *Das Urevangelium Jesu: Der Deutsche Glaube* (Wilster, 1925), 265, as quoted in Germann, *Religion*, 52.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 57-58.

fought on behalf of his fellow Galileans against the dominant Jews, and was to be regarded as the “greatest opponent of Judaism.”⁵⁶ But more than just a model antisemite, Jesus was the son of God.⁵⁷

Even more than Eckart or Dinter, Klagges and Goebbels placed a special emphasis on Christ. But they were not unique in this regard. Another party leader who demonstrated such a commitment was Walter Buch. He is not a well-known Nazi, but as chairman of the party’s Investigation and Conciliation Committee (*Untersuchungs- und Schlichtungsausschuss*) and president of the party’s supreme court, he held one of the most powerful positions in Nazism. What the Gestapo would later be to German society, Buch was to the party itself: a sort of Nazi Cheka, his court had the power to discipline, expel and punish all party members, and none of its judgments could be overturned save for Hitler’s direct intervention.⁵⁸ Martin Bormann, who would achieve infamy near the end of the party’s life, was Buch’s son-in-law: according to his biographer, Bormann married Buch’s daughter to gain entry to Hitler’s inner circle.⁵⁹ Otto Wagener, Hitler’s confidant in the *Kampfzeit*, named Buch as one of only three men who “were prepared and in a position to tell Hitler their own views when they contradicted his.”⁶⁰

Like the others surveyed so far, Buch related Nazism as a movement to Christ’s own “struggle,” sounding a distinct note of triumphalism. He also demonstrated the kind of dualism between good and evil, Christ and Antichrist, which marked the discourse of his fellow party members. To an assembly of the National Socialist Student League (*Nationalsozialistischer*

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 46.

⁵⁸ See Donald McKale, *The Nazi Party Courts: Hitler's Management of Conflict in His Movement, 1921-1945* (Lawrence, 1974).

⁵⁹ Jochen von Lang, *The Secretary — Martin Bormann: The Man who Manipulated Hitler* (New York, 1979), 47-48. Considering Buch’s importance, it is rather surprising that not more has been written on him. Aside from McKale’s work, only Lang’s book on Bormann contains any substantial biographical information on Buch.

⁶⁰ Otto Wagener, *Hitler: Memoirs of a Confidant*, Henry Ashby Turner, ed. (New Haven, 1985), 76. The other

Deutscher Studentenbund, NSDStB) he declared:

Life itself is struggle. ... The National Socialist *Weltanschauung* stands unreservedly for this truth. It is the foundation of all its works and deeds. ... With this conception we follow the example of no one less than our Savior. When Point 24 of our program says the party stands for a positive Christianity, here above all is the cornerstone of our thinking. Christ preached struggle as did no other. His life was struggle for his beliefs, for which he went to his death. From everyone he demanded a decision between yes or no. ... That is the necessity: that man find the power to decide between yes and no.⁶¹

Buch drew direct comparisons not only between Christ's struggle and the Nazis', but between Christ's followers and members of the NSDAP: "Just as Christianity only prevailed through the fanatical belief of its followers, so too shall it be with the spiritual movement of National Socialism."⁶²

Buch's antisemitism, which "he had learned as a young boy from his rigid Lutheran parents," was both racial and religious.⁶³ "The Jew," according to Buch, "is not a human being: he is a manifestation of decay." This was especially evident in the decline of family life. For inspiration Buch looked to Martin Luther, who described the family as "the source of every people's blessings and misfortunes."⁶⁴ The Jew caused the breakdown of the German family, since for him marriage was simply a means to an end, a contract concluded for material benefit. The German, on the other hand, entered into marriage to produce children and imbue them with values such as honor, obedience and national feeling. But as with Eckart, Dinter and Goebbels, the antithesis of the Jew was the Christian as well as the German: "The idea of eternal life, of which the Jew knows nothing, is just as characteristic of our Germanic forefathers as it was of

two were Gregor Strasser and Franz Pfeffer von Salomon, the supreme commander of the SA.

⁶¹ "Geist und Kampf" (speech): Bundesarchiv Berlin-Zehlendorf (hereafter BAZ) NS 26/1375 (n.d., n.p.) (The speech was probably given between 1930 and 1932).

⁶² *Der Aufmarsch, Blätter der deutschen Jugend* 2 (January 1931) (in BAZ NS 26/1375).

⁶³ McKale, *Courts*, 54.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 55-56.

Christ.”⁶⁵ Furthermore, Buch insisted that any mixing of Jews and Germans, whether biological or social, was a violation of the “divine world order.”⁶⁶

This reference to race as God’s creation, whose purity must be upheld as God’s will, was not simply a pious allusion hiding a “most thoroughgoing secularization.”⁶⁷ Rather, it found expression within Protestant circles as a genuine theological trend. Called the “theology of the orders of creation” (*Schöpfungsglaube*), it valorized the *Volk*, along with the family and state, as God-ordained. It was advanced by an influential group of Lutheran theologians whose views, significantly, predated Nazism (see Chapter Four). In this context, therefore, Buch’s Lutheranism is potentially significant. Another Lutheran Nazi who advanced a very similar conception of race was Hans Schemm. Like Buch, Schemm is not usually ranked among the Nazi elite. However, as head of the Nazi Teachers’ League (*Nationalsozialistische Lehrerbund*, NSLB) he was in charge of one of the party’s most important ancillary organizations.⁶⁸ Typifying the tendency of the Nazi elite to hold many feudalities, he was also Gauleiter of Bayreuth — a site of particular symbolism in the Nazi imagination — and after 1933 Bavarian Minister of Education and Culture. According to his friend Wilhelm Kube, “Schemm’s Gau [was] one of the best in Germany.”⁶⁹ Schemm was committed to the revolutionary program of the movement even after the seizure of power, warning the “mandarins” and professionals who

⁶⁵ *Der Aufmarsch 2*. Based on this evidence we can argue against McKale’s assertion that Buch “despised Jews not so much for religious or cultural reasons” (*Courts*, 55).

⁶⁶ McKale, *Courts*, 57.

⁶⁷ Fritz Stern, *The Politics of Cultural Despair: A Study in the Rise of the Germanic Ideology* (Berkeley, 1974), xxv.

⁶⁸ See Willi Feiten, *Der Nationalsozialistische Lehrerbund: Entwicklung und Organisation* (Weinheim, 1981); Hermann Giesecke, *Hitlers Pädagogen: Theorie und Praxis nationalsozialistischer Erziehung* (Weinheim, 1993); Franz Kühnel, *Hans Schemm, Gauleiter und Kultusminister 1891-1935* (Nuremberg, 1985).

⁶⁹ BAZ Sammlung Schumacher (hereafter Schu) 205/2/26 (10 June 1929: Berlin).

were supposedly trying to infiltrate the party that their names were on record.⁷⁰ Schemm was also one of the few Nazis who actually adhered to the Aryan ideal of physical beauty and vitality: according to Otto Wagener, he was “tall, blond, blue-eyed, tranquil, athletic. It was characteristic of him that, out of sheer joy for sport, he became a pilot.”⁷¹ He was also a fervent antisemite, attempting to prove the inferiority of the Jews by likening them to insects he had studied as a biologist. According to Michael Kater, “he came closer to the *terribles simplificateurs* of Jacob Burckhardt’s vision than any of the other Nazi leaders except Adolf Hitler, whom he resembled in charismatic appeal.”⁷²

Schemm was particularly known throughout the Reich for his slogan, “Our religion is Christ, our politics Fatherland!” His speeches, which were famous in Bavaria,⁷³ were designed to cast Nazism as a religious revival. As a police report stated, Schemm “speaks like a pastor” and often ended his deliveries with the Lutheran hymn, “A Mighty Fortress is our God.”⁷⁴ In one of his speeches, he spoke of God in Nazism’s conceptual universe: “Our confession to God is a confession of a doctrine of totality. ... To give ultimate significance to the totalities of race, resistance and personality there is added the supreme totalitarian slogan of our *Volk*: ‘Religion and God.’ God is the greatest totality and extends over all else.”⁷⁵ Here Schemm makes specific reference to the “totalitarian” nature of Nazi discourse. But he makes it clear that the

⁷⁰ Michael Kater, *The Nazi Party: A Social Profile of Members and Leaders, 1919-1945* (Cambridge MA, 1983), 161.

⁷¹ IfZ ED 60/7 (n.d., n.p.). The book made from Wagener’s recollections (Turner [ed.], *Memoirs*) leaves out this passage.

⁷² Kater, *Nazi Party*, 186.

⁷³ See for instance Geoffrey Pridham, *Hitler’s Rise to Power: The Nazi Movement in Bavaria, 1923-1933* (London, 1973), 101-02, who refers to Schemm’s unconventional electioneering through the Franconian countryside and the success this had especially among youth. Pridham also points to Schemm’s organizational skills in explaining Nazi success in this region. See also Kershaw, *Popular Opinion and Political Dissent in the Third Reich: Bavaria 1933-1945* (Oxford, 1983), 158.

⁷⁴ Kühnel, *Schemm*, 134-35.

⁷⁵ Gertrud Kahl-Furthmann (ed.), *Hans Schemm spricht: Seine Reden und sein Werk* (Bayreuth, 1935), 124.

“totalizing” claims of Nazism as a *Weltanschauung* did not preclude the possibility that that *Weltanschauung* could be based on a variety of Christianity. Far from conflicting loyalties, for Schemm Christianity and Nazism went hand in hand: “[W]e are no theologians, no representatives of the teaching profession in this sense, put forth no theology. But we claim one thing for ourselves: that we place the great fundamental idea of Christianity in the center of our ideology [*Ideenwelt*] — the hero and sufferer Christ himself stands in the center.”⁷⁶

Schemm also concerned himself with the ordination of race. In a 1931 debate he held with prominent Protestant churchmen, he directly confronted those who claimed that Nazism replaced Christianity with a new race religion:

Race is clearly the decisive issue and I have already expressed this view in a spirited discussion at a pastors’ conference in Nuremberg. Representatives of the church voiced the suspicion that within National Socialism could be found a deification [*Vergottung*] of the concept of race. I can understand that an earnest theologian who does not quite know our movement perceives a danger in it, when he notices time and again that we place racial thought in the foreground, when he notices that we would make the purity of blood the highest law. However, those who know our movement and introduce themselves to its deep commitment to Christianity immediately lay aside their objections ...

Race and religion give rise to each other. I do not believe that the *Volk* are obliged to put aside race for the sake of religion; otherwise all natural and historical development would be invalid.⁷⁷

Schemm attempted to discursively reconcile science and religion, instead of demoting science as Goebbels and Eckart did. In Schemm’s view, the priority given to the *Volk* in Point 24 did not mean a demotion of Christianity. Mixing racial and religious metaphors, Schemm proclaimed:

When one puts steel into fire, the steel will glow and shine in its own distinctive way. And likewise with every other metal. When I put the German *Volk* into the fire of Christianity, the German *Volk* will react in its racially distinctive way. It will build German cathedrals and create a German hymn.... We want to preserve, not subvert, what

⁷⁶ Walter Künneht, Werner Wilm and Hans Schemm, *Was haben wir als evangelische Christen zum Rufe des Nationalsozialismus zu sagen?* (Dresden, 1931), 19.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

God has created, just as the oak tree and the fir tree retain their difference in a forest. — Why do the trees in the forest not interbreed? — Why is there not only one type of tree [*Einheitsbaum*]? Why should our concept of race suddenly turn into the Marxist concept of a single type of human? We are accused of wanting to deify the idea of race. But since race is willed by God, we want nothing else but to keep the race pure, in order to fulfill God's law.⁷⁸

Here is an explicit evocation of the orders of creation. As did *Schöpfungsglaube* theologians, Schemm established the sanctity of racial separation, the theological precondition for positing the Germans as God's chosen people. As much as he paid attention to the racial question, however, Schemm did not argue for the *supremacy* of race. Indeed, he explicitly rejected the notion of racial materialism, since he considered materialism of any kind to be Marxist: “[T]he spiritual for us always remains primary, blood and race secondary. The cause of all things is and remains the Creator.... Race, *Volk* and nation represent only instruments which lead to God.”⁷⁹ Schemm even rejected Darwin, whose ideas, along with Marx's, represented the “political formulation of materialism.”⁸⁰

These were among the many voices of the Nazi leadership. But did the top Nazi, Adolf Hitler, speak in the discourse of Christ and Antichrist? Much is already known through the “Bible” of the Nazi movement, Hitler's *Mein Kampf*. It undoubtedly spoke of the Jewish “problem” in racial terms; but it also sounded a strongly Christian note. In its pages Hitler gave no indication of being an atheist or agnostic, or of believing only in a remote, rationalist deity.⁸¹ Indeed, he referred continually to a providential, active God: “What we must fight for is to safeguard the existence and reproduction of our race ... so that our people may mature for the fulfillment of the mission allotted it by the creator of the universe. ... Peoples that bastardize

⁷⁸ Ibid., 19-20.

⁷⁹ Kahl-Furthmann, *Schemm*, 127.

⁸⁰ Kühnel, *Schemm*, 123.

⁸¹ As suggested by William Carr, *Hitler: A Study in Personality and Politics* (London, 1978), 135-36.

themselves, or let themselves be bastardized, sin against the will of eternal Providence.”⁸² Hitler cast his antisemitism in economic, political and even eugenic terms, but he frequently concluded on a religious basis: “Hence today I believe that I am acting in accordance with the will of the Almighty Creator: by defending myself against the Jew, I am fighting for the work of the Lord.”⁸³ As did his mentor Eckart, Hitler emphasized the Aryan belief in the afterlife over against Jewish belief, which according to Hitler could even be called religion: “Due to his own original special nature, the Jew cannot possess a religious institution, if for no other reason because he lacks idealism in any form, and hence belief in a hereafter is absolutely foreign to him. And a religion in the Aryan sense cannot be imagined which lacks the conviction of survival after death in some form.”⁸⁴ Here Hitler speaks of the Aryan rather than the Christian. But there is an implicit equating of the two, made explicit on other occasions. Consistent with his party comrades, Hitler regarded the antithesis of the Jew to be the Christian — in this case Christ himself — as well as the Aryan:

[The Jew’s] life is only of this world, and his spirit is inwardly as alien to true Christianity as his nature two thousand years previous was to the great founder of the new doctrine. Of course, the latter made no secret of his attitude toward the Jewish people, and when necessary he even took to the whip to drive from the temple of the Lord this adversary of all humanity, who then as always saw in religion nothing but an instrument for his business existence. In return, Christ was nailed to the cross, while our present-day party Christians [e.g. Center Party] debase themselves to begging for Jewish votes at elections and later try to arrange political swindles with atheistic Jewish parties.⁸⁵

In *Mein Kampf*, the Jew took on the satanic proportions of the Antichrist: “[I]n his vileness he

⁸² Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 214, 327.

⁸³ Ibid., 65. Saul Friedländer suggests that this passage got to the heart of the Nazis’ antisemitism: *Nazi Germany and the Jews: The Years of Persecution, 1933-1939* (New York, 1997), 98. He contends that the Nazis subscribed to a “Redemptive” antisemitism, “born from the fear of racial degeneration and the religious belief in redemption” (ibid., 87).

⁸⁴ Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 306.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 307.

becomes so gigantic that no one need be surprised if among our people the personification of the devil as the symbol of all evil assumes the living shape of the Jew.”⁸⁶

As with *Michael*, Hitler’s *Mein Kampf* enunciates views widely accepted as genuine components of Nazi ideology: racialism, antisemitism, antimarxism, antiliberalism, belief in the need for *Lebensraum*. Whereas Hitler is certainly mendacious about many things in *Mein Kampf*, he is surprisingly frank about the basic contours of the Nazi program. Nonetheless, other historical sources contend that the public stance Hitler took towards Christianity was deceptive, that Hitler was in fact a hater of Christianity who simply posed otherwise for the sake of politics. Historians have long claimed to find Hitler’s “real” attitude on religion in the works of Hermann Rauschning. One book in particular, *Hitler Speaks*,⁸⁷ is consistently employed to argue that Hitler’s professions in *Mein Kampf* were nothing more than opportunism; that beneath this cloak of piety stood a duplicitous hater of Christianity and everything it stood for. According to Rauschning, Hitler stated in April 1933:

Neither of the confessions — Catholic or Protestant, they are both the same — has any future left. At least not for the Germans. [Italian] Fascism may perhaps make its peace with the Church in God’s name. I will do it too. Why not? But that won’t stop me stamping out Christianity in Germany, root and branch. One is either a Christian or a German. You can’t be both. ... Do you really believe the masses will ever be Christian again? Nonsense! Never again. That tale is finished. No one will listen to it again. But we can hasten matters. The parsons will be made to dig their own graves. They will betray their God to us. They will betray anything for the sake of their miserable little jobs and incomes.⁸⁸

The conspiratorial tone of this account of the “private” Hitler has convinced many church historians that Hitler was “a wolf in sheep’s clothing,” anti-Christian to the core and from the

⁸⁶ Ibid., 324.

⁸⁷ Hermann Rauschning, *Hitler Speaks* (London, 1939). The German edition was published in Switzerland as *Gespräche mit Hitler* (Zürich, 1940).

⁸⁸ Rauschning, *Speaks*, 57-58.

outset of his career.⁸⁹ The caricature Rauschning presents of Hitler's ranting should alone have raised questions as to its authenticity; but the more troubling fact remains that Rauschning's book stands completely alone in handing down sayings of this nature from this period.⁹⁰ It is not for nothing that these factors should raise questions: *Hitler Speaks* is now considered to be fraudulent. As a recent biographer has put it: "Especially the chapter 'Hitler in private' ... is untrustworthy through and through — a product of war propaganda. ... [Rauschning's] 'conversations with Hitler' are far-off fantasies."⁹¹ Moreover, Rauschning was too peripheral to the movement to have been part of Hitler's inner-circle of confidants, as he consistently maintained.⁹² However, despite the highly questionable nature of Rauschning as a primary source, some historians curiously persist in using him.⁹³

Other sources for Hitler's private and "confidential" views offer no indication of an anti-Christian agenda, or even indifference in religious questions. As early as 1919 Hitler sketched out his basic worldview in an unpublished manuscript. The first section was on the Bible, under

⁸⁹ See, *inter alia*, Conway, *Persecution*, 15-16; Denzler and Fabricius, *Christen*, 17-19 ("wolf" quote: 19); Carsten Nicolaisen (ed.), *Dokumente zur Kirchenpolitik des Dritten Reiches*, 3 vols. (Munich, 1971-94), 1: 31-34; Hans Buchheim, *Glaubenskrise im Dritten Reich: Drei Kapitel nationalsozialistischer Religionspolitik* (Stuttgart, 1953); Wilhelm Zipfel, *Die Kirchenkampf in Deutschland 1933-1945: Religionsverfolgung und Selbstbehauptung der Kirchen in der nationalsozialistischen Zeit* (Berlin, 1965), 9. Historians are now using Rauschning via other works. For instance, Martyn Housden, *Resistance and Conformity in the Third Reich* (London, 1997), 46, cites Zipfel as the source of this famous Rauschning passage.

⁹⁰ Eberhard Jäckel noted long ago that Rauschning was an unreliable source; he painted such a one-dimensional picture of Hitler as an opportunist that, for instance, the Holocaust ended up having nothing to do with antisemitism: *Hitler's Worldview: A Blueprint for Power* (Cambridge MA, 1972), 15-17.

⁹¹ Eckhard Jesse, "Hermann Rauschning — Der fragwürdige Kronzeuge," in Ronald Smelser et al (eds.), *Die braune Elite II: 21 weitere biographische Skizzen* (Darmstadt, 1993), 201-02.

⁹² Theodor Schieder attempted many years ago to defend Rauschning's works: see his *Hermann Rauschnings 'Gespräche mit Hitler' als Geschichtsquelle* (Opladen, 1972). However, a growing amount of literature has proven they are not reliable sources: besides Jesse, see Wolfgang Hänel, *Hermann Rauschnings 'Gespräche mit Hitler': Eine Geschichtsfälschung* (Ingolstadt, 1984); Fritz Tobias, "Auch Fälschungen haben lange Beine: Des Senatpräsidenten Rauschnings 'Gespräche mit Hitler'," in K. Corino (ed.), *Gefälscht: Betrug in Literatur, Kunst, Musik, Wissenschaft und Politik* (Nördlingen, 1988). In his comprehensive biography of Hitler, Ian Kershaw similarly dismisses Rauschning's book, "a work now regarded to have so little authenticity that it is best to disregard it altogether": Ian Kershaw, *Hitler 1889-1936: Hubris* (London, 1998), xiv.

⁹³ This is especially true for church historians: cf. Denzler and Fabricius, *Christen*, whose revised 1993 edition still relies on Rauschning to support their arguments.

which heading Hitler noted: “Monumental History of Mankind — Idealism-Materialism: Nothing without a cause — history makes men ... the children of God and men.”⁹⁴ He concluded from this the “First result: purification of the Bible — that which is consistent with our spirit. Second result: critical examination of the remainder.”⁹⁵ This is almost certainly an allusion to the Old Testament, which both Eckart and Dinter claimed had to be removed from the Christian canon. As we shall see in Chapter Four, this was a view to be found within established theological circles as well.

Other sources paint a similar picture. In a party gathering at Munich’s Bürgerbräukeller in 1922, Hitler dealt with the question of whether one could be both an antisemite and a Christian:

I say my Christian feelings point me to my Lord and Savior as a fighter (tumultuous, prolonged applause). They point me toward the man who, once lonely and surrounded by only a few followers, recognized these Jews and called for battle against them, and who, as the true God, was not only the greatest as a sufferer but also the greatest as a warrior. ... [A]s a Christian and a human being, I read the passage which declares to us how the Lord finally rose up and seized the whip to drive the usurers, the brood of serpents and snakes, from the Temple! (tumultuous applause)⁹⁶

In this speech, delivered in front of a mostly Nazi audience, Hitler referred to Jesus as “the true God.” He made it plain that he regarded Christ’s struggle as direct inspiration for his own. He added: “Two thousand years ago a man was also denounced by the same race.... The man was dragged before the court and it was also said of him, ‘He stirred up the people.’ So he too had been a ‘rabble-rouser!’ And against whom? Against ‘God’ they cried. Yes indeed, he roused the rabble against the ‘God’ of the Jews, for this ‘God’ is only gold (tumultuous applause).”⁹⁷

⁹⁴ Werner Maser, *Hitler’s Letters and Notes* (London, 1973), 282-83. Following chapters were to have been on “2. The Aryan; 3. His Works; 4. The Jew; 5. His Work” (ibid.).

⁹⁵ Ibid., 282-83.

⁹⁶ *VB*, 13/4/22.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

For Hitler, Jesus was not just one archetype among others, but “our greatest Aryan leader.”⁹⁸

Christ socialists

Aside from a “spiritual” struggle against the Jews, the party’s “positive Christianity” pointed as well to a social ethic in the expression “public need before private greed.” The Nazis’ opposition to the economic system of communism is well known. But the Nazis also insisted they were against “mammonism.” Nazi economic theorists Gottfried Feder and Gregor Strasser advanced the idea of a socially-oriented, ethical “productive capitalism” (*schaffendes Kapital*), contrasting it with a selfish “rapacious capitalism” (*raffendes Kapital*).⁹⁹ Party members designated as economic experts cast their views in similar language. Dietrich Klagges, charged with the task of helping to define Nazi economic theory, made a fairly typical call for the ethical-moral supervision of the economy in a 1929 article: “Comprehensive social justice can be brought to bear only by withdrawing the decision making on interest rates, prices, and wages from the sphere of economic power and transferring it to the sphere of justice and legal authority.”¹⁰⁰ As a professed follower of Christ, Klagges doubtlessly would have found inspiration for his ethical imperative in Christ’s expulsion of the usurers and money-changers. We cannot rehearse the many controversies that surround the persistence or curtailment of capitalism in the Nazi system;¹⁰¹ but it is clear that Nazi ideology sought a “third way” between Marxist and liberal

⁹⁸ Eberhard Jäckel (ed.), *Hitler: Sämtliche Aufzeichnungen 1905-1924* (Stuttgart, 1980), 635.

⁹⁹ Barkai, *Economics*, 23. Such parallels had emerged long before, in the Wilhelmine period.

¹⁰⁰ Quoted in *ibid*, 195.

¹⁰¹ See Peter Hayes, *Industry and Ideology: IG Farben in the Nazi Era* (Cambridge, 1987); Richard Overy, *War and Economy in the Third Reich* (Oxford, 1994); Henry Ashby Turner, *German Big Business and the Rise of Hitler* (Oxford, 1985).

socio-economic modes.¹⁰² The Nazi movement espoused a national, anti-Marxist socialism that would finally end class strife in Germany, forging the People's Community as an organic, harmonious whole. More important than the programmatic details of the Nazis' social policy was the underlying logic of cross-class solidarity.

In the Nazis' conceptual universe, the struggle against marxism and liberalism was intimately bound up with antisemitism. Those Nazis who revered Jesus as the first antisemite often cast him as the first socialist as well. Joseph Goebbels, a Nazi for whom the "socialism" in National Socialism was of particular importance, was a notable example in this regard. In *Michael*, the evil of communism finds its greatest enemy in Christ, who is elevated as the ideal expression of "German" socialism:

The idea of sacrifice first gained visible shape in Christ. Sacrifice is intrinsic to socialism. Sacrifice oneself for others. The Jew, however, does not understand this at all. His socialism consists of sacrificing others for himself. This is what Marxism is like in practice.

Distribute your property to the poor: Christ. Property is theft — so long as it does not belong to me: Marx. Christ Socialists: That means voluntarily and willingly doing what the run-of-the-mill socialists do out of pity or for reasons of state. Moral necessity versus political insight. The struggle we are now waging today until victory or the bitter end is, in its deepest sense, a struggle between Christ and Marx. Christ: the principle of love. Marx: the principle of hate.¹⁰³

Goebbels' reference to "Christ Socialists" (*Christussozialisten*) as opposed to "Christian Socialists" (*Christliche Sozialisten*) emphasizes the nearly evangelical nature of the struggle: an unadulterated return to Christ's teachings, free of the temporal church, is the only way to German salvation. "The modern man is intrinsically a seeker of God, perhaps a Christ-man. ...

¹⁰² Barkai, *Economics*; Jeffrey Herf, *Reactionary Modernism: Technology, Culture and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich* (Cambridge, 1984). As Peter Hayes puts it, "to German industry, the emergent economic system was still capitalism, but only in the same sense that for a professional gambler poker remains poker, even when the house shuffles, deals, determines the ante and the wild cards, and can change them at will, even when there is a ceiling on winnings, which may be spent only as the casino permits and for the most part only on the premises": Hayes, *IG Farben*, 79.

¹⁰³ Goebbels, *Michael*, 66.

We modern Germans are something like Christ Socialists.”¹⁰⁴ Away from the public eye, Goebbels similarly wrote: “Speaking does not help. Action! Be socialists of action. There is too little of that. Be true Christians!”¹⁰⁵ This emphasis on an active morality, a “practical” Christianity, would be a continuous theme for Goebbels long after the seizure of power.

Walter Buch also touched on the social dimension of “positive Christianity.” Addressing himself to Nazi youth, he wrote on the party’s social philosophy:

Public need before private greed. There was a time in Nordic lands when this phrase went without saying.... So important and meaningful is this phrase that Jesus Christ placed it in the center of his religious teaching. However, since Christ was not a politician, since his *Reich* was not of this world, he put the calling into other words. He taught: love your neighbors as yourself! National Socialism is therefore nothing new, nothing that a person after much consideration would not come upon as the solution to the economic plight of the Germans.¹⁰⁶

Buch plainly states that Nazi socialism is “nothing new,” but rather the simple fruit born of Christian love of neighbor, in which the neighbor, or *Volksgenossen*, is defined by his national belonging. Even in a system where priority was given to “race,” Nazis like Buch believed that certain Christian traditions were basic to *völkisch* socialism.

Another leading proponent of Nazi economic theory, Joseph Wagner, suggested a link between Nazi and Christian conceptions of socialism. Gauleiter of Westphalia, Wagner made numerous speeches on the Nazis’ economic agenda.¹⁰⁷ Like Klagges he was considered an expert in economic questions. In 1936 he was appointed “Reich Commissioner for Price Setting” (*Preisbildung*), an occasion lauded in the Nazi press as the final realization of Hitler’s will to

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 65.

¹⁰⁵ Fröhlich (ed.), *Tagebücher*, entry for 27/6/24.

¹⁰⁶ *Der Aufmarsch, Blätter der deutschen Jugend* 2 (January 1931) (in BAZ NS 26/1375).

¹⁰⁷ See, *inter alia*, “Weltwirtschaft und Sozialismus,” *VB*, 27/11/26; “Das Verbrechen der sog. Wirtschaftspartei,” *VB*, 28/6/29; “Wirtschaft und Sozialpolitik,” *Rote Erde*, 24/4/35 (all found in Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv [hereafter BStA], Sammlung Rehse [hereafter Rehse]/P5049).

command the economy.¹⁰⁸ In a 1932 speech Wagner outlined the contours of the party's economic platform, stating that three main tendencies stood opposed to it: Marxism, "the enemy of private property, the national state and Christianity"; political Catholicism; and "Jewish liberalism, the antithesis of Christianity, and as the champion of economic permissiveness and piracy by the stock exchange and banks, the mortal enemy of socialism."¹⁰⁹ Private property was sanctified as such, but not the excesses of an egoistic capitalism. In the Third Reich, Wagner would provide ample evidence that his professions of Christianity were based on more than political expediency.

Some Nazis suggested that a Christian ethics were also vital in bridging the confessional divide that separated the *Volk* into Protestant and Catholic. Bernhard Rust, Gauleiter of South Hanover-Braunschweig and Reich Education Minister after 1933, felt this was a particularly important element of positive Christianity. Making specific reference to "practical Christianity," Rust spoke of both confessions in a clear tone of equity: "Neither the Reformation nor the Counter-Reformation fully conquered all of Germany, nor did either create a Christian state religion. The National Socialist program commits itself to positive Christianity. However, the German *Volk*, split into two religions, cannot express one confession to Christian dogma, but only to practical Christianity. The two confessions can find each other in Christian ethics, whereas in dogma the *Volk* breaks in two."¹¹⁰ Rust lamented the inconclusive outcome of the Reformation, but rather than advancing a radical solution, he sought to sublimate it by emphasizing ideological commonalities. In this context Rust also suggested that the moral teachings available in Christianity, rather than theological doctrines, was what counted: "What

¹⁰⁸ VB, 14/6/36; *Westfälische Landeszeitung*, 30/10/36, in IfZ Fa 223/95. Barkai suggests that translating *Preisbildung* as "Price Controls" overlooks the fact that the Nazis wanted "not merely price control but *the setting of prices* by the government" (Barkai, *Economics*, 188 [emphasis in the original]).

¹⁰⁹ "Gauleiter Wagner vor dem nationalen Köln," *Westdeutscher Beobachter*, 9/4/32 (in BStA Rehse/P5049).

¹¹⁰ *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* (hereafter *DAZ*), 23/3/35.

Christianity achieves is not dogma, it does not seek the outward ecclesiastical form, but rather ethical principles. ... There is no religion and no philosophy that equals it in its moral content; no philosophical ethics is better able to diffuse the tension between this life and the hereafter, from which Christianity and its ethic were born.”¹¹¹

As with antisemitism, Hitler maintained that the party’s socialism was tied to Christianity. In a meeting with his inner circle on Nazi economic thinking, Hitler enunciated his ideas on the roots of “real” socialism:

It is such a far-reaching and complete conversion that the adult is no longer capable of it. Only youth can be converted, newly aligned and adjusted to the socialist sense of obligation toward the community. For almost two thousand years the Gospel of Christ has been preached, for two thousand years the sense of community has been taught.... But today, at the end of these two thousand years, economic liberalism flourishes as never before!¹¹²

This view clearly resonates Goebbels’ notion of the German as a “Christ Socialist.” For Hitler, the answer to the current state of affairs lay in a resurrection of Christ’s ideas: “Today, when we similarly witness signs of decay, need, and liberalistic disintegration as existed in the Roman Empire of Christ’s time, Christian teaching is once more the idea of redemption [*Erlöseridee*]! And as Christ proclaimed ‘love one another’, so our call — ‘peoples’ community’, ‘public need before private greed’, ‘communally-minded social consciousness’ — rings out through the German fatherland! This call will echo throughout the world!”¹¹³ Without reference to a particular variety, “positive” or otherwise, Hitler insists that Christianity is at the center of Nazi social thought. As with Buch and Goebbels, Hitler regards the teachings of Christ as direct inspiration for the “German” socialism advanced by the party.

¹¹¹ *Reichsbote*, 31/3/35 (in BAP 62 Di 1/106/266).

¹¹² Turner (ed.), *Memoirs*, 56.

¹¹³ IfZ ED 60/7 (n.d., n.p.). As with note 71 (above), this passage in Wagener’s memoirs is left out of the volume edited by Turner (it would have appeared on 427 of the German edition, *Hitler aus nächster Nähe: Aufzeichnungen*

At a similar private meeting of his confidants, in which he explained why economics must be subordinate to politics, Hitler again affirmed this connection. It is worth quoting at length:

Socialism is a political problem. And politics is of no concern to the economy.... Socialism is a question of attitude to life, of the ethical outlook on life of all who live together in a common ethnic or national space. Socialism is a *Weltanschauung*!

But in actual fact there is nothing new about this *Weltanschauung*. Whenever I read the New Testament Gospels and the revelations of various of the prophets ... I am astonished at all that has been made of the teachings of these divinely inspired men, especially Jesus Christ, which are so clear and unique, heightened to religiosity. *They* were the ones who created this new worldview which we now call socialism, they established it, they taught it and they lived it! But the communities that called themselves Christian churches did not understand it! Or if they did, they denied Christ and betrayed him! ...

*We are the first to exhume these teachings! Through us alone, and not until now, do these teachings celebrate their resurrection! Mary and Magdalene stood at the empty tomb. For they were seeking the dead man. But we intend to raise the treasures of the living Christ!*¹¹⁴

As with Goebbels, Hitler declares that the “true message” of Christianity is to be found only with Nazism. They both claim that, where the churches failed in their mission to instill a Christian ethic in secular society, their movement would take up the task. Hitler not only reads the New Testament, but professes — in private — to be inspired by it. As a consequence, he also claims (like Buch) that the substance of Nazi social theory is “nothing new.”

Between sectarianism and syncretism

When tying different strands of Christian antisemitism or socialism to their own movement, Nazis spoke an undifferentiated, non-confessional discourse. In large part, this was one of the very purposes of “positive Christianity”: to bridge the religious divide by making no specific

eines Vertrauen 1929-1932 [Frankfurt a.M., 1978]).

¹¹⁴ Turner (ed.), *Memoirs*, 139-40 (emphasis in the original).

references to a particular confessional bias. Any direct allusion to a particular theological lineage would have worked against the priority of the nation. Insofar as this allowed the NSDAP to appeal to all of Germany's Christians, it had potential as an effective political strategy. But it was also central to the inner logic of the Nazi system: by appealing to what the Nazis regarded as the commonalities that joined Protestants and Catholics, they hoped to unify the nation and end a long, bloody history of sectarianism in Germany. In this sense, the Nazis undoubtedly put the nation above confession. This goal notwithstanding, the sectarian fault line that ran through German society — illustrated in conceptions of Luther and the Reformation — could be found within the Nazi movement as well. Even though they upheld the need to place Germans under the common banner of “Christianity,” many positive Christians in the party displayed clear allegiances, and often lent ideological favor to one confession over the other — even ones that were not their own.

In his observations on Germany's religious past, Dietrich Eckart betrayed a Catholic sensibility. Whereas Luther was to be applauded for revealing the Jewish danger as none of his contemporaries could, by attacking Catholicism he inadvertently did the Jews' bidding: “There would never have been a schism, never the war which for thirty years shed torrents of Aryan blood, as the Jews wanted.”¹¹⁵ Even though he criticized Luther, Eckart clearly approved of Luther as a great antisemite and nationalist, an appreciation of the Reformer very rare among Catholics. This is not purely coincidental; Eckart's mother was Lutheran.¹¹⁶ His mixed confessional heritage may account for Eckart's simultaneous approval of Luther and criticism of the religious wars he helped unleash, as well as his known predilection for the “conciliatory,”

¹¹⁵ Eckart, *Bolschewismus*, 31.

¹¹⁶ Lane and Rupp (eds.), *Ideology*, 147.

interconfessional nature of positive Christianity.¹¹⁷

The Catholic Goebbels also had mixed views on Luther and his religion. True to the positive Christian promise to be “above confessions,” he praised Protestantism, even while defending Catholicism from party members’ sectarian attacks:

Yesterday with Kaufmann, Ripke and Etterich. Catholicism and Protestantism. We were not in agreement. I maintain Catholicism is music (feeling), Protestantism poetry (reason and personal responsibility). It is no coincidence that Beethoven and Mozart are Catholics, Goethe and Schiller Protestants. Ripke and Kaufmann meant Jesuits and said Catholics. This is totally false. The Jesuits are as hostile to true Catholicism as they are to every other power. There is a Catholic feeling. Also an *essentia catholica*! Yes indeed, Axel Ripke! It has nothing to do with the Jesuits. But time and again the Jesuits will attempt to utilize the *essentia catholica* for their own political aims. Every great German is Catholic in his feelings, Protestant in his actions. Protestantism is defined: Luther! Here I stand, I can do no other, God help me, amen!¹¹⁸

In his own literary fashion Goebbels attempts here to synthesize the best attributes of each confession. Without explicitly employing the term, he nonetheless argues that an *Überkonfessionalismus* is innate to the character of German greatness. Regardless of one’s confession, elements of both exist in the truly great. Goebbels’ claim that Germans are “Protestant” in their actions suggests that he felt the Nazis themselves, as “men of action,” were similarly Protestant in deportment. A few years later, however, Goebbels’ assessment of Luther was much more negative:

Wittenberg. In Wittenberg straight to Luther’s house. Outside the peace of the cloister garden. Inside writings, Luther’s living room and study. The pulpit from which he preached. History! Yes, history to us. Luther does not give us much more today. He did not measure up to the highest standards. Either he could not come at all, or he had to be a revolutionary and bring everything to his knees. But here stands before us a fellow who left behind nothing else but a religiously divided people. That is what *I* think. Catholicism and Protestantism are both rotten. Luther was the first religious liberal.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷ Plewnia, *Eckart*, 53.

¹¹⁸ Fröhlich (ed.), *Tagebücher*, entry for 26/3/25.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, entry for 16/9/28 (emphasis in the original).

Unlike other Nazis, who recognized the tragic consequences of Luther's Reformation but blamed Catholicism for not giving way, Goebbels here blames Luther. The very attributes other Nazis found so inspiring in Luther — the totalizing revolutionary recasting everything before him — are not appreciated by Goebbels. Instead of appreciation of each confession for its own strengths, we see here a rejection of both confessions similar to the attacks on the churches in *Michael*. Taken as a whole, Goebbels' attitude towards the confessions was ambivalent. He could defend Catholicism while praising Protestantism, or attack both. Goebbels nonetheless retained a distinction between the confessions and Christianity. Shortly after attacking both churches as "rotten," he triumphantly wrote in his diary: "We have brought back the image of Christ."¹²⁰

This position on confessions found resonance within larger circles as well. As early as 1920, the German Socialist Party (DSP), an early rival of the NSDAP which counted Streicher among its leaders, addressed the issue of religion in their first party congress in Hanover. The leadership agreed to take the "Protestant and Catholic religion into account" equally, and a non-confessional platform was readily agreed to: "We are friends and supporters of religion and Christianity, and welcome all efforts that work toward a deeper religious understanding and a reminder of our Christian nature."¹²¹ Years after he left the DSP, Streicher maintained this theme of confessional supersession, tying it in with the common denominator of Jew hatred: "Every National Socialist has the freedom to think what he wants about Catholicism or Protestantism. ... Instead of the Bavarian Peoples' party asking the question, 'where is Christian unity in the

¹²⁰ Ibid., entry for 9/12/28. *Michael* having first been published in 1929 — all of its Christian references intact — is also a fair indication that his anti-confessional feelings of this period in no way conflicted with an attachment to Christianity itself.

¹²¹ "Verhandlungsschrift des 1. Parteitages der Deutschsozialistischen Partei in Hannover": IfZ MA 734 (24-26 April 1920: Hannover) (emphasis in the original).

struggle against the Christ-killers?’ it is proclaiming ‘Hand in hand with the Christ-killers’.”¹²²

If Eckart and Goebbels took an ambivalent stance toward Luther, or at least showed no preference for Protestantism, there were others, both Protestant and Catholic, who placed Luther in the Nazi pantheon along with Christ. As the product of a pious Protestant upbringing, Buch was particularly fond of Martin Luther: “We have all seen how, in our movement and in the work of our Führer, the same ideas can live in many people, that the same spirit is produced. Many people confess their amazement that Hitler preaches ideas which they have always held. ... From the Middle Ages we can look to the same example in Martin Luther. What stirred in the soul and spirit of the German people of that time, finally found expression in his person, in his words and deeds.”¹²³ Buch was fond of quoting Luther, even privately. As he wrote to a friend in 1929: “Luther’s eloquent words, ‘the intellect is the Devil’s whore,’ confirms my belief that the human spirit of the greatest magnitude is too small to alter the laws of life. And the highest law of life is *struggle*. ... Nothing comes from ‘yes, but’ [*Zwar-Aber*].”¹²⁴

Hans Schemm presented a particularly interesting case. His made strong references to the syncretic nature of positive Christianity: “Each confession in honor, but the common holy bond, which is tied together through both confessions, must always be emphasized on account of the German and Christian community. We all say a Lord’s Prayer, we all have a Savior, we all have a Christmas celebration. The banner above both confessions is: Christianity.”¹²⁵ Yet Schemm was also an ardent admirer of Luther, and attempted to connect him with racial thought:

¹²² *Stenographischer Bericht über die Verhandlungen des Bayerischen Landtags*, Siebenundfünfzigste öffentliche Sitzung (29 January 1930) (in BStA MInn/81630/75-76).

¹²³ “Geist und Kampf” (speech): BAZ NS 26/1375 (n.d., n.p.). The same reverence for Luther was found in his family. According to Lang, Buch’s wife was delighted with the prospect of having Bormann as a son-in-law, since “Soon we’ll have a Martin in our family too!” (Lang, *Secretary*, 47). He also refers to “the stern Protestant morality of the Buch family” (ibid.).

¹²⁴ BAZ NS 26/1375 (1 December 1929: Berlin) (emphasis in the original).

¹²⁵ Künne et al., *Christen*, 22-23.

“What went for Luther goes for us as well: only through the mirror of our blood and our race are we able to see God as he must be seen.”¹²⁶

Schemm also attacked the signifiers of German Catholicism, most notably the Center party. He castigated them for placing a *Redeverbot* on a prominent Nazi speaker, the Protestant pastor Ludwig Münchmeyer, while allowing “free room for maneuver” for the Social Democrats.¹²⁷ (Schemm failed to mention that Münchmeyer commonly referred to the Center as “the biggest Jew in the Reich.”¹²⁸) In 1931 Schemm contributed to a booklet meant specifically for the Protestant German giving consideration to the Nazi movement. Here he attacked “political” Catholicism once more: “[T]he political organizations that in Germany today have betrayed Christianity are the Center and Bavarian Peoples’ Parties. One can not join hands in league with the mortal enemy [e.g. social democrats] and then still say: ‘Vote Center! God wills it!’.”¹²⁹ As we have seen already, Nazis regularly attacked “political Catholicism” as a political rival. Usually, however, they refrained from attacking the religion the Center party claimed to uphold, instead casting the Center as a betrayer of Christianity, since it worked closely with the Social Democratic party for much of Weimar. Schemm went beyond this. In party correspondence regarding the intensely sectarian Protestant League, which was seeking active political cooperation with the Nazis, Schemm stated: “The Protestant League stands very close to the NSDAP. It is consciously German and, through moral religious energy, wants to contribute to the building up of the German people. ... [It has] the same line as the NSDAP against the

¹²⁶ Kahl-Furthmann (ed.), *Schemm*, 126.

¹²⁷ *Stenographischer Bericht über die Verhandlungen des Bayerischen Landtags*, Siebenundfünfzigste öffentliche Sitzung (29 January 1930) (in BStA MInn/81630/71-72).

¹²⁸ Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz (hereafter GStA) I Rep 77/Tit 4043/Nr 188/2-18 (23 March 1931: Oberhausen).

¹²⁹ Walter Künneth et al., *Christen*, 20.

Center as [representatives of] political, ultramontane Catholicism.”¹³⁰

Protestant sectarianism was notable in wider circles, especially the German Völkisch Freedom Party (*Deutschvölkischen Freiheitspartei*, DVFP). An antisemitic off-shoot of the German National party, the DVFP actively cooperated with the Nazis, especially in the north, where its organization was much stronger than Hitler’s party. After the failed Beer Hall putsch it joined forces with NSDAP elements to create the National Socialist Freedom Party (*Nationalsozialistische Freiheitspartei*, NSFP), the numerically and politically stronger competitor to the GDVG. A rivalrous relationship with the NSDAP resumed after Hitler’s release, but the two parties had “no real programmatic differences.”¹³¹ Indeed, some of the most notable DVFP members, such as Wilhelm Kube and Graf von Reventlow, were to achieve positions of status in the NSDAP.

Despite these affinities, there was an explicit Protestant sectarianism within DVFP not present in the NSDAP. In a revealing comparison, Goebbels claimed “the two certainly do not belong together. The one wants Prussian Protestantism (they call it the ‘German Church’), the other a Greater German compromise — perhaps something with a Catholic touch. Munich and Berlin remain opposed.”¹³² In 1924, the DVFP proclaimed: “The *völkisch* freedom movement is a religious movement to the core. It wants a deepening of the German people and knows that the German without religion is unthinkable. In its ranks are positive Protestants; prominent ministers of this tendency fight for our movement ... [theological] Liberals as well as German Christians are in our ranks.” They claimed “hundreds of thousands of Catholics” were followers, but in the same breath urged: “Protestant Christians, defend your Christianity against party

¹³⁰ BAZ NS 12/638 (6 March 1931: Berlin). In his original letter to Schemm, Wilhelm Fahrenhorst, head of the Protestant League, indicated that he had spoken with Göring on the NSDAP’s connection to Protestantism: BAZ NS 12/638 (20 December 1930: Berlin).

¹³¹ Thomas Childers, *The Nazi Voter: The Social Foundations of Fascism in Germany, 1919-1933* (Chapel Hill, 1983), 53-56; Orlow, *Nazi Party*, 49-50, 62.

¹³² Fröhlich (ed.) *Tagebücher*, entry for 30/6/24.

politics.”¹³³ Elsewhere they were more plain in their antagonism to Catholicism. The Völkisch-Social Block, an immediate predecessor to the NSFP, went beyond attacking “political Catholicism” to aim its propaganda against the Vatican itself: “We *völkisch* understand Ultramontanism to be the international political activity of the Pope, and hence reject it, since it was harmful to the history of Germany’s development and inner freedom and is still harmful today.”¹³⁴

The close association of some in the *völkisch* movement with Protestantism was noted with alarm in the Catholic press. According to a writer in the *Bayrischer Kurier*:

Not only in Bavaria do the *Völkisch* stir up their Kulturkampf: what they demonstrate here is neither new nor created by them. The same tenor and slogans, the same hypocrisy in the agitation against the Catholic Church is shown, whether they only stand in opposition to the Bavarian People’s and Center parties, or whether they assert themselves against other parties. It is the *furor protestanticus* they want to do business with, the hatred against everything Catholic, to help realize their dream of a Protestant Reich.¹³⁵

As further proof of the Protestant leaning of the *völkisch* movement, the paper reported on a meeting held by the Protestant League (*Evangelischer Bund*) in Nuremberg in February 1924, where a speech was delivered by a Nazi party member: “Two ideologies stand opposed in Germany today: the *völkisch*-Christian and the Jewish-social-democratic with its variations, among them the Jesuit-ultramontane. ... The pillar Ludendorff threw himself against the sea of the Counterreformation. On the 9th of November Ludendorff behaved like a true German and a convinced Protestant.... For us Protestants it is most painful that on 9 November 1923 the Protestant [Bavarian state commissioner] Kahr worked against the realization of the Protestant,

¹³³ “Evangelische Christen, schützt Euer Christentum vor Parteipolitik” (Flugblatt): IfZ MA 740 (1924: Berlin). The reference to “hundreds of thousands of Catholics” is almost certainly an exaggeration.

¹³⁴ “Kirche und Politik” (Flugblatt): IfZ MA 740 (1924: Amberg).

¹³⁵ *Bayrischer Kurier*, 9/4/24 (in Staatsarchiv München [hereafter StAM] PoIDir/6687/23).

Greater German State.”¹³⁶ Other speeches on the failed putsch similarly suggested that it was primarily an act against Rome in defense of Wittenberg. The Luther League (*Lutherbund*) sponsored a speech in Hof, Bavaria by Pastor Hoch, an ex-monk. Devoted mostly to questions of religion and politics, the speech ended with reference to the putsch: “Through some miracle Hitler and Ludendorff were saved. The driving force [behind their suppression] was the Jesuits, who in reality govern Munich. Their aim is the creation of a purely Catholic state (Bavaria-Austria) under a ‘Catholic’ dynasty. The Protestant north cannot assent to this.”¹³⁷

The evidence so far suggests that confessional preferences followed personal affiliation; Eckart and Goebbels, critical of Luther, were themselves Catholic, whereas the strongly Protestant Buch and Schemm were unsurprisingly laudatory. Others however, did not follow this basic pattern. Arthur Dinter was a Catholic like Eckart. And like Eckart, he expressed regret with the sectarian divide in Germany; it was, as he put it, “our whole sorrow and misery,” since it accounted for the nation’s political and spiritual disunity.¹³⁸ He advocated an undogmatic, or as he called it, “spiritualistic” Christianity, bringing together Protestants and Catholics in the face of their common enemy, the Jew. But unlike Eckart, he cast Luther as a religious and national hero who freed the Germans from the stranglehold of the Pope.¹³⁹ Dinter took his admiration for Luther further than any other party member: he formulated a platform for “completing” the Reformation in Germany. Luther had failed to unite all Germans under the

¹³⁶ *Bayrischer Kurier*, 27/2/24 (in StAM PolDir/6687/8). Kahr, an extreme reactionary in the Bavarian government, was at best a hesitant participant in the failed putsch, and later served as a witness for the prosecution at Hitler’s trial (Noakes and Pridham, 1:26-35). The orator is identified only as “the engineer Herr Born.”

¹³⁷ Eisenbahnüberwachungsstelle Hof, “Versammlungsbericht”: StAM PolDir/6687/7 (26 February 1924: Hof i. Bayern). The report adds that “Heil Hitler!” and “Heil Ludendorff!” could be heard from the audience during the speech.

¹³⁸ Dinter, *Liebe*, 206-07.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.* Kren and Morris suggest that “The adolescent Dinter experienced a spiritual crisis, the immediate occasion of which may have been a failed love affair with a Protestant girl, that led him to reject Catholicism as irreconcilable with the truths of evolution” (“Spirituality,” 234). Whether something more substantial may have been behind such a profound turning point is not considered.

banner of “true” Christianity: it would now be the responsibility of the Nazi party to complete the process. Dinter enunciated this vision in 1926 through his *197 Thesen zur Vollendung der Reformation* (“197 theses for completion of the Reformation”), in which he declared that the only path to German political renewal was through a religious revolution. The following year in Nuremberg he established his own organization, the Christian-Spiritual Religious Association (*Geistchristliche Religionsgemeinschaft*), and a periodical, *Das Geistchristentum*. In this departure Dinter felt he had an ally in fellow Catholic Julius Streicher, whom he endorsed as being “one of the very few in the party who have a natural feeling for religion and a general understanding of the religious question.”¹⁴⁰

Dinter’s personal religious agenda — attempting to turn the Nazi movement from a political party into a sectarian religious revival — led to his expulsion from the party. As an episode that helped shape the religious policy of the NSDAP, it is worth discussing in some detail. According to Roger Griffin, “at the level of ideology mainstream Nazism was intensely anti-Christian, except for individual followers, such as Dinter, who was eventually ousted from the party.”¹⁴¹ Griffin fundamentally misinterprets the events surrounding Dinter’s expulsion. Far from being too Christian, Dinter was expelled from the party for not being Christian enough. After the party’s refounding, Hitler regarded Dinter’s religious agenda a threat to his reworked political strategy: as he is supposed to have said, “I need Bavarian Catholics as well as Prussian Protestants to build up a great political movement.”¹⁴² In the same year Dinter created his association, Hitler expressly forbade sectarian dissension: “arguments on these matters may not be carried into the ranks of the NSDAP.”¹⁴³ Dinter’s assault on the “Judeo-Roman” church drew

¹⁴⁰ BAZ Personalakt Dinter (28 June 1928: Weimar).

¹⁴¹ Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (London, 1991), 32.

¹⁴² As quoted in J.R.C. Wright, *‘Above Parties’: The Political Attitudes of the German Protestant Church Leadership 1918-1933* (Oxford, 1974), 78.

¹⁴³ Quoted in Scholder, *Churches*, 1: 95.

the ire of Catholics — even those within the party.¹⁴⁴ Despite party requests that he moderate his line, he continued his polemics unabated. The party leadership regarded this as a threat to their prospects. Whereas attacks on “political Catholicism” were a cornerstone of the movement’s politics, the party’s positive Christians refrained from openly attacking the Catholic religion.

Another factor was of far greater consequence for Hitler; his political philosophy. By the time he wrote *Mein Kampf*, Hitler was firmly opposed to any suggestion that Nazism should take the form of a *völkisch*-religious movement. Explicitly rejecting the role of a *völkisch* prophet, he unequivocally stated: “Not for nothing did the young movement establish a definite program in which it did not use the word ‘völkisch.’ The concept, in view of its conceptual boundlessness, is no possible basis for a movement and offers no standard for membership in one.”¹⁴⁵ He disdained “those German-völkisch wandering scholars whose positive accomplishment is always practically nil, but whose conceit can scarcely be excelled.”¹⁴⁶ The attempt at making Nazism a religious movement, or a “political religion” as some have described it,¹⁴⁷ came in for total reproach: “Especially with the so-called religious reformers.... I always have the feeling that they were sent by those powers which do not want the resurrection of our people.” Hitler stated that the common enemy of the Christian, the Jew, could only profit from such efforts: “For their whole activity leads the people away from the common struggle against the common enemy, the Jew, and instead lets them waste their strength on inner religious squabbles as senseless as they are disastrous. ... I shall not even speak of the unworldliness of these völkisch Saint Johns of the twentieth century or their ignorance of the popular soul.”¹⁴⁸ Elsewhere in *Mein Kampf* Hitler

¹⁴⁴ BAZ Personalakt Dinter (12 June and 19 June 1928: Essen).

¹⁴⁵ Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 362.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 360.

¹⁴⁷ See the works cited in Chapter One, n. 47.

¹⁴⁸ Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 361, 363.

clearly makes positive references to being *völkisch*, and uses the term uncritically. He rejects the phrase only where he sees it being used as a means to turn Nazism from a political movement with a religious department into a religious movement with a political department.

Two years after Hitler expressed this view in Landsberg prison, it was exactly the latter course that Dinter was proposing: “If the *völkisch* movement gets stuck in the lowlands of merely political struggle, it will certainly become bogged down again ... it will only reach its goal when it raises itself to the pure moral and spiritual heights which shine upon us from the teaching of the greatest antisemite and antimaterialist of all time, the hero of Nazareth.”¹⁴⁹ As a “second Luther” increasingly obsessed with a sectarian revolution, Dinter might possibly have left the NSDAP on his own, had he realized the futility of influencing the party in this direction. He slowly turned against Hitler, to whom he was previously so loyal. While still in the party, Dinter accused him of blindness to the fact that “the Roman Pope’s church is just as terrible an enemy of a *völkisch* Germany, to say nothing of a *völkisch* Greater Germany, as the Jew.”¹⁵⁰ Before expelling him from the party, Hitler instructed Gregor Strasser to solicit the party leadership to gauge how wide-spread Dinter’s views may have been. The form they received read:

In the journal *Geistchristentum*, Dr. Dinter attempts to convey the impression that there is a difference of opinion in the National Socialist movement between Adolf Hitler and the other leaders, and that Adolf Hitler alone is opposed to Dinter’s attempt to involve the movement in religious discussions. We, the undersigned leaders of the National Socialist German Worker’s Party, Protestants and Catholics, decisively reject this attempt. Without prejudice to our respective personal views on religion, we will not allow the political movement to be drawn into the whirlpool of religious struggle.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁹ *Das Geistchristentum* 1 (1928), 4.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 274.

¹⁵¹ BAZ NS 26/487 (8 October 1928: Munich).

Among those responding were Goebbels, Göring, Wilhelm Kube, Rudolf Buttmann, and Hanns Kerrl: all affirmed this position. Streicher and Rosenberg were among those who did not respond.¹⁵² Hitler won: Nazism remained “not a religious reformation, but a political reorganization of our people.”¹⁵³ A few weeks after Dinter’s expulsion, Hitler gave a speech in Passau: “We are a people of different faiths, but we are one. Which faith conquers the other is not the question; rather, the question is whether Christianity stands or falls. ... We tolerate no one in our ranks who attacks the ideas of Christianity ... in fact our movement is Christian. We are filled with a desire for Catholics and Protestants to discover one another in the deep distress of our own people. We shall suppress any attempt to put religious issues on the agenda of our movement.”¹⁵⁴ In other words, Hitler wished to cast Nazism as a religious politics rather than a political religion.

Hitler’s dictum was not enforced against Dinter alone. In fact, his attack was leveled more against Erich Ludendorff, early on the greatest luminary of the Nazi party, who like Dinter attempted to create a new religious movement and was expelled from the party (see Chapter Three). But if Hitler rejected the idea of Nazism as a political religion, what did he have to say about politics *and* religion? Put differently: if he rejected Dinter’s suggestion that Nazism should take on a religious form, did this also entail a rejection of the religious content?

To help answer this question, we need to examine Hitler’s description of his political “evolution” in pre-war Vienna, and his evaluation of the two antisemitic movements there: the Christian Socials under Karl Lueger and the Pan-Germans under Georg von Schönerer. Hitler makes it plain in *Mein Kampf* that his “sympathies were fully and wholly on the side of the Pan-

¹⁵² BAZ Personalakt Dinter.

¹⁵³ Dinter lashed out at this decision. According to a police report, “Dinter called Strasser’s Aryanness (*Ariertum*) into question. In his *Das Geistchristentum* he writes: ‘The name Strasser is a good Jewish name ... a look at his characteristic business methods ... is enough to confirm his racial composition’” (BAZ NS 26/1370).

¹⁵⁴ BAZ NS 26/55 (27 October 1928: Passau).

German tendency ... compared as to abilities, Schönerer seemed to me even then the better and more profound thinker in questions of principle. He foresaw the inevitable end of the Austrian state more clearly and correctly than anyone else.” In Pan-Germanism Hitler was primarily attracted to the ideological substance; in Christian Socialism, on the other hand, he was attracted to the political style: “[I]f Schönerer recognized the problems in their innermost essence, he erred when it came to men. Here, on the other hand, lay Dr. Lueger’s strength.”¹⁵⁵ Lueger was the supreme tactician, “inclined to make use of all existing implements of power, to incline mighty existing institutions in his favor, drawing from these old sources of power the greatest possible profit for his own movement.”¹⁵⁶

For Hitler, the most important issue in all this was the Catholic Church: “[Lueger’s] policy toward the Catholic Church, fashioned with infinite shrewdness, in a short time won over the younger clergy to such an extent that the old Clerical Party was forced either to abandon the field, or, more wisely, to join the new party, in order slowly to recover position after position.”¹⁵⁷ On the other hand, the most important reason for Schönerer’s failure was his attack on this institution: “The hard struggle which the Pan-Germans fought with the Catholic Church can be accounted for only by their insufficient understanding of the spiritual nature of the people,” who in German-speaking Austria were overwhelmingly Catholic: “the struggle against the Catholic Church made it impossible in numerous small and middle circles, and thus robbed it of countless of the best elements that the nation can call its own.” The result was that “The Pan-German deputies could talk their throats hoarse: the effect was practically nil.”¹⁵⁸ But if Lueger was the better politician, his lack of ideological insight meant that his ultimate goal, the maintenance of

¹⁵⁵ Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 88-89.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 100.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 100.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 108, 117, 104.

the Habsburg Empire, was doomed: “What he had done as mayor of Vienna is immortal in the best sense of the word; but he could no longer save the monarchy, it was too late. His opponent, Schönerer, had seen this more clearly.” Hence there were problems with both: “All Dr. Lueger’s practical efforts were amazingly successful; the hopes he based them on were not realized. Schönerer’s efforts were not successful, but his most terrible fears came true.”¹⁵⁹

What was needed was a synthesis of both — the ideological substance of a Schönerer, and the political style of a Lueger. Therefore Hitler the *politician* came to the conclusion that: “For the political leader the religious doctrines and institutions of his people must always remain inviolable; or else he has no right to be in politics, but should become a reformer, if he has what it takes! Especially in Germany any other attitude would lead to a catastrophe.”¹⁶⁰ His decision to remove a sectarian reformer like Dinter is entirely congruent with this strategic policy. However, Hitler the *ideologue* revealed a clear affinity for Protestantism. With the “anti-German” efforts of the Habsburgs,

The general impression could only be that the Catholic clergy as such was grossly infringing on German rights. ... The root of the whole evil lay, particularly in Schönerer’s opinion, in the fact that the directing body of the Catholic Church was not in Germany, and that for this very reason alone was hostile to the interests of our nationality. ... The attitude of the Pan-German movement toward the Catholic Church was determined far less by its position on science, etc., than by its inadequacy in the championing of German rights and, conversely, its continued aid and comfort to Slavic arrogance and greed.¹⁶¹

In other words, even though Schönerer’s attack on the Catholic Church was political suicide, it was ideologically sound. In spite of Schönerer’s incapacity in *Realpolitik*, Hitler left no doubt that he sympathized with Schönerer on this score:

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 101.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 116.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 109.

Georg Schönerer was not a man to do things by halves. He took up the struggle toward the Church in the conviction that by it alone he could save the German people. The ‘Away-from-Rome’ [*Los von Rom*] movement seemed the most powerful, though to be sure the most difficult, mode of attack, which would inevitably shatter the hostile citadel. If it was successful, the tragic church schism in Germany would be healed, and it was possible that the inner strength of the Empire and the German nation would gain enormously by such a victory.¹⁶²

For Schönerer as for Dinter, the schism was to be healed under the banner of Protestantism, “completing the Reformation” among irredentist Germans. The *Los von Rom* slogan, “one God, one emperor, one people,” symbolized an understanding of Protestantism as the natural religion of the German.¹⁶³ For the leaders of this movement “Protestantism [was] the religion of master nations,” whereas Catholicism was “the religion of peoples in decline. ... Germany could only survive if it became completely Protestant.”¹⁶⁴ Whereas Hitler did not attack Catholicism in the same way, he took a comparable view of Protestantism: “Protestantism as such is a better defender of the interests of Germanism, in so far as this is grounded in its genesis and later tradition. ... Protestantism will always stand up for the advancement of all Germanism as such, as long as matters of inner purity or national deepening as well as German freedom are involved, since all these things have a firm foundation in its own being.” Schönerer’s Pan-Germanism failed because it took place in a “province [Austria] absent from the general line of [Protestantism’s] ideological world and traditional development.”¹⁶⁵ Looking back fifteen years after *Mein Kampf* was published, Hitler recalled in private conversation how he “had certain impressions which he had brought from his Austrian background, where the

¹⁶² Ibid., 110.

¹⁶³ Lothar Albertin, “Nationalismus und Protestantismus in der österreichischen Los-von-Rom Bewegung um 1900,” Ph.D. dissertation (Cologne, 1953); Wolfgang Altgelt, *Katholizismus, Protestantismus, Judentum: Über religiös begründete Gegensätze und nationalreligiöse Ideen in der Geschichte des deutschen Nationalismus* (Mainz, 1992), 5; Helmut Walser Smith, *German Nationalism and Religious Conflict: Culture, Ideology, Politics, 1870-1914* (Princeton, 1995), 206-34.

¹⁶⁴ Quoted in Smith, *Nationalism*, 208-09.

¹⁶⁵ Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 112-13.

Protestants had been a national church.”¹⁶⁶ Hitler was not ready to elevate Luther to the heights Dinter placed him, but he nonetheless regarded Luther as a hero.¹⁶⁷

In contrast, Hitler’s attitude toward Catholicism revealed ambiguity. On the one hand, the Catholic confessionalist would indeed be incorporated into the nation: “it will be seen that in Germany, as in Ireland, Poland, or France, the Catholic will always be a German.”¹⁶⁸ On the other hand, his church was inimical to the national cause. Regardless of his ideological preferences, Hitler insisted that there would be no sectarian warfare. The fight against the Jew was too important for that: “Catholics and Protestants wage a merry war with one another, and the mortal enemy of Aryan humanity and all Christendom laughs up his sleeve. ... [I]t is the Jewish interest today to make the *völkisch* movement bleed to death in a religious struggle at the moment when it is beginning to become a danger for the Jew.”¹⁶⁹ More than a coy political strategy, positive Christianity was a genuine effort to unite Germans under the banner of a shared religion aimed against the Jew, who would thereby face a united front he had hitherto, according to the Nazi imagination, managed to keep disunited.

Hitler’s basic policy to welcome Catholics and preserve them from *völkisch* attack cost him the support of elements previously loyal to him. The DVFP asked “Is Hitler still *völkisch*?” and answered by accusing Hitler of selling out: “*Völkisch* means fighting against all three supranational powers; Freemasons, Jesuits and Jews. Hitler fights for Rome and the Jesuits. ... Does Mussolini, Hitler’s model, fight against the Vatican? No. Against Freemasons? Only by half. Who are the mainstays [*Hauptstützen*] of Fascism? The almighty financier, the Jew

¹⁶⁶ Hans-Günther Seraphim (ed.), *Das politische Tagebuch Alfred Rosenbergs 1934/35 und 1939/40* (Göttingen, 1956), entry for 19/1/40.

¹⁶⁷ Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 213.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 114.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 564.

Olivetti; the Jewish editor of the Fascist newspaper, Margareta [sic] Sarfatti.”¹⁷⁰ On the occasion of the Vatican’s attempt to conclude concordats with the individual German *Länder*, the DVFP played the sectarian Protestant card it had previously used in a more subdued manner: “You Protestants among the Germans, protect your people! Stay true to Dr. Martin Luther and his Reformation! You know the danger that comes from Rome! No Protestant German can enter into a Reich or state concordat with Rome, as the German Nationals want!” To counter the danger of Nazism’s supraconfessionalism, they announced the creation of a German Reformation Party, which would “have no connection with high finance and Jewish banks! For that very reason it can find its political home with Protestant working people.” Hand in hand with this religious commitment was a nationalist one: “The occupation of the Rhineland must cease! The brutal nonsense of the Polish corridor must be done away with! In order to reach this goal, all those Germans must unite for whom Luther’s holy defiance and Bismarck’s national will still live. The domination of international Marxism, which has thoroughly ruined our *Volk*, must be broken.”¹⁷¹ Of course, in attacking the concordat the party also attacked what would become the Nazis’ own political and foreign relations policies. Indeed, they professed to “have nothing in common with the National Socialists.” In fact, the ideology was largely the same. But by failing to differentiate Hitler’s approval of Catholics from an allegiance with Ultramontanism, they assumed, as Ludendorff put it, that Hitler had become “the servile tool of the romish priests.”¹⁷²

¹⁷⁰ “Ist Hitler noch völkisch?” (Flugblatt): IfZ MA 740 (n.d.: Leipzig). They also could have pointed out that Margherita Sarfatti was one of Mussolini’s most famous mistresses: Victoria de Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women: Italy, 1922-1945* (Berkeley, 1992), 229. The DVFP ignored the fact that Sarfatti was in fact a baptized Catholic, thereby underscoring the racialist antisemitism of this explicitly Protestant party.

¹⁷¹ “Deutsche Reformationspartei im Völkisch-nationalen Block” (Flugblatt): IfZ MA 740 (9 May 1928: n.p.). This party, founded by the head of the Protestant League, Pastor Bruno Doehring, was short-lived, joining the DVFP in a “Völkisch-national block” and garnering little more than 250,000 votes throughout Germany in 1928. See Herbert Gottwald, “Detsche Reformationspartei,” in Dieter Frick (ed.), *Lexikon zur Parteiengeschichte: Die bürgerlichen und kleinbürgerlichen Parteien und Verbände in Deutschland (1789-1945)*, 4 vols. (Leipzig, 1984), 2:60-62; Kurt Nowak, *Evangelische Kirche und Weimarer Republik: Zum politischen Weg des deutschen Protestantismus zwischen 1918 und 1932* (Göttingen, 1981), 153-57.

¹⁷² Quoted in Carr, *Hitler*, 134.

Of course Dinter reached a similar conclusion. In his *Geistchristentum* he accused Hitler of betrayal: “His personal power and money interests — I emphasize again: money interests — will not let him go the way of his earlier honest convictions, but rather ties him to the Jesuit fraud, which he commits against his followers with the Concordat and Rome questions.”¹⁷³ In 1930, the remnant of the DVFP not incorporated into the NSDAP similarly attacked Hitler for his on-going rapprochement with the Catholic Church, based on a defense of Protestantism: “[N]ever can the German freedom movement be led by followers of the Jewish-Roman race-killing religion! For this reason Germany’s liberation could never come from Jewish-Roman Bavaria, but only from Protestant Prussia!”¹⁷⁴

Even though Hitler consistently rejected sectarianism, and never attacked the faith of Catholicism, he resonated Streicher’s contention that the Catholic establishment was allying itself with the Jews. The following attack on the Catholic Church, made behind closed doors, would have pleasantly surprised his *völkisch* opponents:

[The Jews] have even succeeded within the Church of Rome in falsifying this high Christian teaching of the community ordained by God. ... And the struggle which the world and those churches that falsely designate themselves Christian wage against National Socialism — against us, who want only the fulfillment of Christ’s lifework — is nothing more than the continuation of the crime of the Inquisition and the burning of witches, by which the Jewish-Roman world exterminated whatever offered resistance to that shameful parasitism.¹⁷⁵

This is not an anticlericalism leveled at both churches; as we shall see later, whereas the Catholic Church and the Nazi party mostly stayed away from each other, relations between the Protestant churches and the party were much more amiable. In a subsequent meeting, where he compared

¹⁷³ *Das Geistchristentum* 2 (1929), as reprinted in “Mitteilungen zur weltanschaulichen Lage,” 23/10/36 (in BAP 62 Di 1/71/43-54).

¹⁷⁴ “Hitler und Rom” (Flugblatt): IfZ MA 740 (15 October 1930: Berlin). In defense of this position the party quoted extensively from the Catholic Dinter.

¹⁷⁵ Turner (ed.), *Memoirs*, 65.

the German National and Center parties, Hitler even more sharply revealed his ideological affinity for Protestantism over Catholicism:

Without a doubt, [the German Nationals'] ancestors were once pioneers of the German character and bearers of a higher and superior Western culture. ... Then we have the Center Party: those people who have kept the servile slave mentality inculcated during the period that lasted from Roman military despotism to Ultramontane papal dominance. Precisely as the German Nationals allow us to recognize the Germanic will to rule and the spirit of Protestantism against dogmatization of faith and the stifling of conscience, so we see here those people and tribes that were gradually trained in passive obedience to authority ...¹⁷⁶

Ironically, passive obedience to authority would be a quality greatly appreciated in the Third Reich. The same Catholic sensibility that Hitler derided as “slave mentality” would be cast in a more positive light on another occasion. Otto Wagener and Franz Pfeffer von Salomon, top-ranking leaders of the SA, asked Hitler to help them interpret a map showing uneven distribution of SA and SS recruitment. After looking at the map for “three or four minutes,” Hitler said:

Do you see the Roman frontier wall, the *limes*? ... To the south and west of this line the SA is thin; to the north and northeast of it, it is strong. To the south and southwest of this line Germany is predominantly Catholic; to the north and northeast it's Protestant ...

Only those areas of Europe that had lived for centuries under the authoritarian rule of Roman military despotism and had gradually lost their basically democratic Germanic independence remained faithful to Rome. The others, as Protestants, disengaged themselves from the Roman Church and created their own forms of Christianity.

Where the Germanic breed predominates, the people are Protestants; where Romanism has left its mark, the people are Catholic. ... The SA attracts the militant natures among the Germanic breed, the men who think democratically, unified only by a common allegiance. Those who throng to the SS are men inclined to the authoritarian state, who wish to serve and obey, who respond less to an idea than to a man.¹⁷⁷

According to Hitler, the SA's greater strength in Protestant Germany is based on an attraction to Nazism's ideological *substance*, whereas the SS's greater strength in Catholic Germany is based

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 210.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 19-21.

on an attraction to Nazism's authoritarian *style*. However much this helps to explain actual differences in SS and SA recruitment, what is just as revealing is that Hitler believed it to be so. His comparison bears striking similarities to Goebbels' characterization of Protestantism as "action" and Catholicism as "feeling." Like Goebbels, Hitler ultimately sought to unify both confessions under the banner of positive Christianity by emphasizing their strengths.

Institutional relations: the churches

So far we have explored the various kinds of Christian discourse to be found within Nazism. Did the practices of the movement conform to this discourse? Did the totalitarianism of Nazism prohibit involvement with Christian institutions and organizations? Or were Nazis able to take part in Christian associational life? Party leaders often expressed antagonism for the "Roman" Church, even as they insisted their movement was a Christian one: were they equally antagonistic towards the Protestant church?

The Catholic Church opposed the Nazi party due to the latter's racialism, extreme nationalism, and frequent attacks on "Rome." The church hierarchy therefore refused all formal contact with the Nazis before 1933. By contrast, the first official contact between the party leadership and the Protestant authorities took place in March 1931, when Franz Stöhr, a member of the executive committee of the NSDAP, met with Gustav Scholz, an official with the federal organization of Protestant state churches (*Kirchenbundesamt*). The meeting was requested by the church authorities to determine the exact position of the party towards religion. Rosenberg's anticlerical work, "The Myth of the Twentieth Century," had been published the year before, and the churches feared that it represented an influential segment of party opinion, if not the official party line (see Chapter Three).

Stöhr began by assuring Scholz that the NSDAP entered the Reichstag only as a means to

an end, to effect “the creation of the real German Reich of German men.” He maintained the anti-Dinter position that the “character of a Christian party was fundamentally rejected,” that the party was secular and political, but that nevertheless it was “supported and led by Christian people who seriously intend to implement the ethical principles of Christianity in legislation, and to bring them to bear upon the life of the people.” The existence of Catholics in the party was defended by virtue of the need to create a united *Volkstum*. Nevertheless, the party leadership was clearly “shaped by Protestantism.” Those leaders who belonged to the Catholic church were, in spite of their nominal affiliation, also inclined towards Protestantism. There was no danger that “the movement will be pulled into the Catholic stream or be caught up in the Catholic church”: it was a national movement that rejected the claims of the Catholic hierarchy. These principles were reflected in Nazi education policy, which Stöhr acknowledged was a single school for both Catholics and Protestants with common religious instruction. Until such a school was practicable, however, the party would support denominational schools, while at the same time carefully resisting Catholic prerogatives: “The German state should be the master of the German school.” Stöhr asserted that Nazism was opposed to the individual man of Liberalism, the collective man of Marxism, and the hierarchically-controlled man of Catholicism; that its ideal was the independent German who lived not for himself but for the community; and assured Scholz that what he said could be regarded as “official party statements.”¹⁷⁸

The party would maintain a stance of formal neutrality over against the churches, but Stöhr firmly maintained that the substance of Nazism was in accord with Protestant Christian precepts, that party members were free to participate in church-related activities, and that, indeed, the party as a whole was “shaped” by Protestantism. These statements were clearly geared toward a Protestant audience, but the actions of many party leaders added substance to

¹⁷⁸ Nowak, *Kirche*, 317-18; Scholder, *Churches*, 1: 191; Wright, ‘Above Parties’, 81-82.

these claims.

One of the most important Nazis to engage in Protestant church life was Wilhelm Kube. Beginning his post-war political life as General Secretary of the DNVP, Kube migrated via the DVFP to the NSDAP in 1928, where he was quickly awarded the job of Gauleiter of Brandenburg (later “Kurmark”). He was also the caucus leader of the Nazi party in the Prussian Landtag. Although Kube was stripped of his power in 1936 after accusing Buch’s wife of being half-Jewish, he was nonetheless able to retain Hitler’s favor.¹⁷⁹ Kube is also well-known for the very central role he played in establishing the German Christians (*Deutsche Christen*, or DC), a church party that originally went by the name “Protestant National Socialists.” This group has traditionally been cast as an opportunist organization, an arm of the Nazi party more interested in the “coordination” of yet another social institution than honestly taking part in church life. In party correspondence, Kube himself referred more than once to the need to “gain control of the churches,” to “bring the churches in hand.”¹⁸⁰ But this was not motivated solely by tactical considerations: Kube had more lasting links with Protestantism. He had been active in church life, being on a parish community council in Berlin after the First World War, as well as a member of the synod of the Diocese of Berlin.¹⁸¹ His role in founding the DC was propelled more by his conviction that Nazism represented the true interests of German Protestantism than by cynical posturing for the sake of winning votes.

An early opportunity for expressing his views arose with the issue of *Protestant* church concordats in 1929. Sounding a potentially anticlerical note, Kube declared the Nazi view in a session of the Prussian Landtag: “[T]he question of Christian education or the organization of

¹⁷⁹ Kube was actually allowed to keep the title of Gauleiter: Peter Hüttenberger, *Die Gauleiter: Studie zum Wandel des Machtgefüges in der NSDAP* (Stuttgart, 1969), 216. Kube was rehabilitated into the active ranks of the Nazi elite when he was appointed General Commissioner for White Russia in the occupied east.

¹⁸⁰ See, *inter alia*, BAZ NS 22/1064 (7 January 1931: Berlin).

¹⁸¹ Scholder, *Churches*, 1: 197.

church life is in the final analysis a question of legislation by the state. In accordance with these views, we are unable in any circumstances to accept an equation of the two parties, state and church.” But for Kube this was in no way antithetical to Christianity, “precisely because we affirm it, because we are convinced that Christianity and Germanhood have come together in so infinitely many respects that they cannot be separated. ... We have confidence in the German state, that its politics are not opposed to Christian interests and Christian sensibilities, but rather that it will look after these interests in all circumstances.”¹⁸² His attack on the notion of Protestant concordats was not simply a disguised hostility to Protestantism: as Klaus Scholder points out, “[A]s late as the end of 1925 a section of the Prussian Synod had actually rejected categorically any concordat resolution because it was incompatible with the idea of the sovereignty of the state.”¹⁸³ Kube regarded any deal-making between the Protestant church and the SPD-controlled Prussian government as treason. In party correspondence to Gregor Strasser he wrote: “The current leadership of the church want to conclude an unheard-of treaty with the marxist Prussian state.” According to Kube, “the position, dignity and self-respect of the Protestant churches” should have prevented them from “placing themselves under the influence of marxist-infiltrated governments.”¹⁸⁴ As “an old fraternity student” he informed the General Superintendent in Lübben that “with the next church vote we will create a representation in the Protestant church, which is essential in the interest of the revival of church life on German and Christian foundations.”¹⁸⁵

Toward this end Kube suggested the creation of a church party known as the “Protestant National Socialists,” to be separate from the NSDAP itself. Such a plan, however, would require

¹⁸² Ibid., 198.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ BAZ NS 22/1064 (27 October 1931: Berlin).

¹⁸⁵ BAZ NS 26/1240 (1 December 1931: Berlin).

Strasser's approval as the party's chief administrator. Strasser responded by saying that "in every case we must attempt to take part in the Protestant church vote in accord with the size and strength of the party."¹⁸⁶ In addition, Strasser told Kube to inform the rest of the Prussian Gauleiter of his plans, adding that *Kirchenfachberater* (consultants for church affairs) should be set up in each Gau. Hitler, though more worried on account of the Dinter episode, nonetheless also endorsed Kube's plan, based on the assurance that this group would not be an integral part of the NSDAP. Furthermore, true to the *Überkonfessionalismus* of positive Christianity, Hitler suggested "German Christians" as a more appropriate name.¹⁸⁷

None of the Prussian Gauleiter voiced disapproval with Strasser's and Kube's religious plans for the party. Their own religious involvement confirmed that they were themselves actively interested in church life. Erich Koch, as we have already seen, was actually president of his provincial church synod. Even before, however, he was closely involved with the church: the future *Reichsbischof*, Ludwig Müller, was his pastor, and he was involved in furthering Müller's career.¹⁸⁸ Renowned as one of the most autonomous of Gauleiter, Koch fashioned his own regional variation of the DC, and sounded a less belligerent note than Kube: "We commit ourselves, and we demand this commitment not only from the elected representatives of the church, but above all from all Protestant men and women, to service in our communities! We want to serve: through tireless recruitment to our worship; through chivalrous intervention for the poor and needy, through defence of our faith; ... through true Evangelical witness in

¹⁸⁶ BAZ NS 26/1240 (17 December 1931: Munich).

¹⁸⁷ Wright, *'Above Parties'*, 92.

¹⁸⁸ In a monthly report to Strasser, Koch noted that "Röhm was here and has had several discussions regarding the Reichswehr with my pastor." Although Koch does not mention his pastor's name, it was very likely Müller, since Müller came from Königsberg, counted Koch among his friends, and was intimately knowledgeable in military affairs as the *Wehrkreispfarrer* (military chaplain) for East Prussia: BAZ NS 22/1065 (22 July 1931: Königsberg).

public.”¹⁸⁹ Others like Otto Telschow and Bernhard Rust actively sought and welcomed the participation of pastors in the movement.¹⁹⁰ The Gauleiter of Silesia, Helmut Brückner, sent Strasser an internal “Special Circular” he had issued to his Gau officials on the party’s official church-political stance. Its contents became common knowledge once a copy came into the hands of the Kirchenrat and the newspapers *Tägliche Rundschau* and *Christliche Welt*. As a confidential document, however, it provides a glimpse into the Nazis’ true feelings about the Protestant church:¹⁹¹

We ‘Protestant National Socialists’ develop our state churches on the basis of a positive Christianity in the spirit of Martin Luther. Which means:

- 1) Rejection of the liberal spirit of the Jewish-marxist Enlightenment.
- 2) Overcoming the humanity born of the Jewish-marxist spirit, along with its effects, such as pacifism, internationalism, Christian cosmopolitanism, etc.
- 3) Emphasis on a fighting faith in the service of a German *Volkstum* created by God.
- 4) Purification and preservation of the race as an obligation given by God for all eternity.
- 5) Struggle against atheistic and subversive Marxism and its Christian Social train-bearers [*Schleppenträger*] of all shades.
- 6) A new spirit in the official and private posts of the church leadership....
- 7) We struggle for a union of the small Protestant state churches into a strong Protestant Reich Church. ... We are acting not as a party, but as Protestant Christians who only follow a call to faith from God, which we hear in our *Volk* movement. As true members of our church we have a legitimate claim to have appropriate consideration given to the greatness and inner strength of National Socialism in church life and the church administration.¹⁹²

Protests to the contrary notwithstanding, this was a politicization of the church. But such

¹⁸⁹ As quoted in Scholder, *Churches*, 1: 212. On Koch’s independence, see Hüttenberger, *Gauleiter*, 52-53, 72-73; von Lang, *Secretary*, 122, 151.

¹⁹⁰ Telschow, Gauleiter of East Hanover, was a good friend of the Protestant pastor Ludwig Münchmeyer; BAZ NS 22/1063. On Rust, see the correspondence between him and Strasser, in which he endorses the establishment of a “National Socialist Pastors’ Working Group” to facilitate the completion of the Nazis’ “final struggle” (*Endkampf*): BAZ NS 22/1071 (1 June 1932: Hannover). In Rust’s Gau alone, 17 pastors belonged to the Nazi party: Nowak, *Kirche*, 305.

¹⁹¹ This was confirmed by Strasser, who noted in a letter to Brückner that he could find nothing objectionable in the circular: BAZ NS 22/1068 (17 November 1932: Munich).

¹⁹² “Richtlinien für Kirchenfragen,” BAZ NS 22/1068 (10 November 1932: Breslau). Note that the more menacing translation in Scholder (*Churches*, 1: 203), “Purging of the small Protestant Landeskirchen ...,” bears no resemblance to the original German (“Vereinigung der kleinen evangelischen Landeskirchen ...”).

a practice was not limited to the Nazis: most other existing church parties had connections with political parties as well. As Jonathan Wright has suggested, “It is easy to find fault with the anti-German Christian argument that the church must be kept free of politics ... as the German Christians pointed out, politics were already in the church: the church leadership was simply conservative or national liberal not national socialist.”¹⁹³ Even then, however, the DC was not a part of the NSDAP. Whereas German Christians were very often party members, they remained a separate organization, with their own leadership and policy-making apparatus. Nonetheless, section III-3 of the circular stated: “Participation in the church vote is mandatory for every party member.”¹⁹⁴

Nazis could be found in other church organizations as well. One of the most important was the League for a German Church (*Bund für deutsche Kirche*, BdK), which counted no less a Nazi than Walter Buch among its leaders. Joachim Niedlich, who came from a pastor’s home described by one scholar “as politically conservative as it was religiously orthodox,” founded the League in 1921.¹⁹⁵ The BdK remained separate from the DC, but much of its program was the same, not least the aspiration for a Protestant Reich Church. And like the DC, the BdK was opposed to paganism.¹⁹⁶ Their agenda was to build “a church that will fight — not, as up to now, unconsciously pave the way for — both the Jesuit spirit and semitic degeneration through education and instruction, which through the German soul and German Christianity will again

¹⁹³ Jonathan Wright, “The German Protestant Church and the Nazi Party in the Period of the Seizure of Power 1932-3,” in Derek Baker (ed.), *Renaissance and Renewal in Christian History* (Oxford, 1977), 413. On the Deutsche Christen generally, see Doris Bergen, *Twisted Cross: The German Christian Movement in the Third Reich* (Chapel Hill, 1996); Kurt Meier, *Die Deutsche Christen: Das Bild einer Bewegung im Kirchenkampf des Dritten Reiches* (Göttingen, 1964); Hans-Joachim Sonne, *Die politische Theologie der Deutschen Christen* (Göttingen, 1975).

¹⁹⁴ Kube had his Gau church expert come up with a similar *Rundschreiben*, which also made voting in the church elections mandatory: BAZ Schu 205/2/149-50 (1 September 1931: Berlin).

¹⁹⁵ Daniel Borg, *The Old-Prussian Church and the Weimar Republic: A Study in Political Adjustment, 1917-1927* (Hanover NH, 1984), 183.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 188.

provide us a mighty fortress.”¹⁹⁷ Rivalry soon arose between the two groups, especially regarding the German Christians’ status as the only church party to be endorsed by the NSDAP leadership. BdK officials wrote to the party leadership, suggesting that this endorsement violated the party’s official neutrality in church affairs, and pointing out that numerous Nazis had been actively involved with their own organization, both as spokesmen and members. They also insinuated that the DC was “Jewish,” owing to its ties with a slightly more moderate predecessor, the Christian-German Movement, which continued its adherence to the Old Testament.¹⁹⁸ They contacted Rudolf Hess’ cousin, Gret Georg, presumably a BdK member, to intervene with Hess on their behalf, in the hope that they might salvage their position by forming an alliance with the DC for the upcoming church elections.¹⁹⁹ Kube violently rejected the BdK’s suggestions, and brought himself into potential conflict with Buch, who claimed he had Hitler’s ear in Protestant church matters.²⁰⁰ Kube assured Buch that he was giving his endorsement of the DC to other Gauleiter, not as party functionaries, but as “private people interested in the church.”²⁰¹ Buch, in turn, recommended to other BdK leaders that they try to avoid any factionalism among Nazi members of the Protestant church, as this would only serve to weaken the Nazi cause.²⁰²

Links between the Protestant church and the Nazi party could be found lower down the

¹⁹⁷ *Allgemeine Rundschau*, 25/10/23 (in StAM PolDir/6686).

¹⁹⁸ BAZ NS 22/1064 (23 October 1931: Berlin). Although the DC were to get into hot water after one of its leaders, Reinhard Krause, similarly suggested the removal of the Old Testament at the famous *Sportpalast* meeting of November 1933, many German Christians themselves regarded this as excessive. Another DC leader, Friedrich Wieneke, tried to explain this position as a carry-over from Krause’s days in the BdK: *Das Evangelium im Dritten Reich* 2:49 (3 December 1933), 514.

¹⁹⁹ BAZ Schu 245/1/40 (26 October 1931: Berlin). The letter pointed out that Buch and another prominent Nazi by the name of Löpelmann could be counted as members of the BdK.

²⁰⁰ BAZ NS 22/1064 (27 October 1931: Berlin), for Kube’s attack on the BdK; BAZ Schu 245/1/39 (23 October 1931: Munich), for Buch’s position.

²⁰¹ BAZ Schu 245/1/42 (2 November 1931: Berlin).

²⁰² BAZ Schu 245/1/44 (14 November 1931: Munich).

party hierarchy as well. In the Reichstag elections of May 1924, five Protestant theologians ran as NSDAP candidates; six in the December 1924 elections.²⁰³ In the Prussian Landtag elections of December 1924, eight Protestant pastors stood as party candidates.²⁰⁴ One of the most famed heroes of the Nazi rank-and-file, Horst Wessel, who died in a street brawl with the communists in 1930 and gained immediate martyr status thereafter, was the son of a Protestant pastor. By one estimate, 120 pastors counted themselves members of the party in 1930 — certainly a small portion of the total number of pastors in Germany, but significant when it is remembered that the Protestant churches discouraged their clergy from formally joining any political party.²⁰⁵

Relations at the local level could be quite close as well. The local NSDAP branch in Gladbeck was established in the town's Protestant parish hall, which also served as the permanent meeting place for the party.²⁰⁶ In East Prussia, especially the Catholic enclave of Ermland, Protestant congregation centers were often the primary meeting places for the Nazi party.²⁰⁷ Protestant clergymen could be found in the ranks of the district and local party leadership (*Kreis-* and *Ortsgruppenleitung*), as in the case of pastor Michalik of Altmark, pastor Melhorn of Lauenberg, and pastors Leffler and Leutheuser of the Wiera valley in Thuringia, who actually founded the local NSDAP in Altenburg.²⁰⁸

²⁰³ Herbert Christ, "Der Politische Protestantismus in der Weimarer Republik: Eine Studie über die politische Meinungsbildung durch die Evangelischen Kirchen im Spiegel der Literatur und der Presse," Ph.D. dissertation (Bonn, 1967), 278.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 278-79.

²⁰⁵ Albrecht Tyrell, *Hitler befiehlt ... Selbstzeugnisse aus der 'Kampfzeit' der NSDAP: Dokumentation und Analyse* (Düsseldorf, 1969), 379-80. Wright's reference to the "majority" of this number being Protestant ('*Über den Parteien*' [Göttingen, 1977], 140) is not quite correct, since Catholic clergy were prohibited from joining the party altogether, under pain of expulsion.

²⁰⁶ Frank Bajohr, *Verdrängte Jahre: Gladbeck unterm Hakenkreuz* (Essen, 1983), 190-91.

²⁰⁷ Gerhard Reifferscheid, "Die NSDAP in Ostpreussen: Besonderheiten ihrer Ausbreitung und Tätigkeit," *Zeitschrift für die Geschichte und Altertumskunde Ermlands* 39 (1978), 72.

²⁰⁸ On Michalik: GStA I Rep 77/Tit 4043/Nr 423/79 (20 August 1931: Berlin); on Melhorn: Nowak, *Kirche*, 305; on Leffler and Leutheuser: Scholder, *Churches*, 1: 194.

Institutional relations: the schools

Aside from relations with the churches themselves, Nazi designs for the schools are often taken as a barometer of the party's religious views. The most obvious starting point is the NSLB. Although nominally a professional association, the NSLB was in fact one of the most important ideological ancillaries of the Nazi movement.²⁰⁹ We have seen Schemm's personal view on Christianity and Nazism; but was this also the official program of the organization he headed? Ian Kershaw argues that the NSLB was "prepared to take the initiative and lead the way in expressions of support for Nazi policy," thereby pointing to its commitment to Nazi goals, but adds that for this very reason the organization was anti-Christian.²¹⁰ An examination of the NSLB's own position suggests otherwise. The organization's newspaper published a "School policy statement of the NSDAP" in 1931, which mapped out the fundamentals of their platform:

1) The entire education of the German *Volk* is the sole responsibility of the state. ... 4) The 'German school' shall comprise the educational system in its entirety. There shall be no substitute. 5) The German school shall be the Christian community school.... Education should not offer dead knowledge, but should impart those things that mold the soul and character of young people. The living sources are the German *Volkstum*, the German *Heimat* and the eternally living antecedents of the German people. The basic premise of education is active Christianity.²¹¹

The article made no attempt to disguise the party's essential opposition to confessional schools, but at the same time affirmed the importance of Christianity: the Nazi ideal of the *Gemeinschaftschule* is not just German, but also Christian. Such a policy, aimed at sublimating

²⁰⁹ As the party administration (Organisations-Abteilung VII) explained when rejecting the idea of a Nazi Dentist League: "Special organizations based primarily on economics would fritter away the fighting strength of the movement ... The special organizations which the party has allowed, lawyers', doctors' and teachers' leagues, are of a decidedly ideological and not economic nature": BAZ NS 22/1065 (23 March 1931: Munich).

²¹⁰ Kershaw, *Popular Opinion*, 147, 216.

²¹¹ *Nationalsozialistische Lehrer-Zeitung* (n.d.[1931]) (clipping in BAZ NS 22/446).

the confessional divide in German society, was totally consistent with the syncretic vision of positive Christianity.

The same principle was affirmed throughout the ranks of the NSLB. The Saxon branch enunciated its views on religious education in a letter to Schemm: “1) We declare ourselves for Christianity as the singular, towering and irreplaceable spiritual power and reality of life.... 3) Through religious education, youth [will] be prepared for the future growing German *Volk*, to become part of the eternal, living force, as it appeared in Jesus as the power of deliverance, creation and redemption.”²¹² In the same statement the transformation of the Protestant state church into a “people’s church” was affirmed, as was the desire to actively cooperate with it in educational issues. With regards to the religious curriculum, the Old Testament, “in no way comparable to the New Testament, is to be treated as the origin of the Jewish religion and view of history.” Its “Jewish-oriental” spirit was rejected in favor of the gospel of Jesus: “Jewish legalism and materialism [*Lohnsucht*], late-classical intellectualism, and Roman striving for power are not compatible with a German understanding of Christianity.”²¹³ Cooperation would be sought with the church, but the state would not delegate any power to it.

This view was shared by the regional leadership for Berlin-Brandenburg, which was opposed to church prerogatives to oversee religious instruction in non-confessional schools. No suggestion was made that this would be too expensive or too time consuming; rather, the objection was made solely on the grounds that this would “contradict the National Socialist conception of the state school.”²¹⁴ The existence of religious education in state schools per se was not at issue for the NSLB. Rather, the question was: “Who is master over the school, the

²¹² “Grundlinien zur Gestaltung der religiösen Erziehung im nat.-soz. Staate”: BAZ NS 12/808 (13 December 1933: Dresden).

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ BAZ NS 12/638 (n.d. [1932]: Berlin).

church or the state?” However, this led to potential conflict only with regard to the Catholic church. As the press office of the NSLB wrote to Strasser, “our revolutionary convictions, for which we are always reproached ... always find resistance in the reactionary leaning of the Roman church.”²¹⁵ The Baden leadership opposed confessional schools on the grounds that they undermined unity in the *Volk*, but also because they would allow the Catholic church to become a “state within a state.” It was additionally noted that in Baden confessional schools were not an issue, since the existing Badenese system of Christian *Simultanschule* (undenominational schools) was satisfactory to everyone, “save for a few Center party agitators.”²¹⁶ In a similar vein, the Ruhr leadership wrote: “National Socialism wants to built a common cultural consciousness and edifice for the entire *Volk*. ... The best type for this purpose is the Christian-national community school, which is not separated by confession.”²¹⁷

Some within the NSLB revealed a preference for the substance of Protestant Christianity along with the inter-confessional style of positive Christianity. One *Mitarbeiter* of the league stated in a report: “Far and wide in nationalist circles in northern Germany, the prevailing opinion is that nationalist ideas and education are best served by the Protestant clergy. This belief happens to be well founded. About Catholic clergy with ultramontane inclinations — and which are not? — we cannot make the same claim.”²¹⁸ He went on to warn that “a great danger

²¹⁵ BAZ NS 22/446 (6 May 1931: Nürnberg).

²¹⁶ BAZ NS 22/446 (17 June 1931: Heidelberg). No mention was made of Protestant church machinations similar to those apparently undertaken by the Catholic church. The letter was in fact passed on to the *Reichsleitung* by Heinrich Scharrelmann, a member of the Protestant “National Socialist Pastor’s Working Group.”

²¹⁷ BAZ NS 22/446 (19 June 1931: Dortmund). The NSLB files contain many essays written by league *Mitarbeiter* confirming the positive position which the organization took to Christianity, most of which maintain that Christianity in fact played a central role in the Nazi *Weltanschauung*: see, *inter alia*, G. Förster, “Nationalsozialismus und die christlichen Kirchen”: BAZ NS 12/808 (10 December 1932: Münster); Johannes Schwager, “Religiöse Erziehung im neuen Deutschland”: BAZ NS 12/808 (n.d., n.p.); Oskar Winter, “Die Innere Erneuerung Deutschen Lebens: Deutsche Erkenntnis, Deutsche Bildung, Deutsche Liebe, Deutscher Glaube”: BAZ NS 12/1499 (28 February 1934: Straubing).

²¹⁸ G. Förster, “Staat — Kirche — Schule: Unter Berücksichtigung besonders der badischen christlichen Simultanschule”: BAZ NS 12/808 (n.d.[1932], n.p.).

lies in the conclusion of a concordat,” and similarly pointed to the Badenese system as an appropriate model for the Nazi party to follow: “The Christian *Simultanschule* in no way lags behind the confessional school in its results. ... If we compare the administering of sacraments and church attendance in Baden with that of areas with confessional schools, we find a picture favorable to Baden.”²¹⁹

For many, the hostility to confessional schools was in reality aimed against Catholic confessionalism in particular. This became especially evident in the case of Bavaria. Rudolf Buttman, caucus leader of the Nazi party in the Bavarian Landtag (whose other members included Schemm and Streicher), and later head of the cultural division of the Reich Interior Ministry under Frick, attempted to placate the concerns of Catholic Bavarians about his movement: “Our worldview is not directed against Catholicism or Protestantism, not against Christianity, but rather is based on Christianity and against cultural bolshevism, against the false liberalism of the Enlightenment, and against materialism.”²²⁰ During another speech in the Landtag, he restated the argument with specific reference to the school issue:

We stand on the ground of positive Christianity, and hence are more Christian than the ostensibly Christian [*patentchristliche*] Center.... One has opportunity enough to see how our party governs in Thuringia, where party member Dr. Frick has reintroduced Christian morning prayer in school. ... Not through us is religion in danger, but rather through the conditions we know of in Russia, and which they now boast of in Berlin. First we shall sweep clean the recesses of filth of the city — the cinemas and theaters — with an iron broom.²²¹

In these instances Buttman reinforced well-known party views. However, Buttman went one step further when he suggested that the confessional school could find a place in the future Nazi state. Members of the NSLB were especially incensed, and complained to Strasser: “Now that

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ *VB*, 5/1/31.

²²¹ *VB*, 13/12/30 (in BStA Rehse/P3432).

Dr. Buttman has committed the party to the confessional school, we might as well cease our work, for now we are exactly the same as the others. ... What Dr. Buttman said was not just a harmless remark: no, it was the declaration of the caucus leader in the most important school policy debate of the legislative year.”²²²

Confusion on the issue ensued. In private correspondence, league-member Baarß in Mecklenburg tried to clarify the party’s position for Johannes Stark, the Nobel prize-winner and author of *National Socialism and the Catholic Church*, a work which argued that in attacking Marxism, the Nazis were more Christian than the Center. To this convinced Catholic Baarß made no pretense that the party was in favor of confessional schools: “Indeed all German children should receive a Christian education. With confessional schools, however, children are compelled by their parents to choose one dogma or the other. ... One can be a positive Christian without receiving the teachings of Christ through one particular dogma. A non-dogmatic school would undoubtedly be an important step forward in the religious development of our *Volk*.”²²³ No secret was made of the league’s opposition to confessional schools, even for a rare pro-Nazi Catholic whose endorsement would be needed to further the Nazi cause among cautious Bavarians or Rhinelanders. Baarß added that matters were not made easier when party leaders like Buttman and Strasser publicly committed the party to preserving confessional schools.

Buttman, having received a copy of this letter from the Reich Leadership, wrote Baarß to clarify his position. Reminding Baarß that the whole issue was tied to the unfortunate history of sectarian conflict in Germany, Buttman assured him that “with the emergence of a National Socialist state, this historical state of affairs will be altered: not abruptly, but with historically consistent necessity.” He admitted that, given the prevailing circumstances in Bavaria, he

²²² BAZ NS 22/446 (6 May 1931: Nürnberg).

²²³ BAZ NS 12/638 (16 June 1931: Lübz).

preferred the confessional over the non-confessional school. He noted that this was for tactical reasons, however, and specifically requested that Baarß not let his views reach the public: the Bavarian Peoples' party, Buttman contended, was attempting a "systematic recatholicization" of the Protestant segment of Bavaria, which comprised roughly 30% of the population. Should the non-confessional school be instated in Bavaria, he warned, Catholic teachers would infiltrate this population, "grievously effecting the Protestant consciousness of growing school children.... The recatholicization of Germany from the south up is the program of the BVP power brokers [*Drahtzieher*], and for the present we unconditionally need the Protestant confessional school in Bavaria as a bulwark."²²⁴

Buttman solicited Baarß's appreciation of the regional differences between Bavaria and Mecklenburg: "When you lay down the demand that dogma disappear from the school, it is conceivable for a purely Protestant region: but for the entire Reich it is impossible." In other words, where the population was solely Protestant, the formal removal of "dogma" would not engender a weakening of Protestant consciousness, which, according to Buttman, would be beneficial to the future Nazi state. Such confessional consciousness constituted a threat, however, where Catholics were concerned. Buttman concluded on a defensive note: "Believe me, we south German National Socialists know the enormous danger of political Catholicism at least as well as you in the purely Protestant north!"²²⁵

This position was all the more noteworthy for the fact that Buttman was a Catholic. Like many other Nazis, including Hitler himself, Buttman seems to have preferred Protestantism over Catholicism from an ideological point of view. The Catholic church and Ultramontanism was similarly criticized by Gregor Strasser, the party's chief administrator and

²²⁴ BAZ NS 12/638 (23 June 1931: Munich).

²²⁵ Ibid.

one of the most powerful Nazis of the *Kampfzeit*.²²⁶ He publicly supported confessional schools, and refused to grant party membership to members of Ludendorff's Tannenberg League due to their anti-Christian attacks on the Nazi leadership.²²⁷ But in private he himself attacked institutional Catholicism: "History teaches that the Vatican has never had an interest in a strong and independent Germany. Therefore it wants a strong Germany just as little today or in the future. Indeed we all know from Bismarck's time how much Ultramontanism — one can also say the Center was and is mindful of this — will not let Germany back on her feet."²²⁸

Further evidence of a friendlier attitude to institutional Protestantism was provided by the NSLB when it decided to sponsor the creation of a "National Socialist Pastors' Working Group" (*Arbeitsgemeinschaft nationalsozialistischer Pfarrer*). Though it counted few members — largely due to the formal "above parties" stance of the Protestant churches — its relevance lay in the fact that a major Nazi organization should have advocated it in the first place. Bernhard Rust endorsed the idea of such a group, as did Gregor Strasser.²²⁹ Whereas some thought was given to creating an actual *NS-Pfarrerbund*, on par with the NSLB, this would have abrogated the party's formal "above churches" stance; hence it remained a looser "working group" affiliated with Schemm's organization. The first meeting of the group took place in February 1931, at the Berlin home of the mother of the ambassador to Moscow. Among the notables who were present included Prince August Wilhelm ('Auwi') of Prussia and his brother Eitel Friedrich, Wilhelm II's sons and party members since 1930, and Goebbels, who gave a talk on church and state.²³⁰

²²⁶ Peter Stachura, *Gregor Strasser and the Rise of Nazism* (London, 1983), 58.

²²⁷ For instance see the case of Captain August Fleck: BAZ NS 22/1069 (28 November 1930: Munich).

²²⁸ BAZ NS 22/1068 (31 October 1932: Munich). The late date of this letter indicates that Strasser did not let any pro-Catholic feelings give way by this time, as Stachura suggests (*Strasser*, 59). In his private correspondence, Strasser pointed out that any alliance with the Center was to be made in spite of his ideological convictions, not because of them.

²²⁹ On Rust, see note 190; on Strasser's approval: BAZ NS 22/446 (12 January 1931: Munich).

²³⁰ GStA I Rep 77/Tit 4043/Nr 392/1 (23 February 1931: Berlin). The report on this meeting, from the Prussian

In May 1931, the first regional branch of the group was founded in Bremen, with Gauleiter Telschow of East Hanover in attendance.²³¹ The Reich Leadership took an active interest in the group, overseeing appointments of other regional branches in Pomerania and Brandenburg.²³² Others were established throughout the Reich, including Baden, where, according to the *Kölnische Volkszeitung*, half the Protestant pastors belonged to the Nazi party.²³³ This small group had an impact out of proportion to its size. Their meetings served as forums for some of Schemm's many speeches, and Prussian government officials reported that their speakers were frequent guests at Nazi women's assemblies, where religion was usually strongly emphasized.²³⁴ (Aside from serving as speakers to Nazi women, pastors were also involved in the running of their organizations; one Pastor Lossin was the administrative leader of the German Women's Order, the main Nazi women's organization up until the formation of the NSF in 1931.²³⁵)

Conclusion

In this chapter we have attempted to explore the many ideological valences of "positive Christianity." More than just a useful slogan, positive Christianity was a supra-confessional faith that sought to bridge the religious divide in Germany through an integrative antisemitism and

Interior Ministry, provides no detail as to the substance of Goebbels' speech.

²³¹ VB, 1/6/31 (in GStA I Rep 77/Tit 4043/Nr 423/75).

²³² GStA I Rep 77/Tit 4043/Nr 423/78 (19 July 1931: Köln).

²³³ *Kölnische Volkszeitung*, 28/3/31 (in GStA I Rep 77/Tit 4043/Nr 423/74). In light of the probable figure of 120 pastors for the entire Reich, the article most likely meant the political preferences of the pastors, as opposed to their actual party membership.

²³⁴ GStA I Rep 77/Tit 4043/Nr 423/76 (n.d.[1931], n.p.). The Nazis themselves acknowledged the important role played by Working Group speakers at women's rallies: *Westfälische Allgemeine Volks-Zeitung*, 8/9/31 (in BStA Presseauschnittsammlung [hereafter PAS] 929).

²³⁵ BAZ NS 22/1064 (28 May 1931: Berlin). See also Jill Stephenson, *The Nazi Organisation of Women* (London, 1981), 45.

ethical socialism. The language of Point 24 of the Party Program clearly gave ontological priority to the “customs and moral sentiments” of the *Volk*. This was not meant as a way of excluding a particular variety of Christianity: no variety was explicitly privileged or maligned. Rather, it was a way of double casting the Jew as both Nazism’s and Christianity’s “other.” Leading Nazis appropriated Christ, not just as *a* socialist or antisemite, but as the *original* socialist and antisemite. In the process, they displayed a knowledge of and appreciation for some of the basic canons of Christianity, such as the New Testament. In various ways, the Nazis examined here staked a discursive claim to represent the “true” political manifestation of Christianity. They all held that Christianity was a central aspect of their movement, shaped its direction, or in some cases even helped explain Nazism. The themes common among them — a binary opposition of good against evil, God against the Devil; of struggle for national salvation against the Jews, marxism and liberalism — were inscribed not in secular but in Christian discourse. Whereas public professions upholding Christianity may often have been political calculation, at other times they were clearly more than that. Indeed, none of the Nazis examined here who proclaimed a positive attitude towards Christianity in public revealed himself to be anti-Christian in private. Hence the insistence that the Nazis practiced “sheer opportunism,” or placed a “tactical restraint” on their supposed hatred for Christianity “which had been imposed during the years of struggle to achieve power,” needs to be reconsidered.²³⁶

The Nazi approach to confessionalism displayed a general disregard for doctrine. Positive Christians may have said little or nothing about the Augsburg Confession or other signifiers of theological orthodoxy, but nonetheless they regarded Christian social teachings — “practical Christianity” as it was also known — as a linchpin of their worldview. Though generally unconcerned with dogma, many of these Nazis nonetheless adhered to basic precepts of Christian doctrine, most importantly the divinity of Christ as the son of God. Other Nazis

²³⁶ Stanley Payne, *A History of Fascism, 1914-1945* (Madison, 1995), 200; Conway, *Persecution*, 140.

went further still, taking part in religious activities and church organizations. Far from simply professing adherence to Christianity, many Nazis were involved in church life.

Despite attempts to bridge religious differences, there was considerable disagreement on Germany's religious past. Protestant and Catholic Nazis alike acknowledged the schism created by the Reformation. But whereas certain Catholics like Eckart and Goebbels blamed Luther, Protestants uniformly upheld Luther as a nationalist and antisemitic hero. For them, it was not the Reformation itself but the reaction from Rome that had destroyed German unity. In many ways, the Nazi movement reflected the larger sectarian fault lines that ran through Germany. Just as significant, however, was the existence of Catholics in the party — including Hitler — who demonstrated an admiration, and even preference, for Protestantism over Catholicism. For some, this was a function of anti-Ultramontanism; for others, Protestantism meant a greater theological accommodation with nationalism. In a larger sense these Nazis were entering into a nationalist narrative in Germany which, for the previous half century, had been written in a distinctly Protestant language.²³⁷ But however instrumentalist their attraction to Protestantism was, as we shall see in Chapter Four it was predicated on the same things that Protestants themselves heavily emphasized. This affinity for Protestantism was also evident in the anticlerical attacks made during this time, expressed both privately and publicly. Catholic Nazis in particular articulated a negative attitude towards their own church, whereas Protestants such as Buch, Kube and Schemm displayed little if any enmity towards theirs. In the majority of cases, “confessionalism” meant Catholic confessionalism, “the church” meant the Catholic Church — even when the precepts of positive Christianity stipulated that Catholics too had a place in the “Peoples’ Community.”

There were others in the party, however, who made no distinction between church and religion. A vocal minority in the party upheld a radical opposition to Christianity. Represented

by such prominent Nazis as Ludendorff and Rosenberg, these men rejected both the institution of the church and the ideology of positive Christianity, espousing in their place a “paganist” faith of blood and soil. In the next chapter, we will examine the religious views of the party’s paganists, and ask: How influential was this segment of party opinion? What was their relationship to the positive Christians of the party? Did paganists distinguish between Christianity as doctrine and Christianity as secular teaching? Did they distinguish between the confessions, or were they equally opposed to both? Finally, was the paganist battle against Christianity unequivocal, or did it display signs of tension and ambiguity?

²³⁷ See Chapter Four.

3 “Blood and Soil”: The Paganist Ambivalence

The men of the coming age will transform the heroes' memorials and glades of remembrance into the places of pilgrimage of a new religion; there the hearts of Germans will be constantly shaped afresh in pursuit of a new myth. — Alfred Rosenberg¹

Jesus is a linchpin of our history ... the God of the Europeans. — Alfred Rosenberg²

In Chapter Two we surveyed the voices in the Nazi movement which described themselves as Christian or in agreement with varieties of Christian teaching. Rarely did such voices elaborate on doctrinal questions. Seldom did these party members disclose their thinking on Original Sin, the resurrection of Christ, or the communion of the saints. Even though Hitler indicated his belief in an afterlife, he, like most other Nazis, rejected the Old Testament and believed Jesus was an Aryan. A strict theologian of any creed would have found this far from orthodox. At the same time, their frequent references to Biblical passages, and reliance upon them in constructing their image of Jesus and his social message, indicates that a large number of Nazis believed that they were following a kind of Christian ethics, if not metaphysics. Since most positive Christians of the movement believed their kingdom was of this world, their attraction to Christianity rested primarily with its temporal message, its political and social meanings. Certainly many of these Nazis were capable of accepting certain Christian dogmas, gaining inspiration from the gospels and the person of Christ. In general, however, most of them were less concerned with the doctrine of Christianity than with its political ideologies.

Several high-ranking party members suggested that whereas Christian doctrine played little if any role in their movement, Christian social thought was at its core. But other voices in

¹ *Mythus des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Munich, 1930), 365.

² *Ibid.*, 391.

the movement argued a quite different position. Not only did they suggest that Christian dogma was unrelated to Nazism; they went one step further, suggesting that Nazism actually opposed such dogma. In its place, they argued for a “pagan” faith based on a return to the Nordic mysticism of the past. According to some scholars, this ersatz religion was also predicated on a Nietzschean rejection of Christian ethics. We now survey those party leaders commonly regarded as the Nazi “paganists.” What did these paganists have to say about the ideologies and doctrines of Christianity? What were their attitudes to the different confessions? How complete was their rejection of Christ? And how powerful were they in shaping the overall direction of Nazism?

Whereas the paganists’ anti-Christian ideas are commonly regarded as hegemonic in the party, this chapter explores how their religious agendas brought them into conflict with many figures in the party’s leadership. These conflicts arose not only over questions of strategy and electoral tactics, but as well over the very ideas Nazism claimed to represent. Through a close reading of paganist writings, including Rosenberg’s “Myth of the Twentieth Century,” I argue that their detachment from Christianity was partial and ambiguous. Doctrines such as Original Sin and the Immaculate Conception were rejected unequivocally. Nevertheless, paganist understandings of the secular import of Christianity could be much more favorable. Of particular significance is the tendency for paganists to display a more positive attitude towards Lutheran Protestantism than even the many Christians within the party. The paganists’ belief system certainly gave primacy to race. They nonetheless frequently displayed repeated admiration for Protestantism and its historical development as an index of “Germanness.”

A German conception of God

Erich Ludendorff was arguably the first paganist of the Nazi movement and easily the most

recognizable of all early Nazis. He was one of the most notable military leaders of the First World War, who in partnership with Hindenburg won some of Germany's greatest victories, most famously the Battle of Tannenberg on the Russian Front. During the last two years of the war, he and Hindenburg assumed near dictatorial powers as the civilian authorities began to lose credibility. Having advocated a negotiated peace after the collapse of the Western Front in 1918, Ludendorff soon became involved in the *völkisch* movement. It is perhaps no coincidence that one of the men most responsible for Germany's surrender that year would become a leading propagandist of the "stab-in-the-back" legend (*Dolchstoßlegende*). Ludendorff took part in the failed Kapp Putsch of 1920, shortly afterwards becoming a figurehead of the Nazi movement and taking part in the failed Hitler Putsch of 1923. At the putsch trial, his enormous prestige insured that he, unlike Hitler, would be acquitted of all charges. During Hitler's brief imprisonment, Ludendorff attempted a takeover of the NSDAP with a new National Socialist Freedom Party (NSFP), which fought with Streicher's Greater German Peoples' Community (GDVG) for the mantle of Nazism.³

It was during this time that Ludendorff, like Dinter, attempted to turn Nazism into an explicitly religious movement. But while Dinter attempted a "reform" of Christianity, Ludendorff's religious agenda is usually considered thoroughly anti-Christian and pagan.⁴ Indeed, Ludendorff proclaimed a divorce from Christianity — a position that Dinter would have rejected utterly. According to Ludendorff's adjutant Wilhelm Breucker, in 1924 "Ludendorff charged Hitler with having expressly based the party on positive Christianity in his program, and sought to demonstrate to him with biblical quotations that Christianity was and by nature had to

³ See Chapter Two, n. 24, 131.

⁴ See, for instance, John Conway, *The Nazi Persecution of the Churches* (London, 1968), 5, who refers to Ludendorff's "violent anti-Christian campaign," and Jonathan Wright, *Above Parties* (Oxford, 1974), 77, who refers to Ludendorff's Tannenbergbund as "hostile to Christianity as such."

be the sharpest opponent of every *völkisch* movement.”⁵ Ludendorff’s anti-Christian ideology was strongly influenced by his second wife, Mathilde von Kemnitz. The daughter of a theologian, von Kemnitz came to hate everything associated with Christianity, creating in its place a philosophy she called *Deutsche Gotterkenntnis* (“The German Conception of God”). As early as 1920, von Kemnitz had attempted to infuse the Nazi movement with her paganistic religious views, but had received a “brusque rejection” from Hitler, “to whom her ideas and teachings seemed like confused delusions.”⁶ In Ludendorff, however, she found a more receptive audience. He used his power in the NSFP to bring Kemnitz into prominence. At a party conference held in August 1924, the Ludendorffs attempted to impose their religious views. The main speech of the conference was read by von Kemnitz, who insisted on the centrality of a new religion for the Nazi movement which was anti-Christian in tone.⁷ Like her husband, she believed that behind the international powers of Marxism, Catholicism, capitalism and freemasonry, the Jews were at work. But even the Jews were tools of another force — namely the Dalai Lama, who sought to destroy Germany from far-away Tibet.⁸ This fantasy was too much even for Alfred Rosenberg, who later wrote that Kemnitz “made world history into an affair of mere secret conspiracies.”⁹

With Hitler’s release from prison, Ludendorff was increasingly marginalized, especially

⁵ Wilhelm Breucker, *Die Tragik Ludendorffs: eine kritische Studie auf Grund persönlicher Erinnerungen an der General und seine Zeit* (Oldenburg, 1953), 107.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 108.

⁷ Erich Ludendorff, *Vom Feldherrn zum Weltrevolutionär und Wegbereiter Deutscher Volksschöpfung: Meine Lebenserinnerungen von 1919 bis 1925* (Munich, 1941), 350-51. Ludendorff makes no mention of the reception her speech received.

⁸ Peter Viereck, *Metapolitics: From the Romantics to Hitler* (New York, 1941). Viereck errs when he asserts that Ludendorff’s personal influence on Hitler was “enormous” (297).

⁹ Quoted in Robert Cecil, *The Myth of the Master Race: Alfred Rosenberg and Nazi Ideology* (London, 1972), 36. Rosenberg’s own historical theories hardly revealed a level-headed scholar. While he rejected Kemnitz’s mythology, he propagated his own, firmly arguing that European civilization began with the lost continent of Atlantis: *Mythus*, 24-28.

after the latter's disastrous showing in the 1925 presidential elections. In the same year Ludendorff founded the Tannenberg League (*Tannenbergbund*) as an exclusively mystical-religious sect. As we have seen in relation to Dinter's Christian sectarianism, Hitler rejected any attempt to turn Nazism into a political religion. But whereas Hitler adhered to many of Dinter's and Eckart's religious views, he was totally opposed to Ludendorff's. As Hitler wrote in *Mein Kampf*:

The characteristic thing about these people is that they rave about old Germanic heroism, about dim prehistory, stone axes, spear and shield, but in reality are the greatest cowards that can be imagined. For the same people who brandish scholarly imitations of old German tin swords, and wear a dressed bearskin with bull's horns over their bearded heads, preach for the present nothing but struggle with spiritual weapons, and run away as fast as they can from every Communist blackjack.¹⁰

Two years later Hitler expelled Ludendorff from the NSDAP. He additionally forbade members of the Nazi party to enter the Tannenberg League.¹¹ Undeterred, the Ludendorffs continued along their religious path. In 1931, Mathilde wrote a book titled *Erlösung von Jesu Christo* ("Redemption from Jesus Christ"), which sought to replace Jesus with a pantheistic adoration of nature. In it, and in her other writings of the period, Jesus was not the heroic Aryan leader, but an alcoholic Jew who did not even die on the cross. In this account, the Bible was a Jewish fraud that destroyed every *völkisch* impulse. Christians, often innocently unaware of the consequences, were propagating a faith that would lead to the destruction of Germany.¹² The search for God was not to lead to Christ, but rather to the German countryside, to a divine "blood and soil": "Because the entire world is permeated with God's soul, the German plants and

¹⁰ Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, trans. Ralph Manheim (Boston, 1962), 361.

¹¹ Albrecht Tyrell, *Führer befehl ... Selbstzeugnisse aus der 'Kampfzeit' der NSDAP* (Düsseldorf, 1969), 165-66. See also Chapter Two, n. 227.

¹² Ekkehard Hieronimus, "Zur Religiosität der völkischen Bewegung," in Hubert Cancik (ed.), *Religions- und Geistesgeschichte der Weimarer Republik* (Düsseldorf, 1982), 172-73.

animals are not soulless, like the servants of Yahweh.”¹³ Here was a literal deification of Germany, the search for a replacement for Christianity.

If the Ludendorffs represented a clear break with, and attack upon, Christianity, for Erich Ludendorff at least the transformation was not without its ambiguity. While Christian doctrine and metaphysics were clearly rejected, Ludendorff’s sectarian obsessions were still tied to a Protestant way of seeing. In 1923 Ludendorff suggested there could be no compromise “in the struggle of the Christian-Germanic worldview against the three Internationals.”¹⁴ At his putsch trial in February 1924, Ludendorff attributed Germany’s malaise not only to Marxism and Judaism, which corrupted the German people “physically, racially and morally,” but also to “political Catholicism” and Ultramontanism, which he blamed for the destruction of the Kaiserreich as well.¹⁵ As of yet, however, Ludendorff offered no comparable attack on Protestantism. Instead, he made more than one reference to Germany’s “Protestant Dynasty,” for which he fought loyally in the Great War, and which he accused political Catholicism and Bavarian particularism of trying to destroy.¹⁶

That same year Ludendorff laid out his feelings on the Protestant faith in an extended interview. He was, for the moment, turning away from his struggle against Bolshevism to fight the “Roman Church,” which was attempting to conquer northern Germany: “The black threat in Germany has become greater than the red.” Ludendorff asserted that he had done his best to rouse the Protestant Church of north Germany to this danger, but with little effect. He emphasized that Prussia was the bulwark of Protestantism in Germany; “indeed, the world has

¹³ Mathilde Ludendorff, *Deutscher Gottglaube* (Munich, 1932), 20.

¹⁴ As quoted in *Bayrischer Kurier*, 27/3/24 (in StAM PolDir/6687/20). The *Bayrischer Kurier* consistently published anti-Ludendorff opinions, and so questions can be raised as to the veracity of the quotation. However, the paper names its source: the extreme nationalist periodical *Fridericus* (1923, no. 50).

¹⁵ Ludendorff, *Feldherrn*, 271.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 272.

received Protestantism from Prussia.” However, since the return of the Jesuits to Germany after the Revolution, the Catholic Church was making “terrible inroads” into the Protestant Church.¹⁷ Here Ludendorff was being both critical and sympathetic. While he lamented that the Protestant Church in his view was not sufficiently anti-Catholic, he nonetheless betrayed his belief that, by nature, it *should* be. Instead of blaming the state of affairs on a weakness of Protestantism, he looked instead to the organizational strength of international Catholicism: “In contrast to the situation of the Protestant Church in northern Germany, the Catholic Church of southern Germany is extremely organized and well financed, and under the leadership of Rome has opened a determined but secret conversion campaign.” The danger for Ludendorff was clear: if nothing were done to reverse the process, then Protestants would flock to the Catholic fold, making the entire nation once again Catholic.¹⁸ However, Ludendorff overstated the degree of Protestant indifference toward the Catholic threat. Many Protestants, especially those in the Protestant League, saw the Catholic danger in much the same way as Ludendorff. They even depicted Ludendorff as a Protestant warrior fighting Catholicism’s supposedly ongoing counter-reformation.¹⁹

Catholics also tended to see Ludendorff in these terms. To a writer in the *Augsburger Postzeitung*, it was no coincidence that Ludendorff descended from Lutheran pastors. As a Prussian Protestant, he was considered “predestined” to join the Protestant League in opposition to Catholic Bavaria.²⁰ A contributor to the *Bayrischer Kurier* picked up on this relationship as

¹⁷ *Bayrischer Kurier*, 31/1/24 (in StAM PolDir/6687/65).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ See Chapter Two, n. 136-37.

²⁰ “Die wahren Ziele der deutsch-völkischen Bewegung,” *Augsburger Postzeitung*, 10/5/24 (in StAM PolDir/6687/41). The article also referred to Heinrich Hermelink, who after the war wrote *Kirche im Kampf: Dokumente des Widerstandes und des Aufbaus der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland von 1933-1945* (Tübingen, 1950), a work suggesting that the Protestant churches were unambiguously anti-Nazi. In the *Postzeitung* article, reference is made to Hermelink’s claim that Protestants in Germany then, unlike 20 years before, were no longer anti-Catholic. But as we shall see in the next chapter, the Weimar era saw a tension between Protestant and Catholic

well, suggesting that the Protestant League wanted “to wage its religious-political struggle against Rome with the help of the *völkisch* party movement, because it is quite firmly convinced of the intrinsic similarity of its own worldview to the worldview of [this] movement.” The paper suggested that both came together in the name of Ludendorff.²¹ In the *Allgemeine Rundschau* it was pointed out that Ludendorff was born in the frontier territory of Posen: “There, to be German is to be Protestant, and to be Polish is to be Catholic.... A sensitive national feeling [is] intimately tied with confessional tradition. Catholicism, the faith of the subjugated foreign people, is despised.” Then came a revealing parallel: “Ludendorff is thus a type of Ulsterman, something of a German Carson.”²²

The same year that he was expelled from the NSDAP, Ludendorff formally left the Protestant church. In a letter to church authorities, he declared that he no longer believed in the Protestant religion. But perhaps more important was his resentment that the anti-ultramontanist and anti-masonic campaign was insufficiently championed by his church.²³ Given his attack on Hitler for supposedly going to Canossa, we can safely discount his polemic against the Protestant establishment as equally inflated. In return for feeling snubbed by the church, Ludendorff would later profess his disgust that Protestant pastors, “who were supposed to be especially ‘national’,” could read from psalms full of reference to Zion, Yahweh and Jerusalem.²⁴

that was actually more acute than in the *Kaiserreich*.

²¹ Quoted in Klaus Scholder, *The Churches and the Third Reich*, 2 vols. (London, 1987-88), 1: 109.

²² “Mitten im Kulturkampf,” *Allgemeine Rundschau*, 6/4/24 (in StAM PolDir/6687/89). Sir Edward Carson was the leader of the Ulstermen in the first decades of the twentieth century. For a discussion of Protestant sectarianism in the frontier areas of the German east, see Helmut Walser Smith, *German Nationalism and Religious Conflict: Culture, Ideology, Politics, 1870-1914* (Princeton, 1995), esp. 167-205: “Religious and Nationality Conflict in the Borderlands of the Imagined Community.”

²³ Wright, ‘Above Parties’, 75.

The myth of Rosenberg

Perhaps the most prominent paganist in the Nazi party was Alfred Rosenberg. More than any other National Socialist, Rosenberg had pretensions to becoming the movement's great intellect and official ideologue. He failed in both efforts. Early scholars of Nazism, taking Rosenberg's self-promotion at face value, greatly overestimated the importance of his ideas for the movement as a whole.²⁵ The sheer volume of published works and administrative paperwork produced by Rosenberg and his offices lent weight to this impression. Karl Bracher came somewhat closer to gauging Rosenberg's true influence when he described him as "the administrative clerk of National Socialist ideology."²⁶ But even in his role as "protector" of the Nazi worldview, Rosenberg encountered resistance and ultimate defeat at the hands of rival offices within the Nazi party and state, thus throwing into doubt the hegemony of his ideas.²⁷

Born in Estonia of *volksdeutsch* parents, Rosenberg fled to Germany after the start of the Russian Revolution. Like Hitler, Rosenberg received his entrée into the rightist fringe through Dietrich Eckart. It was through Eckart that Rosenberg first met Hitler and in Eckart's *Auf gut deutsch* where Rosenberg published his first article. After Eckart's death in 1923, Rosenberg took over as editor of the Nazis' official newspaper, the *Völkischer Beobachter*. His only other organizational accomplishment before 1933 was to have founded the relatively minor Fighting

²⁴ Ludendorff, *Feldherrn*, 362.

²⁵ Church historians in particular have argued that Rosenberg's ideas represented the party's ideology as such. See, inter alia, the various contributions in Franklin Littell and Hubert Locke (eds.), *The German Church Struggle and the Holocaust* (Detroit, 1974).

²⁶ Karl Dietrich Bracher, *The German Dictatorship: The Origins, Structure and Effects of National Socialism* (New York, 1970), 281.

²⁷ The best account of Rosenberg's many failures in the Nazi party polycracy is Reinhard Bollmus, *Das Amt Rosenberg und seine Gegner: Studien zum Machtkampf im nationalsozialistischen Herrschaftssystem* (Stuttgart, 1970). On Rosenberg's contests for ideological oversight of the party, see Chapter Eight

League for German Culture (*Kampfbund für deutsche Kultur*) in 1928.²⁸ Other than this, Rosenberg's *Kampfzeit* activity was limited to writing a slew of books detailing his version of Nazism and the threat Judaism, Bolshevism, Romanism and Freemasonry posed to German nationhood.

By far the most important of these books was "The Myth of the Twentieth Century," published in 1930.²⁹ Significantly, it was published as a private work, never becoming an official guide to Nazi thinking like *Mein Kampf*. It never received the official stamp of the NSDAP, nor did the party's official publisher publish it. Given the fate that awaited Dinter and Ludendorff when they tried to make their religious views official party doctrine, Hitler would not have countenanced its publication any other way. Indeed, in the same book that put forth a new religious doctrine, Rosenberg felt compelled to assure his reader that he was not trying to resurrect a dead religion and that it should not be Nazi policy to engage in religious matters.³⁰ Most of Rosenberg's opponents in the churches assumed that it was nonetheless the *true* guide to Nazi thinking — some even supposing it was more influential in the NSDAP than Hitler's own book.³¹ The party in fact largely ignored it, as Rosenberg himself would later discover.³² Over 700 pages long, it was easily the most abstruse book ever written by a Nazi. In keeping with their own religious views, party leaders like Hitler and Goebbels heaped enormous scorn upon it. According to one biographer, "Hitler completely rejected ... the mysticism with which

²⁸ Alan Steinweis points out that the *Kampfbund* was a preexisting nationalist organization which Rosenberg later took over: "Weimar Culture and the Rise of National Socialism: The *Kampfbund für deutsche Kultur*," *Central European History* 24 (1991), 406.

²⁹ Alfred Rosenberg, *Der Mythos des 20. Jahrhunderts: Eine Wertung der seelisch-geistigen Gestaltenkämpfe unserer Zeit* (Munich, 1930).

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 5-7.

³¹ Jonathan Wright points to some in the clerical establishment who believed "that Rosenberg's views were more widely held in the party than Hitler's": *Above Parties*, 89.

³² Reinhard Bollmus, "Alfred Rosenberg: National Socialism's 'Chief Ideologue?'," in Ronald Smelser and Rainer Zitelmann (eds.), *The Nazi Elite* (New York, 1993), 187.

Rosenberg, in his main work ... attempted to give a religious intensity to a racist interpretation of history.”³³ Goebbels was characteristically succinct, describing the book as an “ideological belch.”³⁴

Though Hitler was known for tailoring his remarks to please his audience, even in Rosenberg’s presence he was less than enthusiastic. Before publishing it, Rosenberg asked Hitler for his opinion of the book (six months after receiving the manuscript, Hitler still had not read it). Hitler coolly replied: “It is a very clever book; only I ask myself who today is likely to read and understand such a book.”³⁵ It was a reflection of the insecurity of Rosenberg’s position that he replied by asking whether he should suppress it or even resign party office. Hitler supposedly said “no” to both, maintaining that Rosenberg had a right to publish his book since it was his “intellectual property.”³⁶ However, on later occasions Hitler would express regret that Rosenberg had written the book in the first place. According to Albert Speer, Hitler referred to it as “stuff nobody can understand,” written by a “narrow-minded Baltic German who thinks in horribly complicated terms. ... A relapse into medieval notions!”³⁷ On another occasion, Hitler made reference to its “heretical outpourings.”³⁸ In rare moments Rosenberg even admitted to himself that Hitler ultimately rejected his religion: “[Hitler] set his face from the beginning against racial cultism.”³⁹ While it is true that Rosenberg’s *Mythus* sold hundreds of thousands of

³³ Ibid., 185.

³⁴ Quoted in Joachim Fest, *The Face of the Third Reich: Portraits of the Nazi Leadership* (New York, 1970), 168.

³⁵ Quoted in Cecil, *Master Race*, 100.

³⁶ Ibid., 101.

³⁷ Albert Speer, *Inside the Third Reich* (New York, 1970), 96. For Goebbels’ views on and relationship with Rosenberg, see *ibid.*, 122-25; Ralf Reuth, *Goebbels* (New York, 1993), 201-05.

³⁸ Adolf Hitler, *Hitler’s Table Talk 1941-1944: His Private Conversations*, trans. Norman Cameron and R. H. Stevens, intro. by Hugh Trevor-Roper (London, 1953), 555.

³⁹ Cecil, *Master Race*, 100.

copies, this figure is not a real reflection of its popularity. As another of Rosenberg's biographers points out: "Secondary schools and institutions of higher education were required to have copies in their libraries; but to what extent these were read cannot now be estimated."⁴⁰ We can therefore safely discount Robert Pois' assertion that "Rosenberg's view of religion ... was *widely held* by most committed National Socialists."⁴¹

This being said, *Mythus* obviously represented the views of at least one man when it was written: Rosenberg himself. And since Rosenberg remained a "Reich Leader" throughout the course of the party's history (even if one of the least successful), the views found in the book are worth our consideration. Speaking of the need to create a new religion, Rosenberg proclaimed: "Today a new faith is awakening: the myth of blood, the faith that the divine essence of mankind is to be defended through blood; the faith embodied by the fullest realization that Nordic blood represents the mystery which has supplanted and surmounted the old sacraments."⁴² This new religion would place the highest value in the idea of racial honor: "The idea of honor — national honor — is for us the beginning and end of all our thoughts and deeds. It can endure no equivalent center of power of any type, neither Christian love nor freemasonic humanism nor Roman dogmatism."⁴³ This Christian "brotherhood of man" was nothing more than an attempt to allow Jew and "Turk" to take precedence over the European. In the name of Christian love, Europe was besieged by unrest and chaos: "Thanks to preachings on humanity and the equality of all peoples, every Jew, Negro and Mulatto can be a full citizen of a European state."⁴⁴ When the Nordic states of Europe were overwhelmed by the Roman south, the concept of honor was

⁴⁰ Ibid., 103.

⁴¹ Robert Pois, *National Socialism and the Religion of Nature* (London, 1986), 41 (emphasis in the original).

⁴² Rosenberg, *Mythus*, 114 (Rosenberg's opus magnum remains untranslated to this day).

⁴³ Ibid., 514.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 203.

overtaken by that of Christian love: “Christianity ... did not know the idea of race and nationality, because it represented a violent fusion of different elements; it also knew nothing of the idea of honor, because in pursuance of the late Roman quest for power it subdued not only the body, but also the soul.”⁴⁵ This emphasis on love brought Christianity in alliance with Marxism. If the concept of national honor was once again to be dominant, it could only happen when the “true workers” of the German *Volk* formed a united front against all forces associated with economy, profit and money, “regardless of whether these forces were hidden under the cloak of democracy, Christianity, internationalism [or] humanism.”⁴⁶

Rosenberg also rejected the Christian doctrine of original sin: “The sense of sin always goes together with physical and racial cross-breeding. The abominable mixing of races creates ... inner uncertainty and the feeling that our whole existence is sinful.”⁴⁷ The Romans had been racially aware, according to Rosenberg, and so could only reject this Christian cross-breeding: “Everything still imbued with the Roman character sought to defend itself against the rise of Christianity, all the more because it represented, next to its religious teaching, a completely proletarian-nihilistic political trend.”⁴⁸ Rosenberg was also opposed to the Trinity, which he believed overlooked the spirituality of racial nationalism and lead to the “nihilism” implicit in the biblical expression of Paul: “Here is neither Jew nor Greek, neither bond nor free, neither man nor woman.” This nihilism led to the purposeful destruction of Greek and Roman civilizations as culturally worthless. Another Christian doctrine rejected by Rosenberg was the “dogmatization” of the birth of the Virgin Mary, which was regarded as a negation of nature. In

⁴⁵ Ibid., 155-56.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 204-05.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 71.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

addition, he also attacked the biblical emphasis on the resurrection.⁴⁹

Hence we have a near total denunciation of Christian doctrines. Unlike other Nazis, who for the most part left doctrinal questions unexamined, Rosenberg actively rejected them. Where other Nazis referred to “positive Christianity” as a fundament of party ideology, in *Mythus* Rosenberg made no mention of it. As Robert Cecil puts it: “If we accept that the basic Christian beliefs are that Jesus Christ was God, that through His death and resurrection man is redeemed from original sin and that the soul survives the death of the physical body, it is clear that Rosenberg was no Christian.”⁵⁰ But if Rosenberg was not himself a Christian, how opposed to Christianity was his new religion? Here we are confronted with even more ambiguity than in the case of Ludendorff. For in spite of Rosenberg’s denunciation of Christianity’s history and his desire to build a new racialist faith, time and again he excluded the most important figures of the Christian faith — Jesus most importantly — from his attacks, and upheld another Christian — the medieval mystic Meister Eckhart — as the inspiration of his new belief system. Indeed, as we shall see, in the *Mythus* Rosenberg ultimately argued that Christianity itself could be reformed and saved from the “Judeo-Roman” infections of its clerical representatives.

Unlike the Ludendorffs, Rosenberg believed that Jesus had been an Aryan. Here he followed his greatest mentor, Houston Stewart Chamberlain, who had maintained that “in all probability” Jesus had not been a Jew.⁵¹ Rosenberg affirmed his belief that whereas Jesus was born into a Jewish culture, “there was not the slightest reason” to assume that Jesus was Jewish. Christ’s teaching that the Kingdom of Heaven is within us was a “thoroughly un-Jewish, mystical teaching.”⁵² The traditional, ecclesiastical picture of Jesus had been a distortion of the

⁴⁹ Ibid., 77-78.

⁵⁰ Cecil, *Master Race*, 84.

⁵¹ The very title “Myth of the Twentieth Century” was a tribute to Chamberlain’s “Foundations of the Nineteenth Century” of 1899, a work which Rosenberg adored and for which “Myth” was designed as a type of sequel.

⁵² Rosenberg, *Mythus*, 76.

Roman Church to present a picture of submission and meekness, in order to create an ideal that would foster servility. In its place Rosenberg called for a new, manly image of Christ: “Today Jesus appears to us as the self-confident Lord [*Herr*] in the best and highest sense of the word. It is his *life* which holds meaning for the Germanic people, not his agonizing death, which is the image of him among the Alpine and Mediterranean peoples. The mighty preacher and wrathful one [*Zürnende*] in the temple, the man who swept along his followers, is the ideal which today shines forth from the Gospels, not the sacrificial lamb of the Jewish prophets, not the crucified.”⁵³ Instead of the conventional image of Jesus as the sufferer, an old-new [*alt-neues*] picture had to emerge: Jesus the *hero*.⁵⁴ Jesus was not the “hook-nosed, flat-footed savior” of southern European depiction, but the “slim, tall, blond” savior of northern European portrayals.⁵⁵ His entire being was a fiery resistance: for *that* reason he had to die.⁵⁶

Although Rosenberg emphasized Jesus’ human, temporal acts over his divine transcendence, this did not necessarily mean that Jesus had lost his divinity altogether. “In *spite* of all the Christian churches, Jesus is a linchpin of our history. He became the God of the Europeans.”⁵⁷ Rosenberg made many other references of Christ’s divinity. In the context of the “Nordic” Meister Eckhart, whom he regarded as both the ultimate Germanic religious hero and the “poet of the Savior,” Rosenberg suggested that mankind should be independent of the clergy, made aware of his own spiritual uniqueness, and follow the example of Christ’s own “holy union of divine and human natures.”⁵⁸ Rosenberg even adhered to conventional Christology when

⁵³ Ibid., 604 (emphasis in the original).

⁵⁴ Ibid., 414.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 616.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 607.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 391 (emphasis in the original).

⁵⁸ Ibid., 230.

discussing Chamberlain's religious views: "A totally free man, who inwardly disposed with the total culture of our time, demonstrated the finest feeling for the great superhuman simplicity of Christ ... as the mediator between man and God."⁵⁹

Rosenberg's frequent references to Christ (mentioned far more than Wotan or Nietzsche in *Mythus*) and his positive engagement with Jesus' historical and contemporary significance, revealed an attachment impossible for the true anti-Christian. These attachments signified an ambiguous revolution against the cultural heritage of Christianity. But did Rosenberg admit to this lingering affection? Certainly the existing confessions were regarded as inadequate, especially the "Roman Church," which was considered beyond redemption. Institutional arrogance and a greed for power massively corrupted the papacy. The Catholic priesthood was, in Rosenberg's view, a racially defiled mixture of "Etrusco-Syro-Near Easterners and Jews" who had infiltrated and infected ancient Rome. Rosenberg accused Catholicism of superstition, pointing to the "millions" of Europeans killed in the medieval frenzy of witch-hunts and belief in magic.⁶⁰ In his view, the papacy and its racial contamination had destroyed the Germanic Middle Ages, marked by racial consciousness and productivity. It achieved this by creating a raceless theology of hereditary sinfulness that could only be redeemed through grace.⁶¹ The institution of the papacy was interested in nothing more than the eternal submissiveness of the servile masses.⁶² As such, "eternal Rome" represented a "Jewish-clerical 'Christianity'," which propagated the theological "personality-God separation" Jesus had worked against.⁶³ Rome had blocked out Christ, indeed put itself above Christ, separating him from the people and neglecting

⁵⁹ Ibid., 623-34.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 67.

⁶¹ Ibid., 70-71.

⁶² Ibid., 397.

⁶³ Ibid., 396.

his teachings.⁶⁴

In contrast to Catholicism, Rosenberg viewed Protestantism with considerably more ambivalence. Like Ludendorff early on, Rosenberg essentially asserted that the present-day representatives of Lutheranism, through their approximation of the Roman system, had become un-Lutheran. For Rosenberg, Luther's great deed had been the destruction of the priesthood and the Germanification of Christianity. Rosenberg also regarded Luther as nothing less than the greatest forerunner of German nationalism, racial purity, and spiritual independence.⁶⁵ His attack on Rome was especially praiseworthy: "However much Luther was still rooted in the Middle Ages, his action brought about the greatest revolution in Europe after the invasion of Roman Christianity."⁶⁶ Through his fight against Rome's clerical power, he saved the west from "Tibetan-Etruscan Asian" influences. Here again Rosenberg got his cue from Chamberlain, who had declared Luther "the greatest man in world history."⁶⁷ Rosenberg could not be quite this effusive, however: Luther's shortcoming had been his adherence to the "Hebraic" Old Testament. Although this was compensated by his later tract, "On the Jews and their Lies," and his declaration that Christianity would have nothing more to do with Moses, the Old Testament nonetheless remained part of Luther's canon.⁶⁸

But not all was lost for Christianity. As with other Nazi leaders, Rosenberg believed it could be redeemed if the Old Testament were removed from its corpus: "As a religious book the so-called Old Testament must be abolished for all time. With it will end the failed attempt of the

⁶⁴ Ibid., 161.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 84-85, 397.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 183.

⁶⁷ Houston Stewart Chamberlain, *Die Grundlagen des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Munich, 1899), 26.

⁶⁸ Rosenberg, *Mythus*, 129.

last fifteen hundred years to spiritually make us Jews ...”⁶⁹ While other Nazis were content to stop at the Old Testament, Rosenberg went a step further, calling as well for the removal of “obviously distorted” portions of the New Testament. In addition, a new “Fifth Gospel” should be introduced.⁷⁰ These revisions, however sweeping, did not amount to a total negation of preexisting gospel. Rosenberg lavished approval on two in particular, those of John and Mark. John held out the “first ingenious interpretation, the experience of the eternal polarity between good and evil,” and stood “against the Old Testament delusion that God created good and evil out of nothing.”⁷¹ The Gospel of Mark signified “the real heart of the message of *Gotteskindschaft* against the semitic teaching of God’s tyranny.”⁷² Even the Christian notion of love, while it had wrought racial contamination to Nordic Europe, could be salvaged: “Love, humility, charity, prayer, good works, mercy and repentance are all good and useful, but only under one condition: if they strengthen the power of the soul, elevate it and make it more God-like.”⁷³

The Christian religion could ultimately be redeemed if it expunged its negative aspects, those anti-racial elements springing from “Syro-Etruscan” traditions, in favor of its positive aspect: the “genuine” Christianity that appealed to Nordic blood.⁷⁴ As Rosenberg wrote with regard to education: “The basic assumption of all German education is recognition of the fact that Christianity did not bring us morality, but rather that Christianity owes its lasting value to

⁶⁹ Ibid., 603.

⁷⁰ Ibid. Rosenberg made no mention of what this new Gospel would look like.

⁷¹ Ibid., 604.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid., 238.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 79.

the German character.”⁷⁵ If this made Christianity a function of racialism, in the process Rosenberg nonetheless acknowledged the worthiness of Christianity. Of the preexisting varieties of Christianity, Rosenberg believed, Protestantism came closer to his vision than Catholicism. Protestantism in the beginning meant “the blooming of the Germanic will to freedom, national self-determination, personal spirituality. Without question it paved the way for what we now call the highest works of our culture and science.”⁷⁶ Where it failed was in keeping the religious center in Jerusalem. But Rosenberg did not therefore reject Protestantism out of hand. The Jewish elements it retained went against its original purpose: in his view, the Old Testament had been “smuggled” into an initially “individualistic” faith.⁷⁷

Rosenberg would overcome Christianity’s drawbacks through the appropriation of Meister Eckhart. Rosenberg regarded Eckhart as “the greatest apostle of the Nordic west [who] gave us our religion ... who awoke God in our hearts, that the ‘Kingdom of Heaven is within us’.”⁷⁸ This reference to Luke 17: 21 — “The Kingdom of Heaven is within you” — was found as well in Dietrich Eckart, who like Rosenberg considered it a centerpiece of his theology.⁷⁹ For Rosenberg, it was Meister Eckhart’s era of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, not the Renaissance or even the Reformation, which signaled the birth of the new Germanic man and his culture.⁸⁰ Rosenberg was attracted by Eckhart’s credentials as a medieval mystic twice tried for heresy by Pope John XXII and the Curia at Avignon. By displaying his defiance of the Pope and rejection of Roman scholasticism and ecclesialism, Eckhart was a particularly appropriate

⁷⁵ Ibid., 635.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 129.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 128.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 218-19.

⁷⁹ Dietrich Eckart, *Auf gut deutsch* 3 (1919), 38.

⁸⁰ Rosenberg, *Mythus*, 220.

candidate for the new faith. Eckhart proclaimed that the “noble soul,” not the church, the bishop or the pope, was God’s representative on Earth.⁸¹ This emphasis on the individual soul and its self-determination was paramount for Rosenberg. God is not above man, Rosenberg believed, but lives in the individual soul. Rather than “surrender” to or fear God, the inner soul must be totally free, must communicate with God.⁸² In this way, the individual could follow the example of Christ, who strove for a sacred union of divine and human natures.⁸³ Rosenberg’s view of God revealed itself in a direct quote from Meister Eckhart: “God is not an annihilator of works, but an accomplisher. God is not a destroyer of nature, but its perfecter.”⁸⁴ This view of God as the Creator, as the God of Love rather than the Destroyer, could be found among other Nazis, notably Goebbels, who viewed Christ as the “incarnation of love.”⁸⁵ This emphasis on an unmediated relationship between man and God meant that the clergyman, be he Catholic or Protestant, would cease to exist.⁸⁶ However, unlike the priesthood, which would be annihilated, the church was to be sublimated. Rosenberg left open the possibility that it could find a place in his new religious order, provided it “did not prevent the Nordic soul from unfolding itself.”⁸⁷ Hence his call for a “German Peoples’ Church” (*Deutsche Volkskirche*), which would embrace the faith propagated by (Rosenberg’s interpretation of) Eckhart: “In place of a Jewish-Roman worldview steps the Nordic-western soul-faith.”⁸⁸

⁸¹ Ibid., 219.

⁸² Ibid., 223.

⁸³ Ibid., 230.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 231.

⁸⁵ Joseph Goebbels, *Michael: a Novel*, trans. Joachim Neugroschel (New York, 1987), 65-66.

⁸⁶ Rosenberg, *Mythus*, 227.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 219.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 252. This call for a German Peoples’ Church was unrelated to the “League for a German Church,” which was a church-political group within the established Protestant Church. While there were common ideological denominators between Rosenberg and the BdK, most importantly the lionization of Houston Stewart Chamberlain,

In short, Rosenberg's ideology was not a rejection of Christianity per se, but a radical revision of it. As one historian has noted, Rosenberg "was not a pagan in the traditional sense in which one might apply the term to Ludendorff."⁸⁹ While Rosenberg made reference to Nordic gods in *Mythus*, this was not a typically paganist appropriation: "Wotan was and is dead."⁹⁰ Nor was Rosenberg tolerant of all religio-mystical sects: He frequently attacked the growth of astrology and other superstitions in Nazi Germany; he also opposed Rudolf Steiner's Anthroposophists, "who were thought by Nazis to be organised on a similar basis to that of Masonic Lodges."⁹¹ Whereas Ludendorff left the Protestant church in 1927, Rosenberg did not leave it until 1933. Waiting until his party was safely in power does not fully explain Rosenberg's timing. Rather, it was brought on by the dismissal of the leader of the German Christians, Joachim Hossenfelder, by the Reich Bishop of the Protestant Church, who considered Hossenfelder too radical and a threat to his own position within the growing storm of the "Church Struggle."⁹² Until this time, Rosenberg held out the hope that a space could be created in institutional Protestantism for his own views.

Even in Rosenberg's other writings, an element favorable to Christianity (albeit reformist) is found. In his 1920 book *Unmoral im Talmud* ("Immorality in the Talmud"), Rosenberg attempted to show that the Jews' "rise to power" had come by way of lies and treachery motivated by a hatred of Christianity, which "has reached its summit in the systematic persecution of Christians by the Jewish Bolshevik rulers in Russia."⁹³ In the second book he

there was no formal contact between them.

⁸⁹ Cecil, *Master Race*, 83.

⁹⁰ Rosenberg, *Mythus*, 219.

⁹¹ Cecil, *Master Race*, 83-84.

⁹² BAZ NS 8/256/173 (15 November 1933: Berlin).

⁹³ Alfred Rosenberg, *Unmoral im Talmud*, as quoted in Cecil, *Master Race*, 74. This was not simply a feigned sympathy for Slavs. As would become evident during his failed career as Reich Minister for the Occupied Eastern

wrote that year, *Die Spur des Juden im Wandel der Zeiten* (“The Tracks of the Jew in the Change of Time”), Rosenberg called for an attack on Jewish materialism. A sharp distinction was to be made between it and Christian spirituality. The antimaterialist, Nordic religious renaissance was to take place by purging the Old Testament from Christianity, which would raise Christian belief above the “Jewish slag.”⁹⁴ A preference for Protestantism over Catholicism was also evident outside the confines on the “Myth.” Just a few years before the Nazis took power, Rosenberg gave vent to his sectarian preferences when he expressed his belief that the Catholic Chancellor Heinrich Brüning was “an emissary of the Vatican, [who] had only one task: by his policy of emergency regulations and the consequent inevitable impoverishment of ever-widening circles of the population to deliver up Protestant North Germany to Communism, in order by the purgatory of this affliction to leave it ripe for a second counter-revolution with the restoration of the Catholic princely houses.”⁹⁵

The paganist cadre

Rosenberg and Ludendorff were the most prominent paganists in the party. But they were not alone: a cadre of like-minded party members could be found in the ranks of the NSDAP. One of them was Richard Walther Darré, the party’s leading agrarian specialist. After the seizure of power, he would become Reich Peasant Leader (*Reichsbauernführer*) and Reich Minister for Agriculture. In tune with Rosenberg’s mysticism, he envisioned an agrarian return to the soil in

Territories, Rosenberg was perhaps the most favorable of any Nazi to the conditions of the Slavic population, and often fought with his nominal underlings to lessen the brutality of their rule (Cecil, *Master Race*, 189-216, esp. 200). Whereas Rosenberg had envisioned a system of Slavic satellite states under German suzerainty, most other Nazis preferred a simpler system of direct German administration and exploitation. The man who most undermined Rosenberg’s ministerial authority in the east was none other than Erich Koch.

⁹⁴ Alfred Rosenberg, *Die Spur des Juden im Wandel der Zeiten* (Munich, 1920), 321-22.

⁹⁵ Quoted in Fest, *Face*, 169.

Nazi Germany, whereby the peasant and small landowner would be privileged at the expense of the “nomadic” city-dweller. He joined the Nazi movement as a known figure, playing an immediate and central role in the shaping the NSDAP’s agrarian election strategy. Like fellow Nordacist Rosenberg, Darré had pretensions to being a party ideologue, having written “The Peasantry as Life Source of the Nordic Race” three years before joining the party.⁹⁶ The other main work of his career, “A New Aristocracy from Blood and Soil,” was published three years later.⁹⁷ Darré also influenced Himmler in his attempt to transform the SS from a guard unit into a new racial aristocracy. This took shape in practical measures: Darré drew up the strict marriage regulations for SS men, which included a “rigorous” racial inspection of the individual and his genealogy.⁹⁸ Like Rosenberg, however, Darré quickly fell from grace, and was formally replaced as Reich Agriculture Minister in 1942 by Göring’s subordinate Herbert Backe. Even before this date, however, Darré’s adherence to a recrudescing, neopaganist agrarian ethos was losing him influence.⁹⁹ It is perhaps no coincidence that Rosenberg’s greatest adversary in the party, Erich Koch, would quickly emerge as one of Darré’s staunchest opponents as well.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ R. Walther Darré, *Das Bauertum als Lebensquelle der Nordischen Rasse* (Munich, 1927). Like Kube and Reventlow, Darré defected from the DVFP, though with no discernible fanfare.

⁹⁷ R. Walther Darré, *Neuadel aus Blut und Boden* (Munich, 1930). Both books were published through the radical right-wing publisher Lehmanns Verlag, and not through the NSDAP’s own Eher Verlag.

⁹⁸ Anna Bramwell, *Blood and Soil: Richard Walther Darré and Hitler’s ‘Green Party’* (London, 1985), 90; Paul Weindling, *Health, Race and German Politics between National Unification and Nazism, 1870-1945* (Cambridge, 1989), 476. The attempt to turn the SS into a new aristocracy is a theme taken up in Herbert Ziegler, *Nazi Germany’s New Aristocracy: The SS Leadership, 1925-1939* (Princeton, 1989).

⁹⁹ Cf. Paul Weindling, “Understanding Nazi Racism: Precursors and Perpetrators,” in Michael Burleigh (ed.), *Confronting the Nazi Past: New Debates on Modern German History* (New York, 1996), 76, who points to “the disillusion of Richard Walther Darré and Hans F.K. Günther as agrarian ideologists with the power of industrial lobbies in the Nazi state.”

¹⁰⁰ Darré’s conflict with Koch occurred almost immediately after the seizure of power, when Koch announced plans to industrialize his Gau, East Prussia. This naturally horrified Darré, who tried to enforce his own vision of an agrarian East Prussia through his *Land* representatives. When they challenged Koch’s authority, Koch had them arrested. The case was brought before Buch’s party court, with the final decision going to Koch. Henceforth, Regional Peasant Leaders were responsible to the Gauleiter, not to the Reich Peasant Leader (Darré): BAZ Personalakt Koch (1 August 1933: Keppurren); IfZ Fa 199/15/9 (16 April 1934: Königsberg); BAZ Personalakt Koch (8 November 1934: Königsberg). This episode provided a paradoxical demonstration that industrialization and modernization could be supported by a strong Christian in the Nazi movement, whereas ideas of agrarianism

Whereas Darré's works were primarily concerned with the secular past and future of the Nordic *Landvolk*, they did touch on religious elements as well. In *Neuadel*, Darré stated his case rather plainly: "The conversion of the Teutons to Christianity, which means to the teaching of the anointed, deprived the Teutonic nobility of its moral foundations."¹⁰¹ Darré believed that the doctrinal teaching of the equality of men before God robbed the settler race of the north of its innate sense of superiority over the nomadic tribes of the Near East. Their conversion was not the product of popular feeling, but was imported by the Franks and enforced by ruling kings for political reasons.¹⁰² Darré attributed this same teaching to the destruction of the aristocratic structure of ancient civilization (even while he admitted that a new, Christian aristocracy emerged under the Franks).¹⁰³ Under Charlemagne, this new ruling class mercilessly destroyed the "old Germanic paganism" of the Saxons: therefore Charlemagne could in no sense be considered "pure Germanic."¹⁰⁴ In *Bauerntum*, Darré reiterated the same essential arguments.¹⁰⁵

In both works Darré referred to Christianity only in the larger context of peasant history: he did not address religious issues as such. No mention was made of Christ the Hero or Luther the German. In neither work did he make reference to Protestants or Catholics or "positive Christianity": nor did he recommend a reform of the Christian ethos. However, this should not lead us to presume that he was ready to dispose of Christianity altogether. Like Ludendorff and Rosenberg, Darré tempered his apparently unambiguous opposition to Christianity with a clear

and rural communalism were advanced by a professed anti-Christian.

¹⁰¹ Darré, *Neuadel*, 19.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 20.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 25, 27.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 30-31. Portrayals of Charlemagne as a foe of the German past, not a hero, were common among paganist Nazis. They rejected the historical title "Karl the Great" for the partisan "Karl the Saxon Slaughterer." Himmler, upon adopting paganism in the mid 1930s, was a classic example of this: see Josef Ackermann, *Heinrich Himmler als Ideologe* (Göttingen, 1970), 56. Significantly, Hitler repudiated this trend and regarded Charlemagne as a great man of German history (see Chapter Five).

¹⁰⁵ Darré, *Bauerntum*, 345-47.

admiration for Protestantism. In a letter to his wife Alma, he declared the individual relationship to God found in Protestantism far more to his liking than the Catholic emphasis on clerical mediation, describing this theological breakthrough as the great achievement of the Reformation. He also pointed out that this preference for Protestantism was rooted in family history: his father's ancestors were French Huguenots who had migrated to Brandenburg some 250 before; his mother came from Sweden, which Darré described as the land of the great Gustav Adolf, leader of the Protestants in the Wars of Religion.¹⁰⁶ According to Anna Bramwell, Darré belonged to that group of Nazis who “offered Northernness as the *best*, the most important part of the German heritage. In doing so, they excluded the Catholic parts of Germany, including the blonde, blue-eyed German Catholics. ... The Nordics preferred Protestantism to Catholicism, because Protestantism was seen as the Northern reaction to an alien Christianity, a move back to the purer, more individualistic spirit of the north.”¹⁰⁷ Bramwell also mirrors the conceptual fallacies of the paganists she studies: by conflating anti-Catholicism with hostility to Christianity per se, she inexplicably leaves Protestantism outside the boundaries of Christianity.

This tendency was also discernible in the writings of one of the most reputed paganist figures, the racial anthropologist Hans F. K. Günther. More than any other personality in German science, Günther lent a spurious sheen of empirical rigor to Nazi racialism, having written *Rassenkunde des deutschen Volkes* (“Racial Lore of the German People”) in 1922.¹⁰⁸ In this work, Günther presented the Nazi cliché of racial superiority embodied in blond-haired, blue-eyed Nordicism. He attempted to define the Nordic race on the basis of Gobineau's theories of the previous century, and wrote a flood of similar books in the 1920s detailing

¹⁰⁶ IfZ Nachlaß Darré: ED 110/6/98-99 (27 October 1919: Witzenhausen).

¹⁰⁷ Anna Bramwell, *Blood*, 42 (emphasis in the original).

¹⁰⁸ H.F.K. Günther, *Rassenkunde des deutschen Volkes* (Munich, 1922), published by the *völkisch* Lehmann Verlag.

various aspects of his racial typology. He was a confrere of Darré, and became so renowned in Nazi circles that in 1931 he was given a chair in social anthropology at the University of Jena in Thuringia, at the time the only state with a Nazi Minister of Education (Wilhelm Frick). By 1932, over 30,000 copies of *Rassenkunde* were sold.¹⁰⁹

In a second work, *Rassenkunde Europas* (“Racial Lore of Europe”), Günther mapped out the same racial typology for the entire continent. Here we see a seemingly undifferentiated attack on Christianity, which “[I]n its origin and in the blood of its early followers ... stood nearer to the Oriental standpoint than to the Nordic standpoint.” He pointed out that under Constantine, the first Christian emperor of Rome, foundling homes were built for the racially unfit: “in bringing up the blind, the deaf, the dumb, and the deformed, [such homes] also made their propagation possible.”¹¹⁰ By contrast, he held the Nordic myths of the Edda and the Niebelungen in high regard.¹¹¹ When he specified his critique, however, it became clear that Catholicism was the actual target: “When the Roman Church through its political skill in the seventh century destroyed the Arian [heresy], a strong check on race mixture had gone.”¹¹² When he turned his attention to Protestantism, the tone changed completely. Referring to the Huguenots, he claimed that “the Nordic man is Protestant by his disposition.”¹¹³ In a remarkable conflation of race and religion, he argued: “It is noteworthy that the temporary refuge of the Huguenots, the town of La Rochelle and its neighbourhood, still strikes one today by the blondness of its people.” More than making Protestantism the product of a racial condition, Günther indicated that adherence to Protestantism was itself a marker of Nordic superiority.

¹⁰⁹ Weindling, *Health*, 312.

¹¹⁰ H.F.K. Günther, *Rassenkunde Europas* (Munich, 1927), translated as *The Racial Elements of European History* (London, 1927), 191.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 193.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 205-06.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 219.

Among the party leadership of the *Kampfzeit* there were no other paganists. Whereas Heinrich Himmler would emerge as a committed anti-Christian after the party came to power, he had yet to discover the mysticism and occultism for which he later became famous. Far from being anti-Christian, in Nazism's early years Himmler maintained a strong Catholic piety. In 1919, before he joined the party, Himmler wrote in his diary: "Come what may, I shall always love God, shall pray to Him, and shall remain faithful to the Catholic Church and shall defend it even if I should be expelled from it."¹¹⁴ At this time he took great pleasure in attending church: confession and communion were important for him.¹¹⁵ According to Himmler's biographer, he had not seen the war that had just ended "as contradictory to the refining and spiritualization of cultured life and of Christian humanity."¹¹⁶ He was particularly interested in the writings of Conrad von Bolanden, a post-war Catholic apologist, which he regarded as an "edifying hymn to Christianity." His only complaint about Bolanden's work was its negative attitude towards — Protestantism: "I doubt that the Protestant religion is so lacking in content. ... On the contrary, it must have good ingredients, but Bolanden won't credit Protestantism with anything good. We should be happy when this grave division is healed."¹¹⁷

While Ludendorff was waging his war against Christianity, Himmler, who had by now joined the NSDAP and participated in Hitler's failed putsch, was still attending church. But while he enjoyed church life, his attitude towards Catholicism began to change. His diary entries from 1923-24 criticized books on Catholicism that he read as "too doctrinaire" or "fanatical." Of the Jesuits he wrote: "[I]t is now clearer to me than ever that it was a beneficial act of Bismarck's

¹¹⁴ Quoted in Werner Angress and Bradley Smith, "Diaries of Heinrich Himmler's Early Years," *Journal of Modern History* 31 (1959), 271.

¹¹⁵ Bradley Smith, *Heinrich Himmler: A Nazi in the Making, 1900-1926* (Stanford, 1971), 98.

¹¹⁶ Josef Ackermann, "Heinrich Himmler: Reichsführer-SS," in Smelser and Zitelmann (eds.), *Elite*, 101.

¹¹⁷ Smith, *Himmler*, 99.

when the expelled the Jesuits.”¹¹⁸ He sympathetically related the experience of a fellow Catholic who, like himself, was involved in the *völkisch* movement: “He would like to confess but cannot believe in certain dogmas, thus [making confession] impossible. Yet he would like to, because he considers it cowardly to call the priest [only] at the moment of dying.” Himmler added: “This is an exceedingly decent point of view.”¹¹⁹ But he had not yet abandoned Christianity. He attacked the anti-Christian tone of a book on scientific theory by Ernst Haeckel: “[T]he section that ... concerns his suppositions and attack on, and denial of, a personal God, is just terrible.” Himmler also read Renan’s *Life of Jesus*, and enjoyed it, save for one major flaw: “Renan believed that Jesus was a Jew, and he is from all appearances a friend of the Jews.” For Himmler, this was unacceptable: “However, he proves to me by his whole book that Jesus was no Jew, and that Christianity was and is the most important protest of the Aryans against the Jews, of good against evil.”¹²⁰ These lines bear a striking similarity to Eckart’s, Goebbels’ and even Hitler’s religious views. While Himmler would later profess hatred for Christianity, his basic characterization of Jesus as the great antisemite would remain unaltered. And following the pattern of other Nazis who would end up pagan, Himmler the Catholic began to have high regard for Protestantism: “Heinrich swallowed without comment *völkisch* arguments identifying Protestantism with Germandom and reserved his wrath for Catholics.”¹²¹

Lower down the ranks of the party could be found a cadre of paganists. One of the most prominent in the *Kampfzeit* NSDAP was Ernst Graf zu Reventlow. He had made a name for himself before the war as a radical nationalist journalist, whose attacks on the government earned

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 145.

¹¹⁹ Angress and Smith, “Diaries,” 218.

¹²⁰ Smith, *Himmler*, 145.

¹²¹ Ibid., 146.

him an entry into the inner circle of the Pan-German League.¹²² A member of the DVFP after the war, he and Wilhelm Kube defected to the NSDAP in 1927. While he was a notable in his own right, having come from an established family, he held no important office or position of power within the party. He was, however, the editor of the paganist newspaper *Reichswart*, which later served as a mouthpiece of the German Faith Movement (*Deutsche Glaubensbewegung*, or DGB), of which he also shared the leadership. This was not a Nazi newspaper, but it reflected the views of a small number in the party who, like Rosenberg, advocated a new religion. Reventlow called for equal status among Christian and non-Christian faiths, but he did not count himself as an active opponent of the churches. The year he switched over to Hitler, he wrote an article in his paper on “Politics and Confession,” in which he pledged himself to Hitler’s position of confessional neutrality. Along with Hitler, he formally rejected any notion that the *völkisch* movement should be engaging in a new *Kulturkampf*: “The Protestant and the Catholic hit each other over the head to the Jews’ musical accompaniment.”¹²³ According to a report in the *Augsburger Postzeitung*, Reventlow’s article caused great indignation among the ranks of the DVFP, which, as Goebbels had pointed out, were guided by a sectarian ethos.¹²⁴

The other leader of the DGB — which was not actually founded until 1933 — was Jakob Hauer. Like Reventlow he never came close to the leadership circles of the NSDAP; but this did not stop him from portraying his movement as the true religious expression of Nazism. He tried to gain such recognition in a letter he sent to Hitler, in which he requested public, legal recognition of his organization. He claimed that all segments of German society — workers and youth in particular — wanted “in the main not Christianity but rather a German faith.” But like

¹²² Geoff Eley, *Reshaping the German Right: Radical Nationalism and Political Change after Bismarck*, 2nd ed. (Ann Arbor, 1991), 112.

¹²³ *Reichswart*, 5/2/27.

¹²⁴ *Augsburger Postzeitung*, 15/3/27 (in StAM PolDir/6687/63); Elke Fröhlich (ed.), *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels: Sämtliche Fragmente* (Munich, 1987), entry for 30/6/24.

Reventlow, he foresaw coexistence between his paganist faith and the preexisting confessions. He rejected a *Kulturkampf* and saw the German people organizing itself “into the three great religious domains: ... Catholic Church ... Protestant Church ... and German Faith Community.” All three were to work together in a “Religious Working Group of the German Nation.”¹²⁵

Consistent with the lingering attachment of Ludendorff, Rosenberg and Darré, Hauer’s movement — even while proclaiming itself non-Christian — exhibited an ambiguous attitude towards the Protestant faith. This was demonstrated in July 1933 in the formation of a collective *germanisch-deutsch* faith movement at the Wartburg, a site sacred to the memory of Martin Luther. Present for the ceremony were not only Reventlow and Hauer, but also Fritz von der Heydt, one of the directors of the Protestant League and a member of the National Socialist Pastor’s Working Group.¹²⁶ In a memorandum sent to Hitler in August 1933, Hauer commented on the “Church Struggle” taking place in Protestantism between German Christians and the Confessing Church. He had held out his hand to Protestantism, he wrote, stating that “either the Protestant church must widen itself into a religious *Volksgemeinschaft* of all non-Catholic Germans, or the creation of an independent German Faith community will be necessary.” In Hauer’s view, the German Christians made it clear that they had rejected his offer, and hence it was now essential to go forward with the DGB.¹²⁷

Lines of intersection between Protestantism and paganism could be seen elsewhere in the ranks of the DGB. Hanno Konopath, a member of the Race and Culture Division in the Reich Leadership office, was also the leader of the paganist “Nordic Ring,” an association that predated the DGB and would later merge with it. He was slated to take over the administration of the German Christians from its cofounder, Wilhelm Kube, who as leader of the NSDAP in the

¹²⁵ Quoted in Scholder, *Churches*, 1: 452.

¹²⁶ BAP R5101/23139/52 (29-30 July 1933: Wartburg).

¹²⁷ BAZ NS 8/256/73 (24 August 1933: Tübingen). There is no evidence that Hitler responded to the letter.

Prussian parliament was too burdened with other responsibilities. However, it was soon discovered that he belonged to a “school of thought that even the most radical of Kube’s group could no longer consider Christian.” Soon afterwards leading figures in the DC, including Kube and Joachim Hossenfelder, had him ejected from his DC responsibilities. It was reflective of the marginalized status of paganists in the NSDAP at this time that he was additionally deprived of all his party offices by the Buch’s party court on “grounds of immorality.”¹²⁸

In Rosenberg’s employ in the party could be found several ex-pastors. One was Matthes Ziegler, one of Rosenberg’s most important lieutenants after the seizure of power. Rosenberg engaged him as head of the Office of Ideological Information and editor of the internal party report, “Information on the State of Ideology.” Before 1933 he, like Hauer, had been a Protestant theologian.¹²⁹ Another ex-pastor, Hubert Grabert, worked in the “Religious Studies” section of the Office.¹³⁰ These lines of intersection were more than coincidental. As Steven Aschheim observes: “A quite disproportionate percentage of those who articulated the various versions of [pagan] religion were Protestants or ex-Protestant pastors and theologians.”¹³¹ Aschheim accounts for this in a *fin-de-siecle* crisis within Protestantism, brought about by a Nietzschean “Death of God.” These theologians attempted to overcome this crisis through the protean redemptive philosophy of Nietzsche, which ran its course in an “anti-Christian” Germanic faith.¹³² But while this may have accounted for Hauer’s philosophy, it does not necessarily account for Nazi philosophy. Hitler had almost as little fondness for Nietzsche as he

¹²⁸ Scholder, *Churches*, 1: 205-07.

¹²⁹ “Niederschrift der Unterredung des Herrn Professor Dr. habil. Wilhelm Brachmann,” IfZ ZS 210 (29 October 1952: Munich). According to Brachmann, who also worked in the *Amt Rosenberg* after 1933, Ziegler returned to his pastoral occupation after 1945.

¹³⁰ BAP R5101/23141/137 (11 October 1937: Berlin).

¹³¹ Steven Aschheim, *The Nietzsche Legacy in Germany, 1890-1990* (Berkeley, 1992), 230.

¹³² *Ibid.* Aschheim avoids the common fallacy of ascribing this crisis to all Protestants. He shows how several

had for Ludendorff's and Rosenberg's ersatz religions. According to Hans Sluga, Hitler was not at all an admirer of Nietzsche.¹³³ In a conversation he held with Hans Schemm and Otto Wagener, Hitler derided paganists and "the rubbish they dredge up from German prehistory! Then they read Nietzsche with fifteen-year-old boys."¹³⁴ Hitler's mentor Dietrich Eckart had also rejected Nietzsche, as early as 1917: "We Germans, who profess through and through our faith in the Christian worldview, reject this despiser of our religious foundations."¹³⁵ Even Rosenberg in his *Mythus* barely mentioned Nietzsche, and showed little engagement with Nietzsche's philosophy when he did. In comparison, Christian figures like Jesus, Luther and Meister Eckhart received far greater attention. And as we shall see in the next chapter, the Nazi party gained its strongest electoral strength not from those whose Protestant faith was exploded by Nietzschean nihilism, but precisely from those who resisted apostasy and retained a higher degree of Protestant religiosity.

Conclusion

Many of the paganists examined in this chapter were deeply concerned with discovering new forms of faith, new objects of veneration which they believed were more suitable to their times. In their search for a new dogma, they adulated heroism over humility, racial distinctiveness over universalism. Other paganists, less concerned with mapping out a new *völkisch* doctrine, nonetheless articulated a racialist, mystical interpretation of the German past. Regardless of their

Protestant theologians engaged with Nietzsche's thought without falling into apostasy (*Nietzsche*, 203-08).

¹³³ See Hans Sluga, *Heidegger's Crisis: Philosophy and Politics in Nazi Germany* (Cambridge MA, 1993), 180. Sluga contends that a picture of Hitler looking at Nietzsche's bust on a visit to Nietzsche's sister Elisabeth shows "how little the Führer and the philosopher had to say to each other. The encounter is formal and silent, each of them remains quite evidently enclosed in his own world" (*ibid.*, 186). According to Sluga, Hitler's real philosophical heroes were Schopenhauer and especially Wagner, with whose politics Nietzsche violently disagreed.

¹³⁴ Henry Ashby Turner (ed.), *Hitler: Memoirs of a Confidant* (New Haven, 1985), 277.

different emphases, they refuted much that was central to Christian belief. But theirs was only a partial rejection of Christianity. By their own admission, that part of Christianity they most opposed was specifically “Roman.” The institutional arrogance they decried was specifically “papal.” Protestantism, particularly Lutheranism, in its intent if not in its execution, was often cast as the antidote; in contrast to Catholicism, it was national, personal, spiritual. If Protestantism after Luther had taken a wrong turn down the road to freedom, it was because “Rome” and “Judah” made it veer off course. Therefore the established Protestant clergy, because “Romanized,” also had to be rejected. Protestantism’s renewal would be contingent on a rejection of the Old Testament and much Christian dogma, but not on a rejection of Christ himself. These paganists upheld the standard Nazi image of Christ the fighter, Christ the antisemite. The only paganist to reject Christ — and the only paganist to be expelled from the Nazi party — was Ludendorff.

The positive Christians of the party did not welcome the paganists’ attack on established Christianity. Before the seizure of power, most other Nazis regarded paganist mysticism as laughable. If these paganists were nonetheless permitted in the party, it was because they contributed to it in other ways, not because their religious beliefs were hegemonic. Far from dominant, most of the party’s paganists remained peripheral to the centers of power. In Chapter Five, we will explore their relationship with the positive Christians in the first years of the Third Reich. We shall see whether paganists gained power in the Nazi state at the expense of Christians, or whether their attempts to instill their religious views in the larger movement remained as unsuccessful after the seizure of power as before it.

¹³⁵ Margarete Plewnia, *Auf dem Weg zu Hitler: Der ‘völkische’ Publizist Dietrich Eckart* (Bremen, 1970), 45.

4 “Furor Protestanticus”: The Insider as Outsider

We do not question whether the Lutheran confession is still appropriate to the present, but rather ... whether the present is appropriate to Christ! — *Glaube und Volk*¹

In Chapter Two we saw how a surprising number of leading Nazis claimed that their movement was derived from Christian ethics, from a “positive Christian” understanding of what was wrong with German society and how its failings could be rectified. In Chapter Three, we saw that, even while they rejected certain Christian doctrines, party pagans nonetheless expressed admiration for the “spirit” of Protestantism, its dogmatic separation from Rome. Even as they claimed to reject Christianity *in toto*, most of these pagans revealed a qualified affinity for Luther as both a nationalist *and* a religious figure. We will now seek to measure the Nazis’ claims to be a Christian movement against the preexisting varieties of Christian belief in Weimar. How were the many messages in Nazism received by Weimar’s Christians? Can we discern types of Christian that were more receptive than others to the Nazi movement? Was there a variety of Christianity that, like the positive Christians, elevated the *Volk* and stood opposed to Judaism, marxism, liberalism, and “Rome?” Most importantly, was there a variety of Christianity that matched the most common doctrinal beliefs of the party’s positive Christians: a rejection of confessionalism; a rejection of the Old Testament; and a belief that Christ was an Aryan?

The Christian establishment and political engagement

Until the end of the Weimar Republic, German Catholics and their church had their own political representation in the form of the Center Party. During the *Kaiserreich*, the Center Party leader

¹ Quoted in James Zabel, *Nazism and the Pastors: A Study of the Ideas of Three “Deutsche Christen” Groups* (Missoula, 1976), 52.

Ludwig Windthorst attempted to maintain a progressive attitude on the question of civil liberties while at the same time addressing the religious conservatism of his party's constituents.

Windthorst effectively combated antisemitism as party policy, believing that the attack on Jews as "enemies of the Reich" (*Reichsfeinde*) could turn against German Catholics. Catholics with Windthorst's sensibilities appreciated what being a religious minority meant from the *Kulturkampf*.² While antisemitism and illiberalism existed in both the Center Party itself and the German Catholic milieu,³ its leaders curtailed its full political impact. Even as a new generation of Center politicians sought to "leave the tower" of political isolation and join a dominant nationalist discourse in German politics, this faction of the party never achieved hegemony.⁴

Despite the persistence of authoritarian tendencies in German Catholicism, in Weimar the Center Party sought cooperation with other "outsiders," most especially the social democrats, who suddenly found themselves to be the new "insiders" amid the social and political dislocations of the post-1918 period. While the Catholic Church often found itself opposed to the cultural, political and social *Zeitgeist* of the Weimar Republic, it consistently maintained an anti-Nazi attitude. In several parts of Germany, Catholics were explicitly forbidden to become members of the Nazi Party, and Nazi members were forbidden to take part in church ceremonies and funerals. The bishop of Mainz even refused to admit NSDAP members to the sacraments.⁵ This stance was initially met with concern from other bishops, who were still unsure about

² Margaret Lavinia Anderson, *Windthorst: A Political Biography* (Oxford, 1981), 256-57.

³ David Blackbourn, "Roman Catholics, the Center Party and Anti-Semitism in Imperial Germany," in Paul Kennedy and Anthony Nicholls (eds.), *Nationalist and Racialist Movements in Britain and Germany before 1914* (London, 1981); Uwe Mazura, *Zentrumspartei und Judenfrage, 1870/71-1933: Verfassungsstaat und Minderheitenschutz* (Mainz, 1994). The definitive treatment of the subject is Olaf Blaschke, *Katholizismus und Antisemitismus im Deutschen Kaiserreich* (Göttingen, 1997).

⁴ Ronald Ross, *Beleaguered Tower: The Dilemma of Political Catholicism in Wilhelmine Germany* (Notre Dame, 1976). The best introduction to the place of Catholics in pre-1914 German society is Wilfried Loth, *Katholiken im Kaiserreich* (Düsseldorf, 1984).

⁵ John Conway, *The Nazi Persecution of the Churches* (London, 1968), 6-7; Klaus Scholder, *The Churches and the Third Reich*, 2 vols. (London, 1987-88), 1: 132-33.

turning their backs on a movement that fought marxism, liberalism and the “Jewish danger.” Nevertheless, owing to the Nazi emphasis on *völkisch* racialism and frequent attacks on “Rome,” in 1931 the bishops of Bavaria, the upper Rhine, Köln and Paderborn all issued statements proclaiming the incompatibility of National Socialism and Catholicism. By the end of the year, the entire German episcopacy had declared itself against the movement.⁶ Those isolated Catholic churchmen who publicly supported Nazism — like the Benedictine abbot Alban Schachleiter or the Badenese priest Wilhelm Senn — were exceptions that proved the rule. Perhaps because they found themselves at odds with majority Catholics, the minority “Old Catholics” of Germany experienced cordial relations with the Nazis. These were disproportionately middle class Catholics who acknowledged the Pope as head of the Church but refused to recognize papal infallibility.⁷ As Olaf Blaschke has demonstrated, they were generally more nationalist, and also more accommodating to antisemitism, than majority Catholics in Germany.⁸

The political complexion of German Protestantism was not as straightforward as majority German Catholicism. There was no Protestant counterpart to the Center Party, but rather a diffusion of several parties whose members exhibited varying degrees of Protestant commitment. According to Ernst Troeltsch, one of the earliest and most preeminent scholars on this question, German Protestantism “hallowed the realistic sense of power, and the ethical virtues of obedience, reverence and respect for authority.”⁹ The emphasis on obedience and reverence for authority was widely regarded as the particular inheritance of Martin Luther’s “Two Kingdoms”

⁶ Scholder, *Churches*, 1: 133-35. This picture of Weimar Catholicism as anti-Nazi is affirmed in the classic by Guenther Lewy, *The Catholic Church and Nazi Germany* (London, 1964), esp. 3-25, which is critical of the Church’s stance after 1933.

⁷ Jonathan Sperber, *Popular Catholicism in Nineteenth Century Germany* (Princeton, 1984), 233-40.

⁸ Olaf Blaschke, “Der Altkatholizismus 1879 bis 1945: Nationalismus, Antisemitismus, Nationalsozialismus,” *Historische Zeitschrift* 261 (1995): 51-99.

⁹ Ernst Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Church* (New York, 1931), 2: 575.

theology. By emphasizing the abdication of all political responsibility to the monarch, this teaching has traditionally been regarded as the originating moment of the “unpolitical German.” As another observer put it: “The aversion of the German educated classes from too close a contact with politics, their well-known trait of unworldliness, is essentially Lutheran.”¹⁰ Hence these early authorities suggested that there was no such thing as political Protestantism, since the Protestant was portrayed as concerned primarily with the *maintenance* of the status quo, not its construction or transformation.

This view of Protestantism being “above politics” resonated within the Protestant churches themselves.¹¹ Formally, the Protestant pastor was a civil servant, an arm of state authority. Obversely, the German monarch was the secular head, or *Summus Episcopus*, of his Protestant state church. However, the political dimension to Protestantism was not as straightforward as this relationship suggests. As we saw in Chapter One, recent scholarship on the *Kaiserreich* has demonstrated how Protestantism played a *formative* role in shaping German society.¹² Instead of quietly ratifying the course of German history, Protestantism was an active agent in setting it. In unearthing the agency of Protestantism in the political sphere, historians first have had to put to rest the claims of political passivity made by Protestants. They have done this by historicizing religious activity in ways that question the trans-political claims of ecclesiastical authorities. In the same way, this chapter will go beyond Protestant self-representations to be “above politics” by exploring the actual political engagement of Protestants

¹⁰ Gerhard Ritter, “Die Ausprägung deutscher und westeuropäischer Geistesart im konfessionellen Zeitalter,” *Historische Zeitschrift* 149 (1934), 247–48.

¹¹ See especially J.R.C. Wright, *‘Above Parties’: The Political Attitudes of the German Protestant Church Leadership 1918–1933* (Oxford, 1974).

¹² Particularly exemplary in this regard are Wolfgang Altgeld, *Katholizismus, Protestantismus, Judentum: Über religiös begründete Gegensätze und nationalreligiöse Ideen in der Geschichte des deutschen Nationalismus* (Mainz, 1992); Gangolf Hübinger, *Kulturprotestantismus und Politik: Zum Verhältnis von Liberalismus und Protestantismus im wilhelminischen Deutschland* (Tübingen, 1993); Helmut Walser Smith, *German Nationalism and Religious Conflict: Culture, Ideology, Politics, 1870–1914* (Princeton, 1995).

in Weimar Germany. This is especially necessary for a period of German history that experienced such political, social, economic, and cultural upheaval. For, if Weimar Germany turned the outsider of the *Kaiserreich* — Catholic, socialist and Jew — into the insider, it also turned the insider — the religious Protestant — into the outsider.¹³

Confronting Weimar

If Germany before November 1918 had been a monarchical “Christian state,” afterward it looked to many Germans like a Godless republic. Certainly for German Protestantism it was a time of deep insecurity. The *Summus Episcopus*, secular guarantor of the church’s prerogatives, had been overthrown. The churches’ constitutional rights, as well as the professional security of the German pastorate, were similarly thrown into question. The brief tenure of Adolf Hoffmann — a member of the USPD and strong advocate of the separation of church and state — as Prussian Minister of Culture further strained relations between the churches and the Weimar “system.” We might suppose that these structural factors, and not any ideological predisposition against democracy, led most Protestant churchmen to oppose Weimar.¹⁴ However, this argument is undercut immediately by the presence of prominent democratic and liberal churchmen in Weimar. Even while they remained a distinct minority, such churchmen attest to the fact that a shared set of professional and institutional experiences did not always result in the same political outlook.

As with other ideological phenomena, theology is amorphous. Differing theological tendencies interact with one another as ideas and personalities cross the indistinct boundaries

¹³ Of course, this is a play on the famous appellation in Peter Gay, *Weimar Culture: The Outsider as Insider* (New York, 1968).

¹⁴ As argued, for instance, in Gottfried Mehnert, *Evangelische Kirche und Politik, 1917-1919* (Düsseldorf, 1959).

from one camp to the next. Lines of intersection and overlap ensure that some degree of interrelationship will always exist. Therefore any examination of theological tendencies within German Protestantism cannot successfully employ rigid categories. We can nonetheless provide an overview that considers which strands of Protestantism were more likely to support the ideological agenda of the Nazis than others.

As many scholars have demonstrated, Calvinist Protestants as a whole tended to be immune to Nazism. The most prominent Protestant voice against Nazism — or more accurately against those theological tendencies that supported Nazism — was the Swiss Calvinist theologian Karl Barth, primary author of the Barmen Declaration. Because his dialectical theological outlook forbade any association of politics and religion, Barth was almost as opposed to religious interventions on the political left, most notably by the so-called “Religious Socialists” and their successors within the Confessing Church, as he was by those on the right, especially by German Christians. Nor did Barthian Christianity take any stock of social or ethical concerns, since these dealt with the temporal world. As Klaus Scholder observes: “For Barth even morality, even conscience belonged on the human side; they were part of human religion and culture and, like religion, were not bridges to God but walls against him.”¹⁵ The Barthian view of God was dialectical, advocating the “otherness of God,” his separation from the world, which meant that history could not be read for signs of God’s revelation.¹⁶

Significantly, one of Barth’s most outspoken and esteemed opponents, the Lutheran theologian and Nazi supporter Emanuel Hirsch, took the exact opposite position. He rejected dialectical theology, convinced of the need to overcome “the dialectical separation between the

¹⁵ Scholder, *Churches*, 1: 105.

¹⁶ Franz Feige, *The Varieties of Protestantism in Nazi Germany: Five Theopolitical Positions* (Lewiston NY, 1990), 74.

eternal and the temporal through an ethical commitment.”¹⁷ For Hirsch, Lutheranism was a “religion of conscience in the most precise sense of the word.”¹⁸ Hirsch’s understanding of God was the diametrical opposite of Barth’s. Unlike Barth, Hirsch believed one could “read God’s real intention for creation out of the formative and creative forces of history.... There is no other way to inscribe sacrifice for state and nation on the hearts of our *Volk* than by awakening faith in the Lord of history, who testifies in the conscience that he is alive.”¹⁹ Those who followed Barthian dialectical theology, like the Halle Professor of theology Günther Dehn, found themselves opposed to pro-Nazi tendencies. And as we shall see, theologians like Hirsch who were most concerned with a Christian ethics and most convinced of God’s revelation in history — almost all of them Lutheran — had a marked tendency to favor Nazism.

The “Religious Socialists” were another segment of Protestantism opposed to Nazism. Unlike Barthians, they did not criticize Nazism theologically, but rather politically. Religious Socialists were anti-nationalist and pacifist. On other issues, however, there were similarities. Their attempts at creating an antimarxist, antimaterialist socialism, one which “pointed out the deep ethical motives of socialism and professed a preference for socialism over the free economy,”²⁰ were not dissimilar to Hitler’s, Goebbels’, or Buch’s claims that “German” socialism was likewise a matter of ethics and morality.²¹ One of the leading Religious Socialist advocates of this antimarxist socialism, Georg Wünsch, after 1933 actually endorsed Nazism as

¹⁷ Emanuel Hirsch, *Deutschlands Schicksal: Staat, Volk und Menschheit im Lichte einer ethischen Geschichtsansicht* (Göttingen, 1921), 159.

¹⁸ Scholder, *Churches*, 1: 106.

¹⁹ Hirsch, *Schicksal*, 165.

²⁰ Daniel Borg, *The Old-Prussian Church and the Weimar Republic: A Study in Political Adjustment, 1917-1927* (Hanover NH, 1984), 209.

²¹ Henry Ashby Turner (ed.), *Hitler: Memoirs of a Confidant* (New Haven, 1985), 56, 139; Joseph Goebbels, *Michael: a Novel*, trans. Joachim Neugroschel (New York, 1987), 66; Buch, *Der Aufmarsch* (Chapter Two, n. 106).

the realization of Religious Socialist aims.²² Like the German Christians, the Religious Socialists “did not dispute the synthesis of Christianity and the modern world.”²³ Indeed, one of the leading voices of Religious Socialism in this period, Paul Tillich, counted the German Christian Hirsch among his close friends. The two had much in common theologically, even as they parted paths politically.²⁴

The Religious Socialists, Tillich’s own theology notwithstanding, lacked a common theological denominator. One historian has noted “the unimportance with which religious socialists generally treated the theological question.”²⁵ While it has been argued that this lack of a common theological base led to their failure to gain adherents,²⁶ it is doubtful that Religious Socialist fortunes would have increased even had they possessed such a common base. The political center of gravity of politicized Protestantism was firmly on the right, and shifted even further to the right during the 1920s. Religious Socialists often became outcasts in the church, as in the case of pastor Erwin Eckart, who was expelled from the Baden state church in 1931 after its leadership attempted to discipline him for his involvement with the SPD.²⁷ He responded by pointing to the bias of the Upper Church Consistory (*Oberkirchenrat*), claiming it curbed Social Democratic pastors but allowed Nazi pastors free rein. According to Daniel Borg, “religious-socialist pastors, more than their German Church counterparts, considered themselves pariahs in

²² Scholder, *Churches*, 1: 139.

²³ Dieter Schellong, *Bürgertum und christliche Religion: Anpassungsprobleme der Theologie seit Schleiermacher* (Munich, 1975), 96.

²⁴ Robert Ericksen, *Theologians under Hitler: Gerhard Kittel, Paul Althaus and Emanuel Hirsch* (New Haven, 1985), 178-184.

²⁵ Feige, *Varieties*, 68.

²⁶ Scholder, *Churches*, 1: 143.

²⁷ Kurt Nowak, *Evangelische Kirche und Weimarer Republik: Zum politischen Weg des deutschen Protestantismus zwischen 1918 und 1932* (Göttingen, 1981), 280-81.

the church.”²⁸ Scholder similarly states: “While the National Socialist [church] participants felt themselves assured of the blessing of the church on their struggle ... opponents of the movement were made to feel abandoned and betrayed by the church.”²⁹

The third major group of Protestants opposed to Nazism, generally referred to as the left wing of liberal Protestantism, was centered around the theologian Martin Rade, who was editor of the periodical *Die christliche Welt* and brother-in-law of Germany’s leading liberal, Friedrich Naumann. As with the Religious Socialists, considerable theological variety could be found within the ranks of this group.³⁰ Whereas the Religious Socialists were overtly political, the group around *Die christliche Welt* couched their opposition to Nazism in moral terms. Rade in particular was a solid supporter of ecumenism and pacifism, welcoming the League of Nations and declaring that the Christian commandment of “love thy neighbor” precluded Christian nationalism. Like the German Christians and the Religious Socialists, he also believed in the possibility of a Christian politics, and called for the interaction of Christianity with society in his theological ethics. Unlike the German Christians, he did not see God’s hand in the history of nations. And unlike the vast majority of his fellow churchmen, he was opposed to World War One and professed Germany’s guilt after it. He went even further after the war, calling for the establishment of “peoples’ church councils,” an explicit allusion to the revolutionary workers’ and soldiers’ councils appearing in the wake of the November Revolution.³¹ In this call Rade could count very few supporters among the religiously Protestant, who for the most part saw in Weimar everything they associated with apostasy: democracy, cosmopolitanism and the

²⁸ Borg, *Church*, 212.

²⁹ Scholder, *Churches*, 1: 144.

³⁰ Feige states: “The rifts between some of the Friends of the *Christliche Welt* [sic] were deep, especially because of the vast spectrum of theological and political views they represented” (*Varieties*, 166).

³¹ Borg, *Church*, 69.

ascendance of atheistic marxism.³²

There were also numerous smaller Protestant churches, some of them considered sects, that had varying relations with the Nazis. The Jehovah's Witnesses (*ernster Bibelforscher*) easily suffered the harshest persecution of any sect under the Nazi regime, with many of their members being sent to concentration camps. Christian Scientists were banned without suffering persecution. Other churches, particularly the Seventh Day Adventists and Mormons achieved a fair degree of toleration. As Christine King demonstrates, the former emphasized their belief in the leadership principle and healthy living, whereas the latter stressed their racialism.³³ Methodists and other "Free Protestant" churches, owing partly to their small size, also enjoyed fairly good relations with the Nazis.³⁴

As distinct as the three mainline anti-Nazi tendencies were, together they still constituted a minority among German Protestants. The mainline theological tendencies that supported Nazism constituted the majority. They not only represented the most nationalist segment of German Protestantism, but were among the most nationalist voices within Germany itself. One need look no further than the inauguration of Sedan Day, the nationalist holiday celebrating German unification. While many scholars have pointed to its symbolic importance in constructing the "imagined community" of the German nation, it is little known that this celebration was conceived by the Protestant minister Friedrich von Bodelschwingh.³⁵ Protestant ministers also stood at the forefront of nationalist agitation during World War One. The growing

³² As Jonathan Wright points out, "Liberals and socialists within the church felt keenly that they were minority groups isolated from the main stream of opinion": Jonathan Wright, "The German Protestant Church and the Nazi Party in the Period of the Seizure of Power 1932-3," in Derek Baker (ed.), *Renaissance and Renewal in Christian History* (Oxford, 1977), 396.

³³ Christine King, *The Nazi State and the New Religions: Five Case Studies in Nonconformity* (Lewiston NY, 1982).

³⁴ See, *inter alia*, Herbert Strahm, *Die bischöfliche Methodistenkirche im Dritten Reich* (Stuttgart, 1989).

³⁵ Hartmut Lehmann, "Friedrich von Bodelschwingh und das Sedanfest: Ein Beitrag zum nationalen Denken der politisch activen Richtung des deutschen Pietismus im 19. Jahrhundert," *Historische Zeitschrift* 202 (1966): 542-

inclination among Protestant theologians to view Germany as God's favored nation³⁶ culminated in 1914 in "war theology."³⁷ This theology was fostered by an ethical interpretation of Christianity by which God (as described in the case of Hirsch) worked through history to liberate humanity from materialism in order to realize his moral kingdom on earth. War theology reduced ethical activity to the nation, conceived as the means through which God revealed his will. This emphasis on the nation was a uniquely Lutheran construct, ultimately derived from Luther's own sense of the German people as a community, "with a common history and way of life."³⁸ The result was that most Protestant churchmen condemned Germany's adversaries in harsh moral terms, elevating the war into a type of crusade, in which God had chosen Germany to punish his enemies.

Whereas some quarters of German opinion began to call for a negotiated peace as the war dragged on, most Protestant churchmen preached holding out until the very end of the war, endorsing the notion of a "Hindenburg peace," one of total victory and extensive war aims.³⁹ Many reacted to the peace overtures of socialists and the Vatican by joining the Fatherland Party (*Deutsche Vaterlandspartei*) established in 1917. As an increasing number of Germans — conservatives among them — contemplated ending the war, pastors continued to assert that victory could be won, if only the German people could muster the will to win.⁴⁰ When the war

573.

³⁶ Hartmut Lehmann, "The Germans as a Chosen People: Old Testament Themes in German Nationalism," *German Studies Review* 14 (1991): 261-273.

³⁷ Wilhelm Pressel, *Die Kriegspredigt 1914-1918 in der evangelischen Kirche Deutschlands* (Göttingen, 1967); Arlie Hoover, *The Gospel of Nationalism: German Protestant Preaching from Napoleon to Versailles* (Stuttgart, 1986).

³⁸ Karl Kupisch, "The 'Luther Renaissance'," *Journal of Contemporary History* 2 (1967), 47.

³⁹ Borg, *Church*, 40. Annexationist and reparation demands appeared frequently in church periodicals, including liberal ones. Adolf Stöcker's Christian Social Party specifically called for the "dismemberment and partial annexation of Belgium, adjustment of Germany's borders based on military needs, [and] German control over central Africa" (Pressel, *Kriegspredigt*, 270; Borg, *Church*, 42).

⁴⁰ Borg, *Church*, 37.

was finally lost, these churchmen were plunged into a crisis. Instead of interpreting events in military or economic terms, they chose to view defeat in moral terms, believing the cause lay in a domestic betrayal of Germany and God. It is entirely congruent with this theological progression that a Protestant minister would again be at the forefront of nationalist agitation in Germany. The first known public articulation of the infamous “stab-in-the-back” legend came, not from a general or politician, but in a sermon preached on 3 February 1918 — nine months before the end of the war — by the court chaplain Bruno Doehring.⁴¹

The Versailles Treaty turned nationalist Protestant wrath into rage. The *Oberkirchenrat* named 6 July 1919, a week after German acceptance of the treaty, as a day of mourning. Since Protestant churchmen had all along believed in Germany’s innocence, they found the guilt clause of the treaty especially intolerable, and “almost to a man” advised rejection of the treaty. Since war guilt was regarded as a moral issue, it was a matter for the churches as moral authorities to confront. An address delivered to the *Oberkirchenrat* by the general superintendents of the Prussian state church read: “The demand that we admit sole guilt for the war places a lie on our lips that shamelessly affronts our conscience. As Evangelical Christians we ceremoniously raise before God and men the holy protest against the attempt to press this scar on our nation.”⁴² The fervor generated by this moral outrage reached extraordinary heights. Some clergy made clear their preference for “disaster with honor” over a “dishonorable existence.” The Association of Protestant Women’s Organizations stated with unmistakable zeal: “For German Evangelical women, honor is more important than their own and their children’s welfare.” Emanuel Hirsch argued that God had not failed the German people, but rather that the German people had failed

⁴¹ Pressel, *Kriegspredigt*, 305-06; Nowak, *Kirche*, 53-54. This goes against Doris Bergen’s suggestion that the church was implicated in the *Dolchstoßlegende*. See her *Twisted Cross: The German Christian Movement in the Third Reich* (Chapel Hill, 1996), 66. Doehring was later president of the Protestant League and also founder of the *völkisch* German Reformation Party: see Chapter Two, n. 171.

⁴² Borg, *Church*, 217-18.

God. Other theologians suggested that a materialist spirit had infected the *Volk* and driven God to punishment. If Germany were to regain God's favor, these theologians suggested, the nation must return to him. The *Volk* had to prepare for the day "when the Lord of history will give [us] the sign for a new fight of liberation."⁴³

Confessional Lutheranism

We turn now to an examination of those varieties of Protestant that most often tended to support Nazism. We emphasize again that in no theological school could *all* members support exactly the same politics. Nonetheless, an exploration of the evidence suggests certain patterns of political attraction. As Alexis de Tocqueville put it: "By the side of every religion is to be found a political opinion, which is connected with it by affinity."⁴⁴ The largest theological tendency to exhibit an affinity for Nazism, and one which shared many of the ideological valences of "positive Christianity," was confessional Lutheranism. Its main organs were the *Allgemeine evangelisch-lutherische Kirchenzeitung (AELKZ)*, the most widely circulated Protestant church periodical in Germany, and the *Evangelische Kirchen-Zeitung*. Confessional Lutherans constituted the political center of gravity of the Protestant establishment: authoritarian and nationalist.⁴⁵ It was the Weimar generation of Lutheran theologians who, having extended theological tendencies begun in the previous century, helped create war theology. An especially important tendency for this generation was Adolf Stöcker's brand of Lutheranism, which was far more involved with social and ethical concerns than the rest of confessional Lutheranism during

⁴³ Ibid., 219-21.

⁴⁴ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, quoted in Anthony Gill, *Rendering unto Caesar: The Catholic Church and the State in Latin America* (Chicago, 1998), xii.

⁴⁵ According to Klaus Scholder, "Lutheran Protestantism was of necessity and by conviction nationalist" (*Churches*, 1: 99).

the *Kaiserreich*. As a consequence of his social outlook, Stöcker wanted to transform the quietist *Staatskirchen* (churches bound to the state) into activist *Volkskirchen* (churches serving the people).⁴⁶ He set himself off from many Lutherans, who retained an erastian view of the church's place in society. If Stöcker's ecclesiological agenda received only qualified support before the war, the course of events after the war seemed to justify his views. According to one authority, Stöcker ended up "the apostle to the Weimarians."⁴⁷

Another, directly related theological tendency from the prewar period centered on nationalism and the valorization of the *Volk*. Lutheran theology had long proclaimed the so-called "orders of creation" (*Schöpfungsordnungen*), divinely ordained forms of social organization, such as marriage, family and the law, which constituted the worldly kingdom created by God. In addition, another order began to emerge in Lutheran theology with the advent of individualist liberalism. Liberalism's growth in the nineteenth century — along with its political and economic expressions, democracy and capitalism — was seen as a threat to the integrity of the Christian community (*Gemeinschaft*). The nation, as an integral organic entity, was increasingly regarded as a barrier to this danger, one that could serve as a communal foundation of the Christian state. According to *Schöpfungsglaube*, the nation served as another order because it both transcended the individual and fought the disintegrating forces of liberal rationalism and materialism.

This was as much a social as a political response to contemporary developments. According to Daniel Borg, one of the first representatives of this tendency was the Lutheran Friedrich Julius Stahl, an early and prominent "Christian state" theorist. In Stahl's view, the crisis of liberalism was that "[t]he people ask for bread and are offered the stone of universal

⁴⁶ This theme is taken up in detail in W.R. Ward, *Theology, Sociology and Politics: The German Protestant Social Conscience 1890-1933* (Berne, 1979), esp. 55-70. See also Borg, *Church*, 21-24.

⁴⁷ Borg, *Church*, 169.

franchise.”⁴⁸ Along with fellow confessional Lutherans Adolf Stöcker and Johann Wichern, Stahl mourned the apparent loss of *Gemeinschaft*, and saw an answer to the danger of materialist liberalism and marxism in a type of “social Protestantism,” one which would emphasize class conciliation and unity. This ideological impulse would be given institutional expression in the establishment of the Inner Mission (*Innere Mission*), the Protestant church’s charitable network (see Chapter Seven). Although programmatic differences existed among such confessional Lutherans, their shared religious ethic attacked free trade, “mammonistic” capitalism and the notion of a world united by economic interdependence.⁴⁹ And as demonstrated in Adolf Stöcker’s turn-of-the-century Christian Social movement, this wing of Protestantism could be strongly antisemitic, frequently blaming the modern, assimilationist Jew for the perceived threats to *Gemeinschaft*.⁵⁰

After the war, *Schöpfungsglaube* underwent further transformation. The cultural order of the preceding era was no longer viable. And the introduction of parliamentary democracy, regarded as the materialism of special group interests, made a mockery of the state order; hence, the Christian desire for *Gemeinschaft* and solidarity, for dedication and sacrifice, flowed naturally into the order of the *Volk*. Appearing as one of the structural givens of nature, like the other orders, the nation received divine ordination. Since God created the order of the nation, it “assumed the form of an involuntary association, a community of fate” invested with values inimical to individualism and class egoism.⁵¹ The transference of the Lutheran alliance of

⁴⁸ Ibid., 16-18; quote in Ward, *Theology*, 12.

⁴⁹ Ward, *Theology*, 13. Wolfgang Schwentker alludes to the search for a German “social Protestantism,” but without an exploration of its theological underpinnings: “Victor Aimé Huber and the Emergence of Social Conservatism,” in Larry Eugene Jones and James Retallack (eds.), *Between Reform, Reaction, and Resistance: Studies in the History of German Conservatism from 1789 to 1945* (Providence RI, 1993).

⁵⁰ It is noteworthy that, although very outdated, the definitive biography of Stöcker remains the one written by the Nazi Walter Frank, after 1935 President of the Reich Institute for the History of the New Germany. Walter Frank, *Hofprediger Adolf Stoecker und die christlichsoziale Bewegung* (Berlin, 1928 [2nd ed. 1935]).

⁵¹ Borg, *Church*, 178.

“throne and altar” to “nation and altar” was completed with no refutation of Reformation theology. In fact, some of the most notable Reformation scholars to emerge in the post-war “Luther Renaissance” were also some of the most notable theologians to lend their support to the Nazi movement. Many of them were pupils of the theologian Karl Holl, a noted pre-war theologian and one of the most outspoken critics of the liberal interpretation of Protestant culture. Stressing the uniqueness of Luther’s work, he located the Reformation in a historical position between the spiritual development of western and eastern Europe. Maintaining that the Reformation was Germany’s specific contribution to the history of Christianity, Holl further developed the connection between confession and theology on the one hand, and nationality on the other.⁵²

One of Holl’s most distinguished students was Paul Althaus. A theological moderate according to Robert Ericksen, he was well-known for his mild tone and ability to mediate theological conflicts.⁵³ As a strict confessional Lutheran, he in no way can be viewed as part of a theological fringe group. Althaus was particularly interested in the notion that God reveals himself in history, but not to the point of rejecting divine truth revealed through Christ, which was the cornerstone of Barth’s theology.⁵⁴ Althaus thought Barth too narrow in his “Christomonist” or dialectical view of revelation. At the same time, he rejected the notion that God’s will equals the situation at any given moment (such as Weimar). He balanced the two by introducing the concept of *Ur-Offenbarung* (“original revelation”), whereby the law of God was recognizable in the gospel *and* in history: “Since history is full of the will of God, it yields

⁵² Kupisch, “Renaissance,” 44; Nowak, *Kirche*, 228-29.

⁵³ Ericksen, *Theologians*, 79. Althaus was also co-editor of the Lutheran journal *Glaube und Volk* (Nowak, *Kirche*, 231).

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 98-99.

knowledge of God.”⁵⁵ Althaus was thus able to retain an appreciation of Christocentrism and at the same time avoid pantheism. Unlike a simple belief in God’s role in history, to which both pro-Nazis like Hirsch and anti-Nazis like Tillich could subscribe, Althaus’ theology was politically determinant: As Robert Ericksen suggests: “[T]he reference to Tillich, who was politically opposed to and exiled from the Third Reich, seems to imply the political neutrality of the concept. But there is an overwhelming sense in which *Ur-Offenbarung* conformed to Althaus’ politics.”⁵⁶

Althaus also posited a qualification of Luther’s “Two Kingdoms” theology, insisting that subjects must indeed obey earthly authority, unless that authority acts against the word of God.⁵⁷ Here Althaus was in no danger of committing heresy. Luther himself qualified the concept of “Two Kingdoms” by stating that obedience to authority was conditional on authority being Christian: “Luther allowed disobedience only if a government persecuted the word of God.” To the majority of religious Protestants, this is exactly what Weimar was doing.⁵⁸ Most importantly, Althaus argued that as an order of creation, the *Volk* was God’s divine will, indeed was the highest of all the orders of creation. Here Althaus essentially followed Holl, seeing Christian gospel and German values bound together by elective affinity: “Lutheran Protestantism stands ... as a breakthrough of the Germanic spirit into the history of Christianity.”⁵⁹ In Althaus’ view, lovers of the nation would display a natural affection for Christianity: “*Volk* and *Volkstum* are God’s creation and gift.... [W]e cannot think of volkishness without thanking God.”⁶⁰ And

⁵⁵ Quoted in Feige, *Varieties*, 93.

⁵⁶ Ericksen, *Theologians*, 99.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 106-07.

⁵⁸ According to Ericksen, “Weimar was the first period in centuries in which the church found it difficult to support the German state” (*Ibid.*).

⁵⁹ Paul Althaus, *Evangelium und Leben: Gesammelte Vorträge* (Gütersloh, 1927), 92.

⁶⁰ Paul Althaus, “Gott und Volk,” *AELKZ*, as quoted in James Zabel, *Nazism and the Pastors: A Study of the*

because God had created the nation as one of his orders, the church had an obligation to serve the *Volk*: “[T]he church has every reason to be happy about the *völkisch* movement.”⁶¹ The church also had the duty to recognize the threat Jews, as deniers of Christ, posed to this order. It was essential for the churches to speak out against the Jewish menace in public and even, where necessary, resort to “bold action.”⁶²

The political affinities of Althaus’ theology were clear. In a 1927 speech at the Protestant Church Congress (*Kirchentag*) in Königsberg,⁶³ Althaus insisted that German Protestant Christianity had its own special national character, and that any move to promote cosmopolitanism at the expense of *völkisch* interests was unacceptable: “German-Christian and Christian-German coherence stand as a clear, a transparent and an evident fact. The greatest moments and the most splendid figures in our national history bear witness to this.”⁶⁴ In a 1932 speech, he made the exact political ramifications more explicit:

[I]n an age that has questioned, misunderstood and destroyed all ordinances, theology has waged a determined struggle against the individualistic and collectivistic attack on single marriage, against irresponsibility, contraception and abortion, against the liberal-capitalist and marxist spirit in economy and society, against deflation of the state, against pacifist effeminacy of political ethos, against the destruction of penal law and the surrender of the death penalty — in general, for the order of God as the standard for the human shaping of common life.⁶⁵

After the seizure of power he proclaimed: “Our Protestant churches have greeted the turning

Ideas of Three “Deutsche Christen” Groups (Missoula, 1976), 66-67.

⁶¹ Althaus, *Evangelium*, 129.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 186; *idem.*, *Kirche und Volkstum* (Gütersloh, 1928), 33-34.

⁶³ The “loudspeaker of German Protestants,” the *Kirchentag* was a newly formed body of elected representatives of all the state churches. The theme for that years’ congress was *Volk und Vaterland*. In its general statement, the congress declared that the *Volk* was a divine institution. Althaus’ speech was the principal one at the congress: Richard Gutteridge, *The German Evangelical Church and the Jews, 1879-1950* (Oxford, 1976), 42.

⁶⁴ As printed in Althaus, *Volkstum*, 33.

⁶⁵ Paul Althaus, *Theologie der Ordnungen*, 2nd ed. (Gütersloh, 1935), 39 [1st ed. 1934, based on lectures and addresses given in Fall 1932].

point of 1933 as a gift and miracle of God.”⁶⁶

Althaus also put his signature to the “Ansbach Proposal” (*Ansbacher Ratschlag*), a statement written by Althaus’ friend, the theologian Werner Elert. Conceived as a rejoinder to the Barmen Declaration, it was designed to thwart the Confessing Church’s effort to portray itself as the true upholders of Christian doctrine: “[W]e as believing Christians thank God our father that he has given to our *Volk* in its time of need the Führer as a pious and faithful sovereign and that he wants to prepare for us in the National Socialist system of government good rule, a government with discipline and honor. Accordingly, we know that we are responsible before God to assist the work of the Führer in our calling and in our station in life.”⁶⁷ Certainly confessional Lutherans were involved in Barmen as well. But nearly all the theological initiatives represented in the Barmen Declaration came from the Calvinists who participated. Under the intellectual guidance of Barth, they wanted to impart a special canonical significance to the Barmen Declaration, but the Lutheran participants consistently vetoed this measure. As far as Lutherans were concerned, “the declaration was not to be regarded as a confession in the sense of the Heidelberg Catechism or the Augsburg Confession.”⁶⁸ Whereas Calvinists at the synod wanted a clear rejection of all theological tendencies associated with the German Christians, “[h]ere the problems lay above all on the Lutheran side.” Lutherans at Barmen specifically parted company with Calvinists on three points: God in history (“natural

⁶⁶ Ericksen, *Theologians*, 85.

⁶⁷ Gerhard Niemöller, *Die erste Bekenntnissynode der Deutschen Evangelischen Kirche zu Barmen* (Göttingen, 1959), 1: 145.

⁶⁸ Scholder, *Churches*, 2: 144. Scholder continues: “The issue here was not just the preservation of particular points of Lutheran doctrine. No less important was the difference between the Lutheran and the Reformed understanding of church and state. The defenders of this Lutheran line were thus continuing a tradition that already in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries had regarded the Reformed heresy as being worse than the Catholic. Accordingly some of them now regarded the theological errors of the German Christians as far less reprehensible than the understanding of the eucharist and the doctrine of church and state among the Reformed” (*ibid.*, 134).

theology”); the orders of creation; and the ethos of Christian action.”⁶⁹ The very location of the synod — one of the few centers of Calvinist Protestantism in Germany — betrayed the influence of Calvinist theology in the proceedings. Karl Barth claimed that at Barmen: “The Lutheran church slept and the Reformed church kept awake.”⁷⁰

Many Nazis subscribed to views very similar to Althaus’. Protestants such as Walter Buch and Hans Schemm saw God’s hand in the creation of the *Volk*. Schemm’s statement — “[O]nly through the mirror of our blood and our race are we able to see God as he must be seen. ... Race, *Volk* and nation represent only instruments which lead to God”⁷¹ — bore more than a passing resemblance to this passage by Althaus:

God has given me out of the wellspring of my *Volk*: the inheritance of blood, the corporeality, the soul, the spirit. God has determined my life from its outermost to its innermost elements through my *Volk*, through its blood, through its spiritual style. ... As a creation of God, the *Volk* is a law of our life.... We are responsible for the inheritance, the blood inheritance and the spiritual inheritance, for *Bios* and *Nomos*, that it be preserved in its distinctive style and authenticity.⁷²

Others in the confessional Lutheran camp expressed similar theological views. Like his colleague Althaus, Werner Elert was a theologian at Erlangen, a faculty that styled itself as the authoritative voice of Lutheranism in Germany.⁷³ Elert also made frequent contributions to the *AELKZ*.⁷⁴ Like Althaus, Elert insisted on a dual revelation of God, rejecting Barth’s Christomonism as too narrow. Against this “dialectic-calvinistic” theology he posited a “social-

⁶⁹ Ibid., 144.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 137.

⁷¹ Gertrud Kahl-Furthmann (ed.), *Hans Schemm spricht: Seine Reden und sein Werk* (Beyreuth, 1935), 127.

⁷² Quoted in Ericksen, *Theologians*, 103.

⁷³ Hans Tiefel, “The German Lutheran Church and the Rise of National Socialism,” *Church History* 41 (1972), 331. Tiefel points out that “Erlangen’s support of the Nazis and opposition to the Confessing Church always proceeded under the name of Luther” (ibid.).

⁷⁴ Wolfgang Tilgner, *Volksnomostheologie und Schöpfungsglaube: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Kirchenkampfes* (Göttingen, 1966), 202 n. 5, 8.

ethical” Lutheranism.⁷⁵ And like Althaus, Elert held a firm belief in the orders of creation, suggesting that Luther’s theology was essentially one of “national altruism.”⁷⁶ The political consequences of his theology were similar to Althaus’. Elert followed Luther’s concept of the miracle worker (*Wundermann*), a man sent by Providence to intercede in times of crisis, who, with an innate sense of law, was not bound by temporal laws.⁷⁷ Accordingly, two years before Hitler took power, Elert described the calling of the leader (*Führer*) as a Christian one, which demanded faithful service to the *Volk*, but also granted superiority and independence over it.⁷⁸ Shortly after the seizure of power, Elert contended that the national greatness envisioned by Luther was finally being realized in the person of Hitler.⁷⁹

Other voices in confessional Lutheranism supported the general political contours of Althaus’ and Elert’s theology. Walter Künneth, a Berlin University lecturer who publicly debated the link between Protestantism and Nazism with Hans Schemm,⁸⁰ took a nuanced view of the question. Like other confessional Lutherans, he criticized the Nazis’ violent political practices and doctrinal positions: namely, their goal of establishing a *Reichskirche* and non-denominational *Simultanschule*, and attacks on the Old Testament. However, he believed that from the point of view of the gospel one could say a “joyful yes” to Nazism at three points. First, to *völkisch* nationalism: “Because we are Christians, we know that God created us as a particular race, as a particular *Volk*. ... [R]acial commitment is not coincidence, but divinely

⁷⁵ Ibid., 202.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 204.

⁷⁷ Tiefel, “Church,” 336.

⁷⁸ Werner Elert, *Morphologie des Luthertums*, 2 vols. (Munich, 1931), 2: 78. This view was also fully evident in the *Ansbacher Ratschlag*.

⁷⁹ Werner Elert, “Luther und der revolutionäre Gedanke”: speech given at the “Deutscher Luthertag 1933,” BAZ NS 12/808 (19 November 1933: Berlin).

⁸⁰ Walter Künneth, Werner Wilm and Hans Schemm, *Was haben wir als evangelische Christen zum Rufe des Nationalsozialismus zu sagen?* (Dresden, 1931): see Chapter Two, n. 76-78.

ordained destiny.” Second, to a social policy directed against liberalism and its alleged offspring, mammonism and finance capitalism: “The basic principle of ‘public need before private greed’ is a belief and demand which meets Protestant desires and resembles the demands of Luther’s Reformation.” Third, to Nazi intentions toward Christianity: “It is notable how Germanic paganism has been rejected as impossible.”⁸¹ Through his “yes” to both the nationalism and socialism of National Socialism, he displayed an essential conformity to *Schöpfungsglaube*.⁸² The *AELKZ* reported on the meeting, stating that Künne’s lecture had been received with “unanimous approval.”⁸³

Many bishops of the Lutheran state churches saw in Nazism the fulfillment of a Protestant politics. In 1931 the Lutheran *Landesbischof* of Mecklenburg, Heinrich Rendtorff, proclaimed:

Many members of the Protestant Church today live with their complete thought and feeling in the National Socialist movement. The Protestant Church is therefore obliged, by its calling, to seek out the individual and to serve him, to seek him in his own circle, which means especially in the National Socialist movement. Thus the Protestant Church is obliged, for the sake of its calling, to praise the National Socialist movement in its intent.... The National Socialist movement passionately affirms social thought and brotherhood. Therefore it stands for a concern which is also one for the Protestant Church. ... The Protestant Church must, for the sake of its calling, hear and thankfully greet the great intent coming out of the National Socialist movement.⁸⁴

After Hitler’s appointment, Rendtorff was no less enthusiastic: “The Protestant communities of Mecklenburg should know in this hour that their state church in its faith says a joyful and strong

⁸¹ Ibid., 7. As we saw in Chapter Three, paganism was indeed rejected by the party’s positive Christians.

⁸² Künne explicitly evokes *Schöpfungsglaube* in his lecture (ibid., 7). Nowak similarly identifies Künne as a member of the *Schöpfungsglaube* camp (Nowak, *Kirche*, 231).

⁸³ Scholder, *Churches*, 1: 140.

⁸⁴ *Mecklenburgische Zeitung*, 24/4/31, as quoted in Nowak, *Kirche*, 315-16.

yes to German *Volkstum* ... to the German nation ... to the German Reich.”⁸⁵ Other Lutheran bishops expressed identical views. The bishop of Schleswig-Holstein proclaimed: “[A] German freedom movement with a national consciousness has emerged from the distress in Germany.... [T]he leaders have acknowledged openly that only on a Christian basis can a healthy state develop. This is a change for which we thank God with all our hearts.”⁸⁶ Initially reserved about the Nazi movement, Theophile Wurm of Württemberg praised it a few days after the seizure of power: “One must recognize that the National Socialist movement has with great sacrifice broken a terror. Where would the millions of young people be if this movement had not existed? It has welded together classes which had been estranged from one another. I believe that especially our consciously Protestant people who stand in the National Socialist camp will particularly welcome this welding. The church can also welcome the struggle against undermining influences in our cultural life.”⁸⁷

Even many confessional Lutherans who would later join the Confessing Church subscribed to these political views. Otto Dibelius, General Superintendent of the Kurmark, was one of the most conservative in the Confessing Church. During Weimar he took Barth to task for being overly theoretical, for forgetting the social ethic of the church, “namely the activity of practical love.”⁸⁸ Like other confessional Lutherans, he drew his inspiration from Stöcker, calling for an activist, anti-erastian church that would take part in the showdown between the Christian West and the atheistic East and fight the “antireligious crusade of world

⁸⁵ As quoted in Scholder, *Churches*, 1: 235.

⁸⁶ *Das evangelische Deutschland* 10 (1933), 105. This was the semiofficial periodical of the Church Federation (*Kirchenbund*).

⁸⁷ “Frage einer kirchlichen Stellungnahme zu den gegenwärtigen politischen Verhältnissen und Bestrebungen”: BAP R5101/28/22-24 (2-3 March 1933: Berlin).

⁸⁸ Scholder, *Churches*, 125.

Communism.”⁸⁹ After the NSDAP’s electoral breakthrough in September 1930, he certified the Nazi movement as Christian: “The National Socialists, as the strongest party of the right, have shown both by their program and their practical deportment in Thuringia that they have a firm, positive relationship to Christianity. ... We may expect that they will remain true to their principles in the new Reichstag.”⁹⁰ After the seizure of power, Dibelius continued to view Nazism this way, even to the point of excusing Nazi brutality. At a 1933 service in Berlin’s Nikolaikirche for the new Reichstag, Dibelius announced:

[W]hen it is a matter of life and death for the nation, then the power of the state must be applied thoroughly and energetically. ... We have learned from Martin Luther that the church cannot get in the way of state power when it does what it is called to do. Not even when [the state] becomes hard and ruthless. ... When the state carries out its office against those who destroy the foundations of state order, above all against those who destroy honor with vituperative and cruel words that scorn faith and vilify death for the Fatherland, then [the state] is ruling in God’s name!⁹¹

Dibelius here engages the “Two Kingdoms” concept to justify passive obedience for the Christian. But his qualification, “above all against those who ... scorn faith,” suggests that this is no blind obedience. Rather, it is explicit support for a state that defends Christianity. Dibelius’ is a qualified call for obedience, not an unambiguous call that might have forced Lutherans to support Weimar. Equally importantly, Dibelius explicitly sanctified violent action by the state as the appropriate course of Christian action under radicalized circumstances.

Nazi antisemitism also met with Dibelius’ approval. Like a great many confessional Lutherans, Dibelius was motivated by anti-Jewish hostility long before the NSDAP entered the electoral limelight. In 1928 he informed the pastors under his care that he had always considered

⁸⁹ Borg, *Church*, 168-69.

⁹⁰ Quoted in Nowak, *Kirche*, 297.

⁹¹ Günther van Norden, *Der deutsche Protestantismus im Jahr der nationalsozialistische Machtergreifung* (Gütersloh, 1979), 54.

himself to be an antisemite: “It cannot be denied that in all the manifestations of disintegration in modern civilization Jewry has always played a leading role.”⁹² After Hitler’s appointment as chancellor, he felt satisfied that something was finally being done: “In the last fifteen years in Germany, the influence of Judaism has strengthened extraordinarily. The number of Jewish judges, Jewish politicians, Jewish civil servants in influential positions has grown noticeably. The voice of the people is turning against this.”⁹³ When American churches criticized the Nazis for their nation-wide antisemitic boycott of 1 April 1933, Dibelius came to the Nazis’ defense, responding that the boycott was a natural response to disproportionate Jewish influence and “international anti-German propaganda.”⁹⁴

The most prominent Lutheran in the Confessing Church, Martin Niemöller, also leaned toward Nazism during Weimar. He was a member of the *Freikorps Epp* after the November Revolution; he voted for the NSDAP up to Hitler’s appointment as chancellor; and he even flew the Nazi party flag from his church.⁹⁵ True to confessional Lutheran form, Niemöller held a reverence for the *Schöpfungsordnungen* and a fervent enthusiasm for the *Volk*.⁹⁶ He was also an antisemite, even as he steadfastly opposed the introduction of the Nazis’ Aryan Paragraph into the Protestant Church. It was clear that for him, the Aryan Paragraph was purely a scriptural and theological issue, not ethical or humanitarian. Less than two months after founding the “Pastors’ Emergency League,” the predecessor to the Confessing Church, Niemöller wrote: “[W]e as a

⁹² Gutteridge, *Jews*, 1.

⁹³ Wolfgang Gerlach, *Als die Zeugen schwiegen: Bekennende Kirche und die Juden* (Berlin, 1987), 40.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies*, 2 vols. (Minneapolis, 1987), 1: 5-8, 18-22; Shelley Baranowski, *The Confessing Church, Conservative Elites, and the Nazi State* (Lewiston NY, 1986), 49; Robert Michael, “Theological Myth, German Antisemitism and the Holocaust: The Case of Martin Niemoeller,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 2 (1987): 105-122. According to Kurt Nowak, ninety-nine Protestant pastors were members of the *Freikorps Epp* alone (*Kirche*, 20, n. 18).

⁹⁶ Gutteridge, *Jews*, 101.

nation have been made to suffer considerably under the influence of the Jewish people.”⁹⁷ To Niemöller’s great credit, he made a complete reversal of his earlier political and theological positions by the time of Nazism’s demise, and stood out as one of the few to advocate a direct confrontation with the church’s antisemitism.

Antisemitism was widespread among the confessional Lutherans in the later Confessing Church. Hans Meiser, Lutheran Bishop of Bavaria and after 1933 a “sturdy Confessionalist fighter,” wrote in 1926 on the Jews’ domination of the national wealth, and its implications for the health of public life in Germany. An additional threat was presented in the Jewish corruption of press, literature and the stage. Even while he claimed to reject racial antisemitism, Meiser espoused the preservation of German blood against the corrupting influence of intermarriage.⁹⁸ Three years later, the *AELKZ* similarly lamented “the poisonous effect of the Jewish press and Jewish literature,” claiming it pointed to the Jewish root of Germany’s moral decline. The paper welcomed “for the sake of the German people ... every expression of justifiable antisemitism.”⁹⁹ There is no indication that the genocide that would later emerge counted as “justifiable antisemitism” in the eyes of these churchmen. They gave no indication that the boundaries of their Judeophobia included mass murder. But, according to Victoria Barnett, clerical antisemitism not only paralleled Nazi antisemitism, it also “played a role in making Nazism ‘respectable’ in church circles. ... Just as many nationalistic Protestants approved Nazi nationalism, they gave a kind of moral permission to Nazi anti-Semitism [sic] by passively accepting the most murderous part of Nazi dogma.”¹⁰⁰

Such confessional Lutherans did not merely acquiesce to antisemitism or nationalism.

⁹⁷ Gerlach, *Zeugen*, 87.

⁹⁸ Gutteridge, *Jews*, 2.

⁹⁹ *AELKZ*, 1/2/29.

¹⁰⁰ Victoria Barnett, *For the Soul of the People: Protestant Protest against Hitler* (New York, 1992), 125.

Through the theological construct of *Schöpfungsglaube*, which spiritualized the concept of national destiny and infused the preservation of Germandom with intrinsic value, this variety of Protestant persistently advanced a nationalist fervor that fed directly into Nazism. Confessional Lutheran churchmen sanctioned Nazi social and economic policies as well. They professed a sympathy with the lower classes, arguing they were equal and valued members of the *Volk*, but that they also had a responsibility to the *Volk*. They tried to turn workers away from marxism and class conflict through a return to *Gemeinschaft* and curtailment of capitalism, suggesting that management also had a responsibility to maintain social harmony.¹⁰¹ This was directly connected to the confessional Lutheran emphasis on *Schöpfungsglaube*. As Daniel Borg points out, “Evangelical social ethics in the Weimar period and folkish nationalism showed another affinity by orienting the individual’s attention toward the national commonweal as the touchstone of what constituted ‘social’ behavior and what not.”¹⁰² Even before Weimar, this “social Protestantism” carried strong *völkisch* undertones. While the Christian Trade Union movement sought to keep German Catholics away from the temptations of social democracy, the few Protestant workers who sought an explicitly religious organization could look to the *Evangelische Arbeitervereine*. Their name notwithstanding, their ranks were filled more with shopkeepers, craftsmen, teachers and civil servants than workers.¹⁰³ As a Wilhelmine “outpost of Protestantism” they had no interest in propagating class-consciousness, but aimed rather to “combat the red and the black and the gold internationals as diabolical powers of selfishness and hold high our banner: the Evangelical faith.”¹⁰⁴

This social ideology was evident in wider confessional Lutheran circles as well. During

¹⁰¹ Borg, *Church*, 202-03.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 206.

¹⁰³ Ward, *Theology*, 73.

¹⁰⁴ Quoted in Vernon Lidtke, “Social Class and Secularisation in Imperial Germany: The Working Classes,” *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 25 (1980), 33.

the *Kaiserreich* the *AELKZ* consistently attacked the “gold” of capitalism, often in explicitly antisemitic terms. Defending the “little man,” the newspaper viewed the speculation of the *Gründerzeit* as a “dance with the golden calf.”¹⁰⁵ “Liberal terrorism” was held accountable for class warfare and ultimately the rise of social democracy. These forces were directly associated with “the liberal, capitalistic, antireligious Jewish press, the partisan of the stock exchange.... Thus the greatest discontent is produced; through this machinery the *Volk*, the *Mittelstand* is expropriated for the favor of the money potentates, which means first and foremost the Jews. ... That is the reason why the social question is also called the ‘Jewish Question’.”¹⁰⁶ The connection between the two made here also points to why Stöckerite social ethics were innately tied to antisemitism. By limiting the influence of the “mammonistic” Jew, Stöckerites believed they would simultaneously curtail the power of “mammonistic” capitalism. As Stöcker wrote: “[I]t would never have occurred to me to take up my stand against purely economic errors, if this frivolous chase against all Christian elements in our life were not connected with them [the Jews].”¹⁰⁷ Stöcker’s use of antisemitism, although intensely vituperative, was not only cynical demagoguery: it was tied to his concern for the “little man.” Like the Nazis, Stöcker was not a single-issue politician.

This socio-political vision found continued expression in Weimar. One of Weimar’s most notable confessional Lutheran social theorists was Friedrich Brunstäd. As a friend of Brüning’s he never aligned himself with the Nazis; but like Althaus he subscribed to *Schöpfungsglaube* and was an opponent of the Religious Socialists.¹⁰⁸ Brunstäd believed the

¹⁰⁵ Quoted in Thomas Kremers-Sper, “Antijüdische und antisemitische Momente in protestantischer Kapitalismuskritik,” *Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte* 44 (1992), 233.

¹⁰⁶ Quoted in *ibid.*, 233-34.

¹⁰⁷ Quoted in Peter Pulzer, *The Rise of Political Anti-Semitism in Germany and Austria*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge MA, 1988), 95.

¹⁰⁸ Ward, *Theology*, 229; Borg, *Church*, 206.

causes of economic injustice ultimately lay in the atomistic ideology of the Enlightenment. He did not condemn capitalism as such, since the acquisition of property was a God-given instinct. What Brunstäd objected to was its “perversion” by mammonism. Brunstäd also criticized marxian socialism for trying to extinguish natural differences through artificial means.¹⁰⁹ According to Brunstäd, both marxian socialism and mammonistic capitalism, as materialist forces, found their roots in democracy, which degenerated the state by turning it into a “market place” of interest groups. In order for the fight against marxism and capitalism to be won, Weimar’s parliamentary democracy had to be defeated.

The tendency for confessional Lutherans like Brunstäd to reduce the economic problems of the day to a conflict over “mammonism,” making the question of economic justice a moral-ethical issue, closely resonated with the Nazis’ own belief that their “socialism” was a matter of ethics and morality over the free play of unrestrained capitalism.¹¹⁰ As we saw in Chapter Two, both the leaders of the movement and those assigned with special jurisdiction over economics called for an ethical-moral supervision of the economy. Dietrich Klagges was one such “expert,” who had significantly tied in the Nazis’ antisemitism with Christian tradition. Regarding economics, he wrote in 1929: “Comprehensive social justice can be brought to bear only by withdrawing the decision making on interest rates, prices, and wages from the sphere of economic power and transferring it to the sphere of justice and legal authority.”¹¹¹

Just as many Nazi leaders maintained that their economic platform conformed with Christian precepts, certain Protestant churchmen argued the same. The Wolfsberg pastor Herbert Plesch wrote in the Bethel newspaper *Aufwärts*:

¹⁰⁹ Borg, *Church*, 207.

¹¹⁰ Pulzer, *Anti-Semitism*, 43; Avraham Barkai, *Nazi Economics: Ideology, Theory, and Policy* (New Haven, 1990), 23.

¹¹¹ Barkai, *Economics*, 195.

Hitler has set the great goal of creating a national block, embracing all German *Stände* [estates], including the *Stand* of the industrial worker. He affirms the workers' movement as such and therefore also its interest in coalitions and tariffs. Adolf Stöcker also advanced these interests. ... Hitler has taken up the mighty struggle against gold. "Gold determines economic worth," says Americanism. "Man and his labor determine economic worth," declares National Socialism. According to the will of the Creator, gold has no value in itself.... Through the sins of the world economy, gold has received intrinsic value. Man and his work have been made worthless. The Hitler Movement is a large-scale protest against this world injustice. It wants to throw gold off its throne and give back man and his work their value.¹¹²

Another article in *Aufwärts* similarly praised Strasser's economic views, agreeing that the German economy could be built neither with communist-marxist nor liberal-capitalist methods, and praising Strasser's commitment to private property and its "ethical power."¹¹³

Besides an antipathy to the "red" of marxism and "gold" of Jewish capitalism, broad sections within confessional Lutheranism attacked the "black" of Catholicism. The Weimar period, far from seeing cooperation between the confessions based on mutual institutional concerns, witnessed an increased Protestant hostility to Catholicism "that was perhaps more widespread in the Weimar era than in any other period of modern German history."¹¹⁴ The majority of Protestant churchmen viewed the Kaiserreich as a distinctly Protestant construct, and viewed its demise as an open door for Catholic aggrandizement. Pastors looked on with dismay as the Center party promoted the acceptance of the peace resolution of 1917 and the Versailles treaty, and became outraged when Catholics and socialists coalesced to form ruling governments in "Protestant" Prussia. Leading Nazis accused the Catholic Center party of treachery for its alliance with the SPD; nationalist Protestant churchmen accused Catholics of joining hands with an ideologically incompatible party for the sake of increased power. Protestant fears of a

¹¹² "Um Hitler," *Aufwärts: Christliches Tageblatt*, 5/11/32 (in BAZ NS 12/819).

¹¹³ "Gregor Strassers Wege zu Arbeit und Brot," *Aufwärts: Christliches Tageblatt*, 5/11/32 (in BAZ NS 12/819).

¹¹⁴ Borg, *Church*, 262.

“recatholicization” of Germany grew with the creation of the Winfried League, an organization established with the support of German bishops to evangelize in Protestant parts of the country. Just as the Bavarian Nazi Rudolf Buttman feared that political Catholicism was attempting a counter-Reformation against the Protestant north,¹¹⁵ Protestant churchmen regarded the growing numbers of Catholic monasteries in predominantly Protestant areas, in tandem with the activity of the Winfried League, as an attempted counter-Reformation.¹¹⁶

The Nazis rejected the idea of concordats — even as they proceeded to sign one in 1933 for tactical reasons. Most confessional Lutheran churchmen were disturbed by the prospect of concordats between the various German states and the Vatican. While it was feared that concordats would grant the Catholic church a preferred legal position over the Protestant churches, at a more fundamental level the very idea of concordats struck Protestant churchmen as inimical to the sovereignty of the state. For this reason, the Protestant state churches were opposed even to the idea of Protestant concordats, when this idea began to be circulated in the mid-20s. Wilhelm Kube, particularly noteworthy in Nazi circles for his involvement in institutional Protestantism, attacked the idea of a Protestant concordat.¹¹⁷ The Protestant church itself, specifically the *Oberkirchenrat*, regarded it as purely a last resort. According to its president, Hermann Kapler, a Protestant concordat with the Prussian state could only be countenanced if a Catholic concordat appeared imminent, since the Prussian *Landeskirche* would then potentially sink into a secondary position.¹¹⁸

The overall picture that emerges from the preceding discussion is of a variety of Protestantism

¹¹⁵ See Chapter Two, n. 224.

¹¹⁶ Borg, *Church*, 263.

¹¹⁷ See Chapter Two, n. 182-83.

¹¹⁸ Borg, *Church*, 234.

that advocated a range of political and social goals strikingly similar to particular dimensions of Nazi ideology. As Gerhard Besier puts it, “the new national movement — with its struggle against Bolshevism, Judaism, the Center, and against the subsequent effects of the November Revolution and the defeat in war — came extraordinarily close to the feeling of the German pastorate.”¹¹⁹ Just as many in the Nazi leadership cast their social and political goals in Christian terms, many leading figures of confessional Lutheranism endorsed the Nazi movement as a national-Christian one. According to both sides, the many points of intersection between the two was not a result of coincidence. As we have seen, Lutheran sanctification of the *Volk* and *gemeinschaftlich* answers to the “social question” actually presaged some of the Nazis’ own nationalist and socialist constructs. Voices within Lutheranism spoke against the unholy trinity of “black-red-gold” before the Nazis declared war against these powers. Nazi ideology and Lutheran social ethics often diagnosed the same dangers for the German *Volk*. When we ask why the leading voices of confessional Lutheranism endorsed Nazism, therefore, we cannot look exclusively or even principally to “Two Kingdoms” theology for the answer. Had that been the primary determinant of their political attitude, these confessional Lutherans would have been duty-bound to support the Weimar Republic. Weimar’s confessional Lutherans were able to endorse the “practical” aspects of Nazi ideology with such consistency because they believed they could recognize much of their own secular teaching in the social and political dimensions of “positive Christianity.”

Many leading confessional Lutherans embraced many of the ethical, nationalist and antisemitic precepts of Nazism. But they gave no indication of sharing the Nazis’ doctrinal or ecclesial tenets: the “above confessions” syncretism of positive Christianity; the replacement of the confessional school; the rejection of the Old Testament; the insistence that Jesus was not

¹¹⁹ Gerhard Besier, “The Stance of the German Protestant Churches during the Agony of Weimar, 1930-1933,” *Kyrkhistorisk årsskrift* 1 (1983), 152.

Jewish. They particularly stood opposed to the doctrinal attacks of the paganists, especially the rejection of Original Sin. Lutherans like Küneth would have found it much harder to support Nazism had Rosenberg's views been shared by the party at large (even though Rosenberg consistently spoke of historical Protestantism in laudatory terms). If the doctrine and ecclesiology of positive Christianity found no expression in Lutheranism, was there a variety of pre-existing Christianity where these could be found? Was there a variety of Christian who declared Jesus an Aryan, rejected the Old Testament, and called for the sublimation of confessionalism? An interesting clue is provided by a Catholic observer who, in 1930, proclaimed that the Nazis' positive Christianity had nothing to do with Catholic teaching, but was rather a product of "liberal Protestant theology."¹²⁰ We turn now to an exploration of this possibility.

Liberal Protestantism

Theologically liberal Protestantism, also known as *Kulturprotestantismus*, had no political association with extremist or "proto-Nazi" movements before 1918. Indeed, this variant of Protestantism is more usually associated with Martin Rade and the *Christliche Welt* circle, who were affiliated with political liberalism, specifically the National Liberal and Left Liberal parties, before World War One. Its political, social and economic agenda — most notably its views on capitalism — was often at odds with the social and economic views of confessional Lutheranism. Nonetheless, this variety contained doctrinal and ecclesiastical views almost identical to those of the positive Christians.

Liberal Protestantism arose in Germany in the middle of the nineteenth century.

¹²⁰ "Die Religion in Programm und Praxis der Nationalsozialisten Deutschen Arbeiterpartei," *Fränkischer Kurier*, 31/7/30 (in BStA PAS 929).

According to its leading protagonists, its aim was to prepare the ground for a more “rational” conception of religion and to gain support for the principles of Christianity by reinforcing its practical and ethical aspects.¹²¹ As we have seen, ethicism also characterized the confessional Lutherans of the Weimar period, indeed was a centerpiece of their theology. They were following what had been a particular departure *within* confessional Lutheranism. In contrast, liberal Protestantism was ethicist throughout. This was manifest not only in the works of leading theological liberals, but also in the institutions they established, like the Protestant-Social Congress. Liberal Protestants, like confessional Lutherans, also sought divine providence in history. But unlike confessional Lutherans, they sought an immanent God working specifically through culture (hence *Kulturprotestantismus*, or “Culture Protestantism”).¹²²

The founder of this school, Albrecht Ritschl, saw in *Kulturprotestantismus* a conciliation between the positivism of science and the subjectivism of faith, a middle course between the “scientific destruction of revelation” and “doctrinaire confessionalism.”¹²³ This led Ritschl to reject the notion that Protestantism was purely concerned with spiritual matters. Like Stöcker, Ritschl characterized Lutheranism as ethical and activist, not quietist or passive. Lutheranism not only had to make ontological statements in theology but also value judgments in society, keeping a necessary fear of God while insisting that such value judgments were the prerogative of all Christians, not just the clergy.¹²⁴ The clergyman was not even the ideal Christian, since he retreated from the everyday world. Ideal Christians were those who recognized their worldly

¹²¹ August-Hermann Leugers, “Latente Kulturkampf Stimmung im Wilhelminischen Kaiserreich,” in Johannes Horstmann (ed.), *Die Verschränkung von Innen-, Konfessions- und Kolonialpolitik im Deutschen Reich vor 1914* (Paderborn, 1987), 17.

¹²² Borg, *Church*, 32-33.

¹²³ Ward, *Theology*, 34.

¹²⁴ Uriel Tal, *Christians and Jews in Germany: Religion, Politics and Ideology in the Second Reich, 1870-1914* (Ithaca, 1975), 169.

task, their “vocation,” as a duty inspired by God.¹²⁵ This emphasis on the ethical power of the individual arose, so Ritschl contended, from the New Testament viewpoint that in God’s will to mercy, man is in principle absolved of sin.¹²⁶ As such, man was a totality, an individual who strove for perfection. To be Christian involved more than knowing what was virtuous: it also involved an active self-improvement.¹²⁷ According to Ritschl, the essence of Luther’s teaching was to empower the Christian with the ability to spiritually dominate the world. Catholicism, by contrast, was concerned with the political domination of the world. This accounted for the superiority of Protestantism over Catholicism, with the former emphasizing the ethical and spiritual ascent of the individual and the development of moral character, and the latter emphasizing submission to external authority and unquestioned acceptance of given truths.¹²⁸ This emphasis on the individual was not made at the expense of *Gemeinschaft*. Ritschl continually emphasized that a close communal relationship was fundamental. Grace for the individual could only come through “free obedience” to the community of believers.¹²⁹ Here Ritschl preserved the idea of the church, even as he simultaneously denied the spiritual monopoly of the clergyman.

This conception of Protestantism was directed against the confessional Lutheran defense of the Christian state. While liberal Protestants believed in the church as a community of believers within the state, they maintained that it would ultimately be absorbed by the state. According to Richard Rothe, another leading exponent of liberal Protestantism, the state itself would then be imbued with ethical and religious principles derived from the gospels: the

¹²⁵ Friedrich Graf, “The German Theological Sources and Protestant Church Politics,” in Hartmut Lehmann and Guenther Roth (eds.), *Weber’s Protestant Ethic: Origins, Evidence, Contexts* (Cambridge, 1993), 44.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 41.

¹²⁷ Thomas Nipperdey, *Deutsche Geschichte 1800-1866: Bürgerwelt und starker Staat* (Munich, 1983), 427-28.

¹²⁸ Tal, *Christians*, 169.

¹²⁹ Nipperdey, *Geschichte*, 436; Graf, “Sources,” 47.

ecclesiastical stage in the historical development of Christianity would pass, and the Christian spirit would enter its ethical and political stage.¹³⁰ In other words, Christianity would culminate in a secular society on the one hand, with the political state being thoroughly imbued with the spirit of Christianity on the other. Certainly liberal Protestants did not seek the disappearance of the Protestant church as an institution. However, they did support Rothe's central thesis that infusing society in general with Christianity was to be done not through political or ecclesiastical institutions, conformity to external standards, or participation in established rites, but through the power of the human personality: "The Kingdom of Heaven is within you (Luke 17:21)."¹³¹

The implications of *Kulturprotestantismus* for the church were transposed onto the question of confessional schools. For liberal Protestants, education was meant to be not a study of humanity, which was the goal of rational liberalism and "atheism," but a tool for Christian character building. Truth was not gained through rational thought alone, but also through piety. The entire educational system, therefore, had to be infused with a Christian ethos. As a consequence, liberal Protestants did not want religion treated as a special subject, or confined to confessional schools, which they thought furthered "religious particularism."¹³² They believed that confessional Lutherans, due to their defense of confessional schools, were actually causing the exclusion of believing Christians from the *Volksgemeinschaft*. For liberal Protestants, the Christian spirit had to imbue all studies; mathematics and natural sciences as well as the humanities.¹³³ The answer for them lay in nonconfessional *Simultanschule*. This understanding of religion as a cultural ethos also carried implications for Catholicism. Concerned with the

¹³⁰ Nipperdey, *Geschichte*, 429.

¹³¹ Tal, *Christians*, 168, 172. See, in comparison, Chapter Two, n. 15; Chapter Three, n. 52, 78-79.

¹³² Gangolf Hübinger, *Kulturprotestantismus und Politik: Zum Verhältnis von Liberalismus und Protestantismus im wilhelminischen Deutschland* (Tübingen, 1994), 183.

¹³³ Tal, *Christians*, 171.

cultural unity of the nation, liberal Protestants saw the *Simultanschule* as a means to “decatholicize” Germany, since Catholic youth would now be taught “to be patriotic Germans and loyal subjects of a Protestant monarch.”¹³⁴ Only in those areas where Catholics predominated did some liberal Protestants express reservations about introducing *Simultanschule*, since such schools would be de facto Catholic schools and act against national and Protestant consciousness.¹³⁵

Even while confessional Lutheranism grew more anti-Catholic during Weimar, in the *Kaiserreich* liberal Protestantism was the real driving force behind anti-Catholicism. Martin Rade, who was already a prominent intellectual at that time, defined liberal Protestantism as a system of beliefs that progressed from a religion into a rationalist attitude and then into a “secular theology” ideally suited to serve as the main support of German nationalism. Rade believed this would be welcomed by enlightened Germans since it marshaled the historical Protestant sources of German nationalism in the struggle against the “anti-Christian” left, the confessional Lutheran right and the ultramontanists.¹³⁶ In a similar vein, Ritschl regarded the confessional differences between Protestants much less important than a shared opposition to social democracy and “culturally inferior” Catholicism.¹³⁷ Ritschl’s sectarianism went hand in hand with his support for the Prussian Union Church. The Union served as a counterpoint to strict confessional Lutheranism, which before unification furthered the anti-Prussian policies of

¹³⁴ Marjorie Lamberti, *State, Society, and the Elementary School in Imperial Germany* (New York, 1989), 208.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 65-67, 78-79. Some right-liberal Protestants gave up on *Simultanschule* entirely once the *Kulturkampf* proved to strengthen, not weaken, Catholic consciousness in Germany (*ibid.*, 184-86). Others, however, continued to be opposed, fearful that a return of confessionalism would mean “in Prussian primary schools ... it should be possible to teach that Luther was a scoundrel and a suicide tortured by qualms of conscience.” Cited in J. Alden Nichols, *Germany after Bismarck: the Caprivi Era, 1890-1894* (New York, 1958), 172.

¹³⁶ Tal, *Christians* 163.

¹³⁷ Graf, “Sources,” 43, 45.

the smaller German states.¹³⁸ Far more importantly, Ritschl saw the Union as an absolute necessity for the survival of Protestantism against Catholicism. As expressed in the political arena, the *Kulturkampf* of the 1870s against the Catholics and to some extent also against confessional Lutherans was regarded by theologically liberal Protestants as a concrete expression of their opposition to the Christian state and confessional school.¹³⁹ When the *Kulturkampf* came undone, Ritschlians were sufficiently concerned with the renewed threat posed by Catholicism that they founded the “Protestant League for the Protection of German-Protestant Interests.”¹⁴⁰ Like confessional Lutherans, liberal Protestants expressed enmity towards both “black” Catholicism and “red” marxism.

Liberal Protestant attitudes toward Judaism were considerably more complicated. Theological liberals like Ritschl left no doubt that they considered Protestantism superior to Judaism, which suffered from “national segregation and confining ceremonialism dating from the Pharisees in the time of Jesus.”¹⁴¹ As we have seen, leading confessional Lutherans also considered Judaism inferior. But they interpreted the nature of the “Jewish problem” differently. Confessional Lutherans claimed to respect the historical importance of biblical Judaism, and professed no animosity toward the Jew who maintained his divinely ordained separation from the Christian: “I do not attack the Jews,” Stöcker insisted, “but only that light-minded Judaism that is without fear of Heaven, that pursues material gain and practices deceit.”¹⁴² In other words, Stöcker’s antisemitism was a reaction to emancipation, which undermined the precepts of the

¹³⁸ According to Nipperdey (*Geschichte*, 438-39), confessional Lutherans were among the most anti-national in pre-unification Germany, whereas liberal Protestants counted among the most ardent in the nationalist movement, as demonstrated by the leading role played by pastors in the nationalist revolution of 1848 in Schleswig-Holstein (*ibid.*, 437).

¹³⁹ Graf, “Sources,” 43; Lamberti, *State*, 211-14; Smith, *Nationalism*, 38-40.

¹⁴⁰ For a history of the Protestant League and its liberal composition, see Smith, *Nationalism*, 50-61.

¹⁴¹ Quoted in Tal, *Christians*, 169.

¹⁴² Quoted in *ibid.*, 250.

Christian state. He wished to keep Jews politically, socially and economically ghettoized. The liberal Protestant answer to the “Jewish problem” was just the opposite. They shared the desire to see Jews convert to Christianity, in order to effect the second coming and complete the eschatological process of salvation, but believed the way to achieve this was by granting the Jews total freedom and engaging with them theologically. By working for the Jews’ civil liberties, liberal Protestants certainly appeared to display a progressive attitude. But this should not lead us to the belief that emancipationism *per se* was the opposite of antisemitism.¹⁴³ As Gangolf Hübinger contends, many Liberal Protestants were motivated to give Jews their freedom in order to end Judaism, not to promote a new pluralistic society.¹⁴⁴ The *Christliche Welt* repeatedly called for the Jews to relinquish their religion and become an integral part of Christian culture. Liberal Protestants believed that the Jews had long wanted to convert, but were precluded from doing so by the benighted attitude of confessionalist Christianity. Given the choice to do so, liberal Protestants claimed, Jews would recognize their religion as a “petrified pharisaism” and see in Christianity the legitimate heir of Israel.¹⁴⁵ According to liberal scholars such as Julius Wellhausen and Adolf von Harnack, “Judaism is only the withered branch of the religion of the Old Testament whose sap and vitality, by virtue of the New Dispensation, have passed to the side of Christianity. ... [T]he time of Judaism is now over.”¹⁴⁶

When mass conversion did not occur, liberal Protestants were thrown into a crisis. As Uriel Tal puts it: “The main hope and purpose of Liberal Protestantism, namely the national and cultural unity of the Second Reich based on historical and Christian principles, had broken

¹⁴³ As Shulamit Volkov argues in her article “Antisemitismus als kultureller Code,” in idem., *Jüdisches Leben und Antisemitismus im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Munich, 1990), 12-36.

¹⁴⁴ Hübinger, *Kulturprotestantismus*, 275.

¹⁴⁵ Tal, *Christians*, 192.

¹⁴⁶ As quoted in Hübinger, *Kulturprotestantismus*, 273; Tal, *Christians*, 192. Tal provides ample evidence that such views were widely held among liberal Protestants (ibid., 192-196).

against the stiff neck of Judaism.”¹⁴⁷ If liberal Protestant relations with Jews had been marked by friendly dialogue at the time of emancipation, by the turn of the century this dialogue had largely broken down. Seeking an explanation for Jewish “stubbornness” without undermining their own theological system, some liberal Protestants called for a complete doctrinal separation of Christianity from Judaism. They also increasingly suggested that Jewish deafness to their religious plea was attributable to a racial disposition.

This development is illustrated in the liberal Protestant reception of Houston Stewart Chamberlain, and in particular Chamberlain’s relationship with Harnack. According to his biographer, Chamberlain both influenced and was influenced by liberal Protestantism.¹⁴⁸ Harnack’s polemics against Judaism were used by Chamberlain in his own *Foundations of the Nineteenth Century* (1899), a Christian-racist tract widely regarded as one of the most important antecedents of Nazi ideology. According to a review in *Christliche Welt*, “this book ... carries in it an apologetic strength for which our ‘Christian world’ will have much to thank.” The highly charged attacks on Catholicism and scientific materialism in *Foundations* also assured a warm reception among liberal Protestants. While confessional Lutherans firmly rejected Chamberlain’s critique of organized religion,¹⁴⁹ liberal Protestants found their own views echoed in Chamberlain’s call for a nationalist *Kulturreligion*.

The antisemitism of Chamberlain’s book, which argued that Jesus was not a Jew, was directly linked with the racist implications of liberal Protestantism. Another review in *Christliche Welt*, reflecting exasperation with the Jews’ refusal to convert, explicitly agreed with the racist thrust of the book:

¹⁴⁷ Tal, *Christians*, 164.

¹⁴⁸ Geoffrey Field, *Evangelist of Race: The Germanic Vision of Houston Stewart Chamberlain* (New York, 1981), 238-39.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 236.

We theologians have even now failed to take up a real position but for the present continue to operate calmly with the notion of equality for all men before God, as if this also includes equality with each other. However, the emphasis on race expresses a new important knowledge for our time. Today even the Jews ... no longer hide [this fact] as more and more they give vent in public to the racial consciousness which they have always had.¹⁵⁰

The emphasis on race made its way into wider liberal Protestant circles. By the turn of the century it had entered the ranks of the Protestant League, where the arguments in *Foundations* were enthusiastically greeted.¹⁵¹ Some liberal Protestants took issue with the vituperative hostility of Chamberlain's antisemitism. Harnack, a friend of Chamberlain's, flatly told him he was "possessed by an anti-Jewish demon." However, this did not prevent Harnack from admiring Chamberlain's work in general. In a letter to Chamberlain, Harnack portentously assured him: "Still enough — the Jew shall not have the last word. Rather, may he disappear completely and may there remain between us only the conviction of a broad and deep unity and agreement."¹⁵² Harnack's wish for Judaism's "complete disappearance," while certainly not a call for genocide, nonetheless demonstrates how the conceptual boundaries of Christian antisemitism became alarmingly ill-defined in this period. Chamberlain's biographer writes: "Liberal Protestantism's disparagement of the later traditions of Judaism, its call for German national and cultural unity based on Christian principles, and its ingrained bias against Jewish efforts to preserve a separate existence were all easily adaptable by a thoroughgoing anti-Semite like Chamberlain."¹⁵³ Susannah Heschel makes a related point. She suggests that liberal Protestants' dialogue with their Jewish counterparts led to the problem of determining the uniqueness of Jesus' message and the boundary between liberal Protestantism and liberal

¹⁵⁰ Quoted in *ibid.*, 240.

¹⁵¹ Smith, *Nationalism*, 225; Field, *Evangelist*, 237.

¹⁵² Quoted in Field, *Evangelist*, 242.

Judaism. The theological self-doubt that ensued “motivated [certain] Protestant theologians to embrace racial theory: while the content of Jesus’ message may have been identical to Judaism, his difference could be assured on racial grounds.”¹⁵⁴

Harnack went further down this path in his later theological development. At the beginning of Weimar he attempted to resuscitate the second-century Christian Marcion, who had taught that the God of love in the New Testament bore no relation to the imperfect God of the Old Testament, and that Christianity and Judaism had to be totally separated. While he professed to take a critical view of Marcion’s thought, Harnack nonetheless came to a conclusion that the present age was ripe for Marcion’s thinking: “[T]he rejection of the Old Testament in the second century was a mistake which the great church rightly avoided; to maintain it in the sixteenth century was a fate from which the Reformation was not yet able to escape; but still to preserve it in Protestantism as a canonical document since the nineteenth century is the consequence of a religious and ecclesiastical crippling.”¹⁵⁵ As “Jewish carnal law,” the Old Testament as a unity “lies below the level of Christianity.”¹⁵⁶ Harnack sadly acknowledged that Luther did not expunge the Old Testament from Protestantism — “What an unburdening of Christianity and its doctrine it would have been if Luther had taken this step!” — but nonetheless, his emphasis on gospel over law meant that “Luther’s concept of faith actually is the one that stands nearest to the Marcionite concept.”¹⁵⁷ Nowhere in *Marcion* did Harnack engage in a political antisemitism aimed directly against contemporary Jewry. In fact, like many other

¹⁵³ Ibid., 311.

¹⁵⁴ Susannah Heschel, “When Jesus was an Aryan: The Protestant Church and Antisemitic Propaganda,” in Susannah Heschel and Robert Erickson (eds.), *German Churches and the Holocaust*, forthcoming (Philadelphia, 1999).

¹⁵⁵ Adolf von Harnack, *Marcion: the Gospel of the Alien God*, trans. John Steely and Lyle Bierma (Durham NC, 1990 [orig. 1920]), 134.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 135.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 135, 139.

liberal theologians, he took exception to the “rabble-rousing” antisemitism of the Nazis. But the influence of the work on the growing pro-Nazi thrust in *Kulturprotestantismus*, as well as its complete overlap with Nazi attitudes towards the Old Testament, was clear.¹⁵⁸

According to Wilhelm Pressel, it was a combination of Ritschlian theology and Althaus’ *Schöpfungsglaube* that lead to the “war theology” of 1914-18.¹⁵⁹ Confronted with a secular, anti-national Weimar, liberal Protestantism continued in this political direction during the 1920s. The Protestant League became the first of any Christian organization to support the Nazis.¹⁶⁰ More than lending outside support, many of the league’s leaders took part in the movement.¹⁶¹ In its 1924 Munich assembly, presided over by their new president Bruno Doehring, the league endorsed the essential components of Nazi ideology. Doehring proclaimed: “Neither the cries of the ultramontanist press nor the harsh protests of its Jewish confederates will get in our way.”¹⁶² Whereas such statements conceived the Jewish enemy as a tributary of the Catholic one, they nonetheless indicate the strong presence of antisemitism within the league when compared to its inception. This, combined with the strident nationalism the league had always espoused, made the Nazi appeal almost immediate. This enthusiasm was felt right through to the end of Weimar. At the league’s 1931 general assembly in Magdeburg, the Rhineland pastor Hermann Kremers

¹⁵⁸ This point is also made by Rita Thalmann, “Die Schwäche des Kulturprotestantismus bei der Bekämpfung des Antisemitismus,” in Kurt Nowak and Gérard Raulet (eds.), *Protestantismus und Antisemitismus in der Weimarer Republik* (Frankfurt a.M., 1994).

¹⁵⁹ Pressel, *Kriegspredigt*, 179-82, 191-93. Pressel bases this estimation on a close reading of Protestant war sermons, in which a loving, benevolent God — one in keeping with the liberal Protestant view of the New Testament “God of love” — was constantly emphasized (ibid., 180ff).

¹⁶⁰ Scholder, *Churches*, 1: 107.

¹⁶¹ Heinrich Bornkamm, president of the league after Doehring, was a member of the SA, the NSLB and the NS-Dozentenbund, while league director Fritz von der Heydt was in the Arbeitsgemeinschaft NS-Pfarrer. League notables Hermann Beyer and Wilhelm Wehner were respectively in the SA and NS-Volkswohlfahrt, and NS-Volkswohlfahrt, SS and DAF: BAP R5101/23126/85a (n.d., n.p.).

¹⁶² Scholder, *Churches*, 1: 109. The Protestant League frequently made direct contact with the NSDAP, both publicly and privately: see Chapter Two, n. 130, 136.

spoke on “National Socialism and Protestantism.” He was careful to suggest that, like the churches, the Protestant League was not making a political endorsement. He pointed out that his views related to Nazism as a movement, not a party.¹⁶³ Despite this caveat, Kremers was emphatic about the nationalist and antisemitic goals of Nazism, critical only of Hitler’s supposed blindness to the ultramontane threat: “Our Christian duty towards this movement is to protect and preserve it, so that it not be silted up by naturalism, nor, caught by the age old enemy of Germanhood, wither to the roots under the alien sun of Rome.”¹⁶⁴

The tenets of nonconfessionalism, scriptural separation of Judaism and Christianity, and belief in God’s hand in history, all finding expression within liberal Protestantism, could also be found in the doctrinal beliefs of the German Christians and their predecessors in the League for a German Church (which included Chamberlain as a member).¹⁶⁵ One of the leaders of the latter was the Flensburg pastor Friedrich Andersen, who advocated a German Christianity purged of all Jewish influences. One year after Harnack’s *Marcion*, Andersen wrote *Der deutsche Heiland* (“The German Savior”). In it, Andersen identified Christianity as the religion of progress, emphasizing Christ’s loneliness, individuality and ascent to spiritual mastery.¹⁶⁶ Andersen also reduced Christianity to the person of Christ alone, insisting that “foreign underpinnings” like the Old Testament were unnecessary. In his argumentation, Andersen made explicit reference to both Chamberlain and Harnack.¹⁶⁷ Andersen’s rejection of the Old Testament was based on an insistence that the Christian God of the New Testament was a God of love, not the vengeful, unjust God of the Old Testament. He also posited Christian spirituality and belief in the eternal

¹⁶³ Hermann Kremers, *Nationalsozialismus und Protestantismus* (Berlin, 1931), forward.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 52.

¹⁶⁵ Field, *Evangelist*, 412.

¹⁶⁶ Friedrich Andersen, *Der deutsche Heiland* (Munich, 1921), 10, 15.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 19-20.

over against Jewish carnality and crass materialism.¹⁶⁸ These views were established throughout the league. Reinhold Krause, whose call for the removal of the Old Testament caused such a controversy at the German Christian *Sportpalast* assembly of November 1933, had been a member of the league.¹⁶⁹ Significantly, several moderate leaders of the later German Christian movement, while acknowledging their overall indebtedness to the ideas of the league, rejected the anti-Old Testament thrust of its doctrine, explicitly blaming this on theological liberalism.¹⁷⁰ The league's doctrinal origin in liberal Protestantism was also made clear in their view of God. In a manifesto from 1931, they affirmed their belief that: "The kingdom of God comes not in outer form, but from within."¹⁷¹

Despite the reservations of some moderates within their ranks, the German Christians also adhered to basic liberal Protestant doctrines. Julius Leutheuser, the leader of the radical Thuringian German Christians, echoed many of its basic tenets. He attacked the Catholic church as being of Roman body and Jewish spirit. Against Catholicism's emphasis on the monk, Leutheuser posited Protestantism's emphasis on vocation, or as he put it, the "holy worker." After the Reformation Germany had enjoyed a unity centered on the gospel and the German state, which according to Leutheuser was destroyed by Weimar. Hitler had now restored this unity.¹⁷² Leutheuser also disdained the Old Testament, claiming it was useful only for leading to a better understanding of Christ. Charged by an opponent for overlooking sin, Leutheuser

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 59-62. Compare with *Mein Kampf*, 306. Andersen joined the NSDAP in 1928 and immediately became active as a party speaker (Nowak, *Kirche*, 249).

¹⁶⁹ See Chapter Two, n. 198.

¹⁷⁰ See, for instance, Arnold Dannemann, *Die Geschichte der Glaubensbewegung 'Deutsche Christen'* (Dresden, 1933), 11-12; Constantin Grossmann, *Deutsche Christen — Ein Volksbuch* (Dresden, 1934), 24-25.

¹⁷¹ Quoted in Nowak, *Kirche*, 248.

¹⁷² Julius Leutheuser, *Der Heiland in der Geschichte der Deutschen: Der Nationalsozialismus, vom Evangelium aus gesehen* (Weimar, 1933), 10-15.

responded that faith can move mountains, including sin and guilt: “Jesus overcomes sin.”¹⁷³ Siegfried Leffler, Leutheuser’s friend and fellow leader of the Thuringians, similarly suggested that no clergyman was needed to mediate the message of God to the individual Christian, and credited Luther with having recognized this fact. Luther destroyed the “Jewish, Oriental” nature of Christianity, and Hitler now stood in succession to Luther: “[W]e cannot think of Adolf Hitler without Martin Luther.”¹⁷⁴ Significantly, the theological liberalism of these German Christians was noted by the confessional Lutheran Paul Althaus. He left no doubt that, while he agreed with the political and social ideology of the German Christians, he disagreed with their ecclesiology, suggesting it “partook too much of nineteenth-century liberal theology.”¹⁷⁵

Others within the movement displayed the influence of liberal Protestantism. Friedrich Wieneke, one of the leading German Christian publicists, was since 1929 both the cathedral pastor and Nazi party leader in the small Brandenburg town of Soldin. In 1933 he took on the additional job of theological consultant in the German Christian *Reichsleitung*. In the *Deutsches Pfarrerblatt*, he expressed his belief that: “National Socialism brings a fullness of great moral reforms: struggle against all prostitution, against dirt-literature, unclean films and the like. ... National Socialism rejects these notions of humanity. Its state is for the *völkisch* people, who have received Christianity as a gift of grace from God. For this reason it demands not a humanist state, but rather a national Christian state.”¹⁷⁶ Wieneke began his academic life as an admirer of the liberal theologian Ernst Troeltsch, since the latter had “superseded ‘historicism,’ that view which interpreted world history only according to the laws of natural causality.”

¹⁷³ As quoted in Ericksen, *Theologians*, 90. Ericksen suggests that “the arguments show Leutheuser’s debt to liberal theology” (ibid., 215, n. 55).

¹⁷⁴ Siegfried Leffler, *Christus im Dritten Reich der Deutschen: Wesen, Weg und Ziel der Kirchenbewegung ‘Deutsche Christen’* (Weimar, 1935), 75.

¹⁷⁵ Quoted in Ericksen, *Theologians*, 91.

¹⁷⁶ Quoted in *VB*, 22/11/30.

Troeltsch, Wieneke believed, viewed God as the active agent in history.¹⁷⁷

One of the strongest strains in German Christian doctrine was the belief that God had revealed himself in German history. This had been a premise of *Kulturprotestantismus* as well.¹⁷⁸ As we have seen, it was also a strong element in Althaus' thought. But as a confessional Lutheran, Althaus did not take it as far as the German Christians. According to them: "History stands under the will of God, i.e., an historical happening is, in its ultimate base, not the working out of worldly powers of an economic or political nature, but rather leads out of the eternal will of God."¹⁷⁹ Leading German Christians such Leffler and Leutheuser considered it their God-given mission to aid the nation's rebirth: "We believe that in our fatherland's rebirth the power of God reveals itself, that in its fearful suffering the crucified Christ has come to us, and that in his healing announcements Germany's mission to the whole world finds its promise. ... [W]e see the revelation of God not completed in ancient times, but rather we see God living among us and in our Führer Adolf Hitler, his instrument for our day."¹⁸⁰ While Althaus himself had suggested Hitler's ascent to power was a "gift from God," and had even worked out a systematic idea of God in history through his concept of *Ur-Offenbarung*, he rejected the German Christian God of history as insufficiently rooted in the gospel.¹⁸¹ He also opposed the German Christian suggestion — based on the liberal Protestant emphasis on the laity — that Christian virtues were spread more effectively by Nazism than by the church. In *Die deutsche Stunde der Kirche*, his doctrinal response to the German Christians, Althaus agreed with them that the spiritual element of 1933 had to be recognized by theologians, but refused to regard Nazism as more Christian

¹⁷⁷ Friedrich Wieneke, *Deutsche Theologie im Umriss* (Soldin, 1933), 66.

¹⁷⁸ Ericksen, *Theologians*, 98-99.

¹⁷⁹ Quoted in Zabel, *Pastors*, 172.

¹⁸⁰ Quoted in *ibid.*

¹⁸¹ Ericksen, *Theologians*, 91.

than the churches themselves.¹⁸²

One of the most prominent and respected German Christian theologians was Emanuel Hirsch. As we saw earlier, he held a strong belief in the God of history.¹⁸³ In 1933, Hirsch reaffirmed this basic tenet of Ritschlian thought: “Only in the depths of belief in justification by faith was it possible to allow the ethical involvement of the Christian in the historical community. This is not built on the basis of a law, but out of the merciful responsibility based on the general self-testimony and rule of God in nature and history.”¹⁸⁴ Hirsch was more inclined than Althaus to believe that God’s will equaled the situation in any particular moment. He therefore took a far graver view than Althaus of the spiritual health of the *Volk* after the war. Germany’s defeat, according to Hirsch, must have been caused by the German peoples’ betrayal of God. Defeat meant the *Volk* was in danger of succumbing to the judgment of God. This unqualified belief in German history as *Heilsgeschichte* led Hirsch to view the rise of Hitler as God’s desire to rewrite that history: “All of us who stand in the present moment of our *Volk* experience it as a sunrise of divine goodness after endless dark years of wrath and misery. ... Now new hope has been given to us. And should our hearts not burn with enthusiasm that the Protestant church now say yes to this moment, that it seize the opportunity to cooperate with redeveloping the order and style of the German *Volk*?”¹⁸⁵

Like Ritschl, Hirsch also sought a conciliation of science and the gospels, fully accepting the scientific means of the Enlightenment, even while he rejected its political, social and cultural ends. His ability to uncouple the style of Enlightenment modernity from its ideological

¹⁸² Paul Althaus, *Die deutsche Stunde der Kirche* (Göttingen, 1934), 8.

¹⁸³ Hirsch, *Schicksal*, 165.

¹⁸⁴ Quoted in Ericksen, *Theologians*, 159.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 147.

substance made him into a kind of “reactionary modernist.”¹⁸⁶ (By contrast, the confessional Lutheran Althaus took a more critical view of the Enlightenment.)¹⁸⁷ Liberal Protestantism also influenced Hirsch’s view of the state. Following the liberal belief in the religious ascent of the secular state, Hirsch believed that Nazism, as a Christian movement, had the task to take over the social responsibilities that had previously been the domain of the church. In return, the church had the duty to give up the administration of orphanages and hospitals to the ethical *völkisch* state, and go back to its main role of proclaiming the gospel.¹⁸⁸

As Susannah Heschel states: “That the German Christian movement emerged out of liberal Protestantism is crucial; it presented itself as a modern, scientific, theological movement.”¹⁸⁹ But if the German Christians represented a genuine form of liberal Protestantism, and if liberal Protestantism bore such a striking resemblance to the Nazis’ own doctrinal views, how then do we accommodate the rejection of Nazi ideology by liberal Protestants like Rade or Tillich? As demonstrated above, we saw how Rade and the *Christliche Welt* began as Protestant sectarians. Indeed, both initially supported the Protestant League.¹⁹⁰ During much of the *Kaiserreich*, Rade could safely be called a Ritschlian. Beginning in the 1890s, however, the group around the *Christliche Welt* began to take Ritschl’s attempted synthesis of science and spirit more in the direction of science. Around Rade grew a so-called *religionsgeschichtliche* school, one that sought a more historical background to the religious origins of Christianity. They insisted that the history of Christianity had to be mated with a positivist secular history, and

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 185, 189. As Jeffrey Herf has contended, Nazism was similarly marked by a “reactionary modernism,” one that seized on the technical advances of modernity while rejecting the liberal and emancipatory dimensions often associated with it: Jeffrey Herf, *Reactionary Modernism: Technology, Culture and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich* (Cambridge, 1984).

¹⁸⁷ Ericksen, *Theologians*, 92, 189.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 161. See Chapter Seven for Christian welfare in the Third Reich.

¹⁸⁹ Heschel, “Jesus.”

¹⁹⁰ Ward, *Theology*, 83.

compared with other non-Christian religions. Ritschlians, on the other hand, stood firmly against any reduction of the absoluteness of Christianity.¹⁹¹ Others in the *Christliche Welt* circle, especially Ernst Troeltsch, took further departures from Ritschlians theology, insisting on the right of total religious individualism, even as they accepted the God of history.¹⁹² While Ritschl had emphasized the individual in his theology, the individual only gained final spiritual ascendance upon a reaffirmation of *Gemeinschaft*. These theological departures from Ritschl's liberal Protestantism pushed the *Christliche Welt* circle further and further to the theological (and political) left and away from their previous positions. By the time of Weimar, their theology and its political implications had changed significantly. The theological positions of the Protestant League, League for a German Church, and German Christians were, by comparison, right-liberal. By no means did all adherents of the ecclesiastical and educational views of liberal Protestantism end up supporting the German Christians or the Nazi party. Nevertheless, German Christian views on church and school had identifiable origins in liberal Protestant theology; and the closeness of German Christian ecclesiology with that of the Nazis' positive Christianity was striking. Therefore, Rade's and Troeltsch's acceptance of the Weimar Republic does not imply a similar political stance by liberal Protestantism *in toto*.

The Protestant laity and the Nazi movement

So far in this chapter we have studied the varieties of liberal Protestantism in Weimar, and how they engaged or were related to the rise of Nazism. We now turn from the ideological to the social, and explore whether the web of affinities felt by confessionalist and right-liberal

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 84.

¹⁹² Graf, "Sources," 48. Ericksen points out that Tillich, too, had gone over to total theological individualism and a rejection of *Gemeinschaft*, even though he, like Hirsch, believed in a God of history (*Theologians*, 181).

Protestant theologians were matched by the general Protestant population. Of course, a comprehensive survey of the political attitudes of the mass of Protestant Germans must be undertaken through different means. No public opinion surveys for the period exist, and a thorough analysis of all the Protestant newspapers of the era would be impractical. One fruitful way to gauge the relationship between Protestant religiosity and Nazism at the popular level is through the quantitative methods employed by social and political history. In other words, does the literature on “who voted for Hitler” give any indication of the role played by religious feeling?

Here we confront a curious historiographical problem. The still-growing literature on the social origins of Nazism does not yet include a study on religiosity as a possible factor for voting Nazi. Functionalist, class-based analyses of the Nazi electorate remain predominant, largely insulated from the recent insights of cultural studies. A case in point is the recent work of William Brustein, who frankly bases his study of the social origins of Nazism on the belief that people vote only with their pocketbooks. As Brustein writes: “In my application, perceived utility [in supporting a political party] takes the form of material or economic preferences.”¹⁹³ The theoretical premise that “net benefits of joining the Nazi Party before 1933 were largely shaped by individual self-interest” need not necessarily preclude a cultural definition of self-interest; yet as applied by Brustein, it does. Oded Heilbronner’s argument of some years ago, that researchers of the Nazi electorate “use the methodology of social history in explaining the reasons for the rise of the Nazi Party to power, while the cultural-intellectual explanation is put to one side,” still applies today.¹⁹⁴ Nonetheless, there are indicators that point to some potentially fruitful paths of inquiry. In her regional study of Pomerania, Shelley Baranowski proposes that

¹⁹³ William Brustein, *The Logic of Evil: The Social Origins of the Nazi Party, 1925-1933* (New Haven, 1996), 23.

¹⁹⁴ Oded Heilbronner, “The Role of Nazi Antisemitism in the Nazi Party’s Activity and Propaganda: A Regional Historiographical Study,” *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 35 (1990), 437.

Protestantism played a pivotal role in shaping the Nazi electorate.¹⁹⁵ She maintains: “There is much evidence to suggest that a wider discussion of the religious bases of the National Socialist vote is in order. ... [P]oliticized Protestantism might have contributed to transforming the Hitler Party from a fringe movement to a contender for power.”¹⁹⁶

Of course, researchers have consistently shown that Protestants were over-represented in the Nazi electorate, that confessional affiliation is a better measure of who voted for Hitler than any other factor, including class and region.¹⁹⁷ But they have not gone one step further to look at the possible religious motives behind this. For the most part the explanations are largely secular and negative: Protestants did not vote as Protestants, but rather as non-trade unionists or non-Catholics. Suggesting that class analyses of the Nazi vote need to be replaced with new approaches, William Sheridan Allen claims: “For Germany the first thing that makes hash of class conceptualization is religion.”¹⁹⁸ Pointing out that nominal Protestant adherence was the most decisive variable in voting Nazi, Allen then precludes an exploration for this in Protestantism: “Of course most analysts do not think this was because of theology.”¹⁹⁹ Similarly, Jürgen Falter states “Protestants were on average twice as vulnerable to the NSDAP vote as Catholics,” leading him to claim that when one controls for confession, most other factors, including class, tend to disappear. But, like Allen, Falter does not look to religiosity as a

¹⁹⁵ Shelley Baranowski, “The Sanctity of Rural Life: Protestantism, Agrarian Politics and Nazism in Pomerania during the Weimar Republic,” *German History* 9 (1991): 1-22.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 2. See also Baranowski’s book, *The Sanctity of Rural Life: Nobility, Protestantism, and Nazism in Weimar Prussia* (Oxford, 1995), *passim*.

¹⁹⁷ The most recent scholar to point this out is Jürgen Falter, *Hitlers Wähler* (Munich, 1991). Others before him, however, came to similar conclusions: see Thomas Childers, *The Nazi Voter: The Social Foundations of Fascism in Germany, 1919-1933* (Chapel Hill, 1983); Richard Hamilton, *Who Voted for Hitler?* (Princeton, 1982).

¹⁹⁸ William Sheridan Allen, “Farewell to Class Analysis in the Rise of Nazism: Comment,” *Central European History* 17 (1984), 57.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

possible linchpin in the Nazi vote.²⁰⁰

The curious inability of researchers to make the link between Protestantism as a secular category and Protestantism as a religious category is best illustrated by Brustein. He rightly points out that “Proponents of the claim that German Protestants were more likely than German Catholics to become Nazis have largely failed to explain the reasons for the overwhelming attachment to the Nazi Party among the Protestant population.”²⁰¹ Far from suggesting that the problem could be solved by breaking through the confines of a materialist methodology, Brustein states: “The close correlation between the two groups — Nazi supporters and Protestants — may point to a convergence between the content of the Nazi Party program and the material interests of German Protestants.”²⁰² Trained to regard culture and ideology as epiphenomena of socio-economic forces, such scholars draw back from explanations for this remarkable congruence in anything but socio-economic terms. A contributing problem, already alluded to in Chapter One, is that historians have long assumed Protestant Germans were less religious than their Catholic counterparts. The political scientist Peter Merkl subscribes to this common (and unproven) truism when he claims: “[T]he acceptance of national socialism appears to have been a function of the decay of the Protestant faith in Germany. Nazism was a substitute religion for Protestants who had lost their faith.”²⁰³ In order effectively to counter Merkl’s claim, we need to demonstrate that Protestant religiosity, and not simply nominal confessional membership, was the best predictor of Nazi affiliation. Even though nearly none of the literature addresses this question head on, we can still discover a link between Protestant piety and a tendency to vote Nazi using the categories of class, region, geography and gender found in the secondary

²⁰⁰ Falter, *Wähler*, 177, 181.

²⁰¹ Brustein, *Logic*, 10.

²⁰² Ibid. Such a retrenching of materialist methodology is especially surprising given the amount of space Brustein devotes to debunking other scholars’ “methodological and empirical shortcomings” (ibid., 11).

²⁰³ Peter Merkl, *Political Violence under the Swastika: 581 Early Nazis* (Princeton, 1975), 94.

literature.

The question of the class profile of the NSDAP electoral base has always been a central one for researchers.²⁰⁴ While the more recent scholarship points to the essential cross-class nature of the party, this same research demonstrates that class differentiation still existed in its electorate. New emphasis has been placed on the sizable presence of workers in the Nazi movement. Among the blue collar working classes, which accounted for some 35 percent of the party membership and a comparable percentage of the electorate, handicraft and small-scale manufacturing sectors were over-represented. Generally, these workers were nonunionized, employed in small, often family-run workshops in small towns or semi-rural areas.²⁰⁵ Skilled workers were also over-represented in the party, compared with unskilled workers.²⁰⁶ The common denominator among these workers, as these researchers suggest, was their greater likelihood to reject marxian, working-class consciousness. By contrast, the most solidly anti-Nazi segments of the working-classes were urban, unionized, unskilled workers employed in large plants. As Vernon Lidtke has demonstrated for the *Kaiserreich*, it was exactly the latter type of worker, the one most immune to the Nazi appeal, who also tended to be the most

²⁰⁴ Aside from the works mentioned above, see Peter Baldwin, "Social Interpretations of Nazism: Renewing a Tradition," *Journal of Contemporary History* 25 (1990): 5-37; William Brustein and Jürgen Falter, "Who Joined the Nazi Party? Assessing Theories of the Social Origins of Nazism," *Zeitgeschichte* 22 (1995): 83-108; Thomas Childers (ed.), *The Formation of the Nazi Constituency 1919-1933* (London, 1986); Conan Fischer, "Workers, the Middle Classes, and the Rise of National Socialism," *German History* 9 (1991): 357-373; Detlef Mühlberger, *Hitler's Followers: Studies in the Sociology of the Nazi Movement* (London, 1991).

²⁰⁵ Brustein, *Logic*, 154; Childers, *Voter*, 110-11; Michael Kater, *The Nazi Party: A Social Profile of Members and Leaders, 1919-1945* (Cambridge MA, 1983), 36; Peter Manstein, *Die Mitglieder und Wähler der NSDAP 1919-1933* (Frankfurt a.M., 1989), 200-02; Peter Stachura, "The Nazis, the Bourgeoisie and the Workers during the Kampfzeit," in idem (ed.), *The Nazi Machtergreifung* (London, 1983), 26-27. Detlev Mühlberger has shown how, in urban areas, workers comprised a minority of party members, but in towns and rural areas they could account for large percentages (As cited in Fischer, "Workers," 359-60). Kater suggests that many of these rural workers commuted to work in urban areas (Kater, *Nazi Party*, 36). Falter believes that the workers accounted for 40% of the national electorate: Jürgen Falter, "Warum die deutschen Arbeiter während des 'Dritten Reiches' zu Hitler standen," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 13 (1987), 229.

²⁰⁶ Brustein and Falter, "Assessing," 99-102; Brustein, *Logic*, 124-25.

secularized.²⁰⁷ This trend continued into the Weimar period as well, as a full 75 percent of proletarian workers in Berlin formally left the church.²⁰⁸ By contrast, it was more often the “Tory/Christian” worker, employed or living in environments little exposed to marxist agitation, who turned to the Nazis.²⁰⁹

While theories of Nazism’s middle-class social base have been successfully challenged,²¹⁰ the fact remains that the middle classes were over-represented in the party.²¹¹ For the nation as a whole, the “old middle class” (*alter Mittelstand*) was over-represented, especially the small farmers, shopkeepers and independent artisans.²¹² Among the “new middle class,” civil servants (*Beamte*) and white-collar workers (*Angestellte*) were over-represented, though not to the same degree as the old *Mittelstand*.²¹³ Lucian Hölscher and Hugh McLeod demonstrate that in Germany it was these strata which (at least in the urban setting) were the most religious: “... the mainstay of most city parishes seems to have been the ‘little men’ (*die kleinen Leute*): self-employed craftsmen, minor officials, clerks.”²¹⁴ The artisans, who along with the rest of the

²⁰⁷ Lidtke, “Social Class,” 25-26, 35-36.

²⁰⁸ Günter Kehr, “Soziale Klassen und Religion in der Weimarer Republik,” in Hubert Cancik (ed.), *Religions- und Geistesgeschichte der Weimarer Republik* (Düsseldorf, 1982), 79-83. Both Lidtke and Kehr base their conclusions on statistics for leaving the church (*Kirchenaustritt*).

²⁰⁹ The term “Tory/Christian” comes from Fischer, “Workers,” 362.

²¹⁰ One of the earliest advocates of this now outdated view was Seymour Martin Lipset, *Political Man: The Social Bases of Politics* (New York, 1960).

²¹¹ See Brustein, *Logic*; Childers, *Voter*; Falter, *Wähler*; Hamilton, *Hitler*; Kater, *Nazi Party*: all passim.

²¹² See also Adelheid von Saldern, “The Old Mittelstand 1890-1939: How ‘Backward’ Were the Artisans?,” *Central European History* 25 (1992): 27-51.

²¹³ Brustein points out that civil servants were under-represented in the party membership due largely to government bans on civil servants’ participation in the party. Once that ban was lifted in mid-1932, civil servant membership in the NSDAP rose 250% between 1932 and 1933 (*Logic*, 179), thereby quickly becoming over-represented.

²¹⁴ Quoted in Hugh McLeod, *Religion and the People of Western Europe, 1789-1970* (Oxford, 1990), 101; Lucian Hölscher, “Die Religion des Bürgers: Bürgerliche Frömmigkeit und protestantische Kirche im 19. Jahrhundert,” *Historische Zeitschrift* 250 (1990), 609-11, 628-29.

Mittelstand made up the core of the Nazi electorate,²¹⁵ had long been valorized as “the true Christian trade.... [T]hrough religion and the church artisans defend their existence.”²¹⁶ While white collar workers were not over-represented in the party according to Childers,²¹⁷ most who did support Nazism came from explicitly Christian white-collar associations. The German National Association of Commercial Clerks (*Deutschnationaler Handlungsgehilfenverband*) was the first to “coordinate” itself into the Nazi party.²¹⁸ In addition to being the most nazistic of white collar associations, the DHV was also outspokenly Protestant: “The very small Catholic minority in the DHV could not prevent Protestant intellectuals close to the association from evoking Luther and promulgating a militant theology of nationalism.”²¹⁹

Geography-based analyses of the Nazi electorate also point to the significance of religion. Childers, Falter and Hamilton all make the case that the number of Nazi votes was inversely proportional to town size; that is, the percentage of Nazi votes was highest in the small communities of the Protestant regions, and lowest in the largest cities.²²⁰ As numerous studies have shown, Protestant religiosity ran in a continuum from highest in the rural areas to lowest in the largest urban centers.²²¹ As Heilbronner and Mühlberger put it, “the influence of the priest,

²¹⁵ Childers refers to them as the “nucleus” of the Nazi electorate (*Voter*, 264); Falter refers to them as “the group with the greatest NSDAP affinity” (*Wähler*, 251).

²¹⁶ Quoted in Lidtke, “Social Class,” 32. Similarly, the *Evangelische Arbeitervereine*, “outposts of Protestantism,” were populated not by workers, but by the “little men” — shopkeepers, craftsmen, teachers and civil servants (Ward, *Theology*, 73).

²¹⁷ Childers, *Voter*, 169-74, 240-43.

²¹⁸ Hans Speier, *German White-Collar Workers and the Rise of Hitler* (New Haven, 1986), 152.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 149. Childers similarly points out that, as a “Christian-national” association, the DHV were against class-consciousness, portraying white-collar workers as a *Stand* with “its own unique spiritual and economic role to play.... The membership of the DHV seemed particularly receptive to National Socialist ideas” (89).

²²⁰ Childers, *Voter*, 158-59, 224; Falter, *Wähler*, 163-68; Hamilton, *Hitler*, 37-41, 364-71. In some of the smallest communities, the Nazi vote reached 100% (Hamilton, *Hitler*, 38), especially near the end of Weimar, when they were increasingly able to rob the DNVP of its traditional rural vote. It should be noted that all other researchers agree with this conclusion.

²²¹ Lucian Hölscher, *Weltgericht oder Revolution: Protestantische und sozialistische Zukunftsvorstellungen im deutschen Kaiserreich* (Stuttgart, 1989), 148; Kehrer, “Soziale Klassen,” 83-86; Smith, *Nationalism*, 91-92.

social sanctions and personal interrelations were more crucial in determining voting behaviour in rural areas than in towns and cities.”²²² Pomerania, as a province with considerable pastoral influence in the countryside, saw the NSDAP earn 70 percent of the rural vote by 1932.²²³ In Schleswig-Holstein, a heavily agricultural region where the Nazis obtained a province-wide vote of 51 percent the same year, the role of Protestant ministers was particularly important.²²⁴ Where Nazis did succeed in urban areas, the *Mittelstand* was over-represented. So too, according to Hamilton, were the upper and upper middle classes.²²⁵ According to McLeod, this was another segment of the urban population which tended to be the least secularized.²²⁶

Local and regional analyses of the Nazi vote also point to religiosity. We know that the Nazi party’s share of a region’s vote was inversely proportional to the Catholic percentage of its population. Looking at the regional geography of the Nazi electorate, Nico Passchier has shown, through multiple regression analysis of “Nazi mobilization regions,” that the regions registering the highest percentage of Nazi votes were East Prussia, Pomerania, Brandenburg, Schleswig-Holstein, and Franconia — all overwhelmingly Protestant, all predominantly rural.²²⁷ Along with

²²² Oded Heilbronner and Detlef Mühlberger, “The Achilles’ Heel of German Catholicism: ‘Who Voted for Hitler?’ Revisited,” *European History Quarterly* 27 (1997), 232. While this observation is made regarding the Catholic countryside, it holds for both confessions.

²²³ Baranowski, *Sanctity*, passim; Johnpeter Grill, “Local and Regional Studies on National Socialism: A Review,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 21 (1986), 257. While it is not a central part of her study, Baranowski’s *Sanctity of Rural Life* points both to the higher rates of religiosity in the Pomeranian countryside than cities, and the far greater tendency for Pomeranian *Landvolk* to vote Nazi than urban dwellers.

²²⁴ Rudolf Rietzler, *Kampf in der Nordmark: Das Aufkommen des Nationalsozialismus in Schleswig-Holstein* (Neumünster, 1982); idem., “Von ‘politischen Neutralität’ zur ‘Braunen Synode’: Evangelische Kirche und Nationalsozialismus in Schleswig-Holstein (1930-33),” *Zeitschrift der Gesellschaft für Schleswig-Holsteinische Geschichte* 107 (1982): 138-153.

²²⁵ Hamilton, *Hitler*, 100, 181-82, and passim.

²²⁶ McLeod, *Religion*, 101.

²²⁷ Nico Passchier, “The Electoral Geography of the Nazi Landslide,” in Stein Larsen et al. (eds.), *Who Were the Fascists: Social Roots of European Fascism* (Bergen, 1980). Passchier defines “Nazi mobilization regions” as permutations using urban/rural, Protestant/Catholic and “political opportunity space” variables. See also Jeremy Noakes and Geoffrey Pridham (eds.), *Nazism 1919-1945: A Documentary Reader*, 3 vols. (Exeter, 1983-88), 1: 82.

urban-rural variables exist other markers of religiosity. “Diaspora” areas, Protestant enclaves within larger Catholic areas, tended to register higher rates of Protestant religiosity than confessionally homogeneous areas.²²⁸ Upper and Middle Franconia, Protestant enclaves in Bavaria known to be especially pious, saw massive support for the Nazi party even before the NSDAP’s electoral breakthrough in 1930.²²⁹ In July 1932, 39.9 percent of the Franconian vote went to the NSDAP, compared with 20.4 percent in mostly Catholic lower Bavaria. In the smaller communities the voting percentages ran much higher: Uffenheim 81, Rothenburg 83, Neustadt 79.2, Ansbach 76.3, Dinkelsbühl 71.2, Gunzenhausen 72.5.²³⁰

Confessionally mixed areas also tended to be more religious. Baden was one such case. Protestants were concentrated in the north of the state, and were known for their high religiosity.²³¹ In contrast to the Catholic south, which saw near total opposition to the Nazis, this part of the state saw a “clear ascendancy of the Nazi party.”²³² Confessionally mixed towns presented similar results. In Bonn, the Protestant *Mittelstand* made up the bulk of the party’s following, while the entire Catholic population for the most part stayed away.²³³ The Ruhr town of Kaiserswerth, which contained a large Catholic hospital and Catholic retirement home, as well as a Protestant hospital and Protestant female religious order (Diakonissen), provides a particularly revealing example. While the Catholic polling areas returned 7.6 percent of their vote for the NSDAP, the Protestant precinct that returned the highest Nazi vote (70.2 percent)

²²⁸ Thomas Nipperdey, *Religion im Umbruch: Deutschland 1870-1918* (Munich, 1988), 119-20.

²²⁹ Rainer Hambrecht, *Der Aufstieg der NSDAP in Mittel- und Oberfranken (1925-1933)* (Nuremberg, 1976), passim; Ian Kershaw, *Popular Opinion and Political Dissent in the Third Reich: Bavaria 1933-1945* (Oxford, 1983), 21-29.

²³⁰ Hamilton, *Hitler*, 39.

²³¹ Smith, *Nationalism*, 90.

²³² Ernst Bräunche, “Die NSDAP in Baden 1928-1933: Der Weg zur Macht,” in Thomas Schnabel (ed.), *Die Machtergreifung in Südwestdeutschland* (Stuttgart, 1982), 15-48; Johnpeter Grill, *The Nazi Party in Baden, 1920-1945* (Chapel Hill, 1983).

²³³ Victor Haag, *Politische Wahlen in Bonn, 1919-1933* (Bonn, 1989).

had its polling place directly in the institute, where the votes of the sisters and their patients were included.²³⁴ Protestant piety was also stronger in areas with histories of partible inheritance and small-plot farming, like Swabia and portions of Hesse. These areas, along with Franconia and northern Baden, “counted among the most pious areas of Protestant Germany.”²³⁵ They also exhibited strong tendencies to vote Nazi: in Hesse, where 51 percent of the population lived in communities of 5,000 or less, the NSDAP won over 40 percent of the vote in 1932.²³⁶ Even in Protestant regions not especially known for their religiosity, like Westphalia, smaller communities were known to stand out as exceptions. While the Protestant portion of Westphalia generally registered lower percentages of Nazi votes when compared with other Protestant regions,²³⁷ in some especially pious communities, the Nazis did extremely well.²³⁸

The literature on the voting behavior of women during the late Weimar period also points to religion as a possible determinant of the Nazi vote. According to Jill Stephenson, some major points concerning women’s voting behavior after 1918 are generally agreed upon. First, women voted far more strongly than men for clerical/conservatives parties, “with the accent on clerical.”²³⁹ Childers points out that Protestant women in Weimar Germany were more inclined than men to vote for parties emphasizing religious themes. In Protestant areas the DNVP and specifically evangelical interest groups, like the *Christlich-Sozialer Volksdienst*, benefited from

²³⁴ Hamilton, *Hitler*, 183.

²³⁵ Smith, *Nationalism*, 90.

²³⁶ For Swabia, see Wolfgang Domarus, *Nationalsozialismus: Krieg und Bevölkerung* (Munich, 1977) and Zdenek Zofka, *Die Ausbreitung des Nationalsozialismus auf dem Lande* (Munich, 1979). For Hesse, see Eike Hennig (ed.), *Hessen Unterm Hakenkreuz: Studien zur Durchsetzung der NSDAP in Hessen* (Frankfurt a.M., 1983) and Eberhard Schön, *Die Entstehung des Nationalsozialismus in Hessen* (Meisenheim, 1972).

²³⁷ Heilbronner and Mühlberger, “Catholicism,” 230.

²³⁸ See especially Heinz-Jürgen Trütken-Kirsch, “Die Landgemeinde Schale und der Nationalsozialismus: Von der Allianz zum partiellen Dissens,” *Jahrbuch für Westfälische Kirchengeschichte* 86 (1992): 347-361.

²³⁹ Jill Stephenson, “National Socialism and Women before 1933,” in Peter Stachura (ed.), *The Nazi Machtergreifung* (London, 1983), 35.

this.²⁴⁰ Secondly, after 1930, the percentage of women in the Nazi vote rose sharply. Childers argues that in 1932 especially, the party made enormous gains among Protestant women, to the extent that women outnumbered men in the Nazi constituency for the first time (at least in those areas where votes were tabulated by gender).²⁴¹ Falter is more qualified in his analysis, demonstrating that women outnumbered men in the 1932 Nazi constituency only in Protestant towns under 2000 — where religiosity was higher.²⁴²

Other indices point to female religiosity as a direct contributor to the Nazis' social base. According to Michael Phayer, the Protestant Women's Service, a church activist organization and offshoot of the Protestant Women's Auxiliary, estimated that between 80 and 90% of its members were also members of the Nazi party.²⁴³ As well, there was considerable overlap in the class composition of the Women's Auxiliary and the NSDAP: shopkeepers, handicrafts and civil servants were over-represented in urban areas, while both workers and members of the urban elite were also present.²⁴⁴ This leads Phayer to conclude that Protestant women did not vote for the Nazis out of class motives: "Protestant women [chose], rather, to view their attraction to national socialism in religious terms."²⁴⁵ Stephenson similarly points to the religiosity of women in the Nazi Women's Group (*NS-Frauenschaft*), stating "many Nazi women activists had a genuine personal religious conviction."²⁴⁶

²⁴⁰ Childers, *Voter*, 188-89.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 260.

²⁴² Falter, *Wähler*, 144. By contrast, female support for Nazism proved weakest in rural Catholic areas; that is, in areas of greater Catholic religiosity. In Protestant towns with more than 2000, male and female voting for the NSDAP was almost equal (*ibid.*).

²⁴³ Michael Phayer, *Protestant and Catholic Women in Nazi Germany* (Detroit, 1990), 43.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 44-45.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 46.

²⁴⁶ Jill Stephenson, *The Nazi Organisation of Women* (London, 1981), 35-36.

As Stephenson puts it, “while the Christian religion made some women proof against the Nazi appeal, particularly in Catholic strongholds, a desire to defend Christianity at all costs drove other women to support [the] party.”²⁴⁷ Phayer suggests that “those Protestants who were most active in the church and most devoted to their religion voted for Hitler.” On the other hand, “those Catholics who were least ultramontane and least consistent in the sacramental life of their church voted for him.”²⁴⁸ Protestant women saw the NSDAP’s aims dovetail with their own on issues such as the declining birth rate (a sign of “national decadence”), the question of abortion rights, as well as a host of “evils” which were associated with urban society: prostitution, divorce, pornography, feminism and experimental theater.²⁴⁹

Aside from these largely secular indices, there are also explicitly religious indicators that the pious Protestant tended toward Nazism. After the NSDAP’s electoral breakthrough in 1930, the *Christliche Welt* reported on the comment of a theology student who belonged to the SA that “almost all students of theology in his university were National Socialists.” Martin Rade reported that in north German universities that year, “about 90 percent of the Protestant theologians appear at lectures with the National Socialist party badge.”²⁵⁰ In schools as well as universities, explicitly Protestant Christian organizations went over to the Nazis. In 1931, the German Students’ Bible Circle reported that 70 percent of its members supported Nazism “with ardent sympathy.” One executive pastor in a Berlin church noted that Nazi influence on Protestant youth was “extremely strong” and welcomed it “from the religious point of view”:

²⁴⁷ Stephenson, “Women,” 44.

²⁴⁸ Phayer, *Women*, 75.

²⁴⁹ Baranowski, “Sanctity,” 12; Stephenson, “Women,” 38. Stephenson states that “the appeal to non-proletarians on the whole came more naturally because the NSDAP’s leaders ... shared the political, economic, social, and moral prejudices of the middle classes and also of the Christian churches” (38).

²⁵⁰ Quoted in Scholder, *Churches*, 1: 131.

“My best former and present confirmation candidates are all Nazis.”²⁵¹ Another organization, the Alliance for Christian Scholars, noted the appeal of Nazism for Protestant Christian youth: “The self-discipline of the young Nazis is nothing short of exemplary and automatically raises them above the others, involuntarily giving them a position of leadership. From the church’s point of view, therefore, I welcome this movement.”²⁵² When Hitler finally assumed power in January 1933, the *AELKZ* proclaimed that the occasion provided at least 80 percent of professed Protestants with “a clear solution.”²⁵³ Rates of entering and leaving the Protestant church also indicate a direct link between Protestant religiosity and the rise of the NSDAP. As Rita Thalmann demonstrates, in all of Germany approximately 200,000 people left the Protestant churches in 1932, while only 50,000 joined them. With some variation, these figures were fairly typical for the preceding seven years. In 1933, however, the rate of church-leaving (*Kirchenaustritt*) plummeted to a little over 50,000 while the number joining the churches skyrocketed to almost 325,000.²⁵⁴ The highest rates of *Kirchenaustritt* were obtained in the large industrial cities, where the Nazis experienced their lowest electoral returns. The number of church-joiners outweighed the number of church-leavers in all regions, including urban areas, in 1933.²⁵⁵

If a case can be made for a link between Protestant piety and a tendency to vote Nazi, how do we account for the presence of Catholics in the NSDAP electorate? Analyses of the Nazis’ Catholic electorate generally have only observed their under-representation. As with Protestants in the Nazi vote, no explicit work has been undertaken to determine a relationship —

²⁵¹ Ibid.

²⁵² Ibid.

²⁵³ *AELKZ*, 3/2/33.

²⁵⁴ Rita Thalmann, *Protestantisme et nationalisme en Allemagne de 1900 à 1945* (Paris, 1976), 37.

²⁵⁵ Ibid., 37-42. Separate statistics are given for Berlin, Hamburg, the Rhineland, Pomerania, Bavaria, Württemberg, Silesia, Schleswig-Holstein and Thuringia.

either negative or positive — between Catholic religious feeling and a tendency to support Nazism. For the most part, however, membership in the Catholic Church is regarded as a barrier to voting Nazi. More than anyone else, Oded Heilbronner has suggested that the Catholic portion of the Nazi electorate receive greater attention. His findings lead him to conclude that Catholics were more present in the party's electorate than is usually admitted by other scholars.²⁵⁶ However, in an attempt to explain why this minority of Catholics would have voted Nazi, he points out that they “had refrained from integrating into the Catholic milieu since the nineteenth century. It does seem ... that Catholics in those areas which had already voted for the nationalist, anti-clerical [and Protestant] National Liberal Party before 1914 ... continued with their particular political culture thereafter.”²⁵⁷ Heilbronner's conclusion actually complements the arguments made here; whereas Protestant religiosity was a positive indicator for voting Nazi, Catholic religiosity served to impede such an attraction.

It would certainly be erroneous to deny the significance of other, more secular, issues for the Nazi appeal to Protestant voters. Yet it is worth asking what links existed between members of a social group that saw itself threatened by the pluralist political and social forces of the republic, and the rise of a movement that promised to rid Germany of such forces. The near-total absorption of the Protestant electorate by the Nazi party in 1932 and 1933, leaving intact only the Center party's Catholic constituency and the marxist parties' disproportionately secular constituency,²⁵⁸ made the NSDAP into a kind of Protestant Center party. It was the first party to

²⁵⁶ Oded Heilbronner, “The Failure that Succeeded: Nazi Party Activity in a Catholic Region in Germany, 1929-1932,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 3 (1992): 531-549.

²⁵⁷ Heilbronner and Mühlberger, “Catholicism,” 238-39.

²⁵⁸ The *Handbuch für den Preußischen Landtag 1932*, reporting on confessional affiliations in the newly elected Landtag, pointed out that of 93 SPD deputies, 11 were Protestant, 2 Catholic, 1 Jewish, 16 “confessionless,” and 45 “religionless” (the remaining 18 did not indicate their religion; it is likely that a minority among this number were nominal or active Jews). Of 57 KPD deputies, 3 were confessionless and 54 religionless. By contrast, not one

achieve the longed for *Sammlung* (or “rallying together”) of Protestant Germans, providing Protestant voters with an ideological *Volkspartei* of the right and displacing those minor Protestant parties of Weimar conceived along class or economic lines.

Conclusion

Even though historians continue to debate whether the separate components of the Nazi *Weltanschauung* were original, most continue to assume that it was a bricolage, a unique mixture not present in previous movements or ideologies. As Richard Evans has written: “No sensible historian has argued that the total package of Nazism was present in earlier social or economic movements or ideologies.”²⁵⁹ The evidence presented so far in this study confirms this view. We have already seen how paganists and positive Christians parted company over the place of Christianity in the movement. However, for the party’s positive Christians, the basic components of their ideological package could be found in one form or another within most varieties of Protestantism. In most respects, the Nazis’ positive Christianity matched the secular views of Stöckerite Lutheranism, including antisemitism, antimarxism, antiliberalism, and antiultramontanism; a valorization of the “little man”; and the utopia of a harmonious *Volksgemeinschaft*. At the same time, the ecclesiastical views of positive Christianity bore a close resemblance to those of liberal Protestantism — rejection of the Christian state, the confessional school, and the Old Testament. Even the paganists’ emphasis on an individualist faith, emphasizing a direct connection with God free of the temporal interference of the clergy, found some resonance in the doctrinal stance of liberal Protestantism. By no means did

NSDAP deputy was listed as either confessionless, religionless or not responding: “Das Religionsbekenntnis im Landtag,” *Das Evangelische Berlin*, 24/7/32 (in Evangelisches Zentralarchiv in Berlin [hereafter EZA] 14/589).

²⁵⁹ Richard Evans, *Rereading German History: From Unification to Reunification, 1800-1996* (London, 1997), 130.

adherence to any one of these tenets make one a Nazi. What was striking rather was the amount of common ideological and doctrinal ground, the set of shared signifiers, between certain varieties of political Protestantism and the Nazis' positive Christianity.

The Prussian church administration proclaimed on Easter Day, 1933: "This year the Easter message of the risen Christ goes forth in Germany to a people to whom God has spoken by means of a great turning point in history. We know that we are at one with all Protestant fellow believers in joy at the awakening of the deepest powers of our nation to a patriotic consciousness, to a true community of the *Volk*, and to a religious renewal. ... [T]he church knows itself bound in gratitude to the leadership of the new Germany. It is joyfully prepared to cooperate in the national and moral renewal of our people."²⁶⁰ The presence of Protestants who opposed Nazi ideology demonstrates that supporting the movement was not a matter of fate for German Protestantism. There were certain varieties of Protestant who joined the majority of Germans who did not support the movement. Nazism was therefore not the only possible outcome of a politicized Protestantism during Weimar. To say this nevertheless brings into sharper focus the volition of the majority of religious Protestants that did support Nazism. As Nazis and Protestants often insisted, Nazi views on politics, society, church and school were rooted neither in a hostility to Christianity nor in a contemporary heresy. As we shall see in the following chapters, the continued (and contingent) existence of this perception remained largely intact in the years after the Nazi seizure of power.

²⁶⁰ Quoted in Scholder, *Churches*, 1: 236.

5 “National Elevation”: Religion in the New Germany

When I hear that a ‘Germanic wedding’ is to be celebrated, I have to ask: my God, what do you understand to be a Germanic wedding? What do you understand to be National Socialism? — Hermann Göring¹

Chapter Two argued that many Nazi leaders took a positive stance towards Christianity, even as some of them attacked the churches. It also explored how and why anticlerical attacks were leveled not against both churches equally, but in nearly all cases against the Catholic Church. These positive Christians adhered to a supraconfessional faith that overlooked doctrinal and theological “hair-splitting.” In Chapter Three, we explored the views of those Nazis who attacked Christianity, as well as the battles that took place between them and positive Christians. We also discovered a significant degree of ambiguity and ambivalence in these paganists’ views. Both Ludendorff and Rosenberg betrayed a clear preference for Protestantism over Catholicism, even as they openly declared Christianity *in toto* to be an enemy. We now turn our attention to the period after the seizure of power, to assess what kinds of changes took place in the religious views of the party leadership. Where are continuities more easily discerned? Did Nazis become more anti-Christian as they increased their hold on power? Did the paganists of the movement rise to hegemonic dominance in the party? Did the “regime” phase of Nazism betray an anti-Christian agenda hidden from view during the “movement” phase?

As we shall see, lines of continuity between the *Kampfzeit* and the first years of the Third Reich were considerable. But new voices are heard as well: most importantly Hermann Göring’s and Wilhelm Frick’s among the positive Christians, and Heinrich Himmler’s and Reinhard Heydrich’s among the anti-Christians. The intersections of religious and secular identities remained as complex as before. Public statements are relied upon more heavily in this chapter,

partly because there are fewer sources for Hitler's private views for this period, and partly because the Nazis, now occupied with practical matters of state, had less time to engage each other in ideological debate. Nonetheless, even on public occasions, the positive Christians made no attempt to mute their mingling of nationalist-*völkisch* and Christian metaphors for the sake of clerical support. Nor did they pretend that the churches would be equal partners of the new state. They left no doubt in their public declarations that the state and the *Volk* held absolute priority over any one church or confession. At the same time, these leaders of the party continued to maintain that their practical policies were the fruit born of Point 24 of the Party Program. On the other side, some paganists rose to prominence. These Nazis were strikingly honest about their dislike of the Christian religion. Even though the public discourse of the Nazis after 1933 is usually regarded as nothing if not opportunistic, "paganist" Nazis refused to pose as Christians for propaganda purposes. They refused to make pious allusions to the Bible for the sake of public consumption, and were quite open about their own religious agendas. But their ambitions to project their religious platform on the party were rebuffed. Even while Heinrich Himmler gained vast power in the Nazi state, this was in spite of his religious views, not because of them. Within the party, positive Christians showed no sign of losing power to the paganists on the issue of religious affiliation. Both retained their adherents and relative strengths, even as the paganists made persistent efforts to gain hegemony.

Positive Christians in the Party Leadership

On 1 February 1933, two days after the seizure of power, Hitler addressed the German nation as Reich Chancellor for the first time. His first words were: "We are determined, as leaders of the nation, to fulfill as a national government the task which has been given to us, swearing fidelity

¹ *Positives Christentum*, 3/11/35.

only to God, our conscience, and our *Volk*.” Later in the speech, Hitler proclaimed: “Thus the national government will regard its first and foremost duty to restore the unity of spirit and purpose of our *Volk*. It will preserve and defend the foundations upon which the power of our nation rests. It will take Christianity, as the basis of our collective morality, and the family as the nucleus of our *Volk* and state, under its firm protection.” After outlining the agenda of the new government — the defeat of communism, compulsory labor service, return to the land and an aggressive new foreign policy — the speech ended once more on a pious note: “May God Almighty take our work into his grace, give true form to our will, bless our insight, and endow us with the trust of our *Volk*. For we want to fight not for ourselves, but for Germany!”²

Shortly after the Reichstag fire and on the night before the crucial Reichstag elections of 5 March, Hitler spoke in Königsberg. He proclaimed: “Lord God, may we never hesitate or become cowardly, may we never forget the duty we have assumed.... We are all proud that through God’s gracious help we have again become true Germans.”³ The strong Christian tone of Hitler in public becomes even more significant when it is remembered that these were not speeches on church-state relations, meant for an audience of clergymen, but rather on the very future of the Nazi state. On 23 March, the day the Enabling Law was passed, Hitler addressed the new Reichstag for the first time, and again employed a Christian language:

The government, determined to carry out the political and moral purification [*Entgiftung*] of our public life, creates and secures the prerequisites for a truly deep, inner religiosity The national government sees in the two Christian confessions the most important factors for the preservation of our nationality. It will respect the treaties concluded between them and the states; their rights shall not be violated. But the government expects and hopes that the work on the national and moral elevation of our *Volk* which it has made its task will, on the other hand, be equally respected The struggle against a materialistic conception of the world and for the production of a true Peoples’

² Max Domarus (ed.), *Hitler: Reden und Proklamationen 1932-1945*, 2 vols. (Würzburg, 1962-64), 1: 191-94.

³ *VB*, 6/3/33.

Community serves both the interests of the German nation and our Christian faith.⁴

This speech certainly had its political uses, for instance helping to secure the Center party's endorsement of the Enabling Law.⁵ Indeed, most church historians have noted the frequency of Hitler's religious intonations in the year of the seizure of power with great skepticism.⁶ The "Potsdam Day" of 21 March, when the new Reichstag was opened with a state ceremony in the Protestant Garrison Church, replete with numerous religious services, is regarded by Klaus Scholder as a "masterpiece of propaganda."⁷ While the famous image of Hitler obsequiously shaking Hindenburg's hand at the end of the ceremony is an obvious deceit,⁸ there is no empirical evidence that Hitler's religious expressions were likewise deceptive. Even while Scholder takes a cynical view of "Potsdam Day," he concedes: "It is too simple to see all this as no more than a National Socialist propaganda show.... Rather, there was beyond doubt a real religious dimension in Hitler."⁹

In a speech celebrating Germany's exit from the League of Nations, Hitler again touched

⁴ *Dokumente zur Kirchenpolitik des Dritten Reiches*, 3 vols., edited by Carsten Nicolaisen (Munich, 1971-94), 1: 23-24.

⁵ See, for example, Rudolf Morsey, *Die Protokolle der Reichstagsfraktion und des Fraktionsvorstandes der deutschen Zentrumsparlei 1926-1933* (Mainz, 1970), 627 ff. Klaus Scholder contends that the Center voted for the Enabling Law, and its own extinction, in return for Nazi assurances of a Concordat with the Vatican: *The Churches and the Third Reich*, 2 vols. (London, 1987-88), 1: 244-48.

⁶ See, inter alia, Conway, *The Nazi Persecution of the Churches* (London, 1968), 20; Denzler and Fabricius, *Christen und Nationalsozialisten*, 59-60. Günter Brakelmann notes that Hitler made more references to Christianity in his public speeches than other chancellor since 1918: see his "Nationalprotestantismus und Nationalsozialismus," in Christian Jansen et al. (eds.), *Von der Aufgabe der Freiheit: Politische Verantwortung und bürgerliche Gesellschaft im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Berlin, 1995), 338.

⁷ Scholder, *Churches*, 1: 225. Scholder also refers to the occasion as the "Fraud of Potsdam."

⁸ Not all historians are in agreement on the meaning of Hitler's social etiquette. Reciting Berlin socialite Bella Fromm's description of Hitler's first social appearance after his appointment, Jeremy Noakes argues that Hitler "displayed an Austrian petty-bourgeois awe of the nobility": "Hitler's eagerness to obtain the good graces of the princes present was subject to much comment. He bowed and clicked and all but knelt in his zeal to please ... he dashed personally to bring the princesses refreshments from the buffet. He almost slid off the edge of his chair after they had offered him a seat in their most gracious company": Quoted in Jeremy Noakes, "Nazism and High Society," in Michael Burleigh (ed.), *Confronting the Nazi Past: New Debates on Modern German History* (New York, 1996), 60-61.

⁹ Scholder, *Churches*, 1: 226-27.

on Christianity:

[A]long with the fight for a purer morality we have taken upon ourselves the struggle against the decomposition of our religion. ... We have therefore taken up the struggle against the Godless movement, and not just with a few theoretical declarations; we have stamped it out. And above all we have dragged the priests out of the lowlands of the political party struggle and have brought them back into the church. It is our will that they never return to an area which is not made for them, and which will inevitably bring them into opposition to millions of people, who in their hearts [*im Innern*] want to be faithful, but who want to see priests who serve God and not a political party.¹⁰

This declaration was quite consistent with Hitler's speeches earlier in the year, and also with the basic attitude he laid out — privately as well as publicly — in the “time of struggle.” As in *Mein Kampf*, Hitler chose to remain “above churches.” Insisting that Nazism as a *state* would not distinguish between Protestant and Catholic, he recognized only a common supra-Christian faith. True to his promise, Hitler defended Christianity against the “Godless” movement, outlawing the Socialist and Communist parties very early after the seizure of power. At the same time, he quite openly attacked the “meddling” of priests in parliamentary politics. However, this attack was not aimed at both confessions equally: the political engagement of Catholic priests via the Center party was being attacked here,¹¹ not the political engagement of Protestant pastors, who, after the seizure of power as before it, frequently could be counted among the members of the NSDAP.

In the *Kampfzeit*, Hitler had insisted that the Nazi fight against the Jew accorded with Christian practice. He continued this theme after the seizure of power as well. In a reception for the Catholic Bishop Berning on 26 April, Hitler freely conceded that: “I have been attacked because of my handling of the Jewish question.” But he immediately tied his attitude towards the Jews with the church's historical position: “The Catholic Church considered the Jews

¹⁰ *Dokumente zur Kirchenpolitik*, 1: 166.

¹¹ The reference was to article 32 of the Concordat with the Vatican, which specifically prohibited Catholic clergymen from engaging in political activity (*ibid.*, 166, 198).

pestilent for fifteen hundred years [sic], put them in ghettos, etc, because it recognized the Jews for what they were. In the epoch of liberalism the danger was no longer recognized. I am moving back toward the time in which a fifteen-hundred-year-long tradition was implemented. I do not set race over religion, but I recognize the representatives of this race as pestilent for the state and for the church and perhaps I am thereby doing Christianity a great service by pushing them out of schools and public functions.”¹² Certainly the strategic usefulness of such a statement — to disarm possible criticism of Nazi antisemitism from Catholic quarters — cannot be overlooked. However, there is again no direct evidence that Hitler did not believe what he said on this occasion.

The following years showed no change in Hitler’s insistence that Nazism stood on the foundation of positive Christianity. In a speech at the Ehrenbreitstein fortress in Koblenz on 26 August 1934, Hitler directly addressed the growing tensions between the party and sections of the clerical establishment:

I know that here and there the objection has been raised: you have deserted Christianity. No, not we, but those who came before us.... There has been no interference, nor will there be any, with the teachings or religious freedom of the confessions. To the contrary, the state protects religion, though always under the condition that that it will not be used as a disguise for political purposes. ... I know that there are thousands of priests who are not merely reconciled with the present state, but who gladly cooperate with it. And I am of the opinion that this cooperation will grow ever closer and more intimate. Where can our interests be more convergent than in our struggle against the symptoms of degeneracy in the contemporary world, in our struggle against cultural bolshevism, against the Godless movement, against criminality, and for a social conception of community, for the conquest of class war and class hatred, or civil war and unrest, strife and discord. These are not anti-Christian, but rather Christian principles!¹³

Here Hitler affirmed the view he put forward before the seizure of power that “*We are the first to exhume these teachings! Through us alone, and not until now, do these teachings celebrate their*

¹² Quoted in Saul Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews: The Years of Persecution, 1933-1939* (New York, 1997), 47.

¹³ *VB*, 28/8/34.

resurrection! ... [W]e intend to raise the treasures of the living Christ!”¹⁴

Many of these themes were echoed by others in the Nazi leadership, notably Hermann Göring. As the “second man in the Third Reich,” Göring ranked among the most powerful Nazis up to the Second World War. Göring played a very minor role in expounding Nazi ideology before 1933. But there are significant, if fleeting, indicators that he considered himself to be, among other things, a religious Protestant. When defending the Nazi party’s refusal to commit to paganism in a letter to the Tannenberg League, Gregor Strasser pointed out that many members of the party’s leadership were known Protestants; along with the outspokenly Protestant Walter Buch and Wilhelm Frick, Strasser named Göring.¹⁵ And in 1930, when the Protestant League was considering political cooperation with the Nazis, Wilhelm Fahrenhorst, the head of the League, wrote to Göring to determine the NSDAP’s ideological relationship to Protestantism.¹⁶

In a speech he gave on 12 November 1933, Göring picked up on the themes Hitler had sounded earlier that year, but with greater stridency: “In our ten year struggle we have changed the people, that they would no longer be republicans or monarchists, Catholics or Protestants, but Germans. ... He who would violate this unity of the *Volk*, betrays the entire nation! Neither the red rats nor the black moles shall ever rule over Germany.”¹⁷ The reference to the Catholic clergy as “black moles” corresponds with Hitler’s reference to “political priests,” but again the Protestant clergy are left unmaligned. Nor does Göring’s reference to “German” replacing

¹⁴ Henry Ashby Turner (ed.), *Hitler: Memoirs of a Confidant* (New Haven, 1985), 139–40 (emphasis in the original).

¹⁵ BAZ NS 22/1069 (28 November 1930: Munich).

¹⁶ BAZ NS 12/638 (20 December 1930: Berlin). Göring was at this point not yet the “number two man” in the Nazi movement. Göring suggested that Fahrenhorst contact Schemm, describing him as the party’s spokesman on religious questions.

¹⁷ *Kreuzzeitung*, 12/11/33 (in BAP 62 Di 1/106/105).

“Catholic” and “Protestant” suggest a fundamental antagonism to Christianity. In a 1935 speech, Göring upheld positive Christianity: “We have told the churches that we stand for positive Christianity. Through the zeal of our faith, the strength of our faith, we have once again shown what faith means, we have once again taken the *Volk*, which believed in nothing, back to faith.”¹⁸ In the same speech, he attacked the party’s paganists with unmistakable derision:

Believe me, party comrades: naturally there are always people at work who represent a type of provocateur, who have come to us because they imagine National Socialism to be something other than it is, who have all kinds of fantastic and confused plans, who misunderstand National Socialist racial thought and overstate their declaration to blood and soil [*Blut und Boden*], and who in their romantic dreams are surrounded by Wotan and Thor and the like. Such exaggerations can harm our movement, since they make the movement look ridiculous, and ridiculousness [*Lächerlichkeit*] is always something most harmful. When I hear that a ‘Germanic wedding’ is to be celebrated, I have to ask: my God, what do you understand to be a Germanic wedding? What do you understand to be National Socialism?¹⁹

That year Göring demonstrated his disdain for paganist weddings by marrying his second wife, Emmy, in a Lutheran service officiated by Reich Bishop Müller. (He would also give his daughter Edda a Lutheran baptism, much to the chagrin of paganists and those who had left the church.²⁰) Göring had delivered almost the same speech in Breslau a week before, at a party leadership meeting, but made it even more clear that this attack on paganism was also an attack on Rosenberg: “When it is maintained today that we spread an anti-Christian ideology, with reference made to certain writings, then I must reply: No! We National Socialists know only one fundamental work and it is called: Adolf Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*! Nothing else is official.”²¹ Some

¹⁸ *Positives Christentum*, 3/11/35 (in BAP 62 Di 1/106/113).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Many letters of complaint were written by low-ranking paganistic Nazis, expressing varied levels of dismay, all of them addressed to Rosenberg. See Leon Poliakov and Josef Wulf (eds.), *Das Dritte Reich und seine Denker* (Munich, 1978), 211-217.

²¹ *Völkischer Beobachter*, 28/10/35 (in BAP 62 Di 1/106/125). See also “Aus der Breslauer Rede des Ministerpräsidenten Göring am 26. Oktober 1935,” BAP R5101/20.

years later, Göring complained that if Rosenberg had had his way, there would be “only cult, *Thing*, myth, and that sort of swindle.”²²

In a June 1934 speech, in which he explained the expulsion of Catholic civil servants from the government, Göring affirmed the Christian connection, signaling an adherence to the theology of the orders of creation (*Schöpfungsglaube*): “When the churches assert that first come they, and then the *Volk*, then we must say that God did not create the German person as Catholic or Protestant: He gave him his soul in a German body with German blood The National Socialist state does not ask whether the civil servant is Catholic. No one has had their post taken away because they confessed the Catholic faith — but there was a time when Catholic officials were members of the Center party.”²³ In other words, only “political Catholics” were expelled. There was no comparable concern expressed for Protestant officials. This was due in part to the fact that the Nazis could not yet dispense “with at least partial agreement with traditional conservative values and their spokesmen” entrenched in the civil service, army and other sections of the established ruling classes.²⁴ But arguably it was also due to an affinity for Protestantism. In a meeting of the Prussian state council the same month, Göring addressed the conflict taking place in Protestantism between the German Christians and the Confessing Church. He hoped that they could overcome their disagreements, otherwise “the leading role of the Protestant church would be denied to Germany — which up until now has counted as the leading Protestant country, from which the ideas and beliefs of Luther flowed over the world.”²⁵

Wilhelm Frick, Reich Minister of the Interior, echoed all these themes. At a party

²² Elke Fröhlich (ed.), *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels: Sämtliche Fragmente* (Munich, 1987), entry for 13/4/37. *Thing* refers to the “Thing” places, sites set up by Nordic pagans for their religious ceremonies.

²³ *Kölnische Volkszeitung*, 29/6/34 (in BStA PAS 929).

²⁴ Martin Broszat, *The Hitler State: The Foundation and Development of the Internal Structure of the Third Reich* (London, 1981), 233.

²⁵ *Dokumente zur Kirchenpolitik*, 2: 140.

convention in Thuringia in 1935, where he had been the first Nazi to achieve governmental power as State Interior and Culture Minister, Frick affirmed that “the party stands for positive Christianity. The National Socialist state is absolutely ready to work with the Christian churches, but the solidarity of the churches to the *Volk* must be a matter of course; that means that the churches must feel bound to the *Volk* and may never come into opposition to the National Socialist leadership of the state.”²⁶ This was essentially a call for the churches to remain “above politics,” a stance which the conservative state had fostered, albeit with less totalizing language, in the *Kaiserreich*. In accord with the “above churches” aspect of positive Christianity, Frick, like Göring, lamented the existence of “confessional” public servants. In a speech to the Gau leadership of Münster in 1935 he proclaimed: “We National Socialists demand a full deconfessionalization of all public life.” But as Frick immediately made clear, confessional principally meant Catholic: “Does it still make sense to have a Catholic civil servant association? We want only German civil servants. Or does it make any sense to have a Catholic press? We do not want a Catholic press, but only a German press.”²⁷ This went even further than Göring’s speech, since it was not just members of the Center party who came in for attack. But whereas “confessionalism” could not be tolerated when it was Catholic, it was quite a different matter when the confession was Protestant. In his Thuringia speech, Frick made this clear: “I can state with pleasure that exactly in the state of Thuringia the Protestant state church has acknowledged this *Volk* solidarity.”²⁸ Frick’s friendlier view of Protestantism over Catholicism was in keeping with someone who was a member of the Protestant church, and who as Reich Interior Minister looked after the affairs of the Protestant church until the creation of the

²⁶ *DAZ*, 2/6/35.

²⁷ *VB*, 8/7/35.

²⁸ *Dokumente zur Kirchenpolitik*, 2: 310.

Reich Church Ministry in 1935.²⁹

Others in the Nazi state professed a close proximity between Nazi ideology and certain Christian teachings after the seizure of power. One was the newly appointed Prussian Minister of Education and Culture (*Kultus*), Gauleiter Bernhard Rust. Like his Bavarian counterpart Hans Schemm — who lost to Rust in his bid for the post of Reich Education Minister created the next year³⁰ — Rust emerged as a proponent of Christianity in the Nazi leadership. The *Völkischer Beobachter* announced Rust's appointment under the headline "Our Confession of Christianity: Education Minister Rust on his Task." Taking up the non-confessional theme of positive Christianity, Rust declared: "In the 150-year Wars of Religion we were, as a Reich and *Volk*, almost destroyed. Today we stand in a bitter struggle for existence against Bolshevism. I appeal to the Christian churches of both confessions to join with us against this enemy in defense of their living values of belief and morality." Rust emphasized the common ideological struggle against Marxism: "The materialistic-bolshevistic influence on the soul of our people must cease. It is my desire to negate its effect on the German people." As did Hitler, Rust ended the speech on a religious note: "Trusting in God and believing in our *Volk*, we take up our task!"³¹ Rust reiterated these themes in another speech on 23 February:

We must overcome the materialistic worldview which is the foundation of the political organization of Marxism. Additionally, all powers must be summoned which in their spiritual attitude stand opposed to Marxism, who consider the overcoming of the Marxist spirit as a question of religious existence. I intend very soon to fulfill my promise and to

²⁹ Scholder, *Churches*, 1: 308.

³⁰ Hitler's confidant Otto Wagener believed Schemm was easily the more qualified candidate. According to him, the Reich Education portfolio was originally intended for Schemm: "But instead of Schemm came Rust, who was indeed a man of education, but *only* that: he had no geniality, no instinct, no creative talent." Wagener suggested that Rust was appointed to appease the "reactionary" members of Hitler's coalition, but in fact Rust was a long-standing Nazi who never left his office, as conservative ministers did, with the progress of *Gleichschaltung*. IfZ ED 60/7 (n.d., n.p.) (emphasis in the original). The book made from Wagener's recollections, Turner (ed.) *Memoirs*, leaves out this passage.

³¹ *VB*, 9/2/33. The *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* published an article on Rust's appointment with the title "Christlichnationaler Wahlblock" (*DAZ*, 7/2/33, in BAP R5101/23138/6).

summon the Christian churches of both confessions, through a program submitted to them, to cooperation against the Godless movement.³²

Rust backed up his claim two days later, ordering teachers who had left their church to return to religious schools of their original confession.³³ He ordered as well that religious instruction be introduced to trade schools and that the number of secular schools be reduced, “in order to prevent the return of paganism.”³⁴

On the subject of paganism Rust’s tone became distinctly negative. In a speech of July 1934, he stated: “We have not fought to build a paganistic temple, but to unite the German *Volk* for all eternity. We do not build temples against the Christian church, we do not want Valhalla as a substitute for a Christian heaven.”³⁵ Through his later fights with Rosenberg, Rust would prove that he indeed had little sympathy for paganism. He even found the variety of Christianity propagated by Arthur Dinter, Nazism’s erstwhile “second Luther,” unacceptable. In December 1935 Rust ordered that no members of Dinter’s *Deutsche Volkskirche* sect would be allowed to sit on school boards. He prohibited them and others of the “same line” from engaging in Protestant religious instruction.³⁶

Hans Schemm, Reich leader of the National Socialist Teachers’ League (NSLB) and newly appointed Bavarian *Kultusminister*, showed no lessening of the Christian commitment he displayed before the Nazis took power. On 28 March 1933, twelve days after taking office, Schemm laid out the official policy of his ministry:

1) Our schools, like our state, stand on national and Christian foundations. ... 3) Teachers

³² *VB*, 24/2/33.

³³ *Dokumente zur Kirchenpolitik*, 1: 5.

³⁴ *Nationalsozialistische Erziehung*, 15/4/33 (in BAZ NS 12/8).

³⁵ *Das Evangelische Deutschland*, 1/7/34 (in BAP 62 Di 1/106/263).

³⁶ *Germania*, 8/12/35 (in BAP 62 Di 1/71/91).

who affect their freethinking and marxist principles in the school can no longer carry out their teaching in Bavarian schools. 4) It is henceforth the goal of the Education Ministry that every child in Bavarian schools shall be made familiar with the principles of the Christian and national state. ... 5) The state will with all means at its disposal establish the foundations of the life of our state in its children: defense, honor, love of fatherland, faith in God, love of father and mother.... 8) All intellectual activity is to be kept from religious instruction. Religious instruction is nothing other than service to the soul of children. Faith in God and the personality of the teacher must be expressed in a realistic instruction filled with religious sincerity.³⁷

Like Rust, Schemm believed the enemies of Nazism and Christianity were identical: "In accord with our calling, 'Our religion is called Christ, our politics Germany,' both confessions must join hands in Christian faith for common cultural work in service for the totality, for God and *Volk*, and in battle against Marxism and Bolshevism, which destroy God and *Volk*."³⁸ Like Rust, Schemm backed up these words with actions: on 26 April he formally restored obligatory religious instruction and student participation in church festivities.³⁹ In June Schemm again acted according to these convictions, ordering that sporting activities were not to be held on Sunday mornings, in order to accommodate church services. Leaders of all youth groups were to make necessary arrangements for students under their supervision.⁴⁰ The Nazi *Kultusminister* of Baden, in a confidential letter to Frick, fully endorsed Schemm's enforcement of compulsory religious instruction.⁴¹

In a speech the following year, Schemm stressed that Nazism did not care about the individual's confession: "It does not matter whether one prays as a Catholic or a Protestant, since

³⁷ *Dokumente zur Kirchenpolitik*, 1: 28-29.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 1: 29. Schemm reiterated these points in a document written in late June 1933, when the NSDAP no longer needed to court the political favor of the Reichstag's Christian parties: "Die wichterigen Massnahmen des Bayer. Staatsministeriums für Unterricht und Kultus seit der nationalen Erhebung. Gegenwärtige Aufgaben und Probleme," BAZ NS 12/8 (27 June 1933: Bayreuth).

³⁹ EZA 50/420/8 (7 June 1933: Karlsruhe).

⁴⁰ *Dokumente zur Kirchenpolitik*, 1: 54.

⁴¹ EZA 50/420/8 (7 June 1933: Karlsruhe).

the lord God is neither Catholic nor Protestant, but simply the father of us all. We wage a sharp struggle against all those who want to lead people in this direction.” Here Schemm de-emphasized confessionalism in the same way that Rust and other Nazi leaders frequently did. But like these other leaders, Schemm also attacked political Catholicism: “The Center and Bavarian People’s parties have worked together with the atheists. As I have often said, the Center was the most atheistic party that ever walked the earth.”⁴² Like Göring and Frick, Schemm could not hide his disdain for political Catholicism, even while he maintained an impartial posture towards both confessions.

Schemm never publicly declared that Protestantism was to be favored by the Nazis. But a telling episode revealed that behind the stated confessional neutrality of Schemm’s positive Christianity stood an agenda designed to protect Protestant interests. In February 1935 the Reich governor of Bavaria, Franz Ritter von Epp, received an anonymous letter of complaint about anti-Christian actions being taken in the schools. That year, Schemm ordered that the new school year would begin on 24 April, which was also Ash Wednesday. The first Sunday of the school year would therefore fall on the Pentecost (Whitsun). The author asked: “How are the final preparations for the first communicants possible, when the children are kept in school the entire day? ... Such an order ... arouses deep indignation in the entire Catholic population.” The author suggested that this made a mockery of the party’s positive Christian platform: “[Schemm states] ‘We stand on the foundation of Christianity’, but it does not occur to him to respect Catholic celebrations, as he simply eliminates our beautiful holidays without consulting pope or bishops, while Catholics, on the other hand, have to keep the *Buß- und Bettag*. Which Catholic celebrations must the Protestants keep?”⁴³ Citing disturbing trends in government practice, the

⁴² *Saarbrücker Landeszeitung*, 31/7/34 (in BAZ NS 12/14).

⁴³ The “Buß- und Bettag” is a Protestant day of repentance and prayer held in November, and is considered the functional equivalent of the Catholic All Saints Day. As a religious holiday unique to Germany, it has no English translation.

complainant did not look to atheism or paganism to explain this anti-Catholic behavior:

Herr Schemm cannot deny his *Kulturkampf* past in Bayreuth. It is not enough that only Protestants obtain leading posts in the *Kultus* department, apparently on principle — now Protestants have been appointed as principals in the old and new grammar schools [*Gymnasien*] in Würzburg, even though at both institutions there are almost no Protestant students, so that in Würzburg all the higher institutions of learning are headed by Protestants. Are we Catholics second class citizens, allowed only to pay taxes and contribute to collections? It is not known whether perhaps in Protestant towns Catholics are appointed to leading posts.⁴⁴

Schemm proved that those who had displayed a positive attitude to Christianity before the seizure of power continued to do so afterwards. Another such example was Walter Buch, the party's supreme judge. In a 1935 article on the German family, one of his favorite themes from the *Kampfzeit*, Buch revealed that his Lutheran piety had not diminished: "Never more than in the last ten years has the truth behind Luther's words been more evident: 'The family is the source of everyone's blessing and misfortune.'" As with Schemm, Buch tied Christianity to the question of antisemitism, suggesting, as did his friends in the *Bund für deutsche Kirche*, that Jesus had been an Aryan: "The heresies and enticements of the French Revolution allowed the pious German to totally forget that the guest in his house comes from the *Volk* who nailed the Savior to the cross. ... In the nineteenth century the lie of the rabbis' sons, that the Holy Scripture made the Savior into a Jew, finally bore fruit. That his entire character and learning betrayed Germanic blood, however, had been made a certainty by the poet of the savior, Meister Ekkehart.... When Luther turned his attention to the Jews, after he completed his translation of the Bible, he left behind 'On the Jews and their Lies' for posterity."⁴⁵ Buch, like Schemm,

⁴⁴ BStA Epp/644/5 (12 February 1935: Würzburg).

⁴⁵ "Niedergang und Aufstieg der deutschen Familie," *Der Schlesische Erzieher*, 18-25 May 1935 (in BAZ Personalakt Buch). "On the Jews and their Lies" is one of the most notorious antisemitic tracts ever written, especially for someone of Luther's esteem. The rising tide of violence in the work finds its climax in the following passages: "If I had power over the Jews, as our princes and cities have, I would deal severely with their lying mouths. ... For a usurer is an arch-thief and a robber who should rightly be hanged on the gallows seven times higher than other thieves. ... We are at fault in not avenging all this innocent blood of our Lord and of the Christians which

claimed Luther and Christ for his antisemitic inspiration. Although his language was unmistakably racist, he nonetheless maintained clear Christian references to the Jews as “Christ-killers.” Like Schemm, Buch incorporated racial and religious antisemitism, regarding both as equally relevant to Nazism.

Joseph Goebbels was another Nazi who showed no diminution of his religious convictions. Speaking as Reich Propaganda Minister in March 1934, Goebbels alluded to the party’s “practical Christianity.” In spite of the benefits he would have accrued by opportunistically striking a pro-clerical pose, Goebbels demonstrated that his earlier disdain for the churches had not changed: “It is no accident that the churches are empty. They are empty because the *Volk* cannot understand how the churches have nothing else to do but engage in theological argument. ... When today a clique accuses us of having anti-Christian opinions, I believe that the first Christian, Christ himself, would discover more of his teaching in our actions than in this theological hair-splitting.”⁴⁶ The following month, Goebbels delivered a similar speech, detailing the party’s Christian practice. The churches, he stated, should be thankful that “National Socialism preserved them from the assault of atheists and Bolsheviks.... A government which last winter spent 320 Million Marks for the poorest of the *Volk* need provide no further evidence of its Christian convictions.”⁴⁷ More than a year later, Goebbels delivered a similar speech, this time introducing the concept of “active” Christianity:

The National Socialist movement stands and will remain standing on the foundation of

they shed for three hundred years after the destruction of Jerusalem, and the blood of the children they have shed since then (which still shines forth from their eyes and their skin). We are at fault in not slaying them.” Martin Luther, “On the Jews and their Lies,” in *Luther’s Works*, trans. Franklin Sherman (Philadelphia, 1971), 47: 289, 267. At one point, Luther anticipates the medical and scientific metaphors used by racist antisemites later: “I wish and I ask that our rulers who have Jewish subjects exercise a sharp mercy towards these wretched people. ... They must act like a good physician who, when gangrene has set in, proceeds without mercy to cut, saw, and burn flesh, veins, bone and marrow. Such a procedure must also be followed in this instance” (Ibid., 292).

⁴⁶ EZA 50/428/47 (2 March 1934: Hamburg).

⁴⁷ EZA 50/428/47 (25 April 1934: Düsseldorf).

positive Christianity. Just as we are positive Christian, however, we wish and desire that the churches be positive National Socialist. A verbal confession can not suffice; we require an active confession. Christianity to us is no empty form, but rather a continual action, and I believe that in the last two and a half years we have demonstrated a good amount of this Christian conviction. That churches still stand in Germany at all is due to the fact that we threw back the forces of Bolshevism.⁴⁸

This “active” Christianity, like “practical” Christianity, was concerned primarily with ethical deeds, not theological disputes.

In a speech of December 1935, Goebbels ridiculed the notion that Nazism was paganist, arguing again that the actions of the Nazi regime were based on “practical” Christianity: “Is it paganist to mount a winter relief drive, thereby feeding millions of people? Is it paganist to give back the *Volk* its inner freedom? Is it paganist to help poor brothers and neighbors? Is it paganist to restore the ethos of the family? And to give the worker a sense of purpose to his life? Is it paganist to erect a state upon moral principles, to expel Godlessness, to purify theater and film from the contamination of Jewish-liberal Marxism — is that *paganist*?”⁴⁹ Here Goebbels continued the themes expressed in *Michael*, maintaining that the struggle for the *Volksgemeinschaft* and against Jews and Marxists conformed to the social message of Christianity. The theme of active Christianity implicit in Goebbels’ expression “Christ Socialists” was still apparent eight years later: the return to morality; the sanctity of the family; brotherly love towards fellow *Volksgenossen*; the conquest of godlessness and Judeo-Bolshevism. This is especially evident in his reference to the Winter Relief Drive (*Winterhilfswerk*), a clear instance of “active Christianity” in which both the Nazi state and the Christian churches were involved.⁵⁰ With a typical anticlerical flourish, Goebbels attacked the

⁴⁸ *VB*, 5/8/35.

⁴⁹ Helmut Heiber (ed.), *Goebbels-Reden*, 2 vols. (Düsseldorf, 1971-72), 1: 274f (emphasis in the original).

⁵⁰ Jochen-Christoph Kaiser, “NS-Volkswohlfahrt und freie Wohlfahrtspflege im Dritten Reich,” in Hans-Uwe Otto and Heinz Sünker (eds.), *Politische Formierung und soziale Erziehung im Nationalsozialismus* (Frankfurt a.M., 1991), 84.

churchmen who would claim that in spite of these deeds, Nazism was still pagan: “If *that* is paganist, then to be sure we are grateful to a Christianity that has done the contrary!”⁵¹ As with Göring and Rust, Goebbels would supply ample evidence that his antagonistic stance towards paganism made in public was entirely sincere.

Perhaps the most surprising instance of a continued positive attitude towards Christianity was Julius Streicher, the editor of the scurrilous Nazi organ *Der Stürmer*. Even as he acquired a reputation as a rabid anticlerical, Streicher continued to affirm — as he had done in the *Kampfzeit* — that he was not an enemy of Christianity. In a 1937 edition of the *Stürmer*, Streicher praised Christianity, even to the extent of attacking the party’s own anti-Christians: “Some people in Germany today reject Christianity as something ‘alien’; others, because Christ was a Jew, and German people can learn nothing from a Jew. A third party sees a very special divine miracle in his being a Jew. ... But the *Stürmer* will now explain the matter in a way which will finally open the eyes of all men.” As Streicher argued, Jesus was in fact not a Jew. The Nordic peoples had accepted Christianity; therefore Christ’s teaching was in accordance with Nordic blood, not Jewish. Streicher contended that an examination of Albrecht Dürer’s portrait of Jesus revealed no semitic traits, but rather “Nordic courage.” Christianity was “one of the greatest anti-Jewish movements of all time.” The disciples were also not Jewish, save the betrayer Judas: “The crucifixion of Christ is the greatest ritual murder of all time.” Streicher also faulted the churches with attempting to convert the Jews to Christianity, who would thereby contaminate it.⁵²

If the appearance of such sentiments in a highly disreputable newspaper like the *Stürmer* leaves room for skepticism, then the views Streicher expressed in private party functions are more convincing. One such function was a special course given by members of the party elite at

⁵¹ Heiber, *Goebbels-Reden*, 1: 274 (emphasis in the original).

⁵² Quoted in Nathaniel Micklem, *National Socialism and the Roman Catholic Church* (Oxford, 1939), 174-75.

the National Socialist Student League's (NSDStB) *Reichsschule* in Bernau, in July 1935.

Remarks made at this confidential meeting give a frank picture of the religious views of those Nazis in attendance, who besides Streicher included Robert Ley, the head of the German Labor Front. The first day a lecture was given by Hannes Schneider, the head of the school, in which both the Old and New Testaments were rejected: "If we accept either of these writings, then we accept the Jews as the Chosen People, to whom revelation was given."⁵³ Here was an open door for other Nazis to reveal confidentially their hatred for Christianity. But Streicher, who gave a lecture some days later, did not share his fellow party member's feelings: "The clergyman cannot teach religion — at most a confession There is a difference between a churchly and a true Christian." This was the anticlericalism to be expected of Streicher: "The caftan of the rabbi has a certain resemblance to the robes of a Catholic priest." But while the Catholic church was attacked, Christianity was not at all rejected: "Hitler speaks simply, as did Christ. Christ could not speak as openly as he wished. He spoke in parables, for instance he spoke of the flower and the weed (weed = Jew)." Directly contradicting the views of Schneider, Streicher then proclaimed that "the Bible is a great work when viewed from the perspective of race. Schopenhauer: 'The Jew is the master of lies.' Luther: 'Who ever buys from a Jew is a criminal.' Jesus had been a Nordic, Aryan man. ... Christ was the greatest antisemite of all time."⁵⁴ Hitler and Goebbels, of course, had also posited Christ as the world's greatest antisemite (Schneider, in comparison, had made no mention of Jesus). But unlike them, Streicher rarely spoke of "positive Christianity." For him, Christianity held its greatest relevance in Christ's personal struggle against the Jews, the "children of the Devil."

⁵³ "Einleitungsvortrag," IfZ MA 130 (10 July 1935: Bernau).

⁵⁴ "Vortrag vom Pg. Streicher," IfZ MA 130 (23 July 1935: Bernau). "Weed = Jew" reference in the original.

German Luther Day 1933

Despite their almost universal professions to be “above confessions,” 1933 would provide additional evidence that, for several leading Nazis, the *form* of positive Christianity went hand in hand with the *content* of Protestantism. The most portentous occasion was the “Deutsche Luthertag 1933,” the 450th anniversary of Luther’s birth. The fortuitous timing of the occasion was not lost on the Nazis, who took an active hand in preparing the celebrations. In an announcement to the supreme Reich authorities, Wilhelm Frick proposed that 10 November, the actual date of Luther’s birth, should be an official holiday, to celebrate “the work of the German Reformation” and serve as “a lively echo in all German Protestantism, indeed directed far across Germany’s borders.”⁵⁵ In a letter to the state governments, Frick also ordered that all Protestant pupils were to participate in the activities surrounding the *Luthertag*.⁵⁶

Frick, along with other leading members of the Nazi party, took part in these celebrations. In a festivity in Wittenberg leading up to the anniversary, Frick spoke of Luther’s “ruthless will to truthfulness,” “inner modesty” and “uncompromising belief.”⁵⁷ Several Gauleiter took part in the various activities surrounding the anniversary. Gauleiter Loeper of Braunschweig-Anhalt took part in festivities in Magdeburg,⁵⁸ while Christian Mergenthaler, the *Kultusminister* of Württemberg, was asked to be a member of the planning committee of the *Luthertag*.⁵⁹ Of course, Erich Koch of East Prussia (who was also president of the provincial

⁵⁵ *Dokumente zur Kirchenpolitik*, 1: 140–41. The celebrations were eventually held on 19 November, since 10 November was fixed as the date of new Reichstag elections (*VB*, 25/10/33).

⁵⁶ BAP R43 II/168/69 (28 October 1933: Berlin).

⁵⁷ *Badische Presse*, 11/09/33 (in BAP R5101/23189/14). Among the others in attendance on this occasion were Reich bishop Ludwig Müller, Reich Minister of Finance Schwerin von Krosigk — one of the very few non-Nazis to stay in Hitler’s cabinet for the duration of the Third Reich — and the Lutheran bishop of Uppsala, Sweden.

⁵⁸ “Luthergeist im neuen Reich,” *Magdeburger Tageszeitung*, 2/11/33 (in BAP R5101/23189/73).

⁵⁹ BAP R5101/23189/38 (5 September 1933: Stuttgart). There is no indication whether he accepted the offer.

church synod) took part in festivities in Königsberg. Reflecting his particular commitment to Protestant Christianity, he stated: “Only we can enter into Luther’s spirit.... Human cults do not set us free from all sin, but faith alone. With us the church shall become a serving member of the state. We struggle for the completion of the highest good of the nation: truth and right, freedom and honor. There is a deep sense that our celebration is not attended by superficiality, but rather by thanks to a man who saved German cultural values.”⁶⁰ Other members of the Nazi leadership participated as well. Rust spoke at a celebration in August, in which he, like other Nazis, drew direct parallels between Luther and Hitler:

Since Martin Luther closed his eyes, no such son of our people has appeared again. It has been decided that we shall be the first to witness his reappearance. The poor orphan from a broken home in Braunau, the worker from the big city of Vienna, the rifleman from the World War, has had to arrive in order for the people once again to raise the flag before their son from its midst and to hear its voice. ... I think the time is past when one may not say the names of Hitler and Luther in the same breath. They belong together; they are of the same old stamp [*Schrot und Korn*].⁶¹

On a separate occasion, Rust also laid a wreath on Luther’s grave.⁶²

The most important state celebration took place on 19 November itself, in Berlin. In attendance were Reich President Hindenburg, Konstantin von Neurath, Hitler’s Foreign Minister until 1938 and “very much the convinced Protestant,”⁶³ the historian Gerhard Ritter, the Erlangen theologian Werner Elert, and Hans Schemm. More than nine months after Hitler’s appointment as chancellor, Hindenburg gave no indication that he disapproved of the direction the Nazis were taking: “This Luther Day 1933 brings the whole world of Protestantism to consciousness of its community and its bond in faith. But this day of thanks summons the German *Volk* in particular

⁶⁰ *Königsberg-Hartungsche Zeitung*, 20/11/33 (in BAP R5101/23189/83). See also Chapter One, n. 3-6.

⁶¹ *VB*, 25/8/33.

⁶² *Deutsche Zeitung*, 11/11/33 (in BAP R5101/23189/49).

⁶³ Scholder, *Churches*, 1: 546.

to be united in the stewardship of its great historical inheritance, to accomplish the tasks of the present and future in unanimity. Therefore stay firm in the faith of your fathers, be strong in your love of *Volk* and Reich and full of confidence in Germany's destiny!"⁶⁴ Neurath invested even more religious meaning into that year's turn of events:

The German *Volk* celebrates the 450th anniversary of Luther's birth at a time when a mighty political event is welding together a great inner unity. An innerly unified *Volk* will know to value the personalities and acts of the great men of their history. ... Many millions of Germans celebrate Luther as the Reformer whose work led to a great faith community of Protestant Christians around the world. ... The mighty development of the spiritual life of the German *Volk*, even outside the sphere of the religious, is unthinkable without Luther.⁶⁵

Gerhard Ritter, the famous historian and conservative stalwart, took a similar view of the contemporary situation: "The 450th anniversary of Luther's birthday comes at a time of great *völkisch* awakening."⁶⁶

Schemm, who that same year unambiguously upheld the fundamentals of positive Christianity and the equal value of both confessions to the establishment of a *Volksgemeinschaft*, on this occasion exhibited a love for Luther and appreciation for his religious deeds that only a committed Protestant could profess:

The spirit of struggle, something of the genuine spirit of Luther, fills us Germans today. ... Today we are inclined to view [Luther's] translation of the Bible as his greatest act... So long as the Bible was available to us only in a foreign language, so long as it was only spoken to us in Latin, we could only grasp it as things are grasped through the iron gloves of a knight: he is aware of the shape and weight, but can only feel iron. When Luther

⁶⁴ BAZ NS 12/808 (10 November 1933: Berlin).

⁶⁵ BAZ NS 12/808 (10 November 1933: Berlin).

⁶⁶ BAZ NS 12/808 (19 November 1933: Berlin). As Peter Lambert has shown, Ritter's later role as "resister" to Nazism had nothing to do with the Nazis' secular ideology, but only with the disputes surrounding the *Kirchenkampf*: "German Historians and Nazi Ideology: The Parameters of the *Volksgemeinschaft* and the Problem of Historical Legitimation, 1930-45," *European History Quarterly* 25 (1995): 555-582. According to Lambert, the antisemitism of Ritter and his milieu demonstrated their "inability to free themselves of the very same fears and prejudices that motivated the Nazis" (567).

made the Bible accessible to Germans in the glorious German language, it was as if we had cast off the iron glove and with the flesh and blood of our German hand were able at last truly to grasp our unique character [*unser ureigenstes Lebensgut*].⁶⁷

Schemm's comparison of Luther and Nazism on this occasion also brought with it a sanctification of antisemitism: "[Luther said] 'For my Germans am I born; them will I serve!' The older and more experienced he became, the less he could understand one particular type of person: this was the Jew. His engagement against the decomposing Jewish spirit is clearly evident not only from his writing against the Jews; his life too was idealistically, philosophically antisemitic. Now we Germans of today have the duty to recognize and acknowledge this. Only in this way will we do justice to Luther's life."⁶⁸

Broad segments of the Nazi party participated in the Luther Day across Germany. In Coburg on 31 October, celebrations sponsored by the Luther League were held which included the SA, SS, Hitler Youth and League of German Girls, as well as Schemm and Bavarian state bishop Hans Meiser.⁶⁹ On the same day, the Fighting League for German Culture participated in the Luther festivities in the cities of Eisleben and Wittenberg.⁷⁰ This was certainly not the first time such high esteem was held for Luther within the ranks of the *Kampfbund*. Just a few days after the seizure of power, Hans Hinkel, the leader of the Berlin chapter and editor of the league's periodical *Deutsche Kultur-Wacht*, gave a speech on Luther. Hinkel later gained influential positions in Goebbels' Reich Chamber of Culture (*Reichskulturkammer*) and Propaganda Ministry, where he became head of both the Jewish section and the film

⁶⁷ "Luther und das Deutschtum," BAZ NS 12/808 (19 November 1933: Berlin), reprinted in Gertrud Kahl-Furthmann (ed.), *Hans Schemm spricht: Seine Reden und sein Werk* (Beyreuth, 1935), 126-27.

⁶⁸ Ibid., reprinted in Kahl-Furthmann (ed.), *Schemm*, 126. This reference and Buch's confirm that Nazis were fully aware of Luther's notorious "On the Jews and their Lies," and seemed to have gained inspiration from it. Portions of this tract also found their way onto the pages of the *Völkischer Beobachter*: see "Luther und die Juden," *VB*, 8/9/33; "Luther und die Judenfrage," *VB*, 18/11/33.

⁶⁹ *Berliner Börsen-Zeitung*, 1/11/33 (in BAP R5101/23189/41). Meiser was a member of the Confessing Church.

⁷⁰ *Magdeburger Tageszeitung*, 30/9/33 (in BAP R5101/23189/18).

department.⁷¹ On this occasion he spoke of Luther in typically racist terms: “Through his acts and his spiritual attitude he began the fight which we still wage today; with Luther the revolution of German blood and feeling against alien elements of the *Volk* was begun.” But in a remarkable passage Hinkel plainly demonstrated his belief that the Nazi goal of bridging the gap between the confessions would not be a purely syncretic affair: “To continue and complete his Protestantism, nationalism must make the picture of Luther, of a German fighter, live as an example *above the barriers of confession* for all German blood comrades.”⁷² Like the NSDAP itself, the *Kampfbund* could count Protestant pastors among its members.⁷³

Such a coupling of Luther and nationalism could not have been a confessionally neutral affair. Such ideas did not find a positive reception among Catholics, who, it must be remembered, felt no less patriotic for rejecting Luther. Inside the party, there is no record of the Catholic Goebbels lauding Luther in these terms. Of course the same held true for Catholics outside the party as well. Representing their interests, the Papal Nuncio approached Neurath with his opinion that the Luther Day would become “a kind of nationalist celebration”: what was involved was “the celebration of an action (the nailing of the theses on the church door in Wittenberg) which had had a plainly hostile tendency towards the Catholic Church.” The Nuncio “feared for the ratification of the concordat were this celebration to take place on a large scale and with government involvement.” Neurath responded by pointing out that “on the Catholic side as well, festivities were held which in no way were always filled with a friendly spirit towards the Protestant church,” and refused to consider the matter further.⁷⁴ This response

⁷¹ Ralf Georg Reuth, *Goebbels* (New York, 1993), 275, 278, 334; Alan Steinweis, *Art, Ideology and Economics in Nazi Germany: The Reich Chamber of Music, Theater and the Visual Arts* (Chapel Hill, 1993), 62, 124–25.

⁷² *Der Tag*, 17/2/33 (in BAP R5101/23138/7) (emphasis added).

⁷³ One example was the Badenese pastor Teutsch, an “old fighter” who gave a speech at a *Kampfbund* assembly on “the power of belief in National Socialism”: *Karlsruher Tagblatt*, 8/6/34 (in BAP 62 Di 1/75/112e).

⁷⁴ BAP R43 II/168/46 (7 September 1933: Berlin).

was likely conditioned by an event that had occurred four months earlier. Frick had brought to Neurath's attention several anti-Protestant articles which had appeared in the Vatican's semi-official newspaper *Osservatore Romano*. He objected particularly to an article written by a Jesuit describing Protestantism as a symptom of "advanced decay," and warned that such utterances caused offense to Germans and would undermine the "common defense against the enemies of religion, thereby advancing tendencies destructive to the state." Even though the offending articles concerned only Protestantism in Italy, Frick requested that the German embassy take up the matter.⁷⁵ By expressing a traditional anti-Protestant attitude, this Catholic newspaper both demonstrated and reaffirmed the perceived link in many Nazi minds between Protestantism and Germanhood.

Nazis commonly cast themselves as both revolutionary and an extension of the German past: the Luther Day celebrations provided a perfect moment of political theater for this purpose. The Nazi involvement in the Luther Day was certainly an act of political appropriation, but it would be a mistake to explain it away as a *misappropriation*, or a feigned affection for an historical personality for whom they had no real feeling. As Heiko Oberman points out, "The Nazis did not have to discover or create Luther as a German national reformer — he was already there, rifle at the ready."⁷⁶ Protestants as well had long made Luther into both a religious revolutionary and nationalist hero, as both a guarantor of German heritage and beacon for Germany's future.⁷⁷ And during the festivities, a great many spoke with a rhetoric almost

⁷⁵ BAP R43 II/161/42-43 (2 May 1933: Berlin). This file contains no information as to the outcome of this episode.

⁷⁶ Heiko Oberman, "The Nationalist Conscriptio of Martin Luther," in Carter Lindberg (ed.), *Piety, Politics and Ethics* (Kirksville MO, 1984), 70.

⁷⁷ During the Luthertag celebrations, for instance, the theologian Werner Elert gave a speech on "Luther und der revolutionäre Gedanke": BAZ NS 12/808 (19 November 1933: Berlin). For more on this phenomenon, see Hartmut Lehmann, "Martin Luther as a National Hero in the 19th Century," in J.C. Eade (ed.), *Romantic Nationalism in Europe* (Canberra, 1983).

identical to the Nazis'. A typical example was an article in the *Chemnitzer Tageblatt*, which stated: "the German *Volk* are united not only in loyalty and love for the Fatherland, but also once more in the old German beliefs of Luther [*Lutherglauben*]; a new epoch of strong, conscious religious life has dawned in Germany."⁷⁸

The leadership of the Protestant League espoused a similar view. Fahrenhorst, who was on the planning committee of the Luthertag, called Luther "the first German spiritual Führer," who spoke to all Germans regardless of class or confession. In a letter to Hitler, Fahrenhorst reminded him that his "Old Fighters" were mostly Protestants, and that it was "precisely in the Protestant regions of our Fatherland" where Nazism found its greatest strength. Promising that the celebration of Luther's birthday would not turn into a confessional affair, Fahrenhorst invited Hitler to become the official patron of the Luthertag.⁷⁹ In subsequent correspondence, Fahrenhorst voiced the notion that reverence for Luther could somehow cross confessional boundaries: "Luther is truly not only the founder of a Christian confession; much more, his ideas fruitfully impacted all Christianity in Germany." Precisely because of Luther's political as well as religious significance, the Luthertag would serve as a confession both "to church and *Volk*."⁸⁰ It was all the more lamentable, therefore, that the Hitler Youth would not take part in the ceremonies, due to Baldur von Schirach designating 19 November as a recruiting day for the Winter Relief Drive. This would create a conflict of conscience within the Protestant population, especially since Winter relief was a Christian activity: "The chief task of Christianity is helpfully to set to work and allow socialism to become reality."⁸¹ Fahrenhorst also expressed concern that among certain "liberal" circles in the movement, Nazism was being promoted as a "third

⁷⁸ "Luther weist den Weg," *Chemnitzer Tageblatt*, 1/11/33 (in BAP R5101/23189/65).

⁷⁹ BAP R43 II/168/41-42 (15 August 1933: Berlin). Citing preexisting commitments, Hitler cordially turned down the invitation.

⁸⁰ BAP R43 II/168/70-76 (4 November 1933: Berlin).

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

confession,” and that thanks to the concordat, Catholicism was in danger of taking over Germany. Hitler informed Fahrenhorst that arrangements for the Hitler Youth had already been made, and that he did not want to see the Luther Day pushed back a second time; he made no reference to Fahrenhorst’s other concerns. During the entire planning and execution of the event, this was the only moment of discord between the Nazi state and the Protestant organizers.

Opinions expressed that year made it plain that, despite these concerns, many leaders of the Protestant League saw Nazi policies as congruent with their own. Addressing the “Eastern Question,” one member of the League argued that Luther and the Reformation had saved the colonization of the German east at the turn of the sixteenth century. In the nineteenth century, liberalism and the Poles brought new dangers to German nationality, but Hitler’s National Socialism meant a new start in the east for the “slumbering Protestant and Prussian socialist powers.”⁸² One of the speakers at the annual assembly of the League in Kurhessen asked: “Upon what is the authority of the state and the family grounded? Why is our *Volk* holy to us? Only because these orders were created by God.... We thank God that our Führer clearly recognizes this and draws its conclusions.”⁸³ This reference to *Schöpfungsglaube* also brought the Protestant League to an explicit endorsement of Nazi racialism. At a 1933 meeting in Magdeburg, a League speaker stated: “... The Protestant church and every Protestant Christian must participate in the clarification and utilization of the racial and eugenic questions which are so significant for the future of our *Volk*.”⁸⁴

⁸² “Der Evangelische Bund in Marienburg,” *Reichsbote*, 1/10/33 (in BAP R5101/23126/9). Much was made of the “persecution” of the Protestant Church, and therefore Germans also, in Catholic Poland. See, for instance, the article in *Freie Presse* (Lodz), 30/10/33 (in BAP R5101/23189/74), which laments the Slavic domination of German cultural life.

⁸³ “Evangelischer Bund und nationalsozialistischer Staat,” *Kasseler Neueste Nachrichten*, 10/10/33 (in BAP R5101/23126/11).

⁸⁴ *Magdeburgische Zeitung*, 26/9/33 (in BAP R5101/23126/8). See Chapter Seven.

Paganists and anti-Christians

We saw in Chapter Three how a small but significant cadre of Nazi leaders professed opposition to Christianity. Their minority status among the party leadership does not diminish the fact that they represented a *bona fide* variety of Nazism, no less so than the positive Christians. New voices were heard after 1933 that added to their numbers. Some had not been prominent enough in the party to have a platform for their views, while others underwent a transformation. Among the former was Robert Ley. Although he had been a Gauleiter in the *Kampfzeit*, he only came into prominence when he became the new Reich Organization Leader (ROL) just before the seizure of power. Hitler saw to it that this office lost much of its power after Gregor Strasser unexpectedly left the post, and the party, in December 1932. But Ley would soon acquire a much more powerful office as head of the German Labor Front (*Deutsche Arbeitsfront*, or DAF), a mass organization of workers which replaced the labor unions promptly banned by the Nazi state. The DAF took a leading role in sublimating the working classes into the Nazi *Volkgemeinschaft*, combining the stick of a new authoritarian workplace with the carrot of affordable consumer goods, like the Volkswagen, and leisure activities, like workplace concerts and pleasure cruises to Majorca.⁸⁵

At the *Reichsschule* course in July 1935, Robert Ley revealed a clear rejection of Christianity. He went further than Julius Streicher, attacking not only the priest but Christianity itself: "Struggle has given us more religion and faith than Christianity. ... In our struggle against Christianity we do not need the hammer, but only the arrow tip of our worldview. Every good SA man stands head and shoulders above the priest. Hitler has and will demand great sacrifice

⁸⁵ For more on the DAF, see Ronald Smelser, *Robert Ley: Hitler's Labor Front Leader* (Oxford, 1988), 117-48.

from the *Volk*. Neither Frederick the Great, nor Bismarck, nor Luther had this divine quality.”⁸⁶

Ley was one of the very few to repudiate not only Christianity, but even its historical figures.

Rosenberg’s appropriation of Luther as a kind of proto-Nazi was nowhere shared by Ley.

According to Ley’s biographer, “For him the movement became a religion, its leader a German messiah.”⁸⁷

On another occasion, Ley revealed more of his own theological viewpoint: “At last through Adolf Hitler I have found my Lord again. Before that, I no longer had a God. Today I believe in a personal God who is near to me There is nobody more religious and God-fearing than Adolf Hitler. We believe that the Lord sent us our Führer so that he might free Germany from hypocrites and Pharisees.”⁸⁸ No mention is made of Christ here. But Ley’s tone clearly indicates belief in an active, interventionist God. While there is no evidence that Ley was anything more than a nominal Protestant, he was close to several German Christian leaders, especially the fellow Rhinelander Gottfried Krummacher.⁸⁹ And he had no hesitation in throwing the weight of the party organization behind the German Christians in their electoral campaign of 1933. Nonetheless, unlike the German Christians, Ley never referred to Christ. Neither did he intone a heroic Jesus or express an interest in a mystical medieval past, as Rosenberg had done. While he shared the antipathy to Christianity of the paganists, he did not take any apparent interest in their ersatz faith. Ley was, however, instrumental in getting Rosenberg his only real job after 1934: “The Führer’s Delegate for the Supervision of the Entire Intellectual and Ideological Education and Training of the NSDAP” (see below).

⁸⁶ “Vortrag von Pg. Dr. Ley,” IfZ MA 130 (16 July 1935: Bernau).

⁸⁷ Ronald Smelser, “Robert Ley: The Brown Collectivist,” in Ronald Smelser and Rainer Zitelmann (eds.), *The Nazi Elite* (New York, 1993), 145.

⁸⁸ *Westdeutscher Beobachter*, 14/7/36.

⁸⁹ See, for instance the correspondence between Krummacher and Ley, where the former refers to Ley as “Du” and “Lieber Robert”: BAZ NS 22/415 (31 January 1933: Berlin); BAZ Personalakt Hossenfelder (6 February 1933: Berlin).

Rosenberg's ideological stance changed little after 1933. Evidence for this is provided in two works he wrote in response to the critical reactions of Catholics and Protestants to his *Mythus*. (Of the many clerical attacks on Rosenberg published after 1933, none were censored or banned by Nazi authorities.⁹⁰) A comparison of the two demonstrates that Rosenberg continued to show a preference for Protestantism over Catholicism as a worldview, even while he eagerly attacked the clergy of both. His attack against the Catholic Church, called "On the Dark Men of our Times: A Reply to the Attacks against the Myth of the Twentieth Century," was published in 1935. He dismissively suggested that religious Catholics should stay away from his *Mythus*, since it had not been written for them. He even suggested that it was their opposition to his book that had boosted its sales.⁹¹ He claimed that behind Catholic attacks against him stood a greater Catholic conspiracy: to separate the Catholic parts of Germany from the Protestant and merge them with France or Austria. During Weimar, the Center Party was the political arm of this conspiracy, and rightly feared that the ascent of Nazism would put an end to these plans.⁹² The Roman Church, Rosenberg claimed, had always used all means at its disposal to accrue power to itself. In this drive for domination, deceit and falsifications became standard practice. For instance, Rosenberg denied St. Matthew's claim that Jesus had assigned Peter to establish a church. Peter's episcopate in Rome was a falsehood, since the position of bishop was incompatible with the professions of an apostle.⁹³ Roman Christianity was accused not only of hypocrisy, but also of actively seeking to destroy German national character.⁹⁴

⁹⁰ As pointed out by Heydrich himself: BAP R5101/23139/239 (20 July 1935: Berlin).

⁹¹ Alfred Rosenberg, *An die Dunkelmänner unserer Zeit: Eine Antwort auf die Angriffe gegen den Mythos des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Munich, 1935), 5-6. This was Hitler's opinion as well: Scholder, *Churches*, 2: 112.

⁹² Rosenberg, *Dunkelmänner*, 9.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 13-14.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 18.

Rosenberg's counterattack on Protestantism, published two years later, was given quite a different title: "Protestant Pilgrims to Rome: The Treason against Luther and the Myth of the Twentieth Century."⁹⁵ Rosenberg fundamentally detached the contemporary Lutheran Church from its founder by suggesting that, whereas the Reformation began as a rebellion against Rome, the current leadership of the Protestant Church was slowly moving back in the direction of St. Peter.⁹⁶ Ignatius Loyola, not Martin Luther, was now being made head of German Protestantism, thanks largely to the work of the Confessing Church.⁹⁷ Sterile dogmatism and clerical infantilism were replacing Luther's fiery spirit of protest "against Rome and Jerusalem." The Confessing Church in particular was accused of treachery, of becoming "Jewish prophets" through their maintenance of the Old Testament.⁹⁸ Calvinists came in for sharp condemnation, since they frightened people with notions of Hell and self-disdain, and inculcated a "Syrian inferiority complex." Rosenberg regarded Karl Barth as a "Calvinist pseudo-pope" who worked for nothing less than the "Calvinization" — and therefore the destruction — of German Protestantism.⁹⁹ Rosenberg also attacked Anglicanism for trying to propagate an "ecumenical League of Nations." Its attempt to create a world Protestantism was similarly regarded by Rosenberg as an attempt at recatholicization.¹⁰⁰ But after this litany of condemnation, Rosenberg ended on a positive note: not all was lost for Protestantism. It could restore its credibility if it returned to Luther's original intent, recognized the "genuine original forces of Protestantism,"

⁹⁵ Alfred Rosenberg, *Protestantische Rompilger: Der Verrat an Luther und der Mythos des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Munich, 1937).

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 47.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 62-74.

abandoned the Old Testament, and divested itself of doctrines like Original Sin.¹⁰¹

Needless to say, Rosenberg's appointment as "Delegate for Ideology" was very alarming to the representatives of the churches, who supposed that this would make the *Mythus* the official basis of the party's ideology.¹⁰² But Rosenberg's appointment was not the opening of a generalized attack by the Nazi party on Christianity or even the Christian churches. Rather, as Reinhard Bollmus puts it, it simply arose out of "a chance constellation of interests within the party which existed for only a short time."¹⁰³ In 1933, Rosenberg's "Fighting League for German Culture" had managed to take over two theater-going organizations, combining them into the *Deutsche Bühne* ("German Stage"). But Goebbels, whose Reich Chamber of Culture would thereby be challenged, placed a ban on its activity.¹⁰⁴ Just as Rosenberg was to face total exclusion from a domain near and dear to him, Ley appeared on the scene. As head of the DAF he was interested in providing workers with discounted theater and concert tickets through its recreational ancillary, "Strength through Joy" (*Kraft durch Freude*, or KdF). Ley and Rosenberg formulated the wording of a commission that Hitler then signed. As in his relations with others in the Nazi elite, here Rosenberg would find his ambition stymied: "Ley did not allow Rosenberg to play any practical part in training. He stressed ... that 'supervision' meant only the preparation of written material."¹⁰⁵ This was in part a function of Ley's own ideological pretensions: he had

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 77.

¹⁰² Conway, *Persecution*, 72; Scholder, *Churches*, 2: 102-03. Rosenberg did have a second job: head of the Foreign Policy Office of the NSDAP (*Aussenpolitisches Amt der NSDAP*, or APA), founded in 1933. Rosenberg imagined this would lead to his appointment as Foreign Minister, but instead it remained a dead end office with no influence, intended by Hitler to be "harmless compensation [for Neurath's hold on the Foreign Ministry], in order to be rid of Rosenberg": John Heineman, *Hitler's First Foreign Minister: Constantin Freiherr von Neurath, Diplomat and Statesman* (Berkeley, 1979), 122.

¹⁰³ Bollmus, *Amt Rosenberg*, 55.

¹⁰⁴ Bollmus, "Alfred Rosenberg: National Socialism's 'Chief Ideologue?'," in Smelser and Zitelmann (eds.), *Elite*, 189. Relations between Rosenberg, Goebbels and Ley regarding culture are thoroughly discussed in idem, *Amt Rosenberg*, 63-71.

¹⁰⁵ Bollmus, "Rosenberg," 190.

a hand in setting up the Adolf Hitler Schools, and edited his own educational periodical, *Der Schulungsbrief*.¹⁰⁶ It was also a function of Ley's growing conflict with Rosenberg over cultural policy, in which Ley was accused of being soft on "backsliding painters and musicians." (This had been an accusation Rosenberg leveled against Goebbels as well.) Rosenberg was further undercut when Goebbels reached agreement with Ley in November 1936, whereby the KdF would exclusively engage *Kulturkammer* members in their enormous functions, thereby strengthening Goebbels' organization as a cultural cartel.¹⁰⁷ Rosenberg was shut out of another field of operation. Goebbels' true feelings about Rosenberg's abilities were summarized in his reference to him as "Almost Rosenberg": "Rosenberg almost managed to become a scholar, a journalist, a politician — but only almost."¹⁰⁸

Beside Rosenberg, Himmler would now emerge as a leading paganist in the party. As the Reich Leader of the SS and Chief of German Police, he was immeasurably more powerful than Rosenberg. Whereas Rosenberg's star would continue to fall in the course of the Third Reich, Himmler's would continue to rise: the height of his power came in 1943, when he added the portfolio of Reich Interior Minister to his other titles. If Himmler still held an affection for his church in the *Kampfzeit*, by the time of the seizure of power this had certainly been extinguished. After 1933 Rosenberg said of Himmler: "Our thoughts ran along similar lines; he always stressed that his attitude was close to mine."¹⁰⁹ They and Darré had a romantic attitude concerning the peasantry and a fascination with German prehistory, which Himmler interpreted as an Aryan struggle against malevolent Jewish-Roman forces. In 1934, Rosenberg noted with approval how Himmler's SS, "together with the Peasant Leadership, openly educates its men ... in an anti-

¹⁰⁶ Robert Cecil, *The Myth of the Master Race: Alfred Rosenberg and Nazi Ideology* (London, 1972), 124.

¹⁰⁷ Steinweis, *Art*, 71.

¹⁰⁸ Alfred Krebs, *Tendenzen und Gestalten der NSDAP: Erinnerungen and die Frühzeit der Partei* (Stuttgart, 1959), 166.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 119.

Christian fashion.”¹¹⁰ Himmler viewed the SS as something of a new priesthood or a knight’s order. In fact, he drew comparisons between it and the Teutonic Knights, the (Christian) order of crusaders which had led the “civilizing mission” of the East.¹¹¹ But while Himmler had nothing more to do with his original faith, he still retained a deep religiosity. In 1935 he professed belief in “a Lord God who stands over us, who made us and our Fatherland, our *Volk* and the earth, and sent us our Führer.”¹¹² He made no hesitation that his new religion would serve as a replacement for Christianity: “[O]ur business is to spread the knowledge of the race in the life of our *Volk* and to impress it upon the hearts and heads of all, down to the very youngest, as our German gospel.”¹¹³ To an assembly of the SS he stated Christianity would play no part in the organization: “The guideline for us in our struggle is neither the Old nor the New Testament, but the political testament of Adolf Hitler.”¹¹⁴ He never spoke of positive Christianity, and at a private speech in Berlin stated flatly: “We must finish with Christianity.”¹¹⁵ He reserved special wrath for the Catholic priesthood, which he denounced as a “homosexual erotic men’s league.”¹¹⁶ In place of Christianity, Himmler advocated ancestor worship and a myth of “Blood and Soil,” both of which stood opposed to Christian dogma,¹¹⁷ and belief in immortality and an omnipotent God, whose anti-Christian credentials was considerably more uncertain.

¹¹⁰ Hans-Günther Seraphim (ed.), *Das politische Tagebuch Alfred Rosenbergs 1934/35 und 1939/40* (Göttingen, 1956), 56 (entry for 19/8/34).

¹¹¹ Josef Ackermann, *Heinrich Himmler als Ideologe* (Göttingen, 1970), 103; Felix Kersten, *The Kersten Memoirs, 1940-1945* (New York, 1957), 32.

¹¹² *VB*, 17/11/35.

¹¹³ *VB*, 1/7/35.

¹¹⁴ Ackermann, *Himmler*, 40-41.

¹¹⁵ Bradley Smith and A.F. Peterson (eds.), *Heinrich Himmler: Geheimreden 1933 bis 1945* (Frankfurt a.M., 1974), 159.

¹¹⁶ IfZ MA 311 (18 February 1937: Tölz).

¹¹⁷ In a 1937 speech, Himmler declared: “The worst blow which Christianity ever took against us has been the blow against ancestors and ancestor worship”: IfZ MA 311 (18 February 1937: Tölz).

The search for a replacement faith took Himmler down several roads. One was the adoration of the ancient King Heinrich I. Himmler celebrated the one thousandth anniversary of his death at Quedlinburg Cathedral in 1936, and was so enthralled with this medieval figure that he believed himself to be Heinrich's reincarnation.¹¹⁸ Another road was the obscure occultism of Hanns Hörbiger, who had propagated a theory of "Glacial Cosmogony," in which world history was a record of the eternal struggle between fire and ice, "linking the flood of Genesis and the destruction of the Teutonic kingdom of Atlantis to 'gravitational catastrophes' supposedly unleashed when the Earth 'captured' a moon in its orbit."¹¹⁹ Even among the party's other paganists, Himmler's religious views were regarded as bizarre. Himmler unwittingly acknowledged this, warning his underlings that no polemics against Hörbiger's theories would be tolerated.¹²⁰ This particular obsession was too much even for Rosenberg, who sent a circular to all NSDAP offices, assuring them that "adherence to these theories was no part of being a National Socialist."¹²¹

Himmler was also attracted to the ideas of Karl Maria Wiligut, a self-styled "Germanic sage" who claimed to possess an "ancestral-clairvoyant" memory, which supposedly helped him recall the history and experiences of the primitive Germanic religions of the past. Among his mystical contrivances was an historical chronology he invented which began around 228,000 BC, "when there were three suns in the sky and the earth was populated with giants [and]

¹¹⁸ Ackermann, *Himmler*, 60-62; Kersten, *Memoirs*, 153.

¹¹⁹ Jost Hermand, *Old Dreams of a New Reich: Volkish Utopias and National Socialism* (Bloomington, 1992), 193; Ackermann, *Himmler*, 45.

¹²⁰ Hermand, *Dreams*, 64.

¹²¹ Cecil, *Myth*, 119. Given Hitler's utter contempt for Himmler's endless mysticism and pseudo-religious babble, not to mention Rosenberg's own rejection of it, it is extremely unlikely that Hitler "respected" Hörbiger's work, as Hermand suggests: *Dreams*, 193.

dwarves.”¹²² He gained something of a reputation among paganist circles before World War One, having been in contact with Lanz von Liebenfels. He also came up with a set of nine paganist commandments in 1908. Given the eccentricity of his ideas, it is perhaps no coincidence that one of Himmler’s most important paganist associates spent time after World War One in a mental hospital, where he was certified insane and remained for three years.¹²³ Through an SS officer Wiligut was introduced to Himmler, who soon saw Wiligut as a unique source of information on ancient Germanic religions and traditions. In September 1933 Wiligut joined the SS under the pseudonym of Weisthor and was appointed head of the Department for Pre- and Early History within Himmler’s Race and Settlement Main Office. By 1934 he had been promoted to SS-Oberführer (Brigadier). Weisthor would play a substantial role in the development of SS ritual, designing the death’s head ring worn by members of the SS, influencing the conception of the Wewelsburg as the “order-castle” of the SS, and helping to introduce paganist wedding ceremonies for SS officers.¹²⁴

Just as Hitler had no time for Rosenberg’s plans to create a new, mystical religion to replace clerical Christianity, so he found Himmler’s dilettantish religious explorations absurd. As he told a circle of confidants: “What nonsense! Here we have at last reached an age that has left all mysticism behind, and now he wants to start that all over again To think that I may some day be turned into an SS saint!” Whereas Himmler attacked Charlemagne as an agent of Christianity against pagan-Germanic tribes, Hitler declared: “Killing all those Saxons was not a historical crime, as Himmler thinks. Charlemagne did a good thing in subjugating Widukind and killing the Saxons out of hand. He thereby made possible the empire of the Franks and the entry

¹²² Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *The Occult Roots of Nazism: Secret Aryan Cults and their Influence on Nazi Ideology* (New York, 1985), 181.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 182.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 187.

of Western culture into what is now Germany.”¹²⁵ Hitler was equally dismissive of Himmler’s forays into German prehistory: “Isn’t it enough that the Romans were erecting great buildings when our forefathers were still living in mud huts; now Himmler is starting to dig up these villages of mud huts and enthusing over every potsherd and stone axe he finds.”¹²⁶ According to Albert Speer, “The whole thing was beginning to assume far-fetched pseudo-religious forms. Goebbels, with Hitler, took the lead in ridiculing these dreams of Himmler’s, with Himmler himself adding to the comedy by his vanity and obsessiveness.”¹²⁷ Hitler even approached Himmler himself in 1935, fully rejecting the foundation of a new religion, calling it a “chimera.” But rather than attack Himmler frontally, he took the indirect route of attacking Himmler’s paganist ally Rosenberg, stating that he intended to take action against Rosenberg’s *Mythus*.¹²⁸

As outlandish as many of his ideas were, and his own insistence to be thoroughly anti-Christian notwithstanding, Himmler’s views on Christianity were fraught with ambiguity. For instance, he continued to believe that Jesus was not a Jew. Himmler feared that the average SS man would be unable to distinguish between attacks on the churches and a preservation of Christ. Therefore, in a 1937 memorandum marked “to all SS leaders from Standartenführer up,” Himmler instructed: “In ideological training I forbid every attack against Christ as a person, since such attacks or insults that Christ was a Jew are unworthy of us and certainly untrue historically.”¹²⁹ He then added significantly: “I desire that SS men be convinced of the worth of our own blood and our past, through knowledge of the actual history of our *Volk*, the prehistory

¹²⁵ Albert Speer, *Inside the Third Reich* (New York, 1970), 94.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 94-95.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 122.

¹²⁸ “Aktentotiz Himmlers über eine Besprechung mit Hitler, 23. Oktober 1935,” as quoted in Ackermann, *Himmler*, 90. There is no indication whether Hitler followed up on this particular threat. Judging from the continued publication of *Mythus*, he made no serious effort to do so. However, Rosenberg’s book was occasionally banned lower down the ranks of the party, for instance by the Breslau branch of the NSLB: BAZ NS 22/410 (8 September 1935: Breslau).

of our *Volk*, the greatness and culture of our ancestors, so that they will totally root themselves in the value of the past, present and future.” Not only Christ, but belief in Christ as a part of German history, was to be respected in the SS. Such proclamations were not simply for public consumption. When a Hitler Youth wrote to Himmler asking if he was to believe a Nazi lecturer who claimed that Jesus was a Jew, Himmler’s secretary Karl Brandt replied, indicating: “The Reichsführer-SS is of the conviction that Jesus was not a Jew. You must have misunderstood the speaker ...”¹³⁰

Further indications of Himmler’s sometimes positive feelings about Christianity arose in a meeting he held with SS leaders the year before on the question of the traditional nobility, who counted among the stalwarts of the Christian faith in Germany. While they were considered members of the conservative opposition, this was not regarded by Himmler as an immutable situation: “We must try to fill the sons and daughters of those who are now opposed to us with our ideology, which after all is *not so very far removed* from the ideological principles of the nobility ...If [the Gauleiters] refuse, saying that there’s no point, that as old revolutionaries they’re not going to meet this reactionary, then you must reply: we didn’t carry out a revolution for the sake of carrying out a revolution.”¹³¹

The views of the “Germanic sage” of the SS, Wiligut, display that here too there was no simple rejection of Christianity. He propagated an “Irminist” religion, which was distinct from and actually opposed to Wotanism, “celebrating a Germanic God Krist, which the Christian religion had later bowdlerized and appropriated as its own saviour. ... Wiligut’s doctrine blended the Teutonic archaism of [Guido von] List with the Ario-Christianity of Lanz [von

¹²⁹ BAZ Schu 245/2/150 (28 June 1937: Berlin).

¹³⁰ BAZ NS 19/3134/2 (16 June 1937: Berlin).

¹³¹ Quoted in Noakes, “Nazism and High Society,” 58 (emphasis mine).

Liebenfels].”¹³² But rather than denounce the Bible as Jewish, Wiligut preserved it by insisting that it had originally been written in Germany.

Ambivalence also expressed itself in SS policies regarding the religious feelings of its members. In a speech to SS leaders in 1936, Himmler spoke of his own family’s Christian traditions:

My father, in accord with our family tradition, was a convinced Christian, in his case a convinced Catholic. He knew exactly what my attitude was. However, we did not speak on religious points or converse about the political harmfulness and corruption of the Christian churches, about which we were once in agreement. Not once did I touch his convictions, nor he mine. I believe that we must maintain such a position towards those elderly who cannot bring themselves to our path. For this reason I have also demonstrated understanding, and will continue to do so in the future, when someone tells me: out of respect for my parents I must have my child baptized. Please! Certainly! There is no use in disturbing the peace of mind of those with 60 or 70 years behind them.¹³³

This meant that even the burial of SS men’s parents could be conducted in the Christian fashion. For a supposedly fanatical anti-Christian this was an exceedingly mild approach to take.

Himmler consistently maintained that even *within* the SS, Christian viewpoints, while not endorsed by the organization, were nonetheless to be respected. Two years earlier, in reaction to a particular incident, he announced: “I forbid SS members to pester, annoy or mock another due to his religious views. Just as the German has never tolerated religious constraint on himself, so are the religious convictions of his neighbors holy and inviolable to him.” This pertained not only to the religious views of individual SS men, but also to their conduct regarding religious institutions: “I most strictly forbid any disturbance as well as any tactlessness regarding religious events of all confessions (i.e. processions of the Catholic Church). Likewise, a tactful deportment when churches are visited out of historical or artistic interest goes without saying.”

¹³² Goodrick-Clark, *Occult*, 180.

¹³³ “Rede des Reichsführer-SS anlässlich der Gruppenführer-Besprechung am 8. November 1936 in Dachau,” IfZ F 37/3 (8 November 1936: Dachau).

Himmler added that this order was to be enforced on pain of expulsion.¹³⁴ A year later he renewed this order, explicitly basing it upon the “National Socialist version of the age-old German right of freedom of conscience.” Certainly this freedom of conscience did have its institutional limits. In the same memorandum, Himmler forbade members of the SS from “any leadership activity in any kind of religious or faith community (for instance, German Faith Movement etc).”¹³⁵ Holding a position of responsibility in the Christian churches was thus forbidden: but it was also forbidden for the churches’ paganist rivals. (Simple membership in a religious community, Christian or otherwise, was still allowed.) Hence, while Himmler made it clear that he rejected Christianity both as doctrine and as institution, he allowed considerable latitude of Christian expression not only for SS men, but in some senses even for himself. Christ could not be saddled with the curse of Jewishness. Even to his SS associates he professed a respect and esteem for his family’s Christian piety. As we shall see in Chapter Eight, Himmler took this to a degree that made even his close associates question the sincerity of his anti-Christian commitment.

The most important anti-Christian at this time beside Himmler was his subordinate Reinhard Heydrich, whose career in the NSDAP was meteoric. Having joined the party only in 1930, by the next year he became head of the Security Service (*Sicherheitsdienst*, or SD) under Himmler. In 1933 he joined Himmler in the Bavarian Political Police, and again accompanied Himmler when the latter transferred to Berlin. He soon took over as head of the office of the Gestapo (Gestapa), and by the beginning of the war became head of the immensely powerful Reich Security Main Office (*Reichssicherheitshauptamt*, or RSHA), which essentially made him the leading policeman of Germany. In this office he was perfectly positioned to cause the

¹³⁴ BAZ Schu 245/2/133 (15 September 1934: Berlin).

¹³⁵ BAZ Schu 245/2/134-135 (20 September 1935: Munich).

Catholic Church maximum difficulty, which he lost no time in doing. He was at the forefront of most anticlerical actions taken by the Nazi state, most notably the Morality Trials of 1936, in which over 250 Catholic priests were accused of crimes against the nation. That year Heydrich stated in an internal report: “Of all the supranational powers, political Catholicism has shown itself time and again as our major opponent.”¹³⁶ His deportment towards the Catholic church was summarized in the testimony of a fellow Nazi, who pointed out that when Heydrich was assassinated in Prague in 1942, “the Christian churches were rid of their toughest opponent.”¹³⁷ John Conway similarly points out that Heydrich, along with Himmler, far outstripped other Nazis in his anticlerical extremism.¹³⁸

Like Himmler, Heydrich had been raised in a strongly Catholic environment, “in his case verging on the fanatical.”¹³⁹ And while Heydrich did not pursue the esoteric mysticism of his superior, he would turn against his childhood faith with equal determination. According to his biographer, “even had he never belonged to the SS, his reaction to his intensely Catholic upbringing would have resulted in an increasing indifference to the Catholic faith.”¹⁴⁰ Usually regarded as much more of a technocrat of power than an ideologue, his views on Catholicism nonetheless led him to write a book, “The Fortunes of our Struggle,” in 1936.¹⁴¹ In it, he declared that all opposition to Nazism ultimately originated in two forces: “Jews and politicized clergy.”¹⁴² Heydrich did not concern himself with Christianity in the book, but rather the secular

¹³⁶ Quoted in Günther Deschner, *Reinhard Heydrich: A Biography* (New York, 1981), 105.

¹³⁷ Quoted in *ibid.*, 109.

¹³⁸ Conway, *Persecution*, 169. Conway also argues that “the murder of Heydrich in 1942 led to a certain improvement in the situation of the Churches” (*ibid.*, 301).

¹³⁹ Deschner, *Heydrich*, 102.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 106.

¹⁴¹ Reinhard Heydrich, *Die Wandlungen unseres Kampfes* (Berlin, 1936).

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 7.

power of the church:

Originally the churches were intended to serve as intermediaries between God and the *Volk*. According to their founders their kingdom was not to be of this world. Yet an entirely politicized and materially ambitious clergy has reversed the teachings of the churches' founders. Now they all proclaim that only they and only their church have the omnipotence of God in this intermediary role. ... Not content with attempting for centuries to destroy the racial and spiritual values of our *Volk*, they now assume an outward show and falsify the preservation of these values, proclaiming themselves saviors of the world.¹⁴³

To every appearance this looked like an attack on all churches. However, as in so many other cases, when Heydrich homed in on his target, the vituperations were all aimed at the Catholic Church:

[C]hurch supporters organized themselves politically to secure these political positions. Before the seizure of power, the basic party structures (the Center Party and Bavarian People's Party) clearly betrayed their politically secular nature. Those groups founded earlier, with a great deal of foresight, to prepare the way for religious politics, have been transformed into supporters of political parties (Catholic Action, etc). In this way the Church is penetrating all aspects of the lives of our *Volk*. Whereas Germany's religious press denies the political nature of these groups, the same churches abroad openly admit it.¹⁴⁴

Heydrich believed that the Catholic Church was fighting Hitler's attempt to bring religious peace through the Concordat, since this would threaten their political prerogatives: "This struggle is supposed to be against Godlessness, and for the salvation of Christian virtues and the preservation of German culture.... We can prove otherwise by a thorough investigation of the church leadership. Documentation gives the lie to their moral and cultural foundations and reveals the emptiness of their arguments. It is not in reality a positive fight for the preservation of religious and cultural values (which are scarcely in danger), but a continuation of the old bitter

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

struggle for secular control of Germany.”¹⁴⁵

Part of Heydrich’s extreme anti-Catholicism was accountable to his rebellion against “an eternally pious” home life. Unlike other Nazis, however, this did not lead Heydrich to a preference for Protestantism over Catholicism. He made no mention of belief in Christ or positive Christianity, instead simply suggesting that “the glasses through which he sees his God is a matter of individual concern for each German.” Nonetheless, according to his biographer, another factor in his growing detachment from Catholicism was his marriage to a woman who had been “brought up in a particularly north German Protestant atmosphere.”¹⁴⁶ It is therefore all the more relevant that, while Heydrich would attempt to curtail the prerogatives of the Catholic Church at every turn, towards the Protestant Church he was considerably less bellicose: “contacts between the evangelical churches, world Protestantism and leading figures in England were [simply] observed.”¹⁴⁷ One of Heydrich’s greatest charges against the Catholic church was its internationalism; the Protestant church in Germany, which had long put forth a national ethos, could not have come in for such attack.

Christianity and Paganism in Party Organizations

Further evidence of the relative strengths of Christians and pagans in the Nazi movement was their status within party organizations. In the many ancillary organizations of the NSDAP the continuing presence of Christians was affirmed, whereas a distinctly negative attitude was

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 9.

¹⁴⁶ Deschner, *Heydrich*, 102. Significantly, Deschner suggests this rebellion had something as well to do with his father, who was originally Protestant but converted to Catholicism to please his wife. Heydrich was therefore raised a Catholic in a town (Halle) which was 94% Protestant: “Young Reinhard was thus brought up in an atmosphere of consciously maintained Catholicism. His very father was instrumental in making him an outsider” (ibid., 20). Reinhard’s marriage to a Protestant, the author implies, was a further demonstration of his rebellion against Catholicism.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 109.

displayed toward pagans. One of the most notable in this regard was the National Socialist Women's Organization (*NS-Frauenschaft*, or NSF), founded in 1931. In an ideological manifesto drafted by the NSF leadership, all the recognized fundamentals of Nazi ideology were affirmed: national rebirth, autarky, purity of race, indoctrination of youth, and the fight against the "Jewish-marxist spirit." And also Christianity: "*We stand for the preservation of Christian belief. We feel responsible for our acts before our family and our Volk, before ourselves and before God.*"¹⁴⁸ Commemorating the founding of the NSF in 1933, Lilli Otto, one of its leaders, wrote: "Our Frauenschaft flag carries the same colors as the Swastika flag, only in different order. Just as red shines out in the Swastika flag, with our flag black stands out, solemn and worthy. On top shines forth the Christian cross in the color of purity, constantly warning us: 'You women and mothers, be real Christians; protect Christianity in your family, rear your children to love the savior'."¹⁴⁹ This notable Christian rhetoric in the NSF and other *völkisch* women's organizations is one of the few areas where scholars have recognized a strong Christian element within the NSDAP — usually explained, however, as the Nazis' grudging concession to stronger religiosity among women.¹⁵⁰

But one of the most outstanding examples of a Christian identity in the NSF came from its only male leader, Gottfried Krummacker. Although he did not last long in this position, being replaced by Gertrud Scholtz-Klink within 6 months, he revealed a complete commitment to the Nazi agenda.¹⁵¹ Krummacker's speeches contained repeated references to God and the role He

¹⁴⁸ BAZ NS 44/55 (1 October 1932: Munich) (emphasis in the original).

¹⁴⁹ BAZ NS 26/254 (n.d.[1933], n.p.).

¹⁵⁰ See Claudia Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland: Women, the Family and Nazi Politics* (New York, 1987), Ch. 7; Michael Phayer, *Protestant and Catholic Women in Nazi Germany* (Detroit, 1990), Chs. 2, 4.

¹⁵¹ Jill Stephenson demonstrates that Krummacker's short tenure as Nazi Women's Leader was not accountable to ideological impurity, but organizational infighting and the desire among members of the NS-Frauenschaft to have a woman as leader; Jill Stephenson, *The Nazi Organisation of Women* (London, 1981), 103-05.

ordained for women. Shortly after assuming control of the NSF, Krummacher reminded women of their maternal task:

Through German women the German youth must learn to set their sights on the Lord of all the world and the history of its peoples. Everything is located in God's grace. This knowledge, which our *Volk* has forgotten in the last years, must be reawakened in them. There is no life for our *Volk* without the blessing from above, without the leadership of God, who gave us our Führer Adolf Hitler. We expect that our German women will view their work, their service to the German *Volk*, as a calling, as a command from God, as our Führer Adolf Hitler time and again stresses how he views his office and his task as God's calling.¹⁵²

The heavily religious tone of this speech, and others that Krummacher gave as Women's leader,¹⁵³ might be regarded as little more than calculation, reflecting the Nazis' interest in telling their female followers what they wanted to hear. But Krummacher was also a member of the provincial synod of the Protestant Church and the Rhineland leader of the German Christians.¹⁵⁴ In fact, he had been recommended to Rudolf Hess for the position by the Protestant Reich Bishop Ludwig Müller.¹⁵⁵ His speeches repeatedly sounded Christian themes, so much so that even some in the NSF complained. According to one member's protest, "Krummacher cannot talk three minutes without quoting the Bible four times."¹⁵⁶ Josef Grohé, the Gauleiter for Krummacher's home town, similarly lamented that Krummacher could not give a speech "without citing a whole series of passages from the Bible, even from the Old Testament."¹⁵⁷

These complaints notwithstanding, the NSF continued to emphasize Christian values. Hildegard Passow, one of the leaders of the NSF, called Christ the first socialist and Hitler his

¹⁵² *Hamburger Nachrichten*, 29/11/33 (in BStA Rehse/P3356).

¹⁵³ For example, "Die Frau ist die Hüterin deutscher Kultur," *VB*, 25/10/33 (in BStA Rehse/P3356).

¹⁵⁴ *Kölnische Volkszeitung*, 19/11/33 (in BStA Rehse/P3356).

¹⁵⁵ Stephenson, *Organisation*, 102.

¹⁵⁶ Koonz, *Mothers*, 160.

¹⁵⁷ BAZ Personalakt Krummacher (28 February 1934: Köln).

successor.¹⁵⁸ She also suggested that the NSF's antisemitism accorded with the Bible's teachings: "At no time does the Lord God require of us charitable conciliation with the Jew, the mortal enemy of the Aryan character. Christ himself called the Jews 'the sons of the Devil, a brood of snakes,' and drove the dealers and moneychangers from the house of God with a whip."¹⁵⁹ Scholtz-Klink, Krummacher's successor, did not speak a Christian language as did Krummacher. In fact, Scholtz-Klink is usually regarded as having been hostile to Christianity.¹⁶⁰ She almost never spoke of Christ when she addressed religious themes, but neither did she attack Christianity or its representatives as Ley or Himmler did. At the Women's section of the 1935 national party congress, Scholtz-Klink discussed the issue of church-leaving: "God is love. ... I do not say 'German mothers, stay away from the Church;' I say, 'Be as in olden times the priestess in your own homes'."¹⁶¹ As we shall see, under Scholtz-Klink the NSF would live up to this claim, not only permitting its members to stay in the church, but also actively cooperating with church organizations well into the Third Reich. The NSF's positive stance towards Christianity could bring it into conflict with Nazi paganists, such as the race theorist Hans Günther, who complained to Rosenberg that, at a 1934 assembly, the NSF had openly propagated a Christian Nazism aimed directly against him.¹⁶²

The NSF tried to extend its influence over the Nazi organization for young women, the League of German Girls (*Bund deutscher Mädel*, or BdM); but the BdM ultimately came under

¹⁵⁸ Claudia Koonz, "The Competition for Women's *Lebensraum*, 1928-1934," in Renate Bridenthal et al (eds.), *When Biology Became Destiny: Women in Weimar and Nazi Germany* (New York, 1984), 234 n.64.

¹⁵⁹ BAZ NS 26/254 (n.d., n.p. [1933]).

¹⁶⁰ Koonz, *Mothers*, 231, 249; Stephenson, *Organisation*, 171. Neither, it should be noted, empirically demonstrate that Scholtz-Klink was anti-Christian. Michael Phayer points to Scholtz-Klink's hostility towards Catholicism: *Protestant and Catholic Women in Nazi Germany* (Detroit, 1990), 117-18 — but nowhere does he suggest that she was *ideologically* opposed to Protestantism.

¹⁶¹ Quoted in Koonz, *Mothers*, 294. Curiously, Koonz contends this speech "appealed to a pantheistic, pagan Germanic faith" (ibid.), even though Scholtz-Klink makes no reference to non-Christian religions.

¹⁶² BAZ NS 8/257/94 (24 March 1934: Jena).

the control of the Hitler Youth (HJ) and its leader Baldur von Schirach. Describing a BdM vacation camp in 1935, one girl remarked on the religious education she had received there:

We touched upon the Hauer movement and saw clarity and firmness in Christianity, over against the sincere but uncertain searching of paganism [*Deutschglauben*]. We did not always solve the difficult questions to everyone's satisfaction; but when we sometimes went to the village church in the evenings, we knew that God's greatness and love would certainly answer our questions and longings The last morning we were once again assembled, like so many times before, in front of the Swastika flag. 'Be active Christians [*Christen der Tat*]! Serve our Führer, serve our God! Give all honor to him who so happily leads our *Volk*.' These words spoke to us, and accompanied us afterward.¹⁶³

It is not clear whether the "him who so happily leads" was Hitler or God. Given the tenor of the occasion, it was most likely both.

Schirach, head of the Hitler Youth and Reich Youth Leader (*Reichsjugendführer*), had been widely regarded as one of the main exponents of an anti-Christian paganism within the Nazi party. Even the party leadership expressed concern about him, as in a discussion between Hitler, Hans Schemm and Otto Wagener, in which Hitler poured his usual derision on paganism: "All that rubbish about the Thing places, the solstice festivals, the Midgard snake ..."¹⁶⁴ Schemm agreed with Hitler: "I'm very glad to hear you say this There is such a lot of nonsense talked about the cult of Wotan and the spirit of the Edda These idiotic windbags have no idea what their spouting causes."¹⁶⁵ Referring to these paganistic rites, Wagener pointed out that they were known to happen in the Hitler Youth. Hitler suggested that these could have beneficial consequences, since they brought German youth into nature, "to show them the powerful workings of divine creation." They also served a moral purpose by keeping youth out of saloons

¹⁶³ "An der Front," *Das Wort*, 17/11/35 (in BAP 62 Di 1/75/81).

¹⁶⁴ Turner (ed.) *Memoirs*, 277. As Turner explains, the "Midgard snake" was supposed to be the adversary of Thor in Nordic religious mythology.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

and “airless dives.”¹⁶⁶ Wagener maintained “the youth leaders must not fall into the error of wanting to turn this into a religion.” Hitler reassured him: “Don’t worry, they won’t.”¹⁶⁷

As a private conversation, this could hardly have allayed the fears of the churches, especially the Catholic Church, which believed that in Schirach they had found a definite enemy of Christianity.¹⁶⁸ Schirach did little to pacify clerical opinion. At a December 1933 speech in Braunschweig, he promised: “The newly-enrolled members of the Hitler Youth will not ask of their comrades: ‘Are you Protestant?’ or ‘Are you Catholic?’, only ‘Are you German’.”¹⁶⁹ Taken in isolation, this passage would seem to offer ample evidence that the churches’ fears were justified. But in the same speech, Schirach insisted he was not anti-Christian: “They say of us that we are an anti-Christian movement. They even say that I am an outspoken pagan. ... I solemnly declare here, before the German public, that I stand on the basis of Christianity, but I declare just as solemnly that I will put down every attempt to introduce confessional matters into our Hitler Youth.” The churches’ fears were in one sense well-founded: Schirach made no hesitation to publicly proclaim an anti-confessional and to some extent anti-clerical position. But as with so many others in the party elite, Schirach demonstrated his belief that Christianity and the churches were not the same thing. Schirach gave further indication of his religious views in a poem he wrote in 1934 (he considered himself the poet laureate of the Nazi movement, even publishing a collection of his work) called “Christ.” In it we see both the suffering Christ of conventional Christian doctrine and the warrior Christ of *völkisch* Christianity: “If today he descended from Heaven, the great warrior who struck the moneychangers/ You would once again shout ‘crucify!’/ And nail him to the cross that he himself carried/ But he would gently

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 278-79.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 278.

¹⁶⁸ Cf. Conway, *Persecution*, 124-25.

¹⁶⁹ *Dokumente zur Kirchenpolitik*, 1: 182-83. In a meeting at the beginning of October, Schirach said of himself: “I belong to no confession. I am neither Protestant nor Catholic, I believe only in Germany (ibid., 182).

laugh at your hatred/ 'The truth remains even when your bearers are passed/ Faith remains, because I give my life ...'/ And the fighter of all the world towers on the cross."¹⁷⁰

In his book of the same year, "The Hitler Youth: Idea and Form," Schirach made what again appeared to be an unequivocally anti-Christian statement: "Whoever works for Germany uncompromisingly is the mortal enemy of every confessional principle in a state organization." Here again was an unrestrained — and public — attack on confessionalism. While Hitler, among others, suggested that Nazism would respect both confessions equally, it seemed that in Schirach's view Nazism would respect neither. Such sentiments led some observers to the conclusion that Schirach intended to create a "third confession."¹⁷¹ At the same time, however, Schirach insisted that his Hitler youths would have every right to worship according to their own beliefs: "In no manner does the HJ restrict the religious activities of its members. Neither in their visits to Sunday services, nor in their contribution to other church festivities, will Catholic Hitler youths be restricted by the leadership of the HJ."¹⁷² And indeed Schirach made free each Sunday morning and one afternoon during the week for both Protestants and Catholics in the Hitler Youth to worship and engage in religious activity. Additionally, the Hitler Youth provided support for church educational work, so long as it was of a "purely religious" character.¹⁷³ According to Schirach, this granting of religious expression, providing a place for Christianity within one of the most important Nazi organizations, did not contradict the totalitarian claims of the Nazi movement: "I hold the view that religious meetings and events in special religious youth gatherings do not contradict the HJ's totalizing claims. Every effort that aims at a deepening and intensification of religious feeling must not only be welcomed, but also

¹⁷⁰ *Evangelium im Dritten Reich*, 1/7/34 (in BAP 62 Di 1/75/122).

¹⁷¹ Cf. Charles Macfarland, *The New Church and the New Germany* (New York, 1934), 151.

¹⁷² Baldur von Schirach, *Die Hitler-Jugend: Idee und Gestalt* (Berlin, 1934), 44.

¹⁷³ Scholder, *Churches*, 2: 115.

led, by any youth leadership with a sense of responsibility. I believe that through the agreement with the Reich Bishop of the Protestant Church, the Hitler Youth has indicated that it is ready to grant the necessary space for religious education.”¹⁷⁴ Here Schirach was referring to the 13 December 1933 agreement between him and Müller to formally incorporate the various Protestant youth groups into the Hitler Youth. (While the Catholic Church sought to maintain its confessionally distinct youth groups, the pro-Müller faction of the Protestant Church had signaled its desire to subsume confessionalism under the “above churches” doctrine of positive Christianity.)

Several examples of Hitler Youth activity demonstrate that Schirach was sincere in his willingness to permit, seemingly without hindrance, Christian observance and activity. Refuting accusations made by the Protestant Church in Saxony that Schirach was encouraging his officers to leave the church, the Reich Youth Leadership Office informed the party’s Reich Leadership Office in private correspondence that “HJ leaders do not have to make a decision between being an HJ leader or being a Christian.”¹⁷⁵ A Protestant newspaper observed with approval that pastors were to be found addressing outdoor Hitler Youth gatherings. At one such gathering a pastor invited Hitler Youth to regard Christ as the Lord: “He is our light. Away with all dialecticism and formalistic squabbling! Living faith is what counts. Christ seized upon this: selflessly devote yourself to the community, to your brothers; stand responsible before God, be overwhelmed by him. Be free of dross, be free of oneself! As John said: while he grows, I am diminished.”¹⁷⁶ In May 1935 the Nazis’ anticlerical and extremely antisemitic newspaper *Der Stürmer* reported with consternation that a troop of Hitler Youth had greeted representatives of

¹⁷⁴ Schirach, *Hitler-Jugend*, 44.

¹⁷⁵ BAP 62 Ka 1/22/184-185 (12 July 1935: Berlin).

¹⁷⁶ “Hitlerjugend hält Gottesdienst zur Sonnenwende,” *Evangelium im Dritten Reich*, 1/7/34 (in BAP 62 Di 1/75/122).

the Inner Mission — the Protestant Church’s welfare branch and as such a confessional organization — “in full uniform” at Berlin’s Anhalter Bahnhof.¹⁷⁷ While HJ members were allowed these prerogatives, the same freedom of religious expression was not granted within the HJ to paganist organizations like the German Faith Movement (*Deutsche Glaubensbewegung*, or DGB). When the DGB attempted to use a passage from one of Schirach’s poems in a promotional flier, the leadership of the HJ voiced its disapproval. Writing to the head office of the Gestapo, the Reich Youth Leadership Office complained: “The Reich Youth Leader has never given the German Faith Movement permission to use this poem for its propaganda purposes. That the Reich Youth Leader moreover has forbidden any propaganda activity in the Hitler Youth for the German Faith Movement is proof that the quote has been misused.” Schirach’s office requested that the Gestapo confiscate all copies of the leaflet.¹⁷⁸

Christian voices could also be heard within the ranks of the SA, until the Röhm Purge of 1934 one of the most radical of Nazi organizations.¹⁷⁹ One example from the *Kampfzeit* was an article in an SA organ titled “Christ’s Spirit — SA Spirit!”: “We interpret in the Gospel not the word, but the spirit. We see in the seed, in the model of our Savior not only that he does good and shuns evil, but also that he struggles.... Jesus was not locked up in a church, waiting for the throng. ... What SA man has not surprised himself with the thought that the orator in a meeting, the man of the people, says exactly what a minister would preach?”¹⁸⁰ Another article, “Under the Cross,” engaged even more closely with an evangelizing discourse: “To us Christianity is not

¹⁷⁷ “HJ sammelt für konfessionelle Zwecke,” *Der Stürmer*, 19/5/35 (in BAP 62 Di 1/75/175).

¹⁷⁸ BAP R5101/23139/360 (16 December 1935: Berlin).

¹⁷⁹ One of the leaders of the purge was Buch. In a postwar interview, Buch claimed it was he who forced Hitler to recognize Röhm’s homosexuality as unacceptable, and to suggest Victor Lutze — “a man who was the exact opposite of Röhm; married with children, modest” — as his replacement: IfZ ZS 855/34-39 (18 July 1945: n.p.). Donald McKale confirms this, adding that Buch was one of the first to work for Röhm’s assassination: *The Nazi Party Courts: Hitler’s Management of Conflict in his Movement, 1921-1945* (Lawrence, 1974), 100.

¹⁸⁰ *Der S.A. Mann*, VB supplement, 18/1/30.

an empty phrase, but a glowing life. It lives through us and in us Thus is the strength of the nation gathered under the sign of the cross. When the red beast threatens us, or the well-behaved philistine [*sittsame Spießler*] ... sneers at us, we look up to the Cross and receive the doctrine of struggle.”¹⁸¹

Such sentiment continued to be expressed after the *Machtergreifung*. 1933 saw a spate of Nazi mass weddings in Protestant churches, such as one held in the Lazarus Church in Berlin. More than forty couples were married on this occasion, with the entire “Horst Wessel *Sturm*” of the SA in attendance.¹⁸² In 1935 a Protestant theology student in the SA insisted that he and fellow Christians were never made to feel outside the community, were always greeted with feelings of comradeship, and were even appreciated as men of “inner conviction.” Theologians in the SA, this student continued, “show their comrades that above all else theologians are not enemies of the *Volk*, but men like they, who, precisely because they are Christian, want to serve their *Volk* and Fatherland with body and soul.”¹⁸³ He was certainly not the only theologian in the SA.¹⁸⁴ Nor would he necessarily have been a German Christian; within the ranks of the SA could be found members of the Confessing Church as well. A Confessing Church vicar in Silesia was a member, Göttingen members of the BK “routinely belonged to the SA,” and in Brandenburg

¹⁸¹ *Der S.A. Mann*, 11/12/30.

¹⁸² *Evangelium im Dritten Reich*, 3/7/33. Horst Wessel, an SA man killed in a street brawl and one of the greatest heroes in the Nazi pantheon, was the son of a Protestant pastor, and according to his sister Ingeborg a believing Christian: *Evangelium im Dritten Reich*, 4/3/34. On Nazi activity in other Berlin churches, see Manfred Gailus (ed.), *Kirchengemeinden im Nationalsozialismus: Sieben Beispiele aus Berlin* (Berlin, 1990). An SA *Sturm* was roughly the size of an army company.

¹⁸³ “SA-Mann und Theologie Student,” *Evangelischer Beobachter*, 8/8/35 (in BAP 62 Di 1/75/88).

¹⁸⁴ The Institut für Zeitgeschichte in Munich contains a file (F 304) devoted to Protestant theologians in the Nazi movement. One of them, a Hans Kipfmüller, was a pastor and *alte Kämpfer*, having entered the NSDAP in 1925 with membership number 9929. In addition to being the local Protestant pastor, Kipfmüller was also SA *Oberscharführer*, local leader of the Nazi People’s Welfare Organization (NSV) and district leader of the office for cultural policy. In his personnel file, he was listed as a specialist in “race policy.” Bearing the party’s Golden Badge of Honor, a rare distinction which was conferred only upon those who displayed true ideological commitment, rounded out Kipfmüller’s credentials as a Nazi (IfZ F 304 [n.d., n.p.]).

there were several active members of the Confessing Church in the SA.¹⁸⁵

Christian activity in the SA, while perhaps garnering approval from some sections of Protestant opinion, could also generate protest. On one such occasion, indignation was expressed in the *Deutsches Pfarrerblatt* that in the Rhineland town of Ketzberg, near Solingen, the Protestant parish held its Bible hour in the local SA house. As this pastors' newspaper told its readers, "this rings in our ears like the dissonance of the wildest nigger jazz [*Niggerjazz*]." ¹⁸⁶ Pastor Lempfert of Solingen wrote back to the newspaper, explaining that the Bible hour did not take place in an SA home, but "in a private home that has for many years served both an SA formation and the Protestant church congregation." To dispel the impression that the SA were taking liberties with Christian theology, the pastor also stated that "the local political authorities and the undersigned [i.e. the pastor] are on good terms." ¹⁸⁷

Just as paganists complained of Christian activity in the Hitler Youth and Women's Organization, they also expressed dismay when it occurred in the SA. One paganist newspaper reported on an SA *Sturm* taking part in the hundredth anniversary celebrations of the Young Men's Christian Association (CVJM) of 1935 in Bremen. One of the members of this *Sturm*, which had come all the way from Silesia for the event, publicly declared that "the SA is prepared to make its confession to Christ." ¹⁸⁸ In the same year, a rumor had spread that the Rosenberg faction of the party was attempting to expel clergy from the SA. This question was addressed by the Department for Cultural Peace, a small office set up in the *Reichsleitung* in February 1934 to

¹⁸⁵ Victoria Barnett, *For the Soul of the People: Protestant Protest against Hitler* (Oxford, 1992), 40; Robert Ericksen, "A Radical Minority: Resistance in the German Protestant Church," in Francis Nicosia and Lawrence Stokes (eds.), *Germans Against Nazism: Nonconformity, Opposition and Resistance in the Third Reich* (New York, 1990), 129-30; EZA 14/589 (8 April 1935: Zepernick, Kreis Niederbarnim). In the small Brandenburg town of Zepernick alone, two members of the Confessing Church synod were also SA men.

¹⁸⁶ *Deutsches Pfarrerblatt*, 20/10/36 (in EZA 14/590). The newspaper got its information from *Der SA-Mann*, the weekly supplement found in the *VB*.

¹⁸⁷ *Deutsches Pfarrerblatt*, 1/12/36 (in EZA 14/590).

¹⁸⁸ *Flammenzeichen*, 23/2/35 (in BAP 62 Di 1/75/99). The paper reported that this unit had given itself the

handle religious matters in the Nazi party. In a letter addressed to the governing board of the Confessing Church, the Department assured them that such an order had neither been given nor proposed.¹⁸⁹

The German Faith Movement

These organizations were all formally affiliated with the NSDAP. However, in the context of Nazi encounters with paganism, it is also worth exploring briefly the history of a group of pagans loyal to the Nazi movement. Although it never became a party organization, the German Faith Movement (*Deutsche Glaubensbewegung*, or DGB) represented an organized voice for paganism in the Third Reich. Members of the NSDAP could be found in their ranks, even if none in the party leadership were present.

A major DGB rally in June 1934 saw speeches given by both Jakob Hauer and Ernst Reventlow, specifically regarding their views on Christian dogma. As Rosenberg had done, Hauer rejected the notion of Original Sin. Reventlow added that the DGB rejected the biblical concepts of guilt, retribution and salvation: “Our forefathers knew nothing of these concepts, and they were more pious and reverent than the Jews of the Old Testament.” Hauer, the ex-pastor, explicitly rejected “positive Christianity” as irrelevant and even expressed disappointment with Luther: “We will not and cannot stand by Martin Luther’s half protest.”¹⁹⁰ At the same time, however, they insisted that they were not breaking away from the person of Jesus; they were not propagating racial materialism; and they did not believe that the *Volk* itself was divine. They

nickname “Holy *Sturm*.”

¹⁸⁹ EZA 50/17/91 (15 October 1935: Berlin). This office merged into a new Reich Church Ministry the following year.

¹⁹⁰ *Deutsche Zeitung*, 12/6/34 (in BAP R5101/23139/12).

also insisted that the idea of religion without the Hereafter was “unthinkable.” And towards individual Christians they professed no animus: “Whereas the Christian is of the view that the Christian of an alien *Volk* stands closer to him than the ‘pagan’ of his own *Volk*, we maintain that the Christian of our own *Volk* stands closer to us than the ‘pagan’ of an alien *Volk*, precisely because he is of our blood. This is the exact foundation of our faith.” The defense of Jesus was in line with Hauer’s declaration from the month before: “[T]he thousand year history of Christianity in the *germanisch-deutsch* space is only an episode, which today is coming to an end. We do not mean the figure of Jesus — in the future there will always be Jesus congregations — but rather the near eastern-semitic form of faith which is alien to the *germanisch-deutsch* world.”¹⁹¹

Other voices in the DGB took a similarly differentiated view. One was Herbert Grabert, who edited the paganist monthly *Deutscher Glaube* (“German Faith”).¹⁹² He also worked in the Religious Studies section of Rosenberg’s Office of Ideological Information. In 1936, Grabert published a book called “The Protestant Mission of the German *Volk*: Fundamentals of German Faith History from Luther to Hauer.”¹⁹³ He suggested that Germanic faith and Christianity were irreconcilable, that his movement was about belief rather than religion, God rather than Christ, *Volk* rather than Church.¹⁹⁴ Luther was a central figure in Grabert’s religious history, having begun the long process of German liberation from the stifling Roman Church. But Luther did not, in Grabert’s view, found Protestantism. Rather, Luther’s struggle against the Roman Church expressed a preexisting Protestant “original force” (*Urkraft*), which Grabert defined as a Nordic-

¹⁹¹ “Prof. Hauer über die Deutsche Glaubensbewegung,” *Frankfurt Oder-Zeitung*, 18/5/34 (in BAP R5101/23139/2).

¹⁹² BAP R5101/23140/273 (Unidentified newspaper clipping, 30/9/36).

¹⁹³ Herbert Grabert, *Der protestantische Auftrag des deutschen Volkes: Grundzüge der deutschen Glaubensgeschichte von Luther bis Hauer* (Stuttgart, 1936).

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 9-20.

German spirit of the soul (*Seelentum*) aimed against the Christianizing forces emanating from the south.¹⁹⁵ Luther went only half way towards fulfilling the Protestant mission. It was the task of the current age to complete the process: “Never was the Protestant mission of our *Volk* so clear and indispensable as today.”¹⁹⁶ Jesus as a person could remain as a friend and “traveling companion” (*Weggenossen*).¹⁹⁷ But the “foreign, Jewish” Bible would have to be removed. Hence Grabert advocated a Protestantism with even less Christian doctrine than Rosenberg had retained.

Grabert knew this would prompt an obvious question: “What, then, do we as the German Faith Movement have to do with Protestantism, with this phase of Christian church history?” The answer: “It is precisely a chief concern of this work to show that German Protestantism in its best parts can be regarded as a movement of German blood from the German spirit and German soul.”¹⁹⁸ Like Rosenberg, Grabert maintained that contemporary Protestantism, under the influence of Barth, was losing its unique line of thought and returning to Rome. This led Grabert to a paradoxical assertion: “German Protestantism is dead, but the Protestant spirit and mission still live The German Faith Movement of today is the heir of the best elements of German Protestantism.”¹⁹⁹ In other words, the Protestant *institution* was dead, but not Protestant belief, which expressed itself in four fundamentals: an immediacy to God (*Gottunmittelbarkeit*); heartfelt trust and belief in God; a faith beholden to no one but God; and freedom of conscience before God.²⁰⁰ When Grabert mapped out his intellectual path from Luther to Hauer, he

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 38-39.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 40.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 285.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 42.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 43.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 59.

significantly gave a prominent place to the development of liberal Protestantism in the 19th Century, which culminated in the works of the “last great Protestant theologian,” Adolf von Harnack.²⁰¹

The DGB’s insistence that it was *the* religious expression of Nazism was not taken kindly in the NSDAP. Certainly they had their sympathizers. Himmler, for instance, permitted the SS to take part in the official ceremonies of the DGB’s Sports Palace meeting in Spring 1935, an occasion that marked the height of their fortunes.²⁰² In Württemberg, *Kultusminister* Christian Mergenthaler permitted members of the DGB to teach at Protestant schools, much to the displeasure of the Protestant press.²⁰³ At best, such Nazis were willing to tolerate the DGB as a religious community that would remain outside the party. Even Rosenberg, who shared many if not most DGB precepts, could not envision them as a formal party organization. In his ideal Nazi state, they would be made a religious community on par with the Christian confessions, which would lose their status as official religions and become independent associations.²⁰⁴

On the other hand, many other Nazis were far less tolerant, and even took an active stand against them. In July 1934, Richard Zwörner, the consultant for religion and churches in the NSLB, suggested that the religious claims of the DGB were spurious and that the NSDAP reject them.²⁰⁵ In October Hans Schemm banned the DGB in his capacity as Gauleiter of Bayerische Ostmark.²⁰⁶ In Brandenburg the same month, Wilhelm Kube banned the organization after what

²⁰¹ Ibid., 208. Nowhere did Grabert refer to Harnack’s rejection of the Old Testament, which would have presumably enhanced his esteem for this theologian all the more.

²⁰² BAP R5101/23139/338 (2 May 1935: Berlin).

²⁰³ *Das Evangelische Deutschland*, 2/9/34 (in BAP 62 Di 1/106/349). It was noted with indignation that the Concordat protected Catholics from such infiltration.

²⁰⁴ “Plan für die NS-Religionspolitik,” BAP 62 Di 1/84-2 (n.d., n.p.).

²⁰⁵ BStA MK/37069a (31 July 1934: Bayreuth).

²⁰⁶ BAP 62 Di 1/106/34 (16 October 1934: Tübingen).

he regarded to be an inflammatory speech.²⁰⁷ Another paganist organization, the Nordic Ring, was disbanded by the Nazi authorities altogether, and even the use of Norse names was outlawed for several months.²⁰⁸ The next year saw even more repressive measures. In February 1935 an article in the *Berliner Tageblatt* reported that Reventlow's paper *Reichswart* had been banned for subversive content.²⁰⁹ Repression of the DGB intensified after the Sports Palace meeting, where time and again they made claims to being the true voice of Nazi religion. That June the head of the Saxon Gestapo banned a meeting of the DGB in Leipzig, even though it was a private meeting for members only.²¹⁰ Members complained when, a short time later, the Saxon Minister of the Interior banned the movement altogether.²¹¹ Finally, in August 1935, Heydrich forbade all rallies and other public meetings of the DGB across the Reich, restricting them to private meetings only.²¹²

Even this was not sufficient for some party leaders. Josef Terboven, Gauleiter of Essen and Reich Commissioner for occupied Norway during the war, was opposed to the DGB on the grounds that their activities caused considerable difficulties for him in his overwhelmingly Catholic district. He also expressed indignation when the local DGB speaker maintained that "No Christian can be a National Socialist and no National Socialist Christian." Terboven believed this went against the will of the *Führer*. Furthermore, it was not up to the DGB to decide who could be a Nazi and who not.²¹³ Further action was taken against the DGB when it

²⁰⁷ BAP R5101/23139/253 (30 November 1934: Berlin).

²⁰⁸ Paul Weindling, *Health, Race and German Politics between National Unification and Nazism, 1870-1945* (Cambridge, 1989), 478.

²⁰⁹ *Berliner Tageblatt*, 15/2/35 (in BAP R5101/23139/59).

²¹⁰ BAP R5101/23139/203 (15 July 1935: Berlin).

²¹¹ BAP R5101/23139/223 (20 July 1935: Lütz).

²¹² *Dokumente zur Kirchenpolitik*, 3: 60.

²¹³ BAP R5101/23139/145 (8 October 1935: Koblenz).

was noticed that their newspaper *Reichswart*, which had had its ban lifted, described itself as a “National Socialist weekly.” Hanns Kerrl, who as Reich Church Minister was responsible for all religious bodies in Germany, declared this to be a false association of the NSDAP with the DGB, and upon obtaining the backing of Hess and Goebbels, ordered the paper to drop this designation.²¹⁴

The DGB’s claims to represent the true face of Nazi religiosity were also resented by the German Christians. They were especially insulted by Bishop Wurm’s contention that the German Christians, as members of the NSDAP, stood for the ideology of Rosenberg and the DGB. They insisted that *they* were the true representatives of Nazi religion, who stood “in the middle of the great National Socialist front against all opposed ideologies.”²¹⁵ Joachim Hossenfelder, one-time leader of the German Christians and one of its most theologically radical exponents, also rejected comparisons of the DGB with the DC, arguing that not only their theologies differed, but that the DGB contained politically unreliable elements.²¹⁶ This was not simply propaganda: among the many religious associations the DGB absorbed in 1933 was the sizable League of Free Religious Communities, which according to Klaus Scholder “came from the free-thinking Marxist tradition.”²¹⁷ Even Artur Dinter entered the fray. Hauer sued the one-time Gauleiter, expelled by Hitler for trying to make the NSDAP into a platform for his religious views, when Dinter publicly accused him of being an atheist and his DGB of being an atheistic

²¹⁴ BAP R5101/23139/296 (14 December 1935: Berlin). Starting with the 25 January 1936 issue of *Reichswart*, the subtitle was changed to “Weekly for national independence and German socialism” (in BAP R5101/23139/295).

²¹⁵ BAP 62 Di 1/75/89-90 (2 August 1935: Berlin). Similar to the action taken against the *Reichswart*, Nazi authorities issued an order to the German Christians two years later, forbidding them to use the swastika in their official emblem. But while the action against the *Reichswart* was taken to assert the party’s independence from paganism, their stance towards the DC was motivated by a desire to appear neutral in the Church Struggle: BAP R43 II/150/103-04 (4 May 1938: Berlin).

²¹⁶ BAP R43 II/163/145-156 (28 January 1935: Berlin).

²¹⁷ Scholder, *Churches*, 1: 452.

movement.²¹⁸

In spite of repeated warnings, Hauer continued to argue that the DGB's religion fit that of the Nazis more than any other. For this reason, Nazi state authorities finally forced Hauer to resign his leadership of the DGB in April 1936. When Heydrich notified him of this decision, direct reference was made to Hauer's repeated attempts to inject his movement into Nazism.²¹⁹ Reventlow left the leadership as well, but voluntarily. Unlike Hauer, he found the repeated attacks on Christianity increasingly disagreeable. As he stated in private correspondence to Kerrl's ministry: "The struggle which the DG[B] leads against both Christianity and Christian *Volk* comrades is, for me as a National Socialist, highly intolerable. This struggle is not compatible with point 24 of the [party] program ..."²²⁰ He had always been in favor of religious peace, he wrote, and wanted above all to follow Hitler's dictum that there could be no religious warfare for the sake of the nation. Instead of working for cooperation between Protestants, Catholics and non-Christians, elements of the DGB were pushing it in a radically anti-Christian course that he had found unacceptable, because anti-Nazi. Reventlow was not simply covering his tracks here. As early as 1927, years before the founding of the DGB or the seizure of power, Reventlow had announced his agreement with Hitler's policy of religious neutrality, especially the idea that Protestant and Catholic should be united in common defense against the Jew.²²¹ Reventlow took his paper *Reichswart* with him, using it to further his own view that the non-Christian German had to respect and tolerate the views of his Christian compatriots.²²²

²¹⁸ *Westfälischer Volksblatt*, 7/5/36 (in BAP 62 Di 1/71/33).

²¹⁹ Conway, *Persecution*, 108.

²²⁰ "Die nationalsozialistischen Gründe für mein Ausscheiden aus der Deutschen Glaubensbewegung," BAP R5101/23140/39-43 (8 April 1936: Berlin).

²²¹ See Chapter Three, n. 124.

²²² Cf. "Um die innerliche Geschlossenheit des Volkes," *Reichswart*, 23/10/37 (in BAP R5101/23141/177).

Conclusion

With the conquest of power in 1933, the Nazis were afforded the opportunity to act upon the religious convictions they professed in the *Kampfzeit*. The anti-Christians of the party were strikingly honest about their dislike of the Christian religion. Neither Rosenberg nor Himmler affected a Christian stance in public any more than they did behind closed doors. The great clerical hostility that met his *Mythus* did not lead Rosenberg to retract his criticisms in the name of political opportunism; they were instead publicly reaffirmed in his subsequent writings. In the same way, Heydrich publicly derided the Catholic church as perhaps *the* enemy of the state. Himmler, who might have been expected to lean on his former Christian faith for the sake of propaganda, made no public attempt to do so. He did state publicly that his SS men must believe in God: and this was his private position as well.

On the other hand, those who upheld “positive Christianity” before 1933 demonstrated a continued allegiance to it afterward. Goebbels and Hitler suggested in public that many of the domestic measures taken by the regime — the destruction of marxist organizations, the strengthening of the family, the Winter Relief Drive, and other attributes of the *Volksgemeinschaft* — were inspired by the ethical principles of positive or “practical” Christianity. (We shall explore this issue further in Chapter Seven.) All who insisted they or their movement were Christian in the *Kampfzeit* maintained this attitude afterward. Just as new voices emerged on the anti-Christian side, especially Himmler’s, they emerged on the positive Christian side too, most notably with Göring. Their enduring rejection of paganism was equally as public as Rosenberg’s endorsement of it. Publicly and privately, the party’s elite rejected paganist attempts to claim the mantle of “party religion,” whether these came from members of the party or the DGB. There is little to support the claim that the DGB or its ideology were

“widely supported” in Nazi circles.²²³ Lower down the ranks of the party, the right of Christians to retain their religious beliefs and practices was affirmed.

Many of these positive Christians celebrated Luther as a national hero, and positioned themselves as his inheritors. But by celebrating Luther, they also showed the limits of their interconfessionalism. Catholic positive Christians were hard to find at the Luther Day. Notable in his absence during the festivities was Goebbels, who as Propaganda Minister might have been expected to say anything deemed advantageous. While Nazi leaders like Frick, Buch, Koch, Rust or Schemm all freely associated Luther with Nazism, none of Christianity’s antagonists in the party — Himmler and Ley most notably — felt obligated to affect an adoration of Luther for the sake of politics. Their private hostility was matched by public silence. Even Rosenberg, who meticulously detached Luther from Lutheran Christianity, made no appearance at the Luther festivities, presumably because he found them too Christian.

Another limit to the interconfessionalism of positive Christianity was the party’s church policy. Relations with the Catholic Church were never warm, despite several points of ideological contact: whereas Catholics tended to reject Nazi racial theory, in almost all instances Nazis rejected Catholic internationalism. On the other hand, many Nazis proclaimed an affinity for Protestantism. Did this translate into a positive bearing toward the institutions of Protestantism? Was Nazi action against Protestant pastors the natural consequence of putting idea into practice, or the product of contingency? Was it Nazi policy to destroy the Protestant church as an institutional rival, or did the Nazis seek instead to build a relationship with it as an ideological ally? These questions will be taken up in the next chapter.

²²³ Cf. Conway, *Persecution*, 109, 122.

6 “Completing the Reformation”: The Protestant Reich Church

Through me the Protestant Church could become the established church, as in England. — Adolf Hitler¹

Nazis expressed various degrees of anticlericalism. While this anticlericalism was often articulated in an undifferentiated manner, it was not applied uniformly to both confessions. Whereas the Catholic Church continued to be attacked for its “internationalism” and doctrinal stand against racialist categories, the Protestant Church was generally treated much more favorably. Particularly revealing in this regard was the plan to unite the twenty-eight Protestant state churches of Germany into one national church — a Reich Church. Conventional historiography regards the Nazi interest in institutional Protestantism as duplicitous. For instance, John Conway believes that the Nazi endorsement of a *Reichskirche* in no sense implied pro-Protestant sentiment. In his view, the Nazis’ aim in uniting the state churches was to render Protestantism innocuous, to make the Protestant church “an instrument subservient to the Nazi state.... [T]he Church was a pillar of the old order, whose standing, though it might be exploited as a temporary measure, was fundamentally resented by the leading members of the Party.”² This chapter argues that the Nazis in fact hoped for a lasting relationship with the Protestant Church, at least until 1937, when the stance of Niemöller and his allies led them to conclude that the church could not be relied upon. After this break, actions against Protestant clergymen grew in number, becoming comparable in frequency and harshness with the measures which had already been leveled against Catholic churchmen. For most Nazis, and certainly nearly all positive Christians, the anticlericalism of the regime toward Protestantism came arose only when other policy options had been exhausted, and was not planned from the outset.

¹ Albert Speer, *Inside the Third Reich* (New York, 1970), 95.

² John Conway, *The Nazi Persecution of the Churches* (London, 1968), 35, 102.

The Müller Era

As early as 1927, Hitler discussed the subject of a Protestant *Reichskirche* with the military chaplain of Königsberg, Ludwig Müller.³ But this was certainly not the first time that the idea of a unified national Protestant church had arisen. It had been on the agenda of large segments of Protestant opinion some time before then, and was not, as is sometimes suggested, an imposition of Hitler's Catholic understanding of ecclesiastical structure.⁴ As with so much else of the Nazis' ecclesiological platform, the idea of a *Reichskirche* was most closely, but not exclusively, associated with theologically liberal Protestantism. The liberal Protestant Association was founded in 1863 to promote the idea of a national church, and this became a centerpiece of the German Christian platform. On the other hand, confessional Lutherans, owing to their theological conservatism, often opposed the idea of a *Reichskirche*, which, it was feared, might transgress the boundaries of doctrine in order to unite all Protestant Germans.⁵ For instance, confessionalist Lutheran August Marahrens, state bishop of Hanover and acknowledged ideological ally of Nazism,⁶ nonetheless opposed the Nazi hopes for a national church, since this would mean a merger with Reformed and ("Old Prussian") Union churches. The most he could

³ Klaus Scholder, "Die evangelische Kirche in der Sicht der Nationalsozialistischen Führung bis zum Kriegsausbruch," *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 16 (1968), 17.

⁴ As argued, for instance, in Klaus Scholder, *The Churches and the Third Reich*, 2 vols. (London, 1987-88), 1: 306.

⁵ Gerhard Besier, "Die preussische Kirchenpolitik, 1866-72," faculty dissertation (Tübingen, 1976); Martin Gerhardt, *Zur Vorgeschichte der Reichskirche: Die Frage der kirchlichen Einigung in Deutschland im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Bonn, 1934). The idea of a national Protestant Church had also been propagated by the theologically liberal Protestant League and the Adolf Gustav Association, an organization established to address the concerns of "diaspora" Protestants (mostly *Volksdeutsche*) living outside the borders of the German Reich. On the Protestant League's support for the *Reichskirche*, see *DAZ*, 16/7/33 (in EZA 7/1296).

⁶ Robert Ericksen, *Theologians Under Hitler: Gerhard Kittel, Paul Althaus and Emanuel Hirsch* (New Haven, 1985), 167; Eberhard Klügel, *Die lutherische Landeskirche Hannovers und ihr Bischof 1933-1945* (Berlin, 1965), 37.

support was a union of the Lutheran state churches of central Germany.⁷

But this does not mean that the Protestant establishment remained a motionless island of conservatism in a surging sea of revolution. As Jonathan Wright states:

There was a widespread desire among Protestants for a more united church grouped around the different creeds. There was also general hostility to ‘parliamentarism’ in the church. ... There was also criticism of the leadership — that it was too old and that lawyers had too much power. The time had come to choose new men from the generation that had fought at the front in the First World War and therefore belonged to the modern world. ... In the Spring of 1933 there was a general feeling, especially among young theologians, that a new era had dawned which offered great new opportunities after a long period of retreat.⁸

If the confessional Lutheran Marahrens was against a Reich Church, others like Bavarian state bishop Hans Meiser supported the idea of a united Reich Church so long as it was “sufficiently” Lutheran. But the strongest advocates of the national church idea were the German Christians. This did not mean that the German Christians were simply the Nazis’ “fifth column” in this regard. Hitler for one made no indication that he regarded a unified Protestant church solely as a tool to aid in the nazification of German Protestants. According to Müller, the lapsed Catholic Hitler confided to him in the *Kampfzeit* that he “longed to have a religious home again.”⁹ Owing to Hitler’s well established scorn for Rosenberg’s ersatz faith, this statement — made to a Protestant pastor — could only have implied Protestantism. Hitler took no tangible steps to find that religious home in Protestantism. Nonetheless, this sentiment was not inconsistent with the favorable remarks he made about Protestantism, both publicly in *Mein Kampf* and privately in

⁷ Scholder, *Churches*, 1: 281.

⁸ Jonathan Wright, *‘Above Parties’: The Political Attitudes of the German Protestant Church Leadership, 1918-1933* (Oxford, 1974), 120.

⁹ Quoted in Jonathan Wright, *‘Über den Parteien’: Die politische Haltung der evangelischen Kirchenführer 1918-1933* (Göttingen, 1977), 152. This quote is not in the original English version.

his circle of confidants.¹⁰ This attitude continued well into the Third Reich.

Almost immediately after the seizure of power, a series of events in Mecklenburg provided Hitler the opportunity to reveal his intentions for the Protestant church. On 22 April 1933 the Nazi state authorities in Mecklenburg announced that the government of the state church, whose head was the confessional Lutheran Rendtorff,¹¹ had been overthrown and replaced with a commissioner for church affairs. The move was instigated by Richard Walther Darré, who, along with fellow “Blood and Soil” ideologue Walter Bohm and Nazi *Ministerpräsident* of Mecklenburg Walter Granzow planned to replace the “reactionaries” in the state church with German Christians more in line with the Nazi party. Bohm, appointed as commissioner, appealed to the pious country people of Mecklenburg not to be “humbled under the domination of bishops ... [and to dispose] of bishops who want to arrogate to themselves the power of the crosier over against the parishes and the Landeskirchen.” Bohm continued with his admonition: “[T]ake over the government of the church for yourselves along with all functions of church government down to community level.”¹² After an unsympathetic interview with Granzow, Rendtorff contacted Hitler and Hans Lammers, Hitler’s secretary in the Reich Chancellery, to protest the action. Only two days later, Hitler and Frick convened a meeting with Darré, Granzow and Bohm. Hitler made no reference to the church “revolution” just undertaken — much to the consternation of Bohm, who expected to be congratulated on his achievement. Instead they were informed that they were immediately to meet Rendtorff. Frick opened this meeting by declaring that, even though these were revolutionary times, the actions of the Mecklenburg state government were illegal. Rendtorff was reinstated as *Landesbischof*,

¹⁰ Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, trans. Ralph Manheim (Boston, 1962), 112-13; Henry Ashby Turner (ed.), *Hitler: Memoirs of a Confidant*, (New Haven, 1985), 19-21, 210.

¹¹ See Chapter Four, n. 83-84.

¹² *Niederdeutsche Beobachter*, 18/4/33.

Bohm resigned three days later, and the *Ministerpräsident* resigned some months afterwards due to the fallout caused by the incident.¹³ That some of the highest Nazi officials in a state government lost their positions over this affair — they were not reprimanded, not furloughed, but removed from office — demonstrated not only Hitler's intentions towards German Protestants, but also how seriously Protestant church affairs were taken by the Nazi regime.

This affair precipitated a meeting that Hitler held with the president of the Protestant *Oberkirchenrat*, Hermann Kapler. This was the first meeting between Hitler as head of state and a designated representative of the Protestant Church. In it, Hitler upheld the Church's autonomy, but declared himself ideologically for the German Christians, who “wanted to reestablish contact with the *Volk*.”¹⁴ That day, Hitler also made Frick his official liaison in Protestant church affairs, and Müller his personal advisor. Lammers noted Hitler's keen interest in the effort towards unity in German Protestantism, not least because this could serve as a counterweight to Catholicism.¹⁵ In a meeting with the representatives of the state churches, Müller informed them of Hitler's wishes. Hitler was interested in reaching an agreement with institutional Protestantism, Müller stated. Referring to the Concordat with Rome, Müller suggested that Hitler now wanted a bloc against the Catholic Church.¹⁶ Conceiving of a unified Protestant Church as a bulwark against Catholicism was not simply the consequence of Hitler's instrumentalism. A “broad middle group” in the Protestant establishment, including Kapler, contemplated the possibility of a Reich Church in exactly these terms.¹⁷ When the Protestant churches were unable to find mutual agreement, owing largely to the doctrinal differences between the German Christians and those

¹³ *Dokumente zur Kirchenpolitik des Dritten Reiches*, 3 vols., edited by Carsten Nicolaisen (Munich, 1971-94), 1: 38. The entire episode is recounted in *ibid.*, 37-41.

¹⁴ Scholder, *Churches*, 1: 303.

¹⁵ *Dokumente zur Kirchenpolitik*, 39.

¹⁶ BAP R 5101/28/173 (11 July 1933: n.p.[Berlin]).

¹⁷ Wright, ‘*Above Parties*’, 118-19.

who would eventually merge into the Confessing Church (at this point called the “Young Reformers”), Hitler, due to his preference for the former, entered into the power struggle, thereby violating his own party’s position of religious neutrality. But he did so “hesitantly and reluctantly,”¹⁸ not with the enthusiasm to be expected from someone desiring to bend yet another social institution to his totalitarian will.

Lower down the ranks, Nazi participation in the Protestant Church lent confirmation to Hitler’s position. Two months after the seizure of power the opening session of the new Prussian Landtag was celebrated. Wilhelm Kube, as the National Socialist caucus leader in the Prussian Landtag, led all the NSDAP delegates on a march through Berlin to the Protestant Christ Church, where they heard a sermon on John 10:12 delivered by the German Christian leader Joachim Hossenfelder.¹⁹

Hitler’s candidate to head a newly created Reich Church in the position of Reich Bishop was Müller. Müller was a member of the German Christians, but came from their more moderate East Prussian wing, which he also led.²⁰ Hitler’s endorsement of Müller was certainly based on his desire to have the Protestant church led by a Nazi supporter. But he also believed Müller would have the support of the majority of Protestant churchmen. However, there was a rival in the contest for Reich Bishop in the more established Friedrich von Bodelschwingh, head of the charitable Bethel Institution in Bielefeld. Pressed to run against Müller by Union and Calvinist churchmen, in May 1933 Bodelschwingh won in a vote of state church representatives.²¹ The vote was split: whereas the disproportionate representation of Prussia assured that Bodelschwingh would win, Lutheran state bishops, headed by Heinrich Rendtorff,

¹⁸ Scholder, *Churches*, 1: 333.

¹⁹ *Der Angriff*, 22/3/33.

²⁰ Wright, ‘*Above Parties*’, 123.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 130.

had called for “an unconditional Yes to the National Socialist movement, to the new Reich and therefore to Ludwig Müller.”²² Müller and his allies were outraged by the results. According to Martin Broszat: “Without the promptings of Müller and the German Christians Hitler would probably have been agreeable to Bodelschwingh’s candidature.”²³ But given the close ties between German Christians and members of the Nazi party, this never became a serious option. Müller and his associates recruited the SA to harass Bodelschwingh’s offices and had offices of the Nazi party send off protest telegrams. In Prussia *Kultusminister* Rust appointed August Jäger as state commissioner for the church, with the goal of forcing through a “coordination” of the church along German Christian lines.²⁴ Feeling his position to be untenable, Bodelschwingh resigned. The path for Müller was once again cleared. Despite strong-arm tactics against his opponents and rivals, in ecclesiastical matters Müller subsequently took a position considered far too conciliatory for the tastes of most German Christian opinion. In fact, while the German Christians backed Müller as their candidate for Reich Bishop, they refused to name him as their leader, giving him instead the largely empty title of “patron.”²⁵ The national leader of the German Christians remained the more radical Hossenfelder. It was thought that Hitler’s man Müller “would make common cause with the old church (which in fact he did).”²⁶

Despite their internal quarreling, the German Christians (*Deutsche Christen*, DC) obtained the personal and institutional support of the rest of the party leadership, even as a strict

²² Scholder, *Churches*, 1: 330. Wright points out that of the eleven *Landeskirchen* that voted for Müller, only one was not Lutheran (132).

²³ Martin Broszat, *The Hitler State: The Foundation and Development of the Internal Structure of the Third Reich* (London, 1981), 225. This is also confirmed by Wright, who states: “There are indications that Bodelschwingh was not completely unacceptable to Hitler” (*Above Parties*, 131).

²⁴ There is no evidence that Hitler or Müller directly encouraged this appointment: Scholder, “Kirche,” 19; Wright, *Above Parties*, 144.

²⁵ *Dokumente zur Kirchenpolitik*, 1: 43.

²⁶ Cf. Scholder, *Churches*, 1: 327; Shelley Baranowski, “The 1933 German Protestant Church Elections: *Machtspolitik* or Accommodation?,” *Church History* 49 (1980), 303-04.

institutional separation between them and the NSDAP was maintained, and even as Nazis argued with each other as to how much the state should intervene in the “Church Struggle” (*Kirchenkampf*).²⁷ At the first national conference of the German Christians, held in April 1933, an “honorary committee” was established, made up of Nazi dignitaries with a personal interest in Protestant affairs: Frick; Göring; Graf von Helldorf, Berlin leader of the SA and later the city’s chief of police; Hans Hinkel; Hanns Kerrl, President of the Prussian Landtag and later Reich Minister for Church Affairs; and Wilhelm Kube.²⁸ At the behest of Müller, Robert Ley (Strasser’s replacement as Reich Organization Leader) told all Gauleiter to instruct Protestant party members in their domains — regardless of whether they were active church-goers — to vote DC in the upcoming church elections, in which the vote for the Reich Bishop would be opened to all Protestant church-members in the country.²⁹ Such support was not a given: responding to DC complaints that party offices in the Saar were causing them difficulties, Ley sent a letter to Gauleiter Bürckel assuring him that the German Christians were supported by the “highest leadership of the party,” and were welcomed to employ the party organization in their campaigning.³⁰ Hess later instructed all party members to register their names on the election lists of their parishes since “participation in the election is mandatory.”³¹ All Gauleiter were

²⁷ Generalist historians still fall under the impression that the *Kirchenkampf* was a war waged by the Nazi state against the Protestant Church. See, for instance, Martyn Housden, *Resistance and Conformity in the Third Reich* (London, 1997), 46-47: “The first significant Nazi crusade in this connection was led by the German Christians *against* Protestantism” (emphasis mine). While the Nazis certainly took sides in the dispute, this was in fact a struggle between two opposed tendencies *within* Protestantism, not a state-conducted campaign against organized religion: Doris Bergen, *Twisted Cross: The German Christian Movement in the Third Reich* (Chapel Hill, 1996), 12; Conway, *Persecution*, xx.

²⁸ *Evangelium im Dritten Reich*, 26/3/33.

²⁹ BAZ Schu 244/2/24 (17 July 1933: Berlin).

³⁰ BAZ Schu 244/2/26 (24 April 1933: Munich).

³¹ Leonore Siegele-Wenschkewitz, *Nationalsozialismus und Kirchen: Religionspolitik von Partei und Staat bis 1935* (Düsseldorf, 1974), 87.

instructing party members to vote DC.³² Paganists like Rosenberg observed the party's involvement with deep unease.³³

As the Reich's chief legal authority, the most important "state Nazi" in church matters was Wilhelm Frick. He generally held to a moderate line, even though he had displayed a personal preference for the German Christians during his time in Thuringia. He became the first government authority to intervene in the *Kirchenkampf*, but he advised against state intervention on the Müller side. In a meeting with Reich Bishop-designate Bodelschwingh in June, Frick expressed his opinion that the latter "should certainly remain in and carry on the office, but declare that the final decision on the question of the bishop should be made by the Reich Synod," with either an election or vote of confidence.³⁴ As Scholder states: "At this time Frick was certainly more on Bodelschwingh's side, even if as matters stood he could make his influence felt in this direction only to a limited extent."³⁵ The degree of constraint became evident in a meeting between Frick, Hitler, Rust and Müller later that month, which was prompted by Hindenburg's call for Hitler to find a "statesmanlike" resolution to the growing fractiousness of the Protestant church situation. Here again Frick argued against state intervention, while Rust was strongly in favor of it, naturally on the side of the German Christians. Rust in fact was one of the staunchest supporters of state intervention. It was he who appointed the radical August Jäger as state commissioner of the Prussian churches. Rust's position on this occasion won out: national elections were planned for late summer, with the full organizational strength of the NSDAP at the German Christians' disposal. Frick sent a letter to Müller, wishing him "total

³² BAP R43 II/161/158-159 (19 July 1933: Berlin).

³³ Cf. Rosenberg's letter of complaint to Göring: BAZ NS 8/167/156 (27 March 1934: Berlin).

³⁴ Quoted in Scholder, *Churches*, 1: 345. Bodelschwingh refused this course of action, which many German Christians had actually agreed to (Wright, *Above Parties*, 136).

³⁵ Scholder, *Churches*, 2: 345-46.

success and God's blessing."³⁶ Even though his hand was forced in this issue, Frick hoped that Müller would nonetheless build bridges with his Young Reformer rivals. Rudolf Buttman, NSDAP leader in the Bavarian Landtag and now leader of the Culture Department in Frick's Ministry, also shared this view. In January 1934, Buttman informed Müller of his and Frick's view that the Nazi state would not endorse a Reich Church that did not represent the entirety of Protestant opinion.³⁷

Göring, as *Ministerpräsident* of Prussia, also took what appeared to be a position more moderate than Rust's. Citing the ongoing struggle within the ranks of the Protestant churches in a letter to Rust, Göring insisted: "So long as we have state churches and no Reich Church, in my view we cannot appoint a Reich Bishop." Göring's feelings were not directed against Müller, however. Rather, they had a different motive: "Until the revolution the King of Prussia was the *summus episcopus* of the Prussian State Church. In my view this authority has now passed over to the Prussian *Ministerpräsident*. On this basis an alteration to the state church without our explicit consent is not conceivable."³⁸ This consent is exactly what Müller tried to obtain. As late as December 1933, Müller and his advisors in the Reich Church tried to get the appointment of Göring, a "Protestant of some awareness," as "Reich minister *in evangelicis*" — an appointed, as opposed to hereditary, *summus episcopus*.³⁹ According to Müller, Göring was amenable to the idea. For reasons that are unclear, Göring did not pursue his bid to be named secular head of the Reich Church: it is most likely that Hitler vetoed the idea. But in any event, Göring was a strong supporter of Müller. Under his control the Gestapo monitored the activities of Müller's opponents. He fully supported the partisan position of his education minister Rust, and informed

³⁶ *Dokumente zur Kirchenpolitik*, 1: 84.

³⁷ BAP R43 II/161/279-280 (15 January 1934: Berlin).

³⁸ Correspondence of 27/6/33: *Dokumente zur Kirchenpolitik*, 1: 75.

³⁹ Scholder, *Churches*, 2: 17.

Hitler that any opposition which Müller and the German Christians encountered was due to the *political* reaction of the Young Reformers. By contrast, Frick and Buttman blamed the ongoing dissention in the Protestant churches on the incompetence of Müller and his associates.⁴⁰

Whereas Hitler decided to back the German Christians with the party's organizational support, this did not yet mean that he regarded the opponents of the German Christians as opponents of Nazism. In a meeting he held with Hitler, the American churchman Charles Macfarland asked what would be "the reaction of the Government towards utterances by pastors who did not agree with the position or actions of the Government on church matters." Hitler responded that "such a reaction on the part of Protestant clergymen was not at all directed against the Government of the Reich."⁴¹ Here Hitler recognized a position that members of the Confessing Church would later argue with marked consistency: that opposition to the Nazis' church policy was not opposition to Nazism itself.⁴² That Hitler would later take a hostile stand against the Confessing Church was due to his growing impression that the political resistance of *some* of its members represented *all* Confessing Church opinion. Müller, who portrayed his institutional rivals as Hitler's total ideological enemies, in no small measure encouraged this impression. In a letter to Hitler shortly before the national church elections Müller falsely asserted: "[I]n the final analysis, this so-called 'church struggle' is none other than a struggle against you and against National Socialism."⁴³ Whether Hitler accepted Müller's view or not, Hitler instructed that no party disturbances were to occur in the upcoming elections.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Ibid., 2: 33-34.

⁴¹ Charles Macfarland, *The New Church and the New Germany* (New York, 1934), 52-54.

⁴² As Victoria Barnett points out, the majority of Confessing Church leaders repeatedly insisted that they were *not* an anti-Nazi resistance group, and resented the vocal minority who wished to see the Confessing Church take on a political opposition to Nazism: Victoria Barnett, *For the Soul of the People: Protestant Protest Against Hitler* (Oxford, 1992), *passim*.

⁴³ *Dokumente zur Kirchenpolitik*, 1: 120.

⁴⁴ BAP R43 II/161/161 (21 July 1933: Berlin).

At least as important as the organizational support lent to the German Christians was Hitler's radio address to the nation given the night before the church elections, on 22 July 1933. Hitler spoke to the German people after a performance of Wagner's Christian allegory *Parsifal* in Bayreuth, conducted that evening by Richard Strauss:

[A]mong the congregations of the Protestant Confessions there has arisen in the 'German Christians' a movement that is filled with the determination to do justice to the great tasks of the day and has aimed at a union of the Protestant state churches and confessions. If this question is now really on the way towards solution, in the judgement of history no false or stupid objections will be able to dispute the fact that this service was rendered by the *völkisch*-political revolution in Germany and by that movement within the Protestant confessions that clearly and unequivocally professed its allegiance to this national and *völkisch* movement at a time when, unfortunately, just as in the Roman Church, many pastors and superintendents without reason have opposed the national uprising in the most violent, indeed often fanatical, way.⁴⁵

This change in Hitler's attitude towards the German Christians' opponents (now called "Gospel and Church") was almost certainly due to Müller's appeal. In reality, few in this group were "fanatical" opponents of the regime.

Just how little the members of "Gospel and Church" contemplated resistance to Nazism was demonstrated the next day. In several states, such as Braunschweig, the "Gospel and Church" lists voluntarily withdrew "under the impact of the Chancellor's speech and out of loyalty to Adolf Hitler," as one announcement put it.⁴⁶ In many states there was simply no election: in light of Hitler's endorsement, lists were joined into one, thereby precluding the need for elections. Synods in Baden, Württemberg, the Palatinate, Schleswig-Holstein, Hanover, Saxony, Frankfurt and Hamburg were mostly formed by agreement, all with German Christian majorities. In the Old Prussian Union church, where opposition to the German Christians was

⁴⁵ As reported in *Volksparole*, 24/7/33 (in BStA PAS 929). For a slightly different translation see Peter Matheson (ed.), *The Third Reich and the Christian Churches* (Grand Rapids, 1981), 28.

⁴⁶ Quoted in Scholder, *Churches*, 1: 447.

strongest and where elections were still necessary, the German Christians won seventy-five percent of the vote, with all the church provinces save Westphalia returning German Christian majorities.⁴⁷ Any lingering question of anti-Nazi activity within “Gospel and Church” was laid to rest when it was discovered that party members themselves had voted for it. To be sure, this was limited to isolated cases in the lower ranks of the party, but it happened often enough that the Reich Interior Ministry began to take note.⁴⁸ Party authorities took action against these Nazis, many of whom protested loudly. Eventually the party reversed itself, since Hitler wanted to return to a position of religious neutrality as soon as the elections were over. In October this stance was affirmed by Rudolf Hess in a circular to all party offices, guaranteeing the religious freedom of party members.⁴⁹ Some who had been expelled from the NSDAP due to their opposition to the DC were readmitted.⁵⁰

The fortunes of the German Christians vacillated greatly in the next months. Their initial successes were impressive. Overall, the German Christians received over two-thirds of the national vote. The Reich Synod that met in September to select a Reich Bishop consisted of 229 delegates, only 75 of whom were from the “Gospel and Church” party. This time Müller was easily elected. But when the synod voted to make the Aryan Paragraph (the new law forcing all civil servants and their spouses to be “free of Jewish blood”) applicable to the Protestant Church, the “Gospel and Church” delegates walked out.⁵¹ The following November came the national

⁴⁷ Wright, *'Above Parties'*, 140-41. Where united lists were agreed upon, 70% of the seats were given to German Christians (*ibid.*).

⁴⁸ See EZA 7/1296 (18 August 1933: Berlin) and EZA 7/1296 (25 August 1933: Berlin), which document several cases of members of the NSDAP voting “Gospel and Church.”

⁴⁹ On the existence of “Gospel and Church” and later Confessing Church (BK) supporters within the NSDAP, see Barnett, *Soul*, 39-44, who points out that some BK members could count themselves *alte Kämpfer* of the Nazi movement.

⁵⁰ Like Wilhelm Niemöller, brother of Martin, who fought to stay in the party “as a matter of honor” and won: *ibid.*, 42.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 34.

conference of German Christians in the Berlin Sports Palace. The rift in German Protestantism was widened even more when one of the Berlin DC leaders, Reinhold Krause, formally called for the removal of the Old Testament.⁵² The outrage which ensued led Martin Niemöller to found the Pastors' Emergency League (*Pfarrernotbund*, or PNB), the direct institutional forerunner of the Confessing Church, as a counterpoint to the German Christians and their scriptural position. Such outrage was not confined to PNB members however; even within the ranks of the German Christians there was indignation. Many left the DC, while the Bavarian section went so far as to voluntarily disbanded itself in protest.⁵³

In spite of, or perhaps because of, this growing opposition, Hitler's endorsement of Müller became increasingly uncertain. When reports emerged of the immense revolt against Krause's speech at the Sports Palace meeting, Müller's position began to weaken. He tried to stem the tide by stripping Krause of all his church positions. Even Hossenfelder, the more radical leader of the German Christians, agreed to this action. However, this did not serve to placate the opposition. Müller attempted a further step toward conciliation by withdrawing the Aryan Paragraph on 16 November. That same day, Müller even entered into negotiations with Niemöller, offering to disband the German Christians immediately if the PNB would do the same. Müller's offer was rejected by Niemöller, based on "the refusal of the Emergency League to acknowledge that both groups had equal rights in the church."⁵⁴ This, plus Frick's and

⁵² This episode, which caused a scandal even within German Christian ranks, is well documented in all the literature; cf. Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 103, 145; Matheson (ed.), *Third Reich*, 39-40.

⁵³ Ian Kershaw, *Popular Opinion and Political Dissent in the Third Reich: Bavaria 1933-1945* (Oxford, 1983), 160.

⁵⁴ Scholder, *Churches*, 1: 558. Niemöller's intransigence did not impress Karl Barth, who often expressed his opinion that Niemöller was no better than Müller. In private correspondence, Barth wrote of the "whole anthill of agitated pastors ready for action under the dictatorship of the U-boat commander Niemöller, who was all set to turn the Sports Palace scandal into a 'Tannenberg' for the German Christians and in the name of 'fellowship' forbade any theological misgivings. ... If sooner or later there is a catastrophe for the German Christians, and if then the so-called Council of Brethren of the Pastors Emergency League should become our future conference of bishops, my dear pastor, we shall then be in no better shape than at present under the rule of the German Christians ..." (quoted in Scholder, 1: 555). The next month — December 1933 — Barth wrote to another pastor: "All the trouble and anxiety that this year has cost will have been in vain if the only difference is that the future Reich Bishop is — for example

Buttmann's preference for neutrality vis-à-vis the German Christians, made Hitler reconsider his previous loyalty to Müller. Following his usual pattern of maintaining a "wait and see" attitude in any institutional rivalry, Hitler allowed himself to be convinced by Frick of the need for "strict neutrality" in the church struggle.⁵⁵

When Müller met with Hitler on 29 November, he no longer found the Hitler who had previously expressed such faith in him. Instead, Hitler told Müller that the government would in no way intervene on his behalf, and that "he would have to cope with the difficulties himself."⁵⁶ Müller made further attempts to recover his position by withdrawing his patronage of the German Christians and, in his capacity as Reich Bishop, replacing the radical Hossenfelder as DC leader with the more moderate Christian Kinder. (It was this action which precipitated Rosenberg's formal exit from church membership.⁵⁷) Meanwhile, Frick immediately instructed the state governments that they were to remain uninvolved in the church dispute. Any police activity against Protestant clerics, including protective custody and confiscation of mail, was to be stopped. Furthermore, the German Christians were no longer permitted to enlist party or state offices for their purposes.⁵⁸

The Nazi state therefore backed away from a *Gleichschaltung* of the Protestant church. While every other institution in German society was being ruthlessly "coordinated," the Protestant church was now being left unassailed. As Klaus Scholder states, "this decision brought into being — amidst the ideological totalitarianism of the Third Reich — a kind of free space, a place where things could be said that could be uttered *nowhere else* in the Third

— called Niemöller" (quoted in *ibid.*, 556).

⁵⁵ Scholder, *Churches*, 1: 566.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ See Chapter Three, n. 93.

⁵⁸ *Dokumente zur Kirchenpolitik*, 1: 181.

Reich.”⁵⁹ It was a stark reversal of the Nazis’ earlier policy of intervention. But the fact that the Nazis were now permitting the unhindered existence of a supposed resistance group, while the enemies of Nazism were being rounded up everywhere else in Germany, brings into sharp relief the fundamentally positive attitude of the Nazi state towards the Protestant church as a whole. As Martin Broszat observes: “it came about that under a regime which was otherwise so strict, pastors who were dismissed from office, like Niemöller, were confirmed in office by their parishes, continued to carry out their duties and in May 1934 even set up a formal rival organization to Müller’s Church rule with the Barmen Confessional Synod.”⁶⁰ This does not mean that the church struggle ceased. Its continuation after this point was based on the desire of the German Christian faction *within* the Protestant church to conquer their opposition, not on Nazi party pressure.⁶¹

In spite of Hitler’s new caution, Müller recovered considerable ground after an audience of dignitaries of the Protestant church, including Niemöller, held by Hitler on 25 January 1934, five days before the first anniversary of the *Machtergreifung*. These churchmen were all Müller’s opponents, who had taken further offense when Müller handed over all Protestant youth organizations to Baldur von Schirach in December.⁶² In a vain attempt to silence the protests that emerged from this transfer, Müller then placed a “muzzling decree” on the entire pastorate. These church leaders hoped that the meeting would be an occasion for them to voice their concerns by a direct appeal to Hitler. However, the audience with Hitler ended as a total defeat for them and a total success for the Müller camp. It was also useful for demonstrating the views

⁵⁹ Scholder, *Churches*, 1: 566-67 (emphasis mine).

⁶⁰ Broszat, *Hitler State*, 227.

⁶¹ Scholder confronts this misconception head on: “The idea which was circulated widely that August Jäger had only been able to force through the co-ordination of the Protestant church with the help of the Party was quite wrong” (*Churches*, 2: 124).

⁶² See Chapter Seven.

of the Nazi leadership. This encounter has almost always been cast as a classic example of Hitler's hatred for Christianity. According to John Conway, the episode betrayed Hitler's innate hostility towards the Protestant church,⁶³ a view shared by nearly all church historians.⁶⁴ As one of the most analyzed events in the history of church-state relations in the Third Reich, it warrants attention here. Hitler's suspicion that the anti-Müller camp was directed against the state, and not just Müller, was certainly strengthened after this meeting, but a close examination of the episode reveals that Hitler was largely innocent of Conway's and others' charges.

Before his reception, Hitler held a conversation with President Hindenburg, who as head of state and a religious Protestant had taken an interest in the church struggle. Hindenburg took the side of Müller's opponents, asserting that Müller "stood in the way of an agreement, that the unity of the church cannot be allowed to be broken on a personal question." Hitler responded that the "shameful" picture of division within Protestantism was the issue, not the person of Ludwig Müller. He assured Hindenburg that he would work for an understanding. However, the Pastors' Emergency League was "more active in politics than in the church."⁶⁵ Hitler made his position entirely transparent when he concluded: "[I]f the Pastor's Emergency League does not stop its activity the government will have to act against it to maintain its own authority."⁶⁶ Hitler did not defend Müller, but at the very least he still accepted Müller's characterization of Niemöller's activities as political.

The reception of the Protestant dignitaries took place in the afternoon. Before any of them could begin, however, Hitler had Göring read out the transcript of a taped telephone

⁶³ Conway, *Persecution*, 76.

⁶⁴ Victoria Barnett also suggests, though in more qualified terms, that this meeting displayed Hitler's preexisting hostility: *Soul*, 51. See as well Kurt Meier, *Kreuz und Hakenkreuz: Die evangelische Kirche im Dritten Reich* (Munich, 1992), 50.

⁶⁵ Quoted in Scholder, *Churches*, 2: 40.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

conversation between Niemöller and Walter Künne⁶⁷ held just that morning. The very fact that Niemöller's phone had been bugged betrayed the Nazis' clear lack of faith in Niemöller. But the contents of the conversation largely confirmed Hitler's suspicion that the PNB, or at least its leader, was actively engaging in politics:

Niemöller speaks with an unknown person and among other things tells him that at noon Hitler has been summoned to Hindenburg. The Reich President will receive Hitler in his dressing room. The last oiling [*letzte Ölung*] before the discussion! Hindenburg will receive him with our memorandum in his hand. Things have also gone well in the Ministry of the Interior. I am glad that I have got [Bodelschwingh] here and that we have engineered everything so well. ... If things go wrong — which I do not anticipate — we have a simple step to the Free Church.⁶⁸

Niemöller's description of the preparations for the meeting clearly demonstrated his attempt, in an almost conspiratorial fashion, to play off the authority of Hindenburg against Hitler. His clear disdain for Hitler's political abilities (“*letzte Ölung*” also means “last rites”) was a view commonly shared by the conservative elites of the time, who believed they could use Hitler for their own ends.⁶⁹ Hitler's audience was stunned by this revelation. But rather than complain about how closely they were being watched, either to Hitler or to each other afterwards, they instead tried to undo Niemöller's work, insisting on their nationalism and loyalty to the state.⁷⁰

When asked by Hitler if he in fact had had this conversation, Niemöller, as a former U-boat commander, took a step forward in military fashion and declared that he had. He defended himself by referring to the hardships the PNB were experiencing at the hands of Müller and

⁶⁷ See Chapter Four, n. 79-81.

⁶⁸ BAP R43 II/161/326-327 (24 January 1934: Berlin). In spite of suggestions that Göring changed the text to make Niemöller appear more treacherous (for instance Kurt Meier, *Der Evangelische Kirchenkampf*, 3 vols. [Göttingen, 1976-84], 1: 162), Scholder amply demonstrates that this was not the case (2: 302 n. 108).

⁶⁹ As Broszat points out, Niemöller's services in Dahlem “were demonstratively attended by the leading conservative circles of Berlin” (*Hitler State*, 229). Conway suggests that Niemöller's use of the expression “*letzte Ölung*” was an “unguarded phrase” (*Persecution*, 73).

⁷⁰ Barnett, *Soul*, 52; Conway, *Persecution*, 74; Scholder, *Churches*, 2: 41: “... none of the churchmen present even remotely thought of protesting against pressure applied in this way.”

Jäger, adding that the church struggle was being carried on not only out of a concern for the church, but also out of a concern for the *Volk* and the state as well. For Hitler, this signaled the political engagement that he had suspected. He shouted back: “You leave concern for the Third Reich to me and look after the church!”⁷¹ Then, drawing on examples from Göring’s Gestapo reports, he detailed anti-government statements that had been made by other Protestant pastors associated with the PNB.⁷² He then added that Müller had in fact been chosen as Reich Bishop by the church, not by him. This was somewhat disingenuous, given Hitler’s considerable patronage of Müller; but it was nonetheless an accurate statement. Hitler also added that though he was born a Catholic: “Inwardly he stood closer to the Protestant church.”⁷³ The current “politicizing” of the PNB was all the more disappointing, therefore, since Hitler expected from Protestant pastors “a different attitude to that of the Catholics.”⁷⁴

When the other church leaders finally had a chance to speak, they insisted that isolated expressions of political discontent did not reflect the views of the pastorate as a whole. They stated that their complaint rested solely with Müller, who lacked leadership ability, and who opened himself up to ridicule by associating himself with the German Christians.⁷⁵ When Hitler asked whether a Reich Bishop from any other camp could guarantee an end to the church struggle, Bishop Meiser of Bavaria replied that no one could make such a guarantee.⁷⁶ Hitler’s

⁷¹ Scholder, *Churches*, 2: 41. According to some accounts, Niemöller then responded by telling Hitler: “[N]either you nor any nor any other power in the world is in a position to take from us Christians and from the Church responsibility for our people that God has placed upon us” (Arthur Cochrane, *The Church’s Confession under Hitler* [Philadelphia, 1962], 130). However, among the many recountings of this meeting printed in *Dokumente zur Kirchenpolitik* (2: 20-33), including Niemöller’s, not one shows that he made this remark. Neither Scholder nor Barnett make reference to such a statement.

⁷² Cf. BAP R43 II/161/326-327 (24 January 1934: Berlin).

⁷³ *Dokumente zur Kirchenpolitik*, 2: 24; Matheson, *Third Reich*, 43.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ Matheson, *Third Reich*, 43-44.

⁷⁶ *Dokumente zur Kirchenpolitik*, 2: 22 (for Meiser’s recounting), 28 (for Niemöller’s).

question was not rhetorical; he demonstrated that he was willing to give up on Müller if it meant peace in the church. Given Meiser's answer, however, Hitler could only conclude by stating that all segments of the Protestant church had to attempt a conciliation. Müller should therefore be given another chance. Before he left, he shook hands with each of the churchmen, including Niemöller.⁷⁷

The assembled churchmen had expected to prevail over Müller at this meeting; instead, they left totally dejected. They had been thrown on the defensive by Hitler's "opening shot," and thereafter fought simply to prevent further loss. But instead of accusing Hitler of having laid a trap, they blamed the failure of the meeting on Niemöller. In a letter he sent to Rudolf Buttmann, Bishop Wurm stated: "From the beginning the whole thing was utterly devastating. And it was also abominable for you and the minister to appear in this light." Here Wurm meant Niemöller's reference to the Interior Ministry — implying that Frick and Buttmann, as Nazis more sympathetic to Müller's opponents, would now look complicit in Niemöller's scheming. Wurm stated his opinion that "[t]his time the U-boat commander has torpedoed not his opponents but his friends and himself."⁷⁸ Nowhere did Wurm lay responsibility for the outcome on Hitler. Neither did any of the other participants' accounts blame Hitler for the turn of events.⁷⁹ Nor was this necessarily a mistaken perception: according to Scholder, Hitler had not intended the meeting to be a trap, since he "could only have heard of the telephone call just before the reception."⁸⁰

⁷⁷ According to Niemöller's account, Hitler did not shake his hand with aggression or hostility, but simply "gave me his hand, as any German man gives his hand" (ibid., 29).

⁷⁸ As quoted in Scholder, *Churches*, 2: 42. As Barnett points out, Bishops Wurm, Meiser and Marahrens — the most powerful non-"German Christian" Lutheran state bishops — continually accused Niemöller and the Confessing Church of being too political (*Soul*, 49, 57, 69, 90, 200). Even within the Confessing Church, the political activities of a minority were a constant source of infighting (ibid., 55, 57-58, 89-92, 174-75).

⁷⁹ *Dokumente zur Kirchenpolitik*, 2: 21-33.

⁸⁰ Scholder, *Churches*, 2: 41. Scholder points out that Hitler was nonetheless able to exploit "without delay" the

Hitler displayed no preexisting animosity toward the Protestant church or its representatives at this meeting. Hitler left the meeting more suspicious of Niemöller than before, but there is no indication that he presumed the others in the audience were behind Niemöller. Nonetheless, the meeting provided Müller and the German Christians with nothing less than a new lease on life. Putting to rest any possible suspicion of their politics, Müller's opponents (excepting Niemöller) signed a declaration two days later swearing "their unconditional fidelity to the Third Reich and its Führer," and rejected "most sharply all intrigues of criticism of state, *Volk* and movement." Their declaration added: "The assembled church leaders stand firmly behind the Reich Bishop and are determined to carry out his measures and decrees in the way in which he desires."⁸¹ The decree not only undercut opposition to Müller, it also weakened the PNB. In the Lutheran *Landeskirchen* of Bavaria, Württemberg and Hanover, 1500 pastors resigned from the PNB.⁸² Encouraged by Wurm, the Württemberg PNB elected to disband itself altogether a few days later.⁸³ Müller quickly seized the initiative and resumed the course he had taken before the Sports Palace debacle. He reintroduced the Aryan Paragraph into the Reich Church constitution. His associates, most importantly the Prussian state commissioner August Jäger, aggressively reasserted their prerogatives, incorporating one provincial church after the next into the Reich Church.⁸⁴ The remaining members of the PNB refused to recognize their new German Christian bishops. Hitler received Müller again in February but, as before, requested

opportunities provided by the transcript (*ibid.*).

⁸¹ Quoted in Johannes Gauger, *Chronik der Kirchenwirren: Gotthard Briefe*, 3 vols. (Elberfeld, 1934-36), 1: 138.

⁸² Scholder, *Churches*, 2: 45.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 2: 46.

⁸⁴ Within the boundaries of the Prussian state existed not only the Prussian state church ("Old Prussian Union"), but also other churches — such as the Hanover and Schleswig-Holstein *Landeskirchen* — which were established before the territories they served were annexed by Prussia in 1866. The "Old Prussian Union" only extended to those areas that were part of Prussia *before* 1866. As a *state* official, however, Jäger had authority over all churches within the post-1866 *state* boundaries of Prussia.

that the Reich Bishop go about his business in unity and peace.⁸⁵ Heydrich ordered his police forces “to avoid any action that might disturb the work of unity and growth of a united Evangelical Church. ... ‘The authorities must take great care not to mix themselves in purely theological questions.’”⁸⁶

Frick backed this up by cautioning Müller to proceed in an “orderly” fashion.⁸⁷ Given Hitler’s renewed confidence in Müller, Frick could only curb him this far. But he was certainly opposed to the ruthless Jäger. Rust and Göring, on the other hand, remained on side. This was both a conflict between personalities and between governments: Frick’s authority was at the level of the Reich government, while Rust’s and Göring’s authority was limited to *one* state government, although it was by far the most important one. While state governments outside Prussia left their churches relatively untouched — the Reich government having ordered that “[I]t is not the task of the National Socialist state to intervene with its forces in purely church controversies”⁸⁸ — within Prussia Göring used Gestapo reports to cast the PNB as a political, reactionary group.⁸⁹ The Gestapo was not practicing universal anticlericalism, however. At the same time the PNB was being surveilled, the Gestapo were expressing interest in helping emigrant German pastors with their overseas mission work.⁹⁰

As a result of this forced coordination, in March Meiser and Wurm — both of whose churches were still “intact” — requested another audience with Hitler. In their letter to him, they also stated that they were publicly withdrawing the promise of support to Müller they had made

⁸⁵ Scholder, *Churches*, 2: 51.

⁸⁶ Conway, *Persecution*, 75.

⁸⁷ *Dokumente zur Kirchenpolitik*, 2: 59-60.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 60.

⁸⁹ Cf. Göring’s reports of Gestapo activities to the Reich authorities: *Dokumente zur Kirchenpolitik*, 2: 70-78.

⁹⁰ BAZ NS 26/1240 (16 February 1934: Berlin).

two days after their disastrous January reception. With the help of Neurath and Lammers, they were able to get an audience with Hitler within a week.⁹¹ In their meeting, Hitler stated that, while he found the continued dissent within Protestant ranks a growing source of irritation, he still hoped for a strong and united Reich Church. While he wished that the German Christians would cease their theological bickering and “forego all quarrels over doctrinal matters,” he claimed that if Luther were alive, he would have stood behind them. He acknowledged Müller’s shortcomings as a leader, but was still prepared to back him in his efforts to bring unity to the Protestant churches. Hitler also added that the church should come to terms with the realities of “blood and race,” otherwise “developments will simply pass them by.” Finally, he warned that if pastors wanted to declare resistance, this would not make them his “most loyal opposition,” but rather “Germany’s destroyers.”⁹² Here Hitler raised the threat of an attack on the church, indicating that his respect for the institutional independence of the pastorate had definite limits. By rejecting the notion of a “loyal opposition,” Hitler also betrayed his belief that opposition to any one Nazi policy was opposition to Nazism as a whole.

Even the famous Barmen Synod, which formally founded the Confessing Church (*Bekennende Kirche*, or BK) and unambiguously attacked the theology of the German Christians, did little to diminish the views of many Nazis in this regard. Frick, for one, made no objections to the synod, while the Gestapo similarly made no moves against its members. Göring had by this time handed over control of the Gestapo to Himmler and Heydrich. Yet the chief of all

⁹¹ *Dokumente zur Kirchenpolitik*, 2: 79. For Neurath’s involvement in the Church Struggle, see John Heineman, *Hitler’s First Foreign Minister: Constantin Freiherr von Neurath, Diplomat and Statesman* (Berkeley, 1979), 75-77.

⁹² *Dokumente zur Kirchenpolitik*, 2: 80-81. Both Scholder (*Churches*, 2: 70-71) and Conway (*Persecution*, 76-77) claim that Meiser and Wurm declared *themselves* to be Hitler’s “most loyal opposition,” upon which Hitler, “in a fury of rage,” is supposed to have told the bishops: “You are not my most loyal opposition, but traitors to the people, enemies of the Fatherland and the destroyers of Germany.” Both Scholder and Conway use the same source for this quote: Heinrich Schmid, *Apokalyptisches Wetterleuchten: Ein Beitrag der Evangelischen Kirche zum Kampf im ‘Dritten Reich’* (Munich, 1947), 61-63. However, in Meiser’s version of events used here, no mention is made that either he or Wurm described themselves as a loyal opposition, that Hitler called them traitors or enemies, or that Hitler shouted in a fury of rage. Meiser was one of only four people at this meeting (the others being Hitler, Wurm

German police decided in this instance to leave matters as they were, to “guarantee [...] religious freedom of conscience” as one report put it.⁹³ This did not mean that BK members were left unhindered elsewhere. At the behest of the many church governments now under the control of the German Christians, the state authorities confiscated the declarations of the Barmen Synod, and in several places took pastors into protective custody. The strongest state action took place in Schwerin, where three BK pastors were given between three and six months in prison for “political resistance.”⁹⁴

The most important litmus test for the attitudes of the Nazi leadership toward institutional Protestantism came with Jäger’s attempt at a forced coordination of the “intact” state churches of Bavaria and Württemberg, seen as the last bastions of a non-German Christian ethos. The events surrounding Jäger’s actions marked the height of the Church Struggle for the entire period of the Third Reich. Here Müller’s allies would come across unparalleled popular reaction, and were finally confronted with the limits of their power. While they would receive the support of many powerful Nazis in their coordination campaign, as will be demonstrated, wide segments of Nazi opinion, much of it no less powerful, stood against them.

Even before Müller turned his sights on the southern *Landeskirchen*, Nazis were beginning to express wariness with his and Jäger’s ruthless actions, and began to wonder how much their party was involved. The head of ideological training for a Bavarian SA unit, who was also a Protestant pastor, noted in March 1934: “Many evangelical ministers have prepared the ground for the Third Reich with dogged passion and even today know no other political goal. Is all that already forgotten ...?”⁹⁵ The Government President for Upper and Middle Franconia

and Franz Pfeffer von Salomon), thereby making his account the more reliable one.

⁹³ Scholder, *Churches*, 2: 142.

⁹⁴ As Conway points out, it was Müller, and not officials of the Nazi party or state, who put these few Protestant pastors into concentration camps: *Persecution*, 416 n. 12.

⁹⁵ Quoted in Kershaw, *Opinion*, 163.

believed that the *Kirchenkampf* was an ecclesiastical rather than political affair, but that it posed a political danger due to its potential for broadening into a mass protest by the religiously Protestant: “In particular the religiously inclined evangelical circles, which stand behind their Bishop Meiser, could and still can be counted among the most loyal supporters of National Socialism. It is a tragedy that precisely these people have to be upset in the conflict between Reich Bishop and Provincial Church by the State they most gladly acclaimed.”⁹⁶ The President not only pointed to the reality that the state was once again behind Müller, but also demonstrated that Nazis like himself made no confusion between a church dispute against the German Christians and a political dispute against the Nazis.

Other Bavarian Nazis failed to make this distinction. Hans Schemm was no less insistent of the party’s foundation on Christian principles when he declared that there could be no opposition to the Reich Church: “We wish for nothing as ardently as a powerful Protestant Church which stands on the foundations prepared by the great Reformer Martin Luther. ... It is not possible for a church to stand apart or against the *Volk*. Rather the church must stand in service to the *Volk*. The great Nazarene did not stand apart in a quiet corner.” While Schemm did not mention the Confessing Church by name, his conclusion made it clear that this was his target: “I warn the pastors who spoke out against the Reich Church government last Sunday that we know your struggle is aimed not so much against the Reich Bishop as against National Socialism!”⁹⁷ This attitude was shared by deputy Gauleiter of Franconia, Karl Holz, who wrote in the local Nazi paper (which he also edited) that Meiser displayed disloyalty to Hitler through his refusal to acknowledge Müller as Reich Bishop.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Quoted in *ibid.*, 165.

⁹⁷ BStA MK/37069a (n.d.[1934], n.p.[Bayreuth]).

⁹⁸ Kershaw, *Opinion*, 165. Note that rejection of Müller as Reich Bishop did not imply rejection of the Reich Church idea. Bishop Wurm stated firmly that he approved of an “Evangelical Reich Church which stands and remains on the foundation of gospel” (Scholder, *Churches*, 2: 245).

Local authorities increased their pressure on the “intact” churches. When Holz followed up his article two days later with a mass meeting to be held in Nuremberg’s Market Square, Meiser came to Nuremberg to hold rival meetings in nearby Protestant churches. After he arrived, “the crowds streamed away from the meeting in the Market Place and packed the churches.” When crowds started to gather after Meiser’s service, the authorities, rather than dispersing the celebrants, stood at attention as “Deutschland über alles” was sung.⁹⁹ So it was that the ensuing struggle between Nazis state and provincial church should have started in a town — Nuremberg — and region — Franconia — that was a stronghold of both the Nazi movement and the Protestant faith. This did not go unnoticed by the Nazis themselves: as a local Nazi leader pointed out, “the great majority of Meiser’s supporters in Franconia are to be regarded as loyal National Socialists who often include the old Party members.”¹⁰⁰ Following this episode, in October Jäger attempted a forced coordination of the Württemberg church, placing Wurm under house arrest. The next day Meiser went to a Bavarian town along the border with Württemberg, and addressed a huge audience made up of laity from both states. Meiser told the congregation to remain loyal to the church, and resist the machinations of the Reich Church authorities. In conclusion, two songs were sung: “A Mighty Fortress is our God” and the “Horst Wessel Song,” the Nazi party anthem.

Four days later Meiser was also put under house arrest, with Jäger declaring that the state church would be divided into two regional churches.¹⁰¹ Immediately the Protestant population began public protests in the tens of thousands, and started petitions demanding Meiser’s restoration. Nuremberg’s churches were packed as service after service was given in solidarity

⁹⁹ Kershaw, *Opinion*, 166.

¹⁰⁰ Scholder, *Churches*, 2: 251.

¹⁰¹ Helmut Baier, *Die Deutschen Christen im Rahmen des bayerischen Kirchenkampfes* (Nuremberg, 1968), 128-31.

to Meiser. Within a week, Julius Streicher met with leading church dignitaries and published a ban on party attacks on the church. Schemm followed a similar route in Bayreuth.¹⁰² Another high-ranking Nazi now stepped in on Meiser's side: the *Ministerpräsident* of Bavaria, Ludwig Siebert. Siebert presided over the inauguration of Meiser as Bavarian State Bishop in June 1933. On that occasion Siebert expressed his desire to work with Meiser, since "church and state must discuss and promote the same questions.... 1) The awakening of a sense of sacrifice; 2) The creation of the new social ethic; 3) Leading our youth to *Volk* and God, to Fatherland and Christianity."¹⁰³ Having been made aware of the plans of the Reich Church government, Siebert advised Müller to avoid any action against Meiser.¹⁰⁴ Now with Meiser's arrest, Siebert wrote to Frick, stating that party members who held the Golden Badge of Honor, Nazi *Kreisleiter* ("district leaders" of the NSDAP, one step below *Gauleiter*), and long-standing Nazi supporters among the Protestant pastorate all warned of the political consequences for the party if things did not change.¹⁰⁵ Over the period of a week Meiser received several deputations from Franconian citizens, including one which stated that even Nazis with the Golden Badge of Honor were close to rebellion.¹⁰⁶ After several such meetings, in which it was made clear that the attacks on Meiser were being associated not only with the Reich Church but also with the party, Siebert wrote again to Frick, urging that Hitler be comprehensively informed of the situation. The attitude of Siebert and other Nazis demonstrates that not all in the party — or even most — were in favor of Meiser's arrest. This was also true for the Reich Governor of Bavaria, Franz Ritter von Epp, who wrote: "What interests us is the question: who has ordered all this? Who is master in the

¹⁰² Ibid., 147-48.

¹⁰³ *Dokumente zur Kirchenpolitik*, 1: 61-62.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 2: 187.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 2: 182.

¹⁰⁶ Kershaw, *Opinion*, 171.

front — who is master in the back?”¹⁰⁷ According to Klaus Scholder, the only Nazi leaders in Bavaria to have unequivocally supported Meiser’s arrest had been Streicher and Adolf Wagner, Gauleiter of Munich and Bavarian Minister of the Interior. Even the leader of the German Christians, Christian Kinder, “began to work for Jäger’s fall with all the means at his disposal.”¹⁰⁸

Jäger’s activities had repercussions as well in the Confessing Church, which held its second synod in Berlin-Dahlem at the same time. On this occasion, even more than at Barmen, considerable division was displayed. Under the leadership of Niemöller, the radical wing of the BK insisted on a statement that the BK was the only legitimate representative of the Protestant Church in Germany, and that between them and the DC there was no common faith: “We are not leaving this our church for a free church, rather, we *are* the church.”¹⁰⁹ Lutherans, even those whose bishops were under arrest, found this provision unacceptable, since it entirely shut out one part of the church. As one delegate complained, the BK had rejected “the freedom and the willingness to preach to the supporters and followers of the National Socialist Movement.” On the day of the vote, almost half the delegates were absent; of those present, 52 voted in favor, 20 against.¹¹⁰ Others in the BK began referring to the radicals as the “Dahlemites.” These were the first signs of the eventual break-up of the Confessing Church.

The political repercussions of Meiser’s arrest could be felt not only outside Bavaria, but even outside Germany, and would soon bring Hitler into the decision-making process. Foreign Minister Neurath had received reports from the embassy in London that English churchmen, led

¹⁰⁷ BStA MK/37069a (22 October 1934: Munich). Epp added that “in Berlin no one understands the structure of Protestantism in Bavaria and Württemberg.”

¹⁰⁸ Scholder, *Churches*, 2: 260. Scholder states the German Christians felt that Jäger’s continued presence made it “impossible to reach an agreement with the opposition in the Evangelical Church,” implying that the German Christians desired a sincere dialogue (*ibid.*).

¹⁰⁹ Barnett, *Soul*, 65.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 66. As Barnett puts it, “Other delegates at Dahlem worried that the Confessing Church was assuming a power it did not really have” (67).

by the Archbishop of Canterbury, were planning a conference for 24 October at which a statement on the German church situation would be made. Neurath received news of this on the 17th, and immediately delivered it to Hitler. Two days later Hitler postponed the reception planned for Müller and other leaders of the Reich Church from the 23rd to the 25th.¹¹¹ While it would seem from this that Hitler chose to react only under foreign pressure, in fact he had been unaware of the near rebellion taking place. Josef Bürckel, the Gauleiter of the Palatinate, provided proof of this. His jurisdiction was in Bavaria, but he had also been appointed by Hitler as the plenipotentiary for the Saarland, a part of Germany broken off under the Versailles Treaty which was soon to vote on reincorporation into the Reich. Bürckel had never liked Müller, fearing that the anti-Catholic comments he made at public gatherings could only damage the Nazis' prospects in the Saar. In his view, the current events in Bavaria made matters worse still, so on the 22nd he went directly to Hitler to press for the dismissal of Müller and Jäger. And significantly, he found that Hitler had received almost no detailed information on the state of affairs in Bavaria: according to a report written by one of Bürckel's Saar officials, "up until now the Führer was not informed of events."¹¹² The Reich Church authorities had been acting with the general authority over church affairs provided by Hitler, without reporting back to him. Upon hearing of the demonstrations — as Hitler would report later in a closed meeting of Reich Governors — he asked a Munich Standartenführer whether such demonstrations were in fact taking place (the Standartenführer indicated he had not heard of any).¹¹³ In the meantime, Siebert and Epp attempted to lift Meiser's house arrest, but both Frick and Hess declared that they did not have the authority. As Hess told Siebert on the 22nd, since he had been "left out of the

¹¹¹ Scholder, *Churches*, 2: 276. Neurath had warned Müller the previous month about the possible foreign relations repercussions of his actions, but to no avail: BAP R43 II/162/274-276 (20 September 1934: Berlin).

¹¹² *Dokumente zur Kirchenpolitik*, 2: 193.

¹¹³ "Niederschrift über die Reichsstatthalterkonferenz am 1. November 1934": BAP R43 II/1392/49-50 (1 November 1934: Berlin).

game, he did not want to give the orders.” He would, however, meet with Hitler to discuss the matter the next day.¹¹⁴

Three days later, the scheduled date for Müller’s reception, Hitler personally ordered that Meiser and Wurm be immediately released.¹¹⁵ The next day Jäger was relieved of all his duties, thereby ending his damaging engagement in church affairs. This was also a victory for Frick, who had consistently advocated a policy of moderation. Frick now ordered that party members were no longer to involve themselves in the internal disputes of the Protestant church.¹¹⁶ Having cancelled his meeting with Müller and the Reich Church leaders, Hitler instead received Meiser, Wurm and Marahrens on 30 October, and assured them that the state would not interfere in Protestant church affairs.¹¹⁷ In the entire period of the Third Reich, this marked the climax of the Protestant *Kirchenkampf*, and the effective end of Müller’s career. Although he continued in the post of Reich Bishop, he soon lost Hitler’s confidence.

The public protest that arose from Meiser’s arrest constituted the Nazis’ greatest domestic setback to date. As Ian Kershaw puts it: “It was a spectacular display of what popular protest could achieve even in the restrictive conditions of a repressive police state.”¹¹⁸ As much as the Nazi party smarted from their public embarrassment, it appears that only a minority of Nazis actually endorsed the radical actions taken by Müller and his associates. The majority, including Hitler, were sincerely interested in avoiding any kind of open conflict with the Protestant church. At the same time, those most responsible for the attacks on the BK and their allies were not agents in Rosenberg’s employ, but rather a rival group of Protestants. The Protestant church in

¹¹⁴ *Dokumente zur Kirchenpolitik*, 2: 189.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 192.

¹¹⁶ BAP R43 II/163/74 (6 November 1934: Berlin).

¹¹⁷ *Dokumente zur Kirchenpolitik*, 197-98.

¹¹⁸ Kershaw, *Opinion*, 174.

Bavaria certainly drew no political conclusions from the affair. As Kershaw states:

[T]he opposition in the ‘Church struggle’ could not for the most part be classified as ‘resistance’.... [E]normously bitter though the affair was, it touched on no other aspect of Nazi policy or ideology and could come to the boil ironically in a region with a very high level of long-standing avid Nazi support. The same area where popular opposition to Nazi Church policy was so vigorous continued, in fact, to prove itself a hotbed of vicious popular anti-Semitism, provided no indication of anything but wholehearted support for the regime’s chauvinistic and aggressive foreign policy, and remained a bastion of intense pro-Hitler feeling.¹¹⁹

Throughout this period, the majority in the BK never translated their protest against Nazi church policy into any other domain of Nazi governance. On the contrary: they approved of all Nazi measures in foreign and domestic affairs. For instance, when the Nazis pulled Germany out of the League of Nations, the PNB leadership, instead of suggesting that such a move worked against the brotherhood of nations, expressed their joy in a letter to Hitler, “in the name of over 2500 Protestant pastors who do not belong to the ‘German Christians’.”¹²⁰

Although Hitler was certainly exasperated by the turn of events, this rebuff did not turn him into an enemy of Protestantism. Hitler made this clear in a meeting he held with the Reich Governors and members of the party elite (Hess, Frick, Göring, Lammers and Bormann) just a few days after his reception with Meiser, Wurm and Marahrens. His impatience with the turn of events was clear: “In his short reception Bishop Meiser indicated that the confession must be free. If the confession must be free, then the state must also be free. The churches can collect their taxes themselves!”¹²¹ Hitler then immediately pulled back from this position, declaring: “The Reich Bishop must be given time to bring the situation under control. He, the Führer and Reich Chancellor, wanted to create a united, strong Protestant Church.” As Hitler told Albert

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 176-77.

¹²⁰ Quoted in Siegele-Wenschkewitz, *Nationalsozialismus*, 138.

¹²¹ BAP R43 II/1392/49-50 (1 November 1934: Berlin).

Speer: “Through me the Protestant Church could become the established church, as in England.”¹²² Hitler knew that the BK comprised a significant portion of that church, and that seeking unity in German Protestantism meant accommodating them in some way. Whatever he may have thought of Niemöller, he was not yet ready to cast off the BK itself as an enemy of the state. By contrast, Hitler’s attitude towards Germany’s other great confession left no room for ambiguity: “the Catholic Church has always been an enemy of a strong form of government.”¹²³

Although always ready to spot anti-Nazi activity, Himmler’s Gestapo was not yet convinced that the Confessing Church was anti-Nazi. In a confidential memorandum from February 1935, the Gestapo reported that the Confessing Church’s fight with the German Christians remained “above all an internal church fight, in which each of the two parties has assured its loyalty to the state.” At the same time, there was a feeling that *some* in the BK were potentially anti-Nazi: “Both sides must be granted that, at least as far as their genuine adherents are concerned, they do not stand opposed to the state. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that, on the part of the Confessing Movement, the number of inner opponents of National Socialism is large, simply because here the church is more important than the state.”¹²⁴ The reference to “genuine adherents” suggests that the Gestapo did not necessarily view the political activity of some within the Confessing Church as representative of the whole group.

The Kerrl Era

Despite Hitler’s statements on 1 November 1934, Müller finally fell out of favor with Hitler.

¹²² Speer, *Inside*, 95.

¹²³ BAP R43 II/1392/49-50 (1 November 1934: Berlin).

¹²⁴ Heinz Boberach (ed.), *NS und Kirche: Berichte des SD und Gestapo über Kirchen und Kirchenvolk in Deutschland, 1933-1944* (Mainz, 1971), 63-64.

The incompetence of the Reich Bishop was proving a danger to the stability of the regime. But despite his growing impatience and disappointment with the course of the Church Struggle, Hitler did not throw out the baby of the Protestant Church with the bathwater of Müller. Hitler's interest in maintaining institutional Protestantism in Germany was confirmed seven months later by the creation of a Reich Ministry for Church Affairs under Hanns Kerrl. Kerrl, President of the Prussian Landtag before the seizure of power, was a close associate of Göring's, becoming Prussian Justice Minister when the latter was made Prussian *Ministerpräsident*. In this capacity Kerrl faithfully enacted antisemitic and racialist legislation and purged the legal system, until the amalgamation of his portfolio with that of Reich Justice Minister left him temporarily out of a job.¹²⁵ When he was given the position of Reich Church Minister, it was not because he was known to be especially Christian.¹²⁶ He was simply at the right place at the right time — namely, in Hitler's entourage on a tour of inspection when Hitler was pondering the Church Struggle. Kerrl immediately suggested himself, and he was without hesitation made head of the new ministry in July 1935.¹²⁷ Rosenberg was resentful of what he regarded as a pro-church measure and blow to his own position.¹²⁸ In his diary, he assured himself that Kerrl's appointment must have been the work of the "old bureaucracy," and wrote off the new minister as "primitive."¹²⁹

It was hoped that Kerrl could do what Müller could not: bring a peace to the church that would be amenable to the Nazi state while uniting the contesting factions within Protestantism.

¹²⁵ Saul Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews: The Years of Persecution, 1933-1939* (New York, 1997), 29.

¹²⁶ Kurt Meier suggests otherwise, pointing to Kerrl's "affinity for Church and Christianity": Meier, *Kirchenkampf*, 2: 68. Conway goes further, suggests that Kerrl was the only one in the party leadership who actually believed that Nazism was related to Christianity: *Persecution*, 204-07. Had such a belief been the only criterion, however, Nazis like Koch or Buch, to mention just a few, would have been strong candidates. Schemm would also have been ideal for the job, had he not died in a plane crash the previous March. Conway makes no mention of Buch, Koch or Schemm in his book.

¹²⁷ Conway, *Persecution*, 128; *Dokumente zur Kirchenpolitik*, 3: xvi-xvii.

¹²⁸ Reinhard Bollmus, *Das Amt Rosenberg und seine Gegner: Studien zum Machtkampf im nationalsozialistischen Herrschaftssystem* (Stuttgart, 1970), 115-16.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 116.

Witnessing the damage that resulted when the Reich Bishop drove a particular agenda through the Church — instead of staying above the theological and political fray — Nazi functionaries came to the conclusion that the Church Struggle could be better resolved through governmental means. Pivotal in this regard was a memorandum written in January 1935 by the jurist Wilhelm Stuckart, formerly state secretary in the Reich Education Ministry and soon state secretary in the Reich Interior Ministry. Stuckart was more famous as co-author and promoter of the Nuremberg racial laws, which he and Hans Globke wrote a few months later. His fame grew further in January 1942 when he took part in the Wannsee Conference on the “Final Solution of the Jewish Question.” In this memorandum, which was personally delivered to Hitler, Stuckart called for the creation of a “central authority for all church questions.” The German Christians had been unable to unify the church, while the Confessing Church represented nothing more than “German National reaction.”¹³⁰ In contrast to the disarray that had so far marked church policy, it was necessary to impose a clear, unified will. Instead of allowing the church to reshape itself under Müller and the German Christians, Stuckart suggested that the state should take the reins and reshape the church from above. Goebbels voiced much the same opinion in a speech he gave at the end of March: “When we call for the unification of the Protestant church, we do so because we do not see how, in a time when the whole Reich is unifying itself, twenty-eight *Landeskirchen* can persist.... In the interpretation of the Gospel one may hold the command of God higher than human commands. In the interpretation of political realities, we consider ourselves to be God’s instrument.”¹³¹ A few months later, the Reich Church Ministry came into being.

Almost immediately after taking up his new appointment, Kerrl convened representatives

¹³⁰ BAP R43 II/163 (21 January 1935: Berlin). “German National” here means the right-wing German National Peoples’ Party (DNVP), a coalition member of the first Hitler cabinet in January 1933.

¹³¹ *Hannover Kurier*, 29/3/35 (in EZA 50/428/50).

of the *Länder* to assess the church-political situation throughout Germany and to solicit the views of the Nazi regional leadership. The proceedings therefore represent an invaluable cross-section of Nazi elite opinion after two and a half years of party rule. Both pro- and anticlerical Gauleiter expressed their opinions. Martin Mutschmann, Gauleiter, Reich Governor and *Ministerpräsident* of Saxony, was the most anticlerical of all, suggesting that the Jews were behind the Church Struggle. The Catholic Church, he added, wanted nothing less than to create a “state within a state.”¹³² Several other leaders, such as *Kultusminister* Mergenthaler of Württemberg, as well as Mutschmann and representatives from Hesse and Baden, suggested a separation of church and state, especially with regard to ending the church tax.¹³³ Kerrl interjected at this point, suggesting that separation would be very complicated legally. Furthermore, he added: “The *Führer* wants to protect positive Christianity; this must be maintained. It is necessary, therefore, to seize upon the powers of the Christian confessions which affirm the state and National Socialism, and to maintain church life.”¹³⁴ Leaders from Thuringia, Mecklenburg, Schaumburg-Lippe and Westphalia all agreed with this position, noting that either one faction or the other was so strong in their areas that there was no Church Struggle. The Oldenburg representative noted that there was a definite fight between the BK and the DC in his region, but wanted to take no state action for fear of creating martyrs.¹³⁵ The leaders of Braunschweig, Anhalt and Hesse-Nassau stated their belief that behind the activities of the BK in their areas stood the Catholic Church.

At this point Wilhelm Kube made a startling statement: he considered the Church Struggle “unbearable,” and declared that “National Socialism is religious but not confessional.

¹³² “Protokoll einer Besprechung des Reichkirchenministers mit den Oberpräsidenten und Vertretern der Länder,” 8/8/35: *Dokumente zur Kirchenpolitik*, 3: 41. Mutschmann had elsewhere indicated his allegiance to “Deutsche Glaube”: BAP 62 Ka 1/22/272-74 (15 April 1935: Berlin).

¹³³ *Dokumente zur Kirchenpolitik*, 3: 41-42.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 3: 42-43.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 3: 44.

The organizations within the Church must be banned, that means both the German Christians and the Confessing Front.”¹³⁶ For one of the founders of the German Christians, this was an incredible reversal. Kube was nonetheless prepared to endorse such a position if it meant peace in the church. This did not signify, however, that Kube viewed both parties in the same light. He insisted that only “the Confessing Front is today the political enemy of the state.” While Kube suggested changes should be made to the legal relationship between church and state, he did not endorse separation. Erich Koch’s representative from East Prussia stated that the region’s Catholic bishop was “unreliable from a nationalist viewpoint.” But he made no mention of separation. As his representative put it, it was Koch’s personal view that “through the encouragement of the patriotic (*staatsstreu*) elements of the Protestant Church, Protestantism must be made stronger vis-à-vis Catholicism.” Even though he was no longer president of the provincial church synod, Koch evidently retained an interest in the fortunes of his church.¹³⁷ The representatives of Hamburg, Bremen and Lübeck — northern city-states where separation took place before the Nazis came to power — all reported that no Church Struggle existed in their areas.

The assembled regional leaders concluded by acknowledging two religious camps within Nazi ranks: “the followers of Rosenberg’s *Mythus*, and those who unreservedly stand on the foundation of Point 24 of the party program.”¹³⁸ The minutes of the meeting show that Kerri had the last word: “It is untenable to have within the movement an official standpoint (Point 24 of the party program) and an unofficial standpoint (Rosenberg’s direction) towards Christianity.” In

¹³⁶ Ibid. The Nazis, unwilling to accept the claims of the BK that they represented a “church,” used the more pejorative “Confessing Front” instead. Kube found the struggle “unbearable” especially because of his fighting with Otto Dibelius, General Superintendent in his domain of Brandenburg: BAZ NS 26/1240 (19 January 1934: Berlin). Later that year, Kube would involve himself in a dispute between Dibelius and pastor Falkenberg of the DC: BAP R43 II/164/44-47 (20 September 1935: Berlin). Kerri advised Kube to not get involved.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 3: 46-47.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 3: 49.

his opinion, it was necessary to “eliminate” the unofficial standpoint.¹³⁹

To demonstrate the party’s commitment to its platform, Kerrl went about the work of attempting to bridge the theological and political gaps that divided the German Christians and Confessing Church. As he had done with Müller, Hitler stepped back to await results. Kerrl began in September 1935 by restoring the authority of the *Landeskirchen*, stripping the rival DC and BK church bodies of their power, and issuing a general amnesty for all pastors charged by the police for opposing Müller’s administration.¹⁴⁰ In October Kerrl instituted “church committees” for the churches which Müller coordinated, designed to effect an accommodation between the DC, the BK and the substantial number of neutral churchmen in the middle. These committees oversaw the administrative and financial operations of the churches, and were not state bodies as such. Kerrl also established a central “Reich Church Committee,” which was chaired by the leader of the Lutheran Church in Westphalia, Wilhelm Zoellner, and populated by moderates from both factions.¹⁴¹ Kerrl purposely chose committee members who had avoided the Church Struggle, since he hoped to mediate between the contesting parties. Zoellner, for instance, enjoyed the confidence of “moderates” in the Confessing Church.¹⁴² While Müller was kept away from the proceedings, Bodelschwingh, the victim of Müller’s and Jäger’s machinations, was invited to participate. He declined.¹⁴³ Finally, for the duration of the negotiations, Kerrl ordered that the Gestapo take no coercive measures — arrests, expulsions, prohibitions or confiscations — against Confessing Church pastors.¹⁴⁴ As before, the

¹³⁹ Ibid., 3: 50.

¹⁴⁰ Conway, *Persecution*, 135.

¹⁴¹ R 5101/23756/35 (15 October 1935: Berlin).

¹⁴² Broszat, *Hitler State*, 228.

¹⁴³ *Dokumente zur Kirchenpolitik*, 3: 92-98.

¹⁴⁴ BStA Epp 621/1 (5 September 1935: Berlin).

“totalitarian” Third Reich would allow a degree of freedom of expression that existed nowhere else in Germany.

Kerrl’s gesture caused a rift within the Confessing Church. Among the strongest proponents of cooperation with the new church committees were the Lutheran bishops Wurm, Meiser and Marahrens of the “intact” churches.¹⁴⁵ The Dahlemites, mostly from the Old Prussian Union, were opposed. Certainly their treatment at the hands of Müller helped them become permanent enemies of the German Christians. But the Dahlemites were also disturbed by Confessing Church displays of loyalty to the regime, such as holding services of thanksgiving for Hitler when the Saarland was reincorporated into the Reich.¹⁴⁶ Their opposition grew when the Reich Church Committee affirmed their allegiance to “the National Socialist *Volk* on the foundation of race ...”¹⁴⁷ At their annual synod in Bad Oeynhausen in February 1936, the BK formally split, with the Lutherans going their own way in a “Council of Evangelical-Lutheran Churches.” The Lutheran churches accused the “Council of Brethren,” the Dahlemite governing body of the BK, of politically-motivated intransigence, while the Dahlemites professed to be interested only in the Word of God.¹⁴⁸ In fact, the minority Dahlemites were rigidly opposed to any suggestion that members of the DC, who like them confessed faith in Christ, had a right to

¹⁴⁵ Once the German Christians ceased to be a threat to his church, Marahrens was enthusiastically behind most Nazi policies: Klügel, *Landeskirche Hannovers*, passim. Wurm actually went so far as to blame the Dahlemites, rather than the Nazi regime, for the difficulties between church and state. In his view, they “did not merely fight the intrusions of the state into church territory: rather, as a power from below that assumed inappropriate authority, they fought the state as such. ... They were too convinced that an arrangement with the state would drive the church to ruin” (ibid., 223).

¹⁴⁶ For these declarations, see Nikolaus Preradovich and Joseph Stingle (eds.), *‘Gott segne den Führer!’: Die Kirchen im Dritten Reich* (Leoni, 1986), 86-94.

¹⁴⁷ Klaus Scholder, “Kirchenkampf,” in *Evangelisches Staatslexikon* (Stuttgart, 1975), reprinted in idem, *A Requiem for Hitler and Other New Perspectives on the German Church Struggle* (Philadelphia, 1989), 105.

¹⁴⁸ Shelley Baranowski points to additional differences between the confessional Lutherans of the “intact” churches and the BK of the Prussian Old Union: “The disproportionately Prussian composition of the Pastors’ Emergency League disturbed the bishops, whose ingrained anti-Prussian regionalism and Lutheran confessionalism they could never entirely suppress”: Shelley Baranowski, “The Confessing Church and Antisemitism: Protestant Identity, German Nationhood, and the Exclusion of the Jews,” in Susannah Heschel and Robert Ericksen (eds.), *German Churches and the Holocaust*, forthcoming (Philadelphia, 1999).

be in the church.¹⁴⁹ Hermann von Detten, the former head of the Department for Cultural Peace now working in Kerrl's ministry,¹⁵⁰ noted how leaders of the Confessing Church had rejected his suggestion that the BK share church space with the DC in smaller parishes.¹⁵¹

A further sign of their position came when the Dahlemites wrote the "Hitler Memo," sent directly to the Führer in May 1936 above the head of the Church Minister. Oblivious to the removal of Jakob Hauer as leader of the German Faith Movement just a month earlier, or the banning of their public meetings the year before, the authors of the letter wondered if paganism was the official religion of the party. They suggested that "positive Christianity" was theologically unsound, criticized state actions to curtail the Dahlemites, and refuted antisemitic measures as contrary to "love one's neighbor."¹⁵² However outraged Hitler may have been by the letter, he chose to ignore it. And nothing more would have resulted from it had the foreign press not published a copy they received from individuals within the BK. It was roundly rejected by the Lutheran state bishops, who declared some months later: "We stand with the Reich Church Committee in support of the Führer in the struggle for the life of the German *Volk* against Bolshevism."¹⁵³ Regardless of the rectitude of their position, the Dahlemites faced new repressive measures at the hands of Kerrl's ministry. Three of their members were arrested and

¹⁴⁹ Protestant churchmen outside of Germany noted this intransigence with some dismay. As one foreign theologian observed: "That natural theology of creation which characterizes the 'German Christians' can also be found in Anglicanism, in modern world Protestantism and in American activism. But the theology of the Confessing Church, above all its strictly dialectical version, is not fully shared either in the Lutheran north or in the Anglican and American west" (quoted in Scholder, *Churches*, 2: 235). Scholder himself refers to "the danger to which even the Confessing Church readily succumbed, of declaring one's own cause without further ado to be God's cause and thus limiting or even doing away with the freedom of the word of God" (*ibid.*, 2: 87).

¹⁵⁰ See Chapter Five, n. 190.

¹⁵¹ BAP 62 Ka 1/22/202-205 (2 July 1935: Berlin).

¹⁵² Wilhelm Niemöller, *Die bekennende Kirche sagt Hitler die Wahrheit* (Bielefeld, 1954), 9-18.

¹⁵³ Quoted in *ibid.*, 18. Scholder argues the reference to Bolshevism was provided by Germany's involvement in the Spanish Civil War: "Politik und Kirchenpolitik im Dritten Reich: Die kirchenpolitische Wende in Deutschland 1936/37," reprinted in *idem.*, *Requiem*, 150.

put into concentration camps, including Friedrich Weißler, a lawyer who had authorized the publication. Weißler was arrested by the Gestapo and sent to Sachsenhausen Concentration Camp, where he was “brutally done to death.”¹⁵⁴ Weißler was the first member of the Confessing Church to be killed by the Nazis. But this was not a simple matter of Christianity now facing its “Final Solution”: under the Nuremberg Laws, Weißler was a Jew. Two other members of the BK implicated in the matter were also sent to Sachsenhausen, but were immediately separated from Weißler. Whereas Weißler supposedly “hanged himself” four weeks later, the other two were eventually released unharmed.¹⁵⁵

By the beginning of 1937, the Church Committees were no closer to forging links between the BK and the DC than they had been a year before. Rapprochement was not helped by a series of orders which had placed various difficulties on the radicals within the Confessing Church: the banning of certain periodicals; increasing state control over theological exams; and the censure of clergy for political speeches.¹⁵⁶ At the same time, the Church Ministry responded positively to some complaints. When the BK pointed out with dismay that at Nazi assemblies religious songs were being sung to secular texts, and that in some churches Nazi songs were being sung to religious texts, the ministry ordered a halt to this practice.¹⁵⁷ The BK leadership also tried to contact ministers in Hitler’s cabinet who in various ways displayed a commitment to the Protestant faith. Aside from Kerrl, they addressed their pleas to the Nazis Wilhelm Frick and Bernhard Rust. Additional letters were sent to Werner von Blomberg, War Minister and Commander-in-Chief of the Wehrmacht; Foreign Minister von Neurath; Finance Minister Lutz

¹⁵⁴ Conway, *Persecution*, 164.

¹⁵⁵ Barnett, *Soul*, 84-85. Wolfgang Gerlach notes with dismay how the Dahlemite leadership did little to come to Weißler’s defense. He also demonstrates that, while the memo criticized the Nazis for their antisemitism, it hid the antisemitism present in the BK: *Als die Zeugen schwiegen: Bekennende Kirche und die Juden* (Berlin, 1993), 169.

¹⁵⁶ *Dokumente zur Kirchenpolitik*, 3: 185, 188-89, 191-92, 276-77. In June 1936, Heydrich ordered that BK pastors were not to be placed under censure for “purely ministerial activities” (*ibid.*, 3: 199).

¹⁵⁷ BAP NS 6/224/40-42 (21 October 1936: Munich).

Schwerin von Krosigk; Labor Minister Franz Seldte; and Hjalmar Schacht, President of the Reich Bank and Economics Minister.¹⁵⁸

Kerrl's actions against the Dahlemites, while far from persecution, were sufficient harassment to make the work of the church committees impossible. In February 1937 the Reich Church Committee resigned because of the irreconcilable differences between the BK and the DC, and in protest of the measures taken by the Gestapo against select Protestant pastors.¹⁵⁹ The very purpose of Kerrl's Ministry was therefore threatened with collapse. Kerrl immediately convened the state and provincial church committees in a desperate attempt to reassert his authority. He assured the assembly that there would be no chance of new church elections, and threatened that the state would take direct control over the administration of the Protestant Church, since taxes continued to be used for "revolts against the state." The regulations, he promised, had already been sent to the newspapers for publication.

Two days later, however, Hitler again intervened. Annoyed that Kerrl had been as unable as Müller to overcome the divisions in the church, Hitler gathered the party leadership to discuss the church situation. As Goebbels noted in his diary: "A great dilemma about Kerrl's planned decree in the church question. Kerrl has given this to the press without the knowledge of the Propaganda Ministry. Kerrl, Frick, Hess, Himmler and I ordered to Obersalzberg for a conference on the church question. The Führer wants to issue a clear policy. Kerrl made a serious mistake going over our heads. ... One cannot solve the church struggle in this way; one will only create martyrs."¹⁶⁰ Hitler directly contravened Kerrl by announcing that new church

¹⁵⁸ EZA 50/136/10 (17 November 1936: Berlin); EZA 50/136/12 (16 November 1936: Berlin). Of the conservative fellow travelers on Hitler's cabinet, Blomberg, Neurath and Schacht were out of office by 1939. Schwerin von Krosigk and Seldte, on the other hand, stayed in the cabinet for the duration of the Third Reich. It is not known whether any of these men responded to the letter.

¹⁵⁹ *Dokumente zur Kirchenpolitik*, 3: 318.

¹⁶⁰ Elke Fröhlich (ed.), *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels: Sämtliche Fragmente* (Munich, 1987), entry for 15/2/37.

elections were to be held for a general synod that would write a new constitution for the Reich Church.¹⁶¹ Just as Hitler reversed the work of Müller in 1934, so too was he willing to give up on the path chosen by Kerrl. This signaled a decisive break with Kerrl's futile policy of state intervention. Most church historians agree that Kerrl had sincerely hoped for a resolution to the Church Struggle, even if his own actions had undermined that goal. As Kerrl would later remember, Hitler's decision for an election meant that "my authorization as Reich Minister for Church Affairs comes to an end: I no longer carry out church policy on my own responsibility to the best of my knowledge and conscience."¹⁶² For the third time since 1933, Hitler acted in the hope that the Protestant church, left to its own devices, would voluntarily coordinate itself with National Socialism. And for the third time, he was sorely disappointed.¹⁶³

The reaction in the Confessing Church was again mixed. As one observer noted, the moderates greeted the announcement in a way "comparable to the reaction that must have greeted Moses' announcement to the children of Israel that Pharaoh had promised to let them depart from Egypt. But it was Kerrl who was Pharaoh and Hitler who was Moses. The Führer's prestige actually rose, because it was he who had countermanded Kerrl's orders by decreeing new synodical elections."¹⁶⁴ But the Dahlemites took a different position. Otto Dibelius sent an open letter to Kerrl at the end of February, which clearly indicated his objections: "[W]hen children are told in their morning religious instruction that the Bible is the word of God which speaks to us in the Old and New Testament, and when in the afternoon they must learn 'What is our Bible? Our Bible is Hitler's *Mein Kampf* — who has to change his teachings?'" According to Dibelius, if the state were aware of its limits, it could rely "on the readiness of the Protestant

¹⁶¹ BAP R43 II/160/105 (17 March 1937: Berlin).

¹⁶² Quoted in Scholder, *Requiem*, 155.

¹⁶³ Scholder points to "the universal assent among [Protestant] church people of which Hitler felt sure": *ibid.*, 151.

¹⁶⁴ Quoted in Conway, *Persecution*, 207.

Christians of Germany for sacrifice.” If not, however, then they would “offer resistance in God’s name. And we shall do that!”¹⁶⁵ The Council of Brethren issued a similar statement in March: “Today the Church is called upon to allow the Word of God and a human worldview to stand together and to combine them in its preaching. The Church must reject this demand.”¹⁶⁶ Here again was a rejection of *Heilsgeschichte*, of the theological notion that one could detect the will of God in human history.

This was an unmistakable rebuff to the totalitarian *style* of Nazism. But it was not a rebuff to particular dimensions of its ideological *substance*. Even Dahlemites did not refute Nazi policy lying outside the direct sphere of the church, including the policy of antisemitism. Dibelius for one had prided himself on being an antisemite even before the Nazis took power.¹⁶⁷ Long after 1945 he congratulated himself on his refusal to help Jews convert to Christianity in the Third Reich: “I therefore became increasingly firm and exact in my demands. This gradually became known, and in the end I was spared such externally motivated requests for baptism.”¹⁶⁸ Such a position represented a clear flirtation with racialist antisemitism. Flirtation became active endorsement three years after his letter to Kerrl, when Dibelius recommended that the Aryan Paragraph — the original source of conflict between the Confessing Church and the German Christians — be formally instituted in the pastorate.¹⁶⁹

Niemöller also displayed no real opposition to Nazi antisemitism. In 1935, the year of the Nuremberg Laws, Niemöller told his congregation: “[T]he Jews have caused the crucifixion

¹⁶⁵ Joachim Beckmann (ed.), *Kirchliches Jahrbuch für die evangelische Kirche in Deutschland 1933-1944* (Gütersloh, 1948), 160.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 163-64.

¹⁶⁷ Chapter Four, n. 91-93.

¹⁶⁸ Otto Dibelius, *In the Service of the Lord: The Autobiography of Bishop Otto Dibelius* (New York, 1964), 95.

¹⁶⁹ Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 57. On the greater issue of antisemitism in the BK, see Gerlach, *Zeugen*, passim; Uriel Tal, “On Modern Lutheranism and the Jews,” *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 1985 (30): 203-213.

of God's Christ. ... They bear the curse, and because they rejected the forgiveness, they drag with them as a fearsome burden the unforgiven blood-guilt of their fathers."¹⁷⁰ Up until the war, when he volunteered for military service from his prison cell, Niemöller made no apparent sign of rejecting this position. A similar attitude was displayed when members of the Confessing Church attacked Rosenberg's *Protestantische Rompilger*. Responding to the claim that the Protestant establishment had become Judaized, one angry member of the Confessing Church, Dean Kornacher of Kempten, protested that "0.3% of the pastorate, by definition of the current law, is non-Aryan. Which other profession (lawyers, doctors) has been kept so pure?"¹⁷¹ The persistent antisemitism evident within Confessing Church circles lasted even after *Kristallnacht*. Whereas BK members voiced public disapproval of the Nazis' lawlessness and wanton destruction of property, they remained silent regarding its victims.¹⁷² As Victoria Barnett states: "The troubling historical evidence suggests that the churches refrained from criticizing the regime, not just because they wanted to remain 'apolitical' but because they often agreed with it."¹⁷³

Realizing that the elections would do nothing to accomplish a unanimous assent to Nazi ecclesiology, Hitler soon developed second thoughts. Only now, in 1937, were his hopes for a Protestant Reich Church beginning to fade. Up until this point Hitler apparently believed that all

¹⁷⁰ Quoted in Ruth Zerner, "German Protestant Responses to Nazi Persecution of the Jews," in Randolph Braham (ed.), *Perspectives on the Holocaust* (Boston, 1983), 63.

¹⁷¹ "'Protestantische Rompilger' (einige Vorwürfe und Antworten)," BAZ NS 8/151/159 (Reformationsfest 1937: Kempten). This tract goes on to refute Rosenberg's other accusations, for instance that the Protestant pastorate is pacifist: "7000 theologians have marched in the fields; 2400 of those have fallen. That's 36.3%. Of doctors, 14.6% have fallen, lawyers 25.5%. Only the officer corps has overtaken the pastorate in the number of victims. Is that pacifism??"

¹⁷² See especially Heinz Eduard Tödt, "Die Novemberverebrechen 1938 und der deutsche Protestantismus: Ideologische und theologische Voraussetzungen für die Hinnahme des Pogroms," *Kirchliche Zeitgeschichte 2* (1989): 14-37.

¹⁷³ Barnett, *Soul*, 72. See also Robert Ericksen, "A Radical Minority: Resistance in the German Protestant Church," in Francis Nicosia and Lawrence Stokes (eds.), *Germans Against Nazism: Nonconformity, Opposition and Resistance in the Third Reich* (New York, 1990).

of German Protestantism could rally around him unequivocally. But the Dahlemites, no matter how small their numbers, held sufficient power to frustrate that hope. The election was delayed first until April 1937 and then for an additional six months. Finally, at the end of June, all further preparations for an election were stopped. Instead, a new wave of repression was launched against the Dahlemites. Within the week Dibelius was put on trial for his letter of February, and eight members of the Council of Brethren were arrested by the Gestapo. This was quickly followed by the detention of 48 additional BK pastors, including the most persistent thorn in the side of Hitler's church policy, Martin Niemöller.¹⁷⁴ At the same time that Hitler was unleashing the coercive power of the state, he wanted these actions to be controlled and measured. He therefore ordered that all Reich- and Gauleiters take no measures against pastors unless explicitly permitted by himself.¹⁷⁵ Further action was taken in August with the so-called "Himmler Decree," which forbade the administering or taking of BK theological exams and declared separate BK seminaries illegal. These were henceforth criminal activities punishable by imprisonment.¹⁷⁶ The repressive nature of these measures and the human suffering they caused are undeniable. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that they were taken almost exclusively against the Confessing Church of the Old Prussian Union, where the Dahlemites were strongest. By contrast, members of the BK outside the Union Church experienced almost no repression. As one Berlin pastor noted, 206 pastors from Berlin-Brandenburg alone had been imprisoned that year, compared with two from Hanover and one each from Württemberg and Bavaria.¹⁷⁷

Niemöller's trial was perhaps the most notorious case of Nazi anticlericalism vis-à-vis the Protestant church. Ironically, Rosenberg was against the trial, since he believed it constituted

¹⁷⁴ Conway, *Persecution*, 209.

¹⁷⁵ BAZ Schu 245/1/153 (30 June 1937: Munich).

¹⁷⁶ Barnett, *Soul*, 87.

¹⁷⁷ EZA 399/19 (6 October 1937: Berlin).

state interference in church-theological matters. Believing Kerrl had led the charge against Niemöller in the hopes of recovering his position, Rosenberg wrote to Hess that: “Here only cold *state* machinery governs, which has lost sight of the *Volk* and its members — Niemöller is also a member of the *Volk* and before the law *not one dot less* than Kerrl.”¹⁷⁸ Niemöller, like Dibelius, was found not guilty of the charges laid against him in court; in February 1938, he was released from prison. Unlike Dibelius, however, Niemöller was rearrested by the Gestapo on Hitler’s personal order, and as a political prisoner was sent to Sachsenhausen concentration camp. Short of capital punishment, Nazi repression could not have been more severe. But Niemöller’s experience in the concentration camps was far from typical. As the commandant of Sachsenhausen informed the Reich Chancellery, Niemöller’s creature comforts were carefully attended to, including treatment for illness and permission to go on walks.¹⁷⁹ Although Else Niemöller failed in her efforts to have her husband released, Hitler personally granted permission for Niemöller to leave Sachsenhausen for a day to visit his dying father.¹⁸⁰ If this typified the Nazis’ persecution of the Protestant Church — or more accurately a radical portion of it — compared to their other persecutions it was exceedingly mild.¹⁸¹

The idea of a Reich Church was now definitely abandoned. When Kerrl made intermittent attempts to pursue unity in the Protestant Church, Hess continually countermanded

¹⁷⁸ BAZ NS 8/179/138-140 (14 February 1938: Berlin) (emphasis in the original).

¹⁷⁹ BAP R43 II/155/236-237 (6 March 1939: Oranienburg). This was confirmed by Niemöller himself in a letter he sent to his wife Else: BAP R43 II/155/238 (6 March 1939: Oranienburg).

¹⁸⁰ BAP R43 II/155/260 (18 March 1941: Berlin).

¹⁸¹ This is especially evident when figures are compared with those for Catholic clergy. In Dachau, the primary destination for priests and pastors fated for the camps, 447 German clergymen were interned: 411 were Catholic, 36 Protestant. When the numbers are further broken down, the disparity becomes even greater: 8 Catholic clergymen executed, 0 Protestant; 3 Catholic sentenced to death, 0 Protestant; 47 Catholic “deported in KZ,” 2 Protestant; 99 Catholic “imprisoned,” 8 Protestant; 163 Catholic “detained,” 24 Protestant. Konrad Repgen, “German Catholicism and the Jews, 1933-1945,” in Otto dov Kulka and Paul Mendes-Flohr (eds.), *Judaism and Christianity under the Impact of National Socialism* (Jerusalem, 1987), 211-12.

him.¹⁸² As Hess wrote to Göring: “The Führer has not only abandoned the originally much-prized plan of creating a Reich Church; he now opposes it absolutely.”¹⁸³ Even though Hitler had now given up on institutional Protestantism, he had not yet given up on Christianity. In a March 1938 meeting he held with Fürst von Bentheim, the Marshal of the German Association of Nobles (*Deutsche Adelsgenossenschaft*), Hitler continued to maintain that he rejected Rosenberg’s *Myth* and affirmed positive Christianity. When Heydrich caught wind of this, he wrote to Lammers, wondering if this was really Hitler’s view.¹⁸⁴ Lammers responded that this was indeed Hitler’s position, and that furthermore Hitler was of the opinion that “Church and Christianity are not identical.”¹⁸⁵

Conclusion

There is no empirical evidence to support the claim that the Nazis tried gradually to extinguish the Protestant Church in Germany, or that they secretly held off a final showdown until they were secure in their control of the state. To the contrary: the creation of a unified Reich Church would have meant a stronger church organization, as the Nazis realized. The ranks of the Protestant churches were indeed purged, but this was an intra-church affair conducted by the German Christians; the Nazis supported German Christian actions, but did not instigate them. Hitler demonstrated a consistent desire to bring unity to the ranks of German Protestantism. For much of the Third Reich, he correctly understood the Confessing Church per se to be a theological opponent of the German Christians, not a political opponent of the Nazis themselves.

¹⁸² Cf. BAP R43 II/169/186-187 (17 May 1938: Munich).

¹⁸³ BAZ NS 8/184/211-215 (18 April 1940: Munich).

¹⁸⁴ BAP R43 II/150/127-130 (7 March 1938: Berlin).

¹⁸⁵ BAP R43 II/150/133 (26 July 1938: Berlin).

There is no proof that Müller and Jäger were executing Hitler's secret will in their arrest of Wurm and Meiser. Through a careful reconstruction of the timeline of events in those crucial weeks in Autumn 1934, we can see that Hitler did not seek to destroy or church, either from without or within. The excuse that "the Führer must not have known," essential to maintaining Hitler's prestige in the face of unpopular party actions, seems to have been the case here.

In the same way, the creation of a Reich ministry with the sole purpose of ending the Church Struggle cannot be taken as an anti-Christian act. Had the Nazis wanted to destroy Christian institutions, they would have handed control of the Reich Church Ministry to a paganist, or not created such a ministry at all. Had Hitler been consistently, resolutely and fundamentally hostile to Protestantism, he would not have even pondered the idea of church elections four years after every other vestige of democracy in Germany had been wiped out. Only when Hitler understood the permanent impossibility of bringing unity to the fractured ranks of Protestantism did he finally give up on the idea of a Reich Church and dispense with Kerrl. Hitler's turn against the Protestant Church was signaled not by his attempt to "coordinate" it into a unified body, but by his acceptance of its disparate ecclesiastical structure. Only when Hitler gave up on the Reich Church did he give up on institutional Protestantism once and for all.

The various components of Nazi "coordination" have traditionally been viewed in an undifferentiated way as an act of defilement, or at the very least of disrespect. To the Nazis, however, coordination of an institution could be acknowledgement that something was *worth* coordinating. Hitler could not have come to power had he not "coordinated" the various splinter parties of the radical right into a unified movement. Likewise, the Nazis' determined effort to coordinate the Protestant churches suggests that they were seen as compatible — in a particular institutional form — with the Nazi order. This was true as well for the secular institutions and activities of the church. The "practical Christianity" exercised by church bodies for the health of the nation was of paramount interest to the Nazis. As we have seen, many Nazis proclaimed that

positive Christianity largely revolved around certain ethical and social precepts of Christianity. They therefore claimed the same ideological and institutional space as the churches in their efforts to answer the “social question.” In the next chapter, we explore the process whereby the Nazis and the churches, through the implementation of “practical Christianity,” became institutional rivals. There we explore the possibility that the Nazis and the churches found themselves in an antagonistic position not in spite of, but because of, their ideological proximity.

7 “Public Need before Private Greed”: Building the People’s Community

If positive Christianity means ... the clothing of the poor, the feeding of the hungry ... then it is we who are the more positive Christian. For in these spheres the people’s community of National Socialist Germany has accomplished prodigious work. — Adolf Hitler¹

Both before and after the seizure of power, leading Nazis claimed that “practical” or “active Christianity” guided them in defining the ethic of the *Volksgemeinschaft*. As Point 24 of the Party Program stated, “public need comes before private greed.” A whole range of social policy was upheld as the palpable effect of neighborly or brotherly “love,” in which the brother was defined — as we have seen — in terms of his racial belonging (literally “people’s comrade,” or *Volksgenossen*). But as with any other aspect of Nazi discourse, we must ask whether such professions, especially when made in public, were anything more than propaganda. Were these declarations mendacious, meant purely to co-opt potential dissent? Or, aside from their acknowledged propaganda value, could they have been based on a belief that Nazism put forward a kind of Christian ethic? One way to answer this question is to explore the social policies of the churches and their relation to Nazi social policy. It was the churches and their ancillary institutions that had been defining and practicing “active Christianity” decades before the Nazis. If Nazis claimed their actions were the result of practical Christianity, did “practical Christians” agree? How similar were the ethical beliefs and practices of these Christian bodies and those of their Nazi rivals? How close were relations between them? Three areas of particular centrality in Nazi ideology — eugenics, women, and youth — can help uncover the ideological and institutional relationships between certain Nazi and certain Christian conceptions

¹ Hitler speaking to an assembly of *Alte Kämpfer* in Munich: *VB*, 26/2/39.

of “the social.”²

Considerable tension arose between Christian and Nazi social networks in the course of the Third Reich. But such tension was not always due to ideological conflict. Whereas the Catholic Church firmly rejected racial science, many Protestant voices predating Nazism, including those of the later Confessing Church, advocated it. It was strongly promoted by the Inner Mission, the main exponent of “social Protestantism” in Germany, and by a smaller Protestant organization, the Research Center for the Study of Worldview (*Forschungsheim für Weltanschauungskunde*). The same differences between Protestant and Catholic became evident in women’s groups. Here, the overlap in personnel between Protestant and Nazi organizations was even more noteworthy. Hence, the coordination of women’s groups was even more acrimonious than for welfare groups, whereas the degree of ideological affinity was just as substantial. The experience of youth groups fits this pattern as well. For Protestant organizations, the process of “coordination” was not necessarily one of ideological conflict. Rather, it was the frequent *overlap* of Protestant and Nazi conceptions of “the social” that led to an often bitter institutional rivalry.

Eugenics

As we saw in Chapter Four, certain Lutheran Protestants were more likely to endorse particular dimensions of Nazi ideology than Calvinists or Catholics. This was evident not only in their conceptualization of the Marxist or Jewish “dangers” — which Catholics often feared as much as Protestants — but in a theological valorization of the *Volk* as an order of God’s creation. Whereas the Catholic establishment was wary of *völkisch* theology and its practical

² Conceptualizations of the social in the German context are discussed in George Steinmetz, *Regulating the Social: The Welfare State and Local Politics in Imperial Germany* (Princeton, 1993).

consequences, large segments of the Protestant establishment felt more comfortable with the racialist precepts that underlay Nazi eugenicism. In fact, more than simply accommodating eugenics, many of these Protestants actively advanced its cause through their own institutions, most notably the Inner Mission, the Protestant welfare organization founded in the nineteenth century. These Protestants did not passively accept eugenics as a *fait accompli* of Nazi governance; rather, they were at the forefront of discussion and debate about racial science before the seizure of power.

Why would these Christian theologians endorse racial science? Since the theology of the orders of creation (*Schöpfungsglaube*) relegated the value of the individual to that of the communal (the family, the estate, the nation), the status of the sick and suffering was similarly demoted: “[C]haritable institutions which had been designed to alleviate suffering” in the view of *Schöpfungsglaube* theologians “had been transformed into their antithesis. ... [I]n practice, [such institutions] actually favored evil over good and sickness over health.”³ The pro-natalist struggle against a declining birthrate and secular “evils” like abortion, contraception, and loose morality presupposed the sanctification of a morally and physically healthy population.⁴ Therefore, the procreation of the physically and “morally” sick came to be viewed as a sin against God. While Catholics opposed abortion and contraception with no less determination, Protestants far more than Catholics were disposed to view physical abnormality as an index of sin, as a sign of moral and social degeneration. Therefore, as long as this sin existed in the world, the “blessings of science” would be needed to combat it.⁵

Symptomatic of the interest in racial science was the establishment of the Research

³ Young-Sun Hong, *Welfare, Modernity, and the Weimar State, 1919-1933* (Princeton, 1998), 256.

⁴ Cf. Cornelia Osborne, *The Politics of the Body in Weimar Germany: Women's Reproductive Rights and Duties* (Ann Arbor, 1992).

⁵ Claudia Koonz, “Eugenics, Gender, and Ethics in Nazi Germany: The Debate about Involuntary Sterilization 1933-1936,” in Thomas Childers and Jane Caplan (eds.), *Reevaluating the Third Reich* (New York, 1993), 77.

Center for the Study of Worldview in 1927. Headed by Pastor Otto Kleinschmidt, it was associated with the Martin Luther University and housed in the old elector's palace in Wittenberg. Its aim was to synthesize the supposed dialectic between belief and science and undo the common assumption that scientists needed no belief system. Explaining the mission of the center, General Superintendent Schöttler of Magdeburg asked his readership: "What are we doing to our sons? Just as his religion instructor is an orthodox theologian, so is his physics teacher an orthodox monist. The first becomes indignant with the second; the second mocks the first. The student bears the consequences, since he will perpetually be driven back and forth between two intellectual directions, only to be spiritually destroyed in the end." The center's mission was to bridge the gulf between rationalist science and non-rationalist faith, "especially with regard to heredity and race."⁶ As both a pastor and trained zoologist, Kleinschmidt was promoted as the personification of this synthesis.

After a year's work, one Protestant commentator could remark with satisfaction that, in place of the antagonism between science and religion, strides were being made toward their reconciliation. Natural sciences could be pursued without threat of apostasy. Especially commendable was the interest in race, which, as a "new clear concept, is of enormous worth, especially in the field of worldview."⁷ By reinserting religion into science, the Center was working to counteract the image of God as a deistic spirit who simply initiated earthly existence "and then slept." In scientific circles, this article proclaimed, God could once again be considered the living Lord of history. The scientist seeks truth, but, as this observer put it, "truth alone is like light without warmth." Scientific truth needed the warmth of a worldview, but not just any: "the Christian one is simply the most valuable. ... It is important not just for the

⁶ DAZ, 27/12/27 (in BAP R5101/23135/21).

⁷ Kleinschmidt detailed his racist views in *Blut und Rasse: Die Stellung der evangelischen Christen zu den Forderungen der Eugenik* (Berlin, 1933).

theologian, but for every man.” At the same time, Protestantism was especially commendable since it “knows no dogmatic coercion [*Dogmenzwang*]. ... The Protestant church does not stand aside from things, but rather [is] in the center of life as builder and guardian.”⁸

This same attitude to racialist science was evident in the work of the Inner Mission. Since the 1920s, a growing number of theologians advocated eugenics legislation, including Reinhold Seeberg, *Schöpfungsglaube* theologian and after 1923 chairman of the Inner Mission’s Central Committee.⁹ Some theologians were advocating eugenic answers to the problems of mental and physical “defectives” as early as 1920.¹⁰ Seeberg was especially noteworthy in this regard, having “converted” the eugenically minded scientists Baur, Gruber and Fischer to the idea of a broad eugenic front.¹¹ Other Protestant Christians who took up the cause of eugenics included Heinrich Wichern, the grandson of the founder of the Inner Mission, and the scientist Bernhard Bavink. Like Kleinschmidt, both were deeply concerned with reconciling faith and science.¹² Both welcomed the Nazis, especially the passage of the Law for the Prevention of Hereditarily Diseased Offspring in 1933. Countering the objections to eugenics in some Christian circles, especially from the papal encyclical *Casti connubii* of 1930, Bavink argued that: “The mistake of many Christians is that they do not or cannot see that populations and races

⁸ *Reichsbote*, 9-11/9/28 (in BAP R5101/23135/22-23).

⁹ Daniel Borg, *The Old-Prussian Church and the Weimar Republic: A Study in Political Adjustment, 1917-1927* (Hanover NH, 1984), 170; Kurt Nowak, ‘Euthanasie’ und Sterilisierung im ‘Dritten Reich’: *Die Konfrontation der evangelischen und katholischen Kirche mit dem ‘Gesetz zur Verhütung erbkranken Nachwuchses’ und der ‘Euthanasie’-Aktion* (Göttingen, 1980), 91.

¹⁰ Paul Weindling, *Health, Race and German Politics between National Unification and Nazism, 1870-1945* (Cambridge, 1989), 383.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 315; Michael Schwartz, “Konfessionelle Milieus und Weimarer Eugenik,” *Historische Zeitschrift* 261 (1995), 421. These four came out with a popular eugenic journal, *Das kommende Geschlecht* (“The Coming Generation”), in 1920.

¹² Nowak, ‘Euthanasie’, 92-93, 99-100; Heinrich Wichern, *Sexualethik und Bevölkerungspolitik* (Schwerin, 1926); Bernhard Bavink, “Die moderne Rassenhygiene und ihre Beziehung zum sittlich-religiösen Standpunkt,” *Unsere Welt* 18 (1926); *idem*, “Eugenik und Protestantismus,” in Günter Just (ed.), *Eugenik und Weltanschauung* (Berlin, 1932); *idem*, *Die Naturwissenschaft auf dem Wege zur Religion* (Frankfurt a.M., 1933).

have the same standing in God's creation as individuals and therefore have the same claim to existence and protection from extermination. ... God's creation obliges us with all our might to protect the well being of that whole to which we as individuals are subordinate: our *Volk*."¹³

The single most important personality in the Inner Mission's engagement with racialist science was Hans Harmsen, the chairman of its Working Committee on Eugenics. He was at the forefront of eugenics not only in the Protestant milieu, but in Germany as a whole. His interweaving of racial and moral categories was illustrated by the great success he achieved in campaigning for a German Mother's Day, meant both as a pro-natalist celebration of racial hygiene and the family, and an attack on abortion, contraception and "decadence." Harmsen's vision was finally brought to fruition under the Nazis, who made Mother's Day an official holiday.¹⁴ Harmsen also fervently supported the Nazi sterilization laws of 1933.¹⁵ In 1930, three years before the Nazis came to power, Harmsen called for a reorientation in the welfare system, suggesting that "the interests of the individual must retreat further behind those of society."¹⁶ At a meeting of the Inner Mission in August of that year, Harmsen suggested that Protestant charities had to limit the procreation of the socially inferior through compulsory sterilization.¹⁷ The most important policy statement for the Inner Mission as a whole came at a January 1931 conference in Treysa, under the chairmanship of Harmsen. Harmsen called on the assembly to recognize the "natural inequality of all human beings." Whereas the conference as a whole avoided an endorsement of euthanasia, the participants agreed that "[t]he artificial prolongation

¹³ *VB*, 17/8/33.

¹⁴ Karen Hausen, "Mother's Day in the Weimar Republic," in Renate Bridenthal et al (eds.), *When Biology Became Destiny: Women in Weimar and Nazi Germany* (New York, 1984), 131-32.

¹⁵ Weindling, *Health*, 526.

¹⁶ Quoted in Hong, *Welfare*, 257.

¹⁷ Quoted in Jochen-Christoph Kaiser, *Sozialer Protestantismus im 20. Jahrhundert: Beiträge zur Geschichte der Inneren Mission 1914-1945* (Munich, 1989), 316.

of life which is in the process of being extinguished” represented “an interference in God’s creative will.”¹⁸ One of the most eminent participants in the conference was Friedrich von Bodelschwingh, head of the Bethel institutions and Reich Bishop-designate in 1933.¹⁹ At this conference, it was his opinion that: “In service to the Kingdom of God we have received our body. ... God gave man responsibility for the body. If [the body] leads to evil and the destruction of the Kingdom of God in this or that member of the community, then there is the possibility or even duty for elimination [*Eliminierung*] to take place.”²⁰ The public statement issued by the participants was almost identical to this opinion. It proclaimed that the 30,000 patients in their institutions were “the victims of guilt and sin.” The statement concluded that the need for assistance should therefore be curtailed by sterilization, with substantial help only given to those to could regain their productive status in the community.²¹ The statement added that there was “a moral obligation to sterilization on the grounds of charity and the responsibility which has [been] imposed upon us for not only for the present generation, but also for future generations.” Even though the statement rejected sterilization and eugenic abortion, within the Inner Mission’s clinics and hospitals many had already conducted such procedures.²²

The Inner Mission was not simply one voice among the chorus of eugenics advocates in Weimar: it actually constituted part of the eugenics vanguard. The Inner Mission supported the November 1932 draft law providing for the decriminalization of eugenic sterilization, but proposed expanding its scope from the genetically inferior to include the asocial as well. In

¹⁸ Sabine Schleiermacher, “Der Centralausschuß für die Innere Mission und die Eugenik am Vorabend des ‘Dritten Reiches’,” in Theodore Strohm and Jörg Thierfelder (eds.), *Diakonie im ‘Dritten Reich’: Neuere Ergebnisse zeitgeschichtlicher Forschung* (Heidelberg, 1990), 70.

¹⁹ See Chapter Six, n. 21-23, 34-35.

²⁰ Quoted in Schleiermacher, “Centralausschuß,” 70; Kaiser, *Protestantismus*, 330.

²¹ Ernst Klee, *‘Euthanasie’ im NS-Staat: Die ‘Vernichtung lebensunwerten Lebens’* (Frankfurt a.M., 1983), 32; Hong, *Welfare*, 258.

²² Ernst Klee, *‘Euthanasie’*, 32-33. The Treysa conference is discussed at length in Kaiser, *Protestantismus*, 324-

addition, whereas the law would have been based on the voluntary assent of the individual, the Inner Mission proposed that sterilization be dependent solely on the consent of a legal guardian.²³ When the Nazis passed a much stronger version of the law in 1933 against the wishes of the Catholic Franz von Papen (then in Hitler's cabinet as vice chancellor), the Inner Mission welcomed it. The Inner Mission proceeded to voluntarily sterilize inmates in its own asylums, free from coercion by the Nazi state.²⁴ As Michael Burleigh puts it: "The annual reports of [Inner Mission] asylums such as Schwäbisch Hall or Stetten were positively self-congratulatory in tone regarding how the staff had coped with the extra workload involved, or the diplomatic skill they displayed in persuading patients to 'volunteer' for sterilisation."²⁵

Historians have rightly pointed out that eugenics found an audience in many political tendencies in Weimar, and that acceptance of some or most of its tenets did not necessarily constitute a move towards Nazism.²⁶ But the attention the Inner Mission paid to eugenics was not simply part of a larger *Zeitgeist* transcending party lines. Congruence with Nazi ideas could be found on a larger scale. As Burleigh points out, the organization "welcomed the advent of a National Socialist Government."²⁷ Young-Sun Hong similarly contends that "most members of the Inner Mission enthusiastically greeted the Nazi seizure of power."²⁸ As one non-Nazi eugenicist wrote after a course he gave for the Inner Mission in 1931: "[A]mong many pastors

332.

²³ Kaiser, *Protestantismus*, 338-39.

²⁴ Nowak, 'Euthanasie', 96-97, 101-06; Michael Burleigh, *Death and Deliverance: 'Euthanasia' in Germany 1900-1945* (Cambridge, 1994), 41-42.

²⁵ Michael Burleigh, "Between Enthusiasm, Compliance and Protest: The Churches, Eugenics and the Nazi 'Euthanasia' Programme," *Contemporary European History* 3 (1994), 254; idem, *Death*, 51.

²⁶ For eugenics within Social Democracy, for instance, see Michael Schwartz, "Sozialismus und Eugenik: Zur fälligen Revision eines Geschichtsbildes," *Internationale wissenschaftliche Korrespondenz zur Geschichte der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung* 25 (1989).

²⁷ Burleigh, "Enthusiasm," 254.

²⁸ Hong, *Welfare*, 227.

strongly National Socialist tendencies prevailed, making them convinced that the Jewish problem was the central problem.”²⁹ Pastor Johannes Wolff, head of the Stephansstift, went so far as to encourage members of his staff, among them SA men, to work as guards in the neighboring Papenburg concentration camp.³⁰ Outside the ranks of the Inner Mission as well, established Protestant theologians welcomed the Nazi emphasis on eugenics. One of the most prominent was none other than Paul Althaus, one of Germany’s leading *Schöpfungsglaube* theologians.³¹

If these representatives of “social Protestantism” were favorably inclined toward the Nazis and their eugenics policies, what were the Nazis’ views of social Protestantism? This question can be answered through an examination of a parallel welfare organization set up by the Nazis in 1932, the National Socialist People’s Welfare (*Nationalsozialistische Volkswohlfahrt*, or NSV). Headed by *alte Kämpfer* Erich Hilgenfeldt, it grew into a mass organization, reaching 3.4 million members within two years. True to form as a Nazi organization, it experienced polycratic infighting over control of welfare activity with Ley’s German Labor Front, Schirach’s Hitler Youth, and Scholtz-Klink’s Women’s Organization.³² Whereas each of these organizations had their own welfare programs, they eventually gave up their competency in this field to the NSV. More than just a platform for orations about the *Volksgemeinschaft*, the NSV took tangible action, providing about sixteen million Germans with additional winter income to supplement unemployment insurance in the first years of the regime.³³ The NSV grew enormously by the beginning of the war, taking over many aspects of social policy in the Third

²⁹ Quoted in Weindling, *Health*, 477.

³⁰ See Christoph Mehl, “Das Stephansstift im Jahr 1933,” in Strohm and Thierfelder (eds.), *Diakonie*, 153-55.

³¹ Nowak, ‘*Euthanasie*’, 122-23.

³² See Herwart Vorländer, *Die NSV: Darstellungen und Dokumentationen einer nationalsozialistischen Organisation* (Boppard, 1988), esp. 29 for intra-party conflicts; idem, “Erich Hilgenfeldt — Reichswalter der NSV,” in Ronald Smelser et al. (eds.), *Die Braune Elite II: 21 weitere biographische Skizzen* (Darmstadt, 1993).

³³ Thomas de Witt, “‘The Struggle against Hunger and Cold’: Winter Relief in Nazi Germany, 1933-1939,”

Reich.

Whereas the NSV had little to do with the Nazis' sterilization and euthanasia programs, it nonetheless performed many of the functions — notably welfare and Winter Relief — that also fell within the domain of the Inner Mission.³⁴ Referring to the necessity of cooperation between the NSV and its Christian counterparts, Reich Interior Minister Wilhelm Frick took a positive view of the work of the Inner Mission. In June 1933 he denounced the expansion of public, secular welfare during Weimar, which confessional organizations had resented as an invasion and secularization of their domain. Emphasizing that welfare could never do without a Christian sense of charity and love of neighbor, Frick promised that church organizations would be called upon to help build the new *Volksgemeinschaft*.³⁵ That same month, Göring issued a similar statement, proclaiming that the Nazi state should seek active cooperation with Christian welfare organizations.³⁶ Hilgenfeldt, as the leader of a mass organization, wanted the NSV to become the sole body responsible for welfare in the new Germany. He sought cooperation with Christian welfare organizations in the short run, but had little interest in seeing rival bodies competing with his.³⁷ At the same time, true to the doctrine of positive Christianity, he insisted that whereas the NSV was not confessional, it was certainly Christian. In a September 1933 meeting with the Inner Mission leadership, Hilgenfeldt declared that the NSV firmly stood on the basis of Christianity, that it indeed encompassed both of the confessions by effecting their practical

Canadian Journal of History 12 (1978), 364-65.

³⁴ Although the Nazis' Winter Relief Aid (*Winterhilfswerk*, or WHW) was *de jure* a separate organization from the NSV, both were headed by Hilgenfeldt — the latter as an independent organization, the former as a subsidiary of Goebbels' Propaganda Ministry; Herwart Vorländer, "NS-Volkswohlfahrt und Winterhilfswerk des Deutschen Volkes," *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 34 (1986), 342.

³⁵ Vorländer, *NSV*, 204-05.

³⁶ Eckhard Hansen, *Wohlfahrtspolitik im NS-Staat: Motivationen, Konflikte und Machtstrukturen im 'Sozialismus der Tat' des Dritten Reiches* (Augsburg, 1991), 73.

³⁷ Hong, *Welfare*, 232-33; Vorländer, *NSV*, 20-43.

agenda.³⁸ As well as emphasizing the ideological affinity between the NSV and Christian welfare, Hilgenfeldt here clearly pointed to the potential for institutional rivalry.

In a similar meeting in 1934 in which the president of the Central Committee greeted Hilgenfeldt as the “Führer” of all German welfare, Hilgenfeldt and his deputy Hermann Althaus pointed to a shared ideology between the NSV and the Inner Mission: belief in the biblical God, the state and the *Volk* as part of God’s creation. Hilgenfeldt rightly pointed out that, unlike Catholicism, Protestantism neither needed nor desired a concordat with the state. This comment was aimed primarily against the Catholic counterpart to the Inner Mission, the Caritas Association, which was much less willing to endorse Nazi policies.³⁹ Referring to his audience as his “co-workers,” he applauded the Inner Mission’s positive stand on sterilization, adding that artificially sustaining the lives of those spiritually dead ran against God’s order of creation and stood “in opposition to Christian ethics and worldview.”⁴⁰ In spite of the inherent potential for rivalry, the NSV supported these assertions by seeking active cooperation with the Inner Mission in the drafting of new legislation. A top priority was the National Youth Welfare Law, promulgated in 1922 with the aim of overtaking Christian welfare with a secular, republican ethos. In contrast to the NSV’s non-confessional Christian approach to altering the law, the Caritas Association wanted an explicit maintenance of confessionalism in welfare. However, unknown to Caritas, the NSV had already obtained the consent of the Inner Mission for their own draft, which would eventually win out. In that draft, the NSV proclaimed its vision of welfare in the new Germany: to cultivate “a bodily and psychically healthy, morally firm, spiritually developed, vocationally skilled German person, who is rooted ... in a racially

³⁸ Hong, *Welfare*, 236; Kaiser, *Protestantismus*, 282.

³⁹ Kaiser, *Protestantismus*, 294; Vorländer, *NSV*, 213. Only a minority of those involved in the delivery of Catholic welfare in Germany endorsed any kind of sterilization, and even this small number were presented with a major obstacle after the papal encyclical *Casti connubii* of 1930. See Donald Dietrich, “Catholic Eugenics in Germany, 1920-1945,” *Journal of Church and State* 34 (1992): 575-600.

⁴⁰ Kaiser, *Protestantismus*, 295.

conscious manner and, borne by the living forces of Christianity, is committed and bound to *Volk* and state.”⁴¹

This was not only an overlap of ideas. Personnel from the Inner Mission found their way into the NSV as well. The most important among them was Hermann Althaus, pastor’s son and cousin of theologian Paul Althaus. Originally active in the Berlin city missions during the Weimar Republic, Althaus was made deputy director of the NSV by 1934, having joined the NSDAP just two years earlier.⁴² His long involvement in the Inner Mission and relation to Paul in no way made him suspect to Hilgenfeldt. Other NSV leaders to come from the Inner Mission included Bertha Finck, who would become the spokeswoman of the NSV’s “Mother and Child” aid service, and Werner Betcke, who had worked as Reinhold Seeberg’s assistant in the Inner Mission’s Institute for Social Ethics and Science.⁴³ By contrast, no one from the Caritas made their way into the NSV leadership.

With the progress of “coordination,” the Nazi intolerance for rival organizations grew. But this was not primarily the product of ideological difference on the issue of eugenics, as demonstrated by the regime’s view of Kleinschmidt’s Research Center. In 1937 the Gestapo started to contemplate action against the Center, claiming that Kleinschmidt’s work was not built on the foundation of the Nazi *Weltanschauung*. In a letter it sent to Church Minister Kerrl, the Gestapo declared the scientific contributions of the Center to be of dubious value and suggested that Kleinschmidt had demonstrated his unreliability by accepting a monetary gift from a masonic lodge.⁴⁴ The Gestapo also took note of a comment Kleinschmidt made about blood mixing — that a white man who receives a blood transfusion from a black man becomes no more

⁴¹ Quoted in Hong, *Welfare*, 237.

⁴² Kaiser, *Protestantismus*, 194.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 280.

⁴⁴ BAP R5101/23135/152-153 (21 February 1938: Berlin).

black than someone eating blood sausage made from pigs becomes a pig or a sausage.⁴⁵ The Gestapo, taking this as an attack on Nazi science, called for the Center to be closed. As soon as became evident, however, the real bone of contention was that the name of Kleinschmidt's center included the phrase *Weltanschauung* — an expression that the Nazis were anxious to appropriate as their intellectual property. In his defense, Kleinschmidt submitted testimonials to the authorities. One was from the anatomical department of the Halle-Wittenberg University, which confirmed Kleinschmidt's status as a scientist and race scholar of world renown who was doing Germany and the Nazi state a great service.⁴⁶ Even more significant was a letter from Wilhelm Schneider, the head of the race policy office for Gau Halle-Merseburg, which praised Kleinschmidt for his work on science and worldview.⁴⁷ Kerrl himself had written the previous year that the Center was known "in broad circles" for its great value, and that he was happy to continue supporting it financially, as Frick had done when the Interior Ministry was responsible for funding.⁴⁸ When it was discovered that Kleinschmidt's Center was in fact well regarded by race scholars, and could even rely upon the patronage of Göring,⁴⁹ no more threats arrived from the Gestapo. In the final analysis, it was declared that the Center's primary aim — of proving that religion and racial science, Protestantism and Nazism, were compatible — was in no way aimed against the regime. As long as the Center dropped *Weltanschauung* from its title, it could continue its work with financial support from the state.⁵⁰

A similar attitude was apparent toward the Inner Mission. As a consequence of the

⁴⁵ BAP R5101/23135/154-156 (13 December 1937: Halle).

⁴⁶ BAP R5101/23135/40 (29 January 1934: Halle).

⁴⁷ BAP R5101/23135/172 (3 December 1934: Halle).

⁴⁸ BAP R5101/23135/120 (9 November 1936: Berlin).

⁴⁹ BAP R5101/23135/166 (30 August 1938: Berlin).

⁵⁰ BAP R5101/23135/192 (18 January 1939: Berlin).

NSV's drive to take over their welfare activities, the Inner Mission and Caritas found their state subsidies increasingly diminished with time. Whereas they were offered reimbursements equal to their Winter Relief (WHW) collections in the first years of the Third Reich, these amounts were gradually reduced and finally ended in 1936.⁵¹ However, while the NSV wished for the total removal of confessional groups from these activities, its ambition was stymied by other Nazi offices, particularly the Labor and Finance ministries, which showed a more sympathetic attitude by maintaining the Inner Mission's state subsidies.⁵² When Hilgenfeldt asked that the Protestant League be excluded from the Winter Relief drive in 1935, Church Minister Kerri turned him down, pointing out that their participation that year would help mark the League's fiftieth birthday.⁵³ Even as late as 1937/38, most Protestant state churches were participating in the WHW.⁵⁴ Confessional welfare was therefore maintained, even if in reduced form. The NSV was unable to remove the Inner Mission and Caritas altogether, but was still able to curtail their activities by receiving the lion's share of all welfare subsidies from the state.

If welfare was becoming slowly deconfessionalized, was the NSV becoming similarly dechristianized? In a 1937 article, Walter Schäfer, the head of the NSV for Kurhessen, insisted that it was not. In his view, Christian charitable love was aimed at the entirety of the *Volk*, and not the individual. The focus on the individual was not the product of Christianity, this author stated, but of a secular philosophy.⁵⁵ In October 1937, Hitler himself insisted: "Winter Relief is in the deepest sense a Christian work. ... This is the Christianity of an honest confession, because

⁵¹ Thomas de Witt, "The Economics and Politics of Welfare in the Third Reich," *Central European History* 11 (1978), 268.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 269.

⁵³ BAP R5101/23126/32-33 (27 November 1935: Berlin) for Hilgenfeldt's request; BAP R5101/23126/39-40 (9 December 1935: Berlin) for Kerri's response.

⁵⁴ *VB*, 22/12/37 (in BAP 62 Di 1/75/33).

⁵⁵ Kaiser, *Protestantismus*, 423.

behind it stand not words but deeds.”⁵⁶ Even when the Inner Mission began to take aim at the NSV for restricting its activities,⁵⁷ leaders of the NSV continued to maintain that their work accorded with “positive Christianity.” The NSV’s main goal, its leaders suggested, was to coordinate all German welfare efforts under one authority. As Hermann Althaus insisted, the goal was not a dechristianization of welfare, but a rationalization of welfare activity under national leadership.⁵⁸ Even in areas run by Christian Gauleiter, such as Josef Wagner of Silesia, the NSV appropriated the functions of confessional welfare.⁵⁹ This points both to the generalized nature of deconfessionalization as an institutional practice, and to the fact that this process was not of itself an anti-Christian act, since it could take place even under the auspices of Christian Gauleiters like Wagner — who took his own children to parochial Catholic schools instead of the Adolf Hitler Schools favored by party functionaries.⁶⁰

Certainly there were NSV polemics that criticized Christian charity as “bolshevik,” since it supposedly led to the “reign of *Untermenschen*” and the propagation of the racially inferior. But these were aimed primarily against Catholic charities like Caritas, which neither subscribed to *Schöpfungsglaube* nor defended sterilization in the name of the larger community.⁶¹ When it carried over to Protestant organizations, Nazi leaders quickly retracted. After the Protestant deaconess-mother house of Gunzenhausen was attacked as “un-Nazi” by the rival Nazi Nursing Organization (*NS-Schwesternschaft*), the local Kreisleiter wrote to Hilgenfeldt, testifying that the deaconesses were firmly behind Hitler, “in word and above all in deed.” They gave material and

⁵⁶ *Frankfurter Zeitung*, 7/10/37.

⁵⁷ Kaiser, *Protestantismus*, 424-25.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 427. De Witt suggests that this was in fact the primary goal of the NSV: “The Struggle against Hunger and Cold”; “The Economics and Politics of Welfare,” *passim*.

⁵⁹ Hansen, *Wohlfahrtspolitik*, 249.

⁶⁰ See Chapter Eight.

monetary assistance to the NSDAP during the *Kampfzeit*, and actively sought to work with the *NS-Schwesternschaft*. In short, according to the Kreisleiter, they were a “bulwark of National Socialism.”⁶² Hilgenfeldt, upon hearing of this complaint, visited the deaconess house shortly thereafter to assure them personally of his high esteem.⁶³

If sterilization met with general approval in the ranks of the Inner Mission, euthanasia was given a mixed response. Many church leaders, especially those with Confessing Church leanings such as Bodelschwingh and Wurm, came out firmly against the Nazis’ euthanasia program. Shortly before the war, both men would make attempts to curtail the Nazi’s infamous “T-4” action (see below). However, this picture of opposition has to be weighed against the fact that fully half of all victims of the Nazis’ euthanasia action came from church institutions.⁶⁴ This figure alone testifies to the muted nature of such church opposition. But it is also attributable to the fact that some Protestants were actually in favor of euthanasia. One was Ewald Meltzer, head of the Protestant Katherinenhof home. After the seizure of power, he admitted that he had permitted sterilizations to take place at a time when they were still illegal. In 1937, at an Inner Mission conference on racial hygiene, he stated that there were certain conditions under which the “patient too must pay his duties to the fatherland” through “mercy killing.” Such circumstances included food shortages or urgent care for military personnel. Meltzer specifically referred to “idiots” as the target group, thereby excluding others like the elderly.⁶⁵

⁶¹ Kaiser, *Protestantismus*, 427-28.

⁶² BAP R43 II/180/47 (26 June 1935: Gunzenhausen).

⁶³ Ibid. The rector of the house, pastor Keupp, noted that he had already received a visit from the area Gauleiter, Julius Streicher, assuring him of the Nazi’s regard for the house’s work: BAP R43 II/180/48 (13 September 1934: Munich).

⁶⁴ Burleigh, *Death*, 166.

⁶⁵ Burleigh, “Enthusiasm,” 256; Ernst Klee, *Die SA Jesu Christi: Die Kirche im Banne Hitlers* (Frankfurt a.M., 1989), 97.

If Meltzer's was only a qualified endorsement of euthanasia, there were more outspoken proponents. One was Rudolf Boeckh, chief doctor of the Lutheran Neuendettelsau asylum in central Franconia.⁶⁶ In a 1937 address to the local NSDAP Ortsgruppe, he advocated the elimination of "life unworthy of life." His theological justification for this course of action acknowledged that "the Creator had certainly imposed illness upon the destiny of mankind." However, "the most severe forms of idiocy and the totally grotesque disintegration of the personality had nothing to do with the countenance of God.... [W]e should not maintain these travesties of human form through an exaggerated, and therefore false, type of compassion; rather, we should return them to the Creator."⁶⁷ Rector Hans Lauerer, head of Neuendettelsau, disagreed that there was such a thing as "life unworthy of life." This was not quite a refutation of biological determinism, however, since Lauerer immediately added that "naturally there exists life of lesser value." He then added that, since the Nazi state was "an order of God," it was contingent upon good Lutherans to affirm the state in its actions.⁶⁸ In 1941, 1911 of Neuendettelsau's 2137 patients were removed in the "T-4" action and killed.

Such active support for euthanasia was rare within the Inner Mission. The same director of Stetten who had so glowingly approved of sterilization found himself opposed to the measures being taken to kill his patients. When he was ordered by T-4 personnel to round up 92 inmates for transportation, he flatly refused to cooperate, going so far as to complain to the Württemberg Interior Minister (with the help of a doctor on staff, the patients were rounded up nonetheless).⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Christine-Ruth Müller and Hans-Ludwig Degener, *Warum sie sterben mußten: Leidensweg und Vernichtung von Behinderten aus den Neuendettelsauer Pflegenstalten im 'Dritten Reich'* (Neustadt/Aisch, 1991). See Chapter Six, n. 100, 106, 119, for central Franconia as a center of both high Protestant religiosity and high levels of Nazi support.

⁶⁷ Hans Rössler, "Die 'Euthanasie'-Diskussion in Neuendettelsau 1937-39," *Zeitschrift für bayerischen Kirchengeschichte* 55 (1986), 208; Klee, *'Euthanasie' im NS-Staat*, 244.

⁶⁸ Rössler, "'Euthanasie'-Diskussion," 202.

⁶⁹ Klee, *'Euthanasie'*, 269-72.

Overall, however, reactions to the T-4 action tended to be substantially more ambiguous. One case was the Protestant asylum of Marienberg in Württemberg, where, instead of blocking Nazi attempts to euthanize patients, the staff went over the list of transferees to determine who were the more physically productive. Far from countering the Nazis' work, this asylum facilitated it, determining the value of their patients by their productive abilities instead of leaving it up to the Nazi authorities, who had not bothered to discern between "loyal and willing workers" and "those needing constant care."⁷⁰

Even some of the Protestants at the forefront of protest exhibited a paralyzing ambivalence toward euthanasia. Egged on by the objections of pastor Gerhard Braun, vice president of the Central Committee of the Inner Mission and head of the Lobetal asylum, Wurm decided to state his personal position to the Nazis. He did so privately, so as to spare the regime public embarrassment. (This was a very charitable gesture given that his release from Jäger's house arrest six years before was precipitated on *public* protest.) Writing to Wilhelm Frick, he presented the evidence he had compiled from laity whose relatives had been killed, and denounced the euthanasia action. But he also displayed a willingness to see things from the regime's point of view. He was careful to distinguish his criticism of Nazism on this one issue from any thought of disloyalty to the regime itself, even stating that he had prayed for the recent defeat of France. Even more significant — given that Wurm had once been a pastor in a state asylum — was his opinion that "Naturally, the thought has crossed the minds of those who have seen such regrettable people: 'Wouldn't it be better to put an end to such an existence?'"⁷¹

Bodelschwingh's position was even more ambivalent, since he had been a strong supporter of sterilization before the Nazis. He was initially against the T-4 action, refusing to

⁷⁰ Quoted in Burleigh, *Death*, 140.

⁷¹ Klee, *Euthanasie*, 213-14.

carry out the registration of his patients. Even the head psychiatrist at Bethel, an *alte Kämpfer* who joined the Nazi party in 1931, worked against the euthanasia program by falsifying medical records.⁷² Like Wurm, Bodelschwingh kept his concerns private, never contemplating a direct challenge to the regime. However, Bodelschwingh began to change his position after he talked with pastor Constantin Frick, the president of the Inner Mission's Central Committee.

Bodelschwingh now reversed himself and approved of the euthanasia program, as long as it would affect only "patients no longer capable of any human contact." He would not allow his staff to be involved, but would instruct them to not obstruct the work of state authorities or refuse access to medical records.⁷³ Bodelschwingh then went a step further by ordering his own doctors henceforth to categorize patients according to their productive abilities, easing the work of the Nazis.⁷⁴ As Burleigh acerbically puts it, "'Aktion T-4' stopped before the efficacy of Bodelschwingh's brand of decentralised opposition through apparent accommodation could be tested."⁷⁵ In fact, not one *public* protest against euthanasia was ever launched by a Protestant churchman. This would be left to the Catholic Bishop Clemens August Graf von Galen, whose fiery denunciation of euthanasia from the pulpit in August 1941 sent shock waves through the Nazi regime (see Chapter Eight). Whereas most Protestant churchmen could not be called active supporters of euthanasia, their ability to actively work against it was undermined from the start by *Schöpfungsglaube* and its racist implications.

⁷² Jörg Thierfelder, "Karsten Jaspersens Kampf gegen die NS-Krankenmorde," in Strohm and Thierfelder (eds.), *Diakonie*, 229-31. The doctor in question, Karsten Jaspersens, had been Martin Bormann's physician during the *Kampfzeit* (234).

⁷³ Klee, *Euthanasie*, 281. Constantin Frick had entered into secret negotiations with Leonardo Conti, the Reich Health Leader, consenting to the voluntary completion of registration forms so long as the euthanasia programme "would proceed more circumspectly": Burleigh, *Death*, 168.

⁷⁴ Klee, *Euthanasie*, 320-21.

⁷⁵ Burleigh, *Death*, 169.

Women

The ideological and institutional affinities between Nazism and certain types of Christianity became even more apparent regarding the issue of women. As we have already seen, Christian discourses played a particularly important role in mediating the message of Nazism for women, both in a positive sense for many Protestants and in a negative sense for most Catholics. As with welfare and eugenics, the experiences of Catholics and Protestants under Nazism revealed sharp differences in their relationship with the regime and its ideology. Indeed, the nature of the relationship revealed itself in great measure over the issue of welfare, one of the very few areas within the public sphere traditionally open to the influence of women.

We saw in Chapter Four that Protestant women were attracted to Nazism in a way that Catholic women were not. As Wilhelm Zoellner, chairman of the Protestant Reich Church Committee, wrote to Reich Women's Leader Gurtrud Scholtz-Klink in 1936, Protestant women "put themselves at the disposal of the party" when it rose to power, whereas liberal and Catholic (and he might have added Jewish) women stayed away.⁷⁶ These women were attracted to Nazism by a mutual loathing of Weimar and appreciation of the cultural role of women as the center of the German family. They shared remarkably similar notions about the position of women in society — out of politics and the workplace and into the home as wives and mothers.⁷⁷ In addition, as with so many other voices within German Protestantism, a large portion of Protestant women subscribed to *Schöpfungsglaube*. As Michael Phayer puts it: "As far as most churchgoing women were concerned, belief in Protestantism and support of the National

⁷⁶ Michael Phayer, *Protestant and Catholic Women in Nazi Germany* (Detroit, 1990), 67. On Zoellner, see Chapter Six, n. 141-42. His language clearly indicated his belief that one could not be both Protestant and liberal.

⁷⁷ Some historians have contended that women had no positive place in the Nazis' conceptual universe, even going so far as to suggest that women were victims of Nazism and stood in opposition to it: see Gisela Bock, *Zwangssterilisation im Nationalsozialismus: Studien zur Rassenpolitik und Frauenpolitik* (Opladen, 1986). For a convincing dissection of this argument, see Atina Grossmann, "Feminist Debates about Women and National Socialism," *Gender and History* 3 (1991): 350-358.

Socialist revolution went hand in hand.”⁷⁸

As with the Inner Mission, Protestant women’s groups were in the forefront of advocating social policies that the Nazis would later adopt as their own. In 1927, hundreds of thousands of Protestant women signed a petition opposing educational reforms that would have given girls the same curriculum (including science and mathematics) as boys.⁷⁹ One particularly noteworthy organization in this regard was the Protestant Mothers’ Association, founded by Klara Lönnes. She was committed to the fight against the falling birth rate and asserted that “mothers are the most worthwhile part of the *Volk*.”⁸⁰ The same year Lönnes started publication of *Mutter und Volk*, a racist, pro-natalist magazine that supported eugenics from its inception. It advocated such practical measures as marriage loans and subsidies for large families, measures which were adopted after the Nazis came to power.⁸¹ Lönnes’ organization, among other Protestant women’s groups, actively supported Nazi legislation increasing penalties for abortion, pornography, prostitution and homosexuality.⁸² Among their ranks could also be found support for eugenics. Lönnes suggested that individual women should not have the right to decide if and when to have children. As one Protestant woman put it, there was a need for “a new morality, a new will for purity, healthy marriages and healthy families — together with physically, spiritually, and psychologically healthy children.”⁸³

Another Protestant women’s leader whose ideas foreshadowed much of the Nazi program

⁷⁸ Phayer, *Women*, 81 (for quote); 81-82, 84 (on women and *Schöpfungsglaube*).

⁷⁹ Doris Kampmann, “‘Zölibat — ohne uns!’ Die soziale Situation und politische Einstellung der Lehrerinnen in der Weimarer Republik,” in Frauengruppe Faschismus Forschung (ed.), *Mutterkreuz und Arbeitsbuch: Zur Geschichte der Frauen in der Weimarer Republik und im Nationalsozialismus* (Frankfurt a.M., 1981), 99.

⁸⁰ Quoted in Phayer, *Women*, 87.

⁸¹ Claudia Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland: Women, the Family and Nazi Politics* (New York, 1987), 240-41.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 241.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 240.

was Guida Diehl, who in 1919 founded the ultra-right New Land League (*Neulandbund*). A disciple of Adolf Stöcker, Diehl did battle with the alleged enemies of “Christianity” and the Fatherland: Judaism, marxism, materialism and mammonism.⁸⁴ Hitler recognized Diehl’s ideological value, having paid her a visit at her headquarters in Thuringia as early as 1925.⁸⁵ She finally joined the NSDAP in 1930, and shortly thereafter made a bid to take over the National Socialist Women’s Organization (*NS-Frauenschaft*, or NSF). Leaders in the party administration, particularly Gregor Strasser, were willing to accept her, together with others, into the party leadership; but she wanted nothing less than exclusive control of the NSF. She was made its “cultural advisor” in 1931, but soon fell out with her rivals, refusing to accept the authority of those above her. When it became clear that she would not cooperate with others or bring her New Land League into the Nazi movement, she was expelled from her office the next year.

The differences between her and Nazi women were not ideological, but rather were mostly concerned with “ambition and place-seeking.”⁸⁶ Even after she was removed from office, Diehl’s vision for the NSF — to reestablish women’s place in the community and family, making women upholders of the German *Volk* and German culture — formed the basis of its activities until the beginning of the war. Diehl and the Nazis remained close enough that she campaigned for the NSDAP in the November 1932 elections.⁸⁷ There were other organizations besides the *Neulandbund* to support the Nazis. The members of the largest Protestant women’s organization, the Protestant Women’s Auxiliary (*Evangelische Frauenhilfe*), were “among Hitler’s most avid supporters at the polls,” and counted many *alte Kämpfer* of the NSDAP

⁸⁴ Jill Stephenson, *The Nazi Organisation of Women* (London, 1981), 27, 77.

⁸⁵ Koonz, *Mothers*, 81.

⁸⁶ Stephenson, *Organisation*, 78.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 79-81.

among their ranks.⁸⁸ The German Protestant Women's League, headed by Paula Müller-Otfried, similarly embraced Nazism. Just weeks before the seizure of power, Müller-Otfried wrote: "Are we on the brink of collapse? Is the *Volk* to become extinct? ... We must remain faithful and prey, confident that God is at the controls."⁸⁹ As Michael Phayer puts it, "the fascination of Protestant women with *völkisch* renewal antedates national socialism [sic]. ... Protestant women liked to view themselves as the precursors of the *völkisch* renewal under the National Socialists. They were not just imagining this."⁹⁰

As with the NSV regarding the Inner Mission, we must ask: if these Protestant women's organizations were so favorably inclined towards the Nazis, was the feeling reciprocal? As was shown in Chapter Five, one of the first leaders of the NSF, Gottfried Krummacher, was not only positively inclined towards Protestant women's organizations, but was actively Protestant himself. However, Krummacher's tenure as head of NSF was brief. Much more important for the development of relations between Protestant and Nazi women was his successor, Scholtz-Klink. Scholtz-Klink was brought in to calm the dissent that arose from having a man as NSF leader. (Because Krummacher had also proven himself a poor administrator, Erich Hilgenfeldt was put in charge of the NSF's day-to-day operations. The NSF was formally made a subsidiary of Hilgenfeldt's NSV.⁹¹) Scholtz-Klink provided little indication of a personal Protestant religiosity. Nonetheless she sought active cooperation with these Protestant groups. She complimented the maternal aid services of Protestant groups as "immeasurably fruitful."⁹² The

⁸⁸ Phayer, *Women*, 157. Phayer translates *Evangelische Frauenhilfe* as "Protestant Ladies' Auxiliary," while Koonz translates it as "Ladies' Aid."

⁸⁹ Quoted in Claudia Koonz, "The Competition for Women's *Lebensraum*, 1928-1934," in Renate Bridenthal et al (eds.), *Biology*, 222.

⁹⁰ Phayer, *Women*, 87.

⁹¹ Stephenson, *Organisation*, 105-06.

⁹² Quoted in Phayer, *Women*, 53.

NSV's "Mother and Child" aid service also cooperated with the Protestant Women's Auxiliary (Bertha Finck, "Mother and Child" *Referentin*, had come out of the Inner Mission). Throughout Germany, members of the Women's Auxiliary cooperated with the NSV in collections for the WHW. In some areas the level of cooperation reached the stage where officers in the Women's Auxiliary simultaneously served as heads of local NSF branches.⁹³

Perhaps the most significant instance of cooperation between Nazi and Protestant women was the founding of a new Protestant women's umbrella organization, the Women's Bureau (*Frauenwerk*) of the German Protestant Church. Established in 1933 by pastor Hans Hermenau, it claimed a membership that year of 2.5 million women. It was lead by Agnes von Grone, who was given the title Reich Women's Leader (*Reichsfrauenführerin*), an appellation which did not yet apply to Scholtz-Klink.⁹⁴ Von Grone was both very active in the Women's Auxiliary, having been the head of its Braunschweig branch since 1925, and a member of the Nazi party. She was offered an immediate pretext for revealing her intentions when, in early 1934, Nazi authorities began to take measures against Protestant women's organizations. In conjunction with Hilgenfeldt's NSV, Reich Bishop Müller worked to have Klara Lönies expelled from her position as head of the Mothers' Association. Furthermore, party leaders in Saxony declared that Women's Auxiliary activities would henceforth be outlawed. Scholtz-Klink similarly banned the formation of new branches of Women's Auxiliary.⁹⁵ As offended as Protestant women were by Nazi measures, their complaints were not ideological in nature. Instead, they had been motivated by organizational ambition; if branches of the Women's Auxiliary continued to spring up, it was

⁹³ Ibid., 90.

⁹⁴ Phayer translates *Frauenwerk* in this context as "Women's Work Front." For a biographical overview see Fritz Mybes, *Agnes von Grone und das Frauenwerk der Deutschen Evangelischen Kirche* (Düsseldorf, 1981). Koonz considers this work apologetic (*Mothers in the Fatherland*, 254).

⁹⁵ Jochen-Christoph Kaiser, "Das Frauenwerk der Detuschen Evangelischen Kirche: Zum Problem das Verbandsprotestantismus in Dritten Reich," in Heinz Dollinger et al (eds.), *Weltpolitik, Europagedanke, Regionalismus* (Münster, 1982), 491.

feared, the NSF would be unable to establish its own network.⁹⁶ The expulsion of Lönnes was similarly based on institutional rivalry, not ideological opposition.⁹⁷

Von Grone successfully worked to have these measures reversed. She was aided by the fact that she had already proven her credentials as a Nazi. Without pressure from above, she had already purged the Women's Bureau leadership of anti-Nazis, and could boast that her entire family as well were active in Nazi organizations.⁹⁸ Von Grone succeeded in getting the NSF to order its branches not to restrict the work of Protestant organizations. Even though new Women's Auxiliary branches could still not be founded, Scholtz-Klink announced that double membership in her organization and von Grone's would be permitted, and that active cooperation would be sought between the two in their common areas of interest, such as education and maternal assistance. Von Grone even got the NSV to overrule the orders of the Saxon authorities regarding organizational activity.⁹⁹

Part of the reason for the NSF's retreat was the realization that it was not sufficiently developed institutionally to take over all the tasks of its Protestant counterparts. As much as they wished to gain exclusive control of all Women's Auxiliary competencies, Nazi women did not want to do so at the expense of the services being rendered. But another reason was the realization that by attacking Protestant women, the Nazis would burn ideological bridges they could not afford to lose. The most portentous sign of this ideological connection came in the summer of 1934, when von Grone and Scholtz-Klink agreed that the NSF could use Protestant

⁹⁶ Phayer explicitly points *away* from ideological differences in explaining this premature attempt at "coordination": *Women*, 91-93.

⁹⁷ Jochen-Christoph Kaiser, *Frauen in der Kirche: Evangelische Frauenverbände im Spannungsfeld von Kirche und Gesellschaft 1890-1945* (Düsseldorf, 1985), 196-206.

⁹⁸ Koonz, *Mothers*, 237.

⁹⁹ Phayer, *Women*, 93.

facilities for open courses in racial ideology.¹⁰⁰ By contrast, Catholic women's organizations unequivocally rejected a similar offer made by Scholtz-Klink.

If imitation is the greatest form of flattery, then Protestant women had every right to feel flattered. For as the NSF developed its organization, it systematically adopted one feature after another of its Protestant counterpart: Scholtz-Klink named her bureau the *Frauenwerk*; Scholtz-Klink began to call herself *Reichsfrauenführerin*; and the NSF copied exactly the format and logo of the Protestant mother's magazine *Mutter und Volk*, eventually taking it over outright.¹⁰¹ The NSF also took on the exact tasks that Women's Auxiliary performed: marriage counseling, maternal education, and the building of maternal aid centers. With the growing membership and increasing budgets of Scholtz-Klink's *Frauenwerk* and its parent organization NSV, renewed attempts were made to forcibly "coordinate" Protestant women. Slowly, Women's Auxiliary was once again curtailed in their actions, and often told by regional authorities that they could not hold double membership in Protestant and Nazi organizations. Whereas the NSF had earlier relied upon Women's Auxiliary homes for their own work, with the increased funding that came from the regime, it withdrew from these arrangements.¹⁰²

The *Kirchenkampf* also played a role in the growing rift between Nazi and Protestant organizations. Much as Bishop Meiser of Bavaria simultaneously fought Reich Bishop Müller while swearing unconditional loyalty to Hitler, so too did von Grone oppose Müller's attempts to aggressively place her organization under Nazi control, even as she affirmed the Nazi state. Many Protestant women, especially in Confessing Church strongholds like Westphalia, were alarmed by Müller's handing over of Protestant Youth to the Hitler Youth, fearing a similar fate awaited them. Even though von Grone was not a member of the Confessing Church and

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 94.

¹⁰¹ Koonz, *Mothers*, 239.

¹⁰² Phayer, *Women*, 187.

displayed no particular attachment to its cause,¹⁰³ she was concerned for the autonomy of the organization she headed. When she fought with Müller over the *Frauenwerk*'s forced coordination with the NSF, he fired her and replaced her with Hermenau. But since the leaders of the *Frauenwerk* refused to recognize Hermenau's authority, he set up a rival *Frauendienst* (Women's Service), made up of German Christian women in line with Müller and the Reich Church.¹⁰⁴ Von Grone continued to offer resistance to these machinations, even after Bishop Marahrens indicated that he backed Scholtz-Klink's efforts at "coordination."¹⁰⁵ Shortly afterward, von Grone was expelled from the Nazi party by local authorities in September 1935 — a decision she immediately appealed to Buch's party court. Zoellner, by then chair of the Reich Church Committee, faulted not Scholtz-Klink but von Grone, and worked for the latter's removal as *Reichsfrauenführerin* of the Protestant Women's Bureau.¹⁰⁶

In an attempt to break her power, in 1936 Hermenau's Women's Service, Hilgenfeldt's NSV and Scholtz-Klink's NSF worked together to have von Grone defeated in the party court.¹⁰⁷ The party, represented by Hilgenfeldt, specifically accused von Grone of continuing to establish new Women's Auxiliary branches, leading her organization into the Church Struggle, and making cooperation with the NSF impossible. Although attacks on her became personal, the real aim was not to do away with von Grone, but to get her to stay on while conceding Scholtz-

¹⁰³ Ibid., 143.

¹⁰⁴ Fritz Mybes, *Geschichte der evangelischen Frauenhilfe in Quellen unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Evangelischen Frauenhilfe im Rheinland* (Gladbeck, 1975), 106-09. Koonz suggests that about 10% of Protestant women joined the German Christians (*Mothers*, 246). Hermenau's organization was much smaller than von Grone's, comprising only 32 regional associations out of a nationwide total of 704 for all Protestant women (Mybes, *Geschichte*, 110).

¹⁰⁵ Phayer, *Women*, 161.

¹⁰⁶ Mybes, *Agnes von Grone*, 55-63.

¹⁰⁷ Kaiser, *Frauen*, 233.

Klink's supremacy. Since von Grone refused to do this, her expulsion was upheld.¹⁰⁸ Shortly thereafter the *Frauenwerk* was finally incorporated into the NSF.¹⁰⁹ Church authorities, seemingly taking Scholtz-Klink's side, ordered von Grone to sever all ties with women's organizations.¹¹⁰

The NSF's attempts to cut away at the *Frauenwerk* were undertaken in cooperation with German Christian churchmen, state bishops among them; this was more than just a party act. All the leaders of the Women's Service sided with Scholtz-Klink. One of the Service's leaders, Eleanor Liebe-Harcourt, discussed the relationship of her organization with Scholtz-Klink, who assured her that they would continue to work closely together. Scholtz-Klink also provided evidence of a German Christian leaning when she stated: "For National Socialism there can be no division of religious and *völkisch* interests."¹¹¹

It would be a mistake to characterize the conflict between Protestant and Nazi women as exclusively institutional. Certainly, many members of Women's Auxiliary took the Confessing Church side of the Church Struggle, rejecting the Aryan Paragraph on ideological grounds. These women were strongest where the Confessing Church itself was strongest: Westphalia and the Rhineland.¹¹² Dissension between them and their Nazi counterparts reached such levels that in some cases Nazi women were forced out of Protestant organizations. As Liebe-Harcourt put it, "This really hurts when our National Socialist women, early fighters for our cause, receive no gratitude for their service during the hard times when they had encountered ridicule and rebuff." In some cases, wives of Nazi leaders were known to resign from Protestant organizations due to

¹⁰⁸ Koonz, *Mothers*, 253.

¹⁰⁹ *Dokumente zur Kirchenpolitik des Dritten Reiches*, 3 vols., edited by Carsten Nicolaisen (Munich, 1971-94), 3: 277.

¹¹⁰ Kaiser, *Frauen*, 223.

¹¹¹ Kaiser, "Frauenwerk," 495.

¹¹² Mybes, *Geschichte*, 96.

increased hostility.¹¹³ There was also growing dissention over the place of eugenics and racialism in Protestant women's organizations. Many women social workers began to complain of the dire impact of sterilization on the victim as well as on the larger society. And among those who had always supported eugenics came concerns over its practical implementation.¹¹⁴ Fighting between Nazi and Protestant women's organizations was not entirely over ambition and place-seeking.

However, this dissension was not typical of relations between Protestant and Nazi women. Though they were certainly dismayed with the curtailing of their activities and the progressive appropriation of their programs one by one into the rival NSF, Protestant women rarely reached the stage of outright ideological opposition. More typical was the attitude of von Grone herself, who never wavered in her support for Nazism, even as she came under attack from fellow party members: "Not only as a party member but also as a Protestant woman I stand in the most thoughtful, respectful and most faithful obedience in our work behind our Führer."¹¹⁵ Consistent with her earlier position, she never turned against the eugenicist thrust of her organization.¹¹⁶ Whereas it might be claimed that some women's break with eugenicism represented a true ideological split with the Nazis, even here institutional rivalry played a role. Protestant women still resented their own eugenicist magazine *Mutter und Volk* being rudely taken over by the Nazis. Claudia Koonz even argues that institutional rivalry was primary: "When they believed they would control eugenics programs, Protestant women approved; but when Nazi programs excluded them from influence and left them to repair the social and

¹¹³ Koonz, *Mothers*, 256.

¹¹⁴ Mybes, *Geschichte*, 257.

¹¹⁵ Quoted in Phayer, *Women*, 163.

¹¹⁶ Kaiser, *Frauen*, 218.

psychological damage, they objected.”¹¹⁷

The Nazis themselves maintained a distinction between institutional conflict and ideological opposition. Although Scholtz-Klink was eager to monopolize women’s activities, and attempted to suppress those organizational branches which backed the Confessing Church, she did not attack all Protestant women equally. Right up to its forced “coordination” in 1936, there were many branches of the Protestant Women’s Auxiliary that remained politically acceptable to Scholtz-Klink.¹¹⁸ And even after she precluded them from maternal aid activities, Protestant and Nazi women very often continued to cooperate in pro-natalist work.¹¹⁹ Relations between Protestant and Nazi organizations varied from region to region, with many branches of the Women’s Auxiliary continuing to work peacefully with their Nazi counterparts up until the war. Some Protestant women were actually pleased to see the NSF take over these programs, since centralized authority and control meant greater efficiency and increased funding.¹²⁰ The specifically religious activities of women’s organizations, such as Bible study programs and the establishment in 1936 of a Bible Institute in Potsdam, went on without interference from either the NSF or the state.¹²¹ The Christian mien of the NSF itself was upheld well into the process of “coordination,” even while challenged by pagans and anticlericals. At a December 1938 meeting of the local NSF in Neuruppin, a speaker caused considerable dissension when she quipped: “The real unemployed in Germany are the pastors. Only on Sundays between 9 and 10 have they anything to do.” In a letter of complaint to the NSF head office, a branch official expressed her rejection of this position, “since among the audience a great number have been

¹¹⁷ Koonz, *Mothers*, 258.

¹¹⁸ Kaiser, *Frauen*, 236.

¹¹⁹ Phayer, *Women*, 201.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 193-97, 201-02.

members of Christian congregations and since all the local pastors' wives are members of the *Frauenschaft*."¹²² If the NSF attacked institutional Protestantism in the shape of the Women's Auxiliary, its members still affirmed Protestantism as ideology and religion.

Youth

Rivalries in associational life between Christian and Nazi organizations arose in a third area held especially dear to both: youth. For the confessions and the Nazi party alike, the inculcation of a belief system into coming generations of Germans was the best guarantee of their perpetuity; therefore the institutional battles waged here were just as heated as elsewhere. But again, questions of institutional and ideological conflict should not be conflated. Here, as with eugenics and women, confessional responses to the lure of Nazism varied considerably. And as far as Protestants were concerned, the struggle that emerged between them and Nazi groups — particularly the Teachers' League (NSLB) and Hitler Youth (HJ) — was largely institutional in nature.

Immediately after the seizure of power, a new intraconfessional parents' association was established, the Christian Parents' League (*Christliche Elternbund*, or CEB). Although it aspired to be an ecumenical organization representing both confessions equally, its strongest representation came from the Protestant Reich Parents' League, and it was set up in conjunction with the Inner Mission. Its view towards the new regime was made abundantly clear in a manifesto from 1933: "[T]he most important task in the new Germany is to educate the coming generation in Germandom based on Christian foundations. The state safeguards Christianity, so the churches must serve the state in order to preserve and develop it. They may not behave as rulers of the state, or create a state within a state. The various confessions may not struggle

¹²² EZA 14/590 (6 December 1938: Berlin).

against one another, but rather must meet one another with respect in the spirit of Christian charity. ... The objective is the creation of a strong, unified *Volk* in a Christian, National Socialist state.”¹²³ Here the major tenets of positive Christianity were affirmed: a unified *Volk* seeking common ground, and a state ruling supreme in temporal affairs, without the threat of clerical interference. Most significant of all, no mention was made of the confessional school.

At precisely the same time, a rival Nazi organization was established. The NSLB, having sponsored the ancillary Working Group of National Socialist Pastors in the *Kampfzeit*, flexed its organizational muscle again by erecting a new group, the National Socialist Parents’ League (*Nationalsozialistische Elternbund*, or NSEB). Growing out of a prefatory Saxon organization called the National Socialist Working Group for the Rights of the Parent and the Strengthening of the German Family, the NSEB’s professed aim was to restore parental authority in the education and schooling of German children. Its goal was the elevation of the “German State School” as the sole medium of education in the new Germany. It would be in service of the German parent, but nonetheless completely under state control. Only children of German blood would be permitted as pupils. Regarding religion, the NSEB’s manifesto stated: “The German State School is a confessional school only in the sense [that it confesses] the German state and the *Volksgemeinschaft* in the spirit of positive Christianity. The liberation of the German State school from the shackles of the Concordat is to be effected as soon as possible.”¹²⁴ Even though the ideological thrust of education would clearly be nationalist, it was specifically added that this would not be at the expense of the “various Christian religious communities.” Finally, the NSEB plainly stated that it worked for the dissolution of all confessional youth groups into the Hitler Youth.

¹²³ BAZ NS 12/822 (n.d.[1933]: Berlin).

¹²⁴ BAZ NS 12/822 (24 May 1933: Munich).

Whereas rivalry between confessional and Nazi organizations took some time to emerge in welfare and women's fields, here there was almost immediate confrontation. In Saxony, as they attempted to cooperate together, the possibility of formally merging the CEB and the NSEB was raised almost immediately. The members of the local CEB, with one exception, voted to enter *en masse* into the NSEB.¹²⁵ However, disagreement soon arose as to whether they would merge under the aegis of the Inner Mission or the Nazi Teachers' League.¹²⁶ The NSEB had no interest in bowing to the authority of the Inner Mission, using the argument that the Inner Mission was not an educational organization, whereas this was the NSLB's exclusive concern. The leader of the Leipzig NSEB was ready to compromise, however: the churches themselves could establish a pastors' committee within the NSEB, in order to ensure a "strong union" of Christian and Nazi interests.¹²⁷ Intersecting loyalties were made harder to disentangle when the Saxon State Bishop, the German Christian Friedrich Coch, entered the fray as both a member of the Inner Mission and the Nazi party. The debate was cut short, however, when Rudolf Buttmann, leader of the Cultural Policy section of the Reich Interior Ministry, ordered the NSLB to abandon the project of creating a parents' league altogether. Such a league, Buttmann proclaimed, would be superfluous, since the state itself was now taking over the responsibilities that were left to parents' associations in the days of the "liberal state."¹²⁸ Buttmann assured the NSLB that it could seek cooperation with parents in individual schools, but that it was to disengage itself from any formal relationship with parents' associations. This was an unusual setback for the process of "coordination," all the more so since the Nazi state had ordered it.

Other organizational rivalries of much greater scope would emerge that year. One of the

¹²⁵ BAZ NS 12/822 (18 July 1933: Leipzig).

¹²⁶ BAZ NS 12/822 (12 August 1933: Dresden).

¹²⁷ BAZ NS 12/822 (18 July 1933: Leipzig).

¹²⁸ BAZ NS 12/822 (7 September 1933: Berlin).

greatest concerned youth organizations. Protestant youth were represented in several groups with a total membership of about 700,000: the Reich Association of Protestant Young Men's Leagues, Youth Leagues for Determined (*entschiedenes*) Christianity, the League of Christian-German Youth, Christian Boy Scouts of Germany, the League of German Bible Circles, the Christian Young Men's Association, and the League of Protestant Young Women's Associations.¹²⁹ By comparison, Catholic youth groups in Weimar were far more centralized, having been brought together in 1928 under one umbrella organization, the Catholic Youth of Germany, with a membership of 1.3 million.¹³⁰ Here again, there were stark confessional differences in attitudes towards Nazism and the Hitler Youth. Catholic Youth, as might be expected, stayed away, having been warned by one of its leaders that no member "who stands by the banner of Christ and by the young Catholic Peoples' Front can belong to [this] movement."¹³¹ There were only isolated cases of Catholics belonging to the *Kampfzeit* Hitler Youth. In fact, before 1933 the Hitler Youth was weakest in precisely those areas where Catholic religiosity and membership in Catholic Youth was strongest: Bavaria, the Rhineland, and parts of Silesia.¹³² This is accountable both to institutional centralization of Catholic youth, and to ideological opposition to Nazi racial thought.

By comparison, Protestant youth groups were far more favorably inclined toward the Nazis. The League of Bible Circles in particular was supportive of Nazism, with many *alte Kämpfer* among its ranks.¹³³ As one observer stated: "[I]n 1931 it could be affirmed ... that the

¹²⁹ Arno Klönne, *Jugend im Dritten Reich: Die Hitler-Jugend und ihre Gegner* (Düsseldorf, 1982), 164; Manfred Pripke, *Die evangelische Jugend im Dritten Reich 1933-36* (Hanover, 1960), 237; Peter Stachura, *Nazi Youth in the Weimar Republic* (Santa Barbara, 1975), 116.

¹³⁰ Stachura, *Youth*, 115.

¹³¹ Quoted in Hans Müller (ed.), *Katholische Kirche und Nationalsozialismus: Dokumente 1930-35* (Munich, 1963), 6.

¹³² Stachura, *Youth*, 106.

¹³³ Pripke, *Jugend*, 11.

young mens' association of the entire *Bündische* and Protestant youth ... belong either to the NSDAP and its youth or combat organizations, or at least ... they stand very close to them."¹³⁴ As part of the religious renewal that took place that year, Protestant youth groups actually saw an increase in their numbers for most of 1933.¹³⁵ Immediately after the seizure of power, the various Protestant youth groups began to centralize their organization, eventually unifying themselves into the Protestant Youth of Germany, under the leadership of Erich Stange and the patronage of Reich Bishop Müller. One of the first acts of unified Protestant youth was to issue this statement: "Germany's destiny has once again been pulled back from the abyss of Bolshevism. A strong leadership of the state calls upon all Germans to their responsibility. The God-ordained foundations of Heimat, *Volk* and state are once again newly recognized. ... Therefore the position of Protestant Youth in these days can be nothing other than a passionate participation in the destiny of our *Volk*."¹³⁶

As we have already seen in Chapter Five, the Hitler Youth rejected confessional organizations even as they insisted they were Christian or at least favorably disposed to Christianity. Headed by the ambitious and aggressive Baldur von Schirach, the Hitler Youth — like the NSV and NSF — aimed at nothing less than the total incorporation of all preexisting confessional groups into his own. But this did not mean that Christian religiosity was removed from the HJ. Throughout 1933 Protestant field services were frequently conducted within the Hitler Youth.¹³⁷ Many HJ units collectively attended Protestant services, and began meetings with such services. Pastors even took up office in the Hitler Youth.¹³⁸ Well into the Third Reich,

¹³⁴ Quoted in Stachura, *Youth*, 108.

¹³⁵ Priepke, *Jugend*, 52.

¹³⁶ "Erklärung der 'Evangelischen Jugend Deutschlands'," EZA 50/420/2 (30 March 1933: n.p.).

¹³⁷ Werner Klose, *Generation im Gleichschritt: Ein Dokumentarbericht* (Oldenburg, 1964), 50-51.

¹³⁸ Klönne, *Jugend*, 165.

Hitler Youth continued to receive religious instruction from Protestant clergy, in which the juvenile audience was instructed to receive Christ, not Wotan, into their hearts.¹³⁹ The HJ even participated in purely confessional ceremonies, such as a reception for the Inner Mission in Berlin.¹⁴⁰

Members of both Catholic and Protestant youth groups wished to retain their institutional autonomy; but the reactions from the Catholic Church were once again starkly different from those of the Protestant Church. Catholic youth organizations strenuously fought to maintain their existence independent of the Hitler Youth, whereas Protestant youth organizations were incorporated into the Hitler Youth in December 1933 by decree of Reich Bishop Müller. Segments of the Protestant establishment protested Müller's action, especially those opposed to the German Christians.¹⁴¹ Bishop Wurm, for instance, decried Müller's action, which did nothing to ease relations between him and the local Nazi authorities.¹⁴² But this was largely due to questions of institutional autonomy, not ideological difference. In an October 1933 meeting, in which the Hitler Youth and Protestant Youth discussed how to effect a working relationship with each other, the most important Protestant youth leaders and youth pastors stated "virtually unanimously [that] Protestant youth unconditionally supported National Socialism."¹⁴³ Stange declared that the Protestant Youth wanted to remain independent. Nonetheless, he sought close relations between his organization and the HJ. Discussions were held on making Protestant Youth a "corporate member" of the HJ, in which political and military training of their youth

¹³⁹ "Hitlerjugend hält Gottesdienst zur Sonnenwende," *Evangelium im Dritten Reich*, 1/7/34 (in BAP 62 Di 1/75/122).

¹⁴⁰ "HJ sammelt für konfessionelle Zwecke," *Der Stürmer*, 19/5/35 (in BAP 62 Di 1/75/175).

¹⁴¹ Klaus Scholder, *The Churches and the Third Reich*, 2 vols. (London, 1987-88), 1: 576-77.

¹⁴² BAP R43 II/161/303-308 (22 January 1934: Stuttgart). Later that year Wurm would come under house arrest on the orders of Müller and his adjutant Jäger.

¹⁴³ Scholder, *Churches*, 1: 574.

would be left to the HJ in exchange for the ability to conduct mission work among HJ members. Whereas most Protestant Youth leaders were eager to work closely with the HJ, others like Udo Smidt of the Bible Circle, were more wary of these negotiations.¹⁴⁴ Schirach, satisfied with nothing less than total “coordination,” rejected the proposal. Schirach was prepared to honor the Christian religiosity of individual Hitler youths, but was not willing to enter into such an arrangement with Stange. Far from contemplating organizational cooperation, Schirach raised the stakes by prohibiting double membership in the HJ and confessional youth groups.¹⁴⁵

Proclaiming his desire to “carry the Savior to the *Volk*,” Reich Bishop Müller was eager to incorporate Protestant Youth into the Hitler Youth. This was the product both of Müller’s attempt to ingratiate himself with the Nazi state and of German Christian doctrine, which called for the state — once imbued with a Christian spirit — to take over the social network of the churches.¹⁴⁶ Protestant youth leaders, much like Agnes von Grone in the case of Protestant women, were naturally opposed to the dissolution of their own groups into a rival Nazi organization. When Stange complained about Müller’s ongoing negotiations with Schirach despite his objections, Müller dismissed him from office.¹⁴⁷

In December 1933, Müller handed over leadership of Protestant Youth to the Hitler Youth. This action largely precipitated the crisis that Müller encountered not only with Niemöller’s Pastors’ Emergency League (PNB), but with the Nazis themselves.¹⁴⁸ But if youth leaders and the PNB were against the “coordination” of a major part of the Protestant

¹⁴⁴ Mattias von Hellfeld, *Bündische Jugend und Hitlerjugend: Zur Geschichte von Anpassung und Widerstand 1930-1939* (Cologne, 1987), 84-86.

¹⁴⁵ Klönne, *Jugend*, 165. On religious observance in the HJ, see Chapter Five, n. 181-90.

¹⁴⁶ Emanuel Hirsch made such an argument: see Chapter Four, n. 187.

¹⁴⁷ Priepke, *Jugend*, 196.

¹⁴⁸ See Chapter Six, n. 62.

establishment, the German Christians were very pleased. State bishop Peter of Magdeburg, himself a league pastor for the Protestant Young Mens' Association, applauded this merging.¹⁴⁹ Others in the ranks of the German Christians, notably Joachim Hossenfelder, shared the sense of joy in the "coordination" of youth. But the later Confessing Church, remaining opposed, would continue to defy the order, setting up local branches of their own youth groups, often based on original groups whose local leaders were committed to the BK.¹⁵⁰ The Hitler Youth, in turn, made life difficult for BK youth groups. Whereas the HJ promised to allot certain times of the week for religious observance and activity, these rights were curtailed for the BK. In order to receive permission to conduct youth outings, for example, these groups had to submit months in advance a list of participants with their birthdates, how long and where the outing would take place, and a detailed description of the planned activities. Those who did not receive written permission from their Hitler Youth leader were not allowed to participate.¹⁵¹

In spite of these curtailments, however, Schirach continued to instruct his Hitler Youth groups not to schedule activities during hours of Sunday church services. Special gatherings of Protestant youth were permitted. Bible study hours were allowed in the HJ without restriction. In 1937, a high-point of Nazi coordination, 108 Bible studies were held attracting some 6000 participants.¹⁵² Even a new office of Reich Youth Pastor was created within the HJ, and given to one Karl Zahn.¹⁵³ As Schirach himself insisted: "[W]e all believe in an almighty God. We are all, even the youngest among us, witnesses to the wonderful transformation that the *Volk* has experienced through His help, the transformation from impotence and destruction to strength and

¹⁴⁹ *Magdeburgische Zeitung*, 6/3/34 (in BAP 62 Di 1/75/112i).

¹⁵⁰ As was the case, for instance, with the "West German Young Mens' League" of the Christian Young Mens' Association: Klönne, *Jugend*, 168.

¹⁵¹ Victoria Barnett, *For the Soul of the People: Protestant Protest against Hitler* (Oxford, 1992), 78.

¹⁵² Heinrich Riedel, *Kampf um die Jugend: Evangelische Jugendarbeit 1933-1945* (Munich, 1976), 230.

¹⁵³ Priepke, *Jugend*, 123-24.

harmony. The Hitler Youth wants nothing less than to secure this strength and harmony for all time.”¹⁵⁴ It is most likely that Schirach would have continued permitting Christian activity among the HJ had he not been reprimanded in 1938 by Martin Bormann, one of the Nazi party’s greatest anticlericals.¹⁵⁵ Schirach’s positive attitude towards religious observance in the Hitler Youth was further confirmed by his brief tenure as Gauleiter of Vienna after the *Anschluß* of 1938. Schirach advised the Hitler Youth in his domain not to snub the clergy, and even went so far as to give military inductees a gift of religious pictures and texts, which included one of his own poems.¹⁵⁶

Conclusion

The Nazi coordination of Christian organizations has usually been viewed as proof of the regime’s anti-Christian posture. But in a totalizing state — whether Christian or anti-Christian — no alternative to such coordination existed. The Nazis maintained that it was not enough to be in a religious organization: one had to serve *Volk* and Führer in the new Germany by joining the NSV, NSF or Hitler Youth. What this points to are the exclusivist claims of the Nazi state. But just as Nazis freely admitted that their worldview was a totalizing one, they also believed they could take credit for protecting the *Volk* and its religious sensibilities from the threat of liberalism, judaism, communism and atheism. The exploration of organizational relations between the churches and Nazism illustrates the need to differentiate the substance of Nazi ideology — which made constant and direct reference to Christian traditions — from the style of

¹⁵⁴ *Märkische Volkszeitung*, 3/6/35 (in BAP 62 Di 1/106/271).

¹⁵⁵ Jochen von Lang, *The Secretary — Martin Bormann: The Man who Manipulated Hitler* (New York, 1979), 127. For more on Bormann, see Chapter Eight.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 250. Although von Lang does not mention the name of this poem, it could very possibly have been “Christus,” the poem von Schirach had published in 1934 (Chapter Five, n. 171).

Nazi discourse, which permitted no institutional “dual allegiance” in the new regime. Nazism was anticlerical in the sense that it could not tolerate church involvement in secular life. But this says very little about Nazi ideology. Indeed, it was the considerable overlap of certain Nazi and Protestant conceptions of “the social” that lead to the systematic appropriation of the Protestant programs and groups discussed here. Some Protestants advocated a voluntary coordination into Nazi organizations, whereas others fought for institutional autonomy. But for the latter, the fight was mostly institutional; even as they argued for their continued existence, they maintained that they still worked for goals congruent with those of the Nazis. Just as importantly, many Nazis maintained that their actions were predicated on the same beliefs, the same ethical values, as those of their Protestant counterparts. Catholic organizations, with a different social theory, pursued policies more at odds with those of the regime, and came into greater conflict with it.

For still other Nazis, as we shall see in the next chapter, the process of coordination was freighted with more ideological baggage. Old “paganists” persisted in their hostility, while an extreme anti-Christian figure emerged in Martin Bormann. As time went on, the Nazi party seemed to align itself, not only against the churches, but increasingly against Christianity itself. After the collapse of the planned Reich Church, distinctions between anticlericalism and anti-Christianity were increasingly overlooked. Was this the gradual unfolding of a tactically delayed offensive against an ideological enemy? Or was it a contingent process, based on more immediate factors? As we look to the last years of the Reich, do we see leaders who had formerly been friendly towards Christianity begin to turn against it? Did the party have in mind a “Final Solution” for Christianity itself?

8 “Gottgläubig”: Assent of the anti-Christians?

National Socialist and Christian conceptions are incompatible. ... Christianity has inalterable foundations, which were established almost 2000 years ago and which have stiffened into dogmas alien to reality. — Martin Bormann¹

I've nothing against Christianity in itself. — Heinrich Himmler²

With the breakdown in relations with the Protestant Church in 1937 came a reorientation in Nazi attitudes. Whereas the party had previously welcomed the participation of Protestant pastors in the movement and counted church-friendly elements even among the party leadership, with the cancellation of church elections in 1937 emerged a new tenor in Nazi religious attitudes and relations between party and church. The position of churchmen in the party became more tenuous, and individual party members detached themselves from the churches in increasing numbers. Along with this growing separation came what appeared to be a heightened ideological enmity between Christianity and Nazism. Over time, Nazi hostility to Christianity seemed to increase, as new anti-Christian voices, particularly Martin Bormann's, began to be heard. By the early 1940s, Hitler himself was taking a more antagonistic stance. As we survey the religious views of Nazi leaders for the latter years of the regime, we must ask: Did the regime itself become more anti-Christian with time? Did party anti-Christians gain greater power? Did Nazi leaders still distinguish between anticlericalism and hatred for Christianity itself? Or was Christianity now rejected as well? Answering these questions will also help us to unveil the many tensions that arose between party offices over the continuing place of Christianity in the movement, particularly the contentious relationship of party leaders with Bormann, whose hold on power brought him close to sole responsibility for many of the anticlerical and anti-Christian

¹ BAP NS 6/336/18-22.

² *The Kersten Memoirs*, 155.

measures taken late in the regime.

Through a survey of the evidence, I argue that the heightened anticlericalism of the regime was not the final unleashing of a long-suppressed antagonism to traditional religion, but was, in the case of Protestantism, attributable to the collapse of institutional relations between church and state. Whereas those who had a prior antagonism to Christianity left their churches, so did those who had made clear their personal commitment to Christian traditions. The polycratic infighting that took place over the policing of Nazi ideology is particularly revealing in this regard. Whereas Rosenberg's Office of Ideological Information adopted a markedly negative attitude toward the continued expression of Christian views within the party, rival offices staking a claim to ideological oversight displayed a much more positive attitude, and successfully wrested control of ideology from Rosenberg precisely over the question of religion. In a similar process, Bormann's relations with other party leaders reveal how he continually advocated a position that took him beyond the pale even of paganist thought. A broad range of top Nazis attempted repeatedly, and often successfully, to blunt his extremist policies. Finally, Hitler's pivotal "secret conversations" of the war years are examined. His statements about Christianity, though often taken as unambiguously hostile, were actually inconsistent and even contradictory. Hitler undoubtedly became more anti-Christian with time, but not completely anti-Christian. His on-going estimation of Christ's significance — however idiosyncratic — and open admiration for select aspects of Christian teaching demonstrates an incomplete apostasy.

The separation of church and party

Starting in late 1936, many Nazis began a movement within the party known as *Kirchenaustritt* ("leaving the church"). There was no directive from the party leadership ordering *Kirchenaustritt*; the evidence suggests that it arose as a spontaneous movement within the

NSDAP. Whereas no single event triggered it as a phenomenon within the party, a general worsening of relations with the churches was clearly the operative factor. Many (nominally) Protestant Nazis left their churches after the caesura of 1937; but some of the first Nazis to leave their church, in 1936, were Catholics. Those who withdrew their church membership were designated *Gottgläubige*, “believers in God.” In a statement issued to Reich authorities, Interior Minister Frick explained that the phrase was meant as a replacement for the designation “dissident,” whose original meaning of not belonging to a designated religious community had been transformed in the public imagination into someone “without belief” (*glaubenslos*). To rectify this problem, one’s religious status could henceforth be designated in three ways: member of a religious community, believer in God, or unbeliever.³ In a letter to the chief of the Reich Chancellery Heinrich Lammers, Frick pointed out that several technical issues had been weighed in making the decision, including the fact that now Jews would be able to designate themselves *gottgläubig* if they so desired.⁴ Another issue was the collection of church taxes, a particular concern for the Reich Finance Ministry. Changes to the tax laws were contemplated, but in the end were not enacted.⁵

Rosenberg was the first party leader to leave the church, in November 1933.⁶ For the next three years no Nazi leaders withdrew from their churches. In 1936, however, came a flood, beginning with Himmler and Heydrich leaving the Catholic Church early that year.⁷ This was quickly followed by announcements of the *Austritt* of several Gauleiter, including the anti-

³ BAP NS 6/232/136 (16 November 1936: Berlin).

⁴ BAP R43 II/150/70 (30 July 1937: Berlin). This would not have posed a threat to the integrity of Nazi antisemitism, however, since Jews would still carry the racial designation of “non-Aryan.”

⁵ BAP R43 II/150/74-75 (30 July 1937: Berlin).

⁶ See Chapter Three, n. 93.

⁷ *La Libre Belgique*, 4/3/36 (in BAP 62 Di 1/106/146); Günther Deschner, *Reinhard Heydrich: A Biography* (New York, 1981), 103.

Christian Mutschmann of Saxony, Röver of Oldenburg and Robert Wagner of Baden.⁸ Whereas pagans obviously opted for the status of “gottgläubig,” not all *Gottgläubigen* were pagans. Those who had clearly established their faith in Christianity could also be counted among their ranks. For instance, by 1937 Walter Buch had left the church, while the Silesian Gauleiter Josef Wagner — who was actually expelled from the party in 1941 for taking his own children to Catholic confessional schools — defended those who did.⁹ By 1943 Erich Koch had also declared himself *gottgläubig*.¹⁰ This phenomenon clearly reflected the growing institutional tensions between church and party; but the *Austritt* of known Christians gives reason to doubt a move against Christianity per se. Further evidence of this is provided by a 1936 speech by Fritz Sauckel, Gauleiter of Thuringia and leader of Germany’s slave labor program during the war. Sauckel aggressively attacked those clergy who accused Nazism of deifying Adolf Hitler or the blood of the *Volk*, calling them “jackals and hyenas.” The *Gottgläubige* could not be compared to atheistic bolshevists or pagans. Sauckel insisted that “just as we protect the true clergyman on his altar, we also protect ourselves from the pitiable defamation of atheism or the deception of the concept of paganism.”¹¹ In a secret 1939 memorandum defending *Kirchenaustritt* within the party, the anticlerical Bormann proclaimed that the clergy were not servants of God but of the church. In the context of the church situation in the newly annexed Austria, Bormann claimed that the clergy were hypocritical because they could not possibly know more about the hereafter than anyone else. Church service was not the same as service to God. One therefore had to distinguish between “ecclesiastical” and “religious,” between the Christian confession and the

⁸ *Deutsch-Evangelische Korrespondenz*, 21/10/36 (in BAP 62 Di 1/106/209) for Mutschmann; *Die christliche Welt*, 19/12/36 (in BAP 62 Di 1/106/260) for Röver; *Reichspost*, 4/1/37 (in BAP 62 Di 1/106/336) for Wagner.

⁹ In a 1937 form, Buch lists himself as “gottgläubig”: BAZ Personalakt Buch; for Wagner, see *Westfälische Landeszeitung*, 6/12/34 (in BStA Rehse/P5049).

¹⁰ Kurt Meier, *Der Evangelische Kirchenkampf*, 3 vols. (Göttingen, 1976-84), 1: 287.

¹¹ *Mitteldeutsche Zeitung*, 12/10/36 (in BAP R5101/23126/76).

Christian worldview.¹² If by 1939 Bormann was already a sworn enemy of Christianity as well as the churches, he was not yet prepared to state so, even in confidential correspondence.

Within the party, *Kirchenaustritt* was not compulsory: Gauleiter Florian of Düsseldorf, in private party correspondence, denied accusations that he was fomenting church-leaving in his district.¹³ Indeed, in some quarters of the Nazi party, remaining *in* the church was compulsory. Rosenberg expressed dismay when his paganist ally Richard Walther Darré explicitly forbade his peasant leaders from leaving their churches. Rosenberg complained that this went against the individual Nazi's right to choose his religious affiliation.¹⁴ Darré replied, informing Rosenberg that, after consultations with his *Unterführer*, he decided to keep the ban in place, adding cryptically that "it is best to leave these things in peace."¹⁵ But if leaving the church was not compulsory, holding office in church bodies, especially for higher-ranking Nazis, was made practically impossible. As the Church Ministry pointed out in a 1937 memo, it was deemed necessary for Nazi leaders from the rank of Ortsgruppenleiter upward not to hold office in or serve as speakers for church bodies, in order to insure that the party as such would not get entangled in church-political disputes. It was pointed out that this held true for all religious bodies, including the DGB, and not simply Christian organizations.¹⁶ However, this stipulation was not always adhered to. For instance, in September 1938, notice was made of Ortsgruppenleiter in Gau Kurmark sitting on local church councils. As the Protestant Consistory

¹² BAP NS 6/232/134-36 (2 February 1939: Munich).

¹³ EZA 14/708 (14 December 1936: Düsseldorf).

¹⁴ BAZ NS 8/173/119 (12 November 1938: Berlin).

¹⁵ BAZ NS 8/173/117-118 (18 November 1938: Munich). This could have meant either that leaving the church was unpopular with Darré's *Unterführer*, or that it would have received a hostile reception from the German peasantry, an especially pious segment of the German population.

¹⁶ EZA 14/590 (20 December 1937: Berlin).

reminded the Kreisleiter for the area, this was now forbidden.¹⁷

The highest percentage of *Kirchenaustritt* took place in the SS. A secret 1939 report on the confessional makeup of SS members showed that Protestants, Catholics and “Gottgläubigen” made up 60, 21.1 and 18.7 percent of SS members in 1937 respectively; by 1938, those figures had changed to 51.4, 22.7 and 25.7 percent respectively.¹⁸ The actual rise in the percentage of Catholics in the SS was attributed in the report to the annexation of Catholic territory in ‘38. In spite of the sharp drop in Protestant confessionals, the report nonetheless emphasized that Protestants were over-represented in the ranks of the SS vis-à-vis Catholics, adding: “[O]ne can be certain that the Protestant portion of the population displays greater appreciation for the struggle and the task of the SS, and hence is more readily recruited from than the Catholic [portion].”¹⁹

Ironically, Himmler reviewed these high numbers with some trepidation. As we have already seen, for a radical anticlerical, he demonstrated a remarkable degree of flexibility, continually insisting that SS men who chose to remain active Christians had every right to do so.²⁰ In a 1937 speech he showed equal leniency on the question of *Kirchenaustritt*: “As you know, personally I have chosen to leave the church. But I do not wish for this to become a sport for lower-level leaders. ... I would rather have a *Sturm* in which only 10 percent have left, with the remaining 90 percent remaining just as good National Socialists. ... To me it is truly preferable if someone takes one, two or five years to leave the church, thus leaving it out of true

¹⁷ EZA 14/590 (23 September 1938: Berlin).

¹⁸ “Die Konfession der SS-Angehörigen,” BAZ Schu 245/2/156-57 (2 June 1939: Berlin).

¹⁹ Ibid., 160.

²⁰ See Chapter Five, n. 135, for Himmler’s warnings that Christian SS be respected. These warnings were repeated in 1938: see “Bekenntnis der Angehörigen der uniformierten Ordnungspolizei zu religions- und Weltanschauungsgemeinschaften und Teilnahme an Veranstaltungen derselben,” BAZ Schu 245/1/163-167 (13 June 1938: Berlin).

conviction, than for someone to follow a fashion, and do it only externally.”²¹ Bormann took a similar position. In a confidential circular to Gauleiter, he advised that *Kirchenaustritt* was to be undertaken only by those truly and inwardly lost to the church, and was not to be seen as a matter of opportunity.²² Bormann revealed ambivalence in his own attitude, however, when he defended the rights of those who had left the church to have church bells rung at their funerals: he seems not to have realized that such a request on the part of those supposedly liberated from the churches would have signified an incomplete apostasy. It was clearly within the rights of the churches to refuse such a service to those who were no longer church-members; but Bormann ordered the churches to ring bells at the funeral of any *Gottgläubiger* who requested it.²³

Kirchenaustritt outside the party, as a larger phenomenon in German society, was not a striking success. In 1936, when *Kirchenaustritt* became a discernible tendency within the NSDAP, many reports indicated that statistics for entering the church actually exceeded numbers for leaving it. For the first half of 1936, the number of people entering the Thuringian Protestant Church exceeded the number leaving it by 300.²⁴ Württemberg registered an equal number of those reentering the church as those leaving it.²⁵ Hamburg, on the other hand, was already registering more church-leaving than church-entering by 1934: the rise in church participation after the *Machtergreifung* was particularly short-lived here.²⁶ This discrepancy between urban Hamburg and rural Thuringia points to the paradox that this new initiative within the Nazi party found its greatest popular appeal in precisely those geographic areas where voters most

²¹ IfZ MA 311 (18 February 1937: Tölz).

²² BAP NS 6/334/48 (15 March 1941: Munich).

²³ BAP NS 18/149 (1 July 1941: Munich).

²⁴ *Bayerische Volkszeitung*, 15/10/36 (in BAP 62 Di 1/135/31).

²⁵ *AELKZ*, 11/9/36 (in BAP 62 Di 1/135/28).

²⁶ *Paulinusblatt*, 5/4/36 (in BAP 62 Di 1/135/34).

consistently stayed away from the NSDAP at the polls. This was confirmed in a statistical report released by Martin Bormann in 1941, which gave the percentages of those listed as *gottgläubig* in each Gau for 1939. The top five were Berlin with 10.2 percent, Hamburg with 7.5 percent, Vienna with 6.4 percent, Düsseldorf with 6.0 percent, and Essen with 5.3 percent.²⁷

At the same time that some members of the NSDAP were leaving the churches, attempts were being made gradually to force pastors to give up their membership in the NSDAP. The first signs of clerical *Parteiaustritt* were made the same week in February 1937 as Kerrl's confrontation with the Reich Church Committee, which precipitated the call for new elections. In a circular, Martin Bormann indicated to party officials that they should "refrain" from admitting members of the clergy into the ranks of the party, "in order to prevent church controversies from entering the movement."²⁸ This was not a compulsory order, however, and furthermore made no reference to pastors already in the NSDAP. The position of pastors grew more dire in June 1937 when they were required to leave the SA. Once more, the timing of the order — shortly before church elections were called off — is highly significant. The order met with strong protest by Protestant clergymen, many of whom were long-standing *alte Kämpfer* who sent letters of appeal to Hitler.²⁹ Bormann followed this action in July 1938 with another circular that indicated that pastors were now forbidden to be "political leaders" or "holders of high rank" in the party.³⁰ This meant above all their engagement as local leaders or in higher-level offices. This latest move certainly served to limit clerical influence; but pastors were still not barred from membership in the NSDAP. Nor was it entirely prejudicial — at least in the

²⁷ StAM NSDAP/178 (15 August 1941: Führerhauptquartier). Of course Vienna was not part of the original electoral map of the NSDAP in the *Kampfzeit*.

²⁸ Copy of original of 9 February 1937 in BAZ NS 8/182/260-261 (14 June 1939: Munich).

²⁹ Cf. BAP R43 II/155/6 (8 June 1937: Eisenach); BAP R43 II/155/14-15 (13 March 1939: Berlin). The records provide no indication that Hitler responded.

³⁰ BStA Epp/621/1 (27 July 1938: Munich).

Nazi imagination — for the party leadership to ensure that those who held another institutional allegiance did not hold positions of responsibility, especially since among the ranks of party members could be found members of the Confessing Church. As a corollary to the banning of pastors from positions of influence, Bormann also prohibited high-ranking party members from holding leading positions in a “religious community.” The kinds of church involvement that Nazis displayed early in the regime, most notably Erich Koch’s tenure as president of the East Prussian Synod, were now expressly forbidden. But this held true as well for explicitly anti-Christian paganist groups like the Tannenberg League and Fighting Ring of German Faith (*Kampfring Deutsche Glaube*).³¹ The order was therefore as much anti-paganist as it was anti-clerical.

In January 1939, Bormann continued the incremental separation of church and party, prohibiting party *Untersführer* from holding office in church or religious organizations. However, Bormann explicitly exempted regular party members from this prohibition, who apparently could continue their ecclesiastical duties unhindered.³² The wearing of party uniforms at church services or the activities of other religious communities was also forbidden, with exception made for Christian funerals.³³

In May 1939 came the single most significant step, when pastors as well as “those *Volk* comrades who are strongly committed confessionally,” were told that they were no longer permitted in the party. It was further ordered that those party members who entered the clergy or studied theology would be forced from party membership.³⁴ This order, finally expelling all

³¹ BAP NS 6/229/38-39 (1 June 1938: Munich).

³² BAP R43 II/155/8-10 (28 January 1939: Munich). Kerrl intended to take action against Bormann’s order, but without any apparent success.

³³ This issue had been raised the year before in Bavaria, in which the church funeral of SS General Heinemann had been attended by Hess, several Reich leaders and other leading party members: “Kirchliche Beerdigung von Parteigenossen, Verhalten der uniformierten Teilnehmer hiebei,” BAZ NS 19/2242/6 (10 March 1938: Munich).

³⁴ “Aufnahme von Geistlichen und Theologiestudenten in die NSDAP und deren Gliederungen,” BAZ NS

pastors from the NSDAP, aroused great indignation. In a 1940 letter, Friedrich Wieneke, one of the leaders of the German Christians, asked what effect this would have on the front, stating: "I can scarcely believe that this is happening in wartime."³⁵ Similar letters came from other pastors of the Reich.³⁶ The German Christians, who had always imagined themselves to be the only religious voice of the Nazi movement, were deeply disappointed by the party's unilateral action. The expulsion order can only be interpreted as a sign of the Nazis' deep frustration with and final rejection of the Protestant Church as a whole.

Some of the loudest protests came from Austrian pastors. For years, while the NSDAP was banned in Austria, Protestants had stood in the forefront of support for Nazism and Austria's reintegration into Germany. As we have already seen in the case of Georg von Schönerer, this tendency fit in with an historical understanding of the nation which German nationalists in the Habsburg Empire associated with Protestantism.³⁷ This held true as well in the 1930s. After 1933, the number of conversions from Catholicism to Protestantism in Austria increased dramatically, reaching 20,000 in the first half of 1934 alone. Since 1898, the highest number of Protestant converts in one year had been only 6000.³⁸ Konrad Henlein, the Sudeten Nazi leader who later became Gauleiter of the annexed Sudetenland, had been a convert to Protestantism out of "conviction and love for his *Volk*," as one pastor put it.³⁹ Even Hitler acknowledged the strongly nationalist element of Austrian Protestantism. Long after he gave up on the Reich Church, he told Rosenberg that he "previously had certain impressions which he had brought

8/182/260-261 (14 June 1939: Munich).

³⁵ BAP R43 II/155/25 (6 April 1940: Berlin).

³⁶ Cf. BAP R43 II/155/70 (22 June 1940: Berlin).

³⁷ Even Rosenberg's Office of Ideological Information acknowledged the role played by Protestants in German-Austrian nationalism. See *Mitteilungen zur weltanschaulichen Lage*, Nr. 11/ 4. Jahr (6 May 1938) (in BAP 62 Di 1/Film 3851 P/20143-20156).

³⁸ Doris Bergen, *Twisted Cross: The German Christian Movement in the Third Reich* (Chapel Hill, 1996), 107.

from his Austrian background, where the Protestants had been a national church.”⁴⁰

The German *Anschluß* of Austria was greeted by the Austrian Protestant Church as a “gift from God,” as the salvation of the *Volk* from materialism through the hands of the Führer.⁴¹ The Protestant Church in Austria even agreed with the Nazis’ abolition of the confessional school, which for Protestants was associated with the long-endured dominance of the Catholic Church and the privileged status it enjoyed in the Austrian state.⁴² In January 1939 the *Deutsch-Evangelische Korrespondenz* reported with great pride on the place of Protestant pastors in the Austrian Nazi movement: of 127 Austrian pastors who responded to an inquiry, 73 were members of the NSDAP. Before the *Anschluß*, the paper reported, pastors’ homes often served as meeting places for the party. Pastors could be found holding party office as school leaders, organization leaders, cultural experts, and up the chain of command to Ortsgruppenleiter.⁴³ The paper went on to point out that, due to their involvement in Nazism, several of these pastors suffered state action against them, including 17 imprisoned or placed under house arrest.

Given their devotion to the Nazi cause and the consequences they endured at the hands of the Austrian authorities, these pastors could only receive the news of their expulsion with great indignation. One letter, written by a Protestant theology student, expressed fairly typical sentiments. As a Protestant Christian, this student was a convinced National Socialist and “true follower of the Führer” during the time of illegality. His fellow theology students were some of Austria’s most ardent Nazis. This student pointed out that Hitler himself was aware of this, since

³⁹ Ibid., 52.

⁴⁰ Hans-Günther Seraphim (ed.), *Das politische Tagebuch Alfred Rosenbergs 1934/35 und 1939/40* (Göttingen, 1956), entry for 19/1/40.

⁴¹ *Der Alemanne*, 2/4/38 (in BAZ NS 22/542).

⁴² *Deutsch-Evangelische Korrespondenz*, 13/7/38 (in BAP 62 Di 1/124-1/19).

⁴³ The Ortsgruppenleiter was directly below the Kreisleiter and Gauleiter: “Die evangelischen Pfarrer der Ostmark und die NSDAP,” *Deutsch-Evangelische Korrespondenz*, 18/1/39 (in BAP 62 Di 1/75/18).

he received an official deputation of the Protestant Church in Vienna on 9 April 1938, shortly after the Nazis entered the city.⁴⁴ Others protested as well, all pointing out how they suffered legal and social consequences for joining what was then an illegal organization. One Pastor Kühne of Vienna boasted that he had been clandestinely supporting the movement since 1920.⁴⁵

Reactions to these protests varied. The deputy Gauleiter for Vienna wrote that the expulsion order had to be implemented to maintain the party's neutrality in confessional affairs, and was not meant as a sign of disrespect to those who had faithfully served the movement under severe conditions. Nor was it to be interpreted as an act hostile to Christianity.⁴⁶ Walter Buch, interviewed immediately after the war, stated: "Protestant ministers were dismissed from the party without prejudice as 'Kirchengebunden.' They continued to preach and suffered no disadvantages."⁴⁷ Bormann, Buch's son-in-law and the originator of the order, took a more antagonistic view. He acknowledged that *alte Kämpfer* could be found among the Protestant clergy, but diminished its significance, suggesting that this was simply because the preexisting regime was a Catholic clerical dictatorship (which it was).⁴⁸ In June 1941, Bormann attempted to demonstrate that Austrians who had converted from Catholicism to Protestantism in the Austrian *Kampfzeit* were now leaving Protestantism to declare themselves *gottgläubig*, thereby implying that the move to Protestantism had been motivated by little more than expediency, since under Austrian law one had to have a confession.⁴⁹ As we shall see, Bormann would continue to take a view of the Protestant clergy, and of Christianity in general, that was far more antagonistic than

⁴⁴ BAP R43 II/155/63 (21 February 1940: Vienna).

⁴⁵ BAP R43 II/155/71 (29 August 1940: Berlin).

⁴⁶ BAP R43 II/155/36-38 (22 April 1940: Vienna).

⁴⁷ IfZ ZS 855/34-39 (18 July 1945: n.p.).

⁴⁸ BAP R43 II/157/149-153 (13 and 20 September 1940: Berlin).

⁴⁹ BAP NS 6/334/162-69 (25 June 1941: Munich).

that of most other Nazi leaders.

Church Minister Kerrl was against the move. Suspecting that primarily Bormann was behind it, Kerrl asked Heinrich Lammers, the head of the Reich Chancellery, if this order had come from Hess (to whom Bormann was nominal chief of staff), and what Hitler's personal view was.⁵⁰ Lammers sought out Hitler's attitude, and in a letter to Hess, indicated that "for the time being, the Führer absolutely does not wish any actions to be taken against the churches. ... [T]he Führer declares that he — independent of the question of whether pastor membership in the NSDAP is correct — finds the [expulsion] actions of the *Ortsgruppen* to be entirely inopportune in time of war."⁵¹ Apparently the vigorous protests on behalf of Protestant clergy were beginning to have an impact. Ever sensitive to the morale of the German population, Hitler took a position against Bormann on this issue. It would not be the last time that Hitler personally intervened to override Bormann in religious matters. A few weeks later, in June 1940, Lammers wrote to Bormann, expressing displeasure that pastors were still being expelled from the party on his authority, and stating that he expected a letter from the Führer's Deputy which would counteract that order.⁵² The files of the Reich Chancellery do not indicate whether Bormann was formally overridden; but the fact that pastors continued to be found in the ranks of the NSDAP even after 1940 suggests that in practice he was.⁵³

The continued presence of members of the Confessing Church in the NSDAP was also a

⁵⁰ BAP R43 II/155/26 (17 April 1940: Berlin).

⁵¹ BAP R43 II/155/27 (23 April 1940: Berlin).

⁵² "Ausscheiden von Pfarrern aus der NSDAP," BAP R43 II/155/32 (5 June 1940: Berlin).

⁵³ See, for example, the personnel file of one Hans Kipfmüller, a minor official in the NSDAP who was simultaneously a local leader of the SA, the local NSV, and Protestant town pastor past 1940, by which time he would have presumably been forced to choose between party and pastorate: IfZ F 304 (n.d., n.p.). As well, see the statement by Konstantin Hierl, head of the Reich Labor Service (like Ley's German Labor Front an ancillary NSDAP organization), that theologians and theology students could remain in his organization. While they would be accorded no special status, neither would they suffer any discrimination for their Christian convictions: BAP NS 6/340/92-95 (24 February 1943: Berlin). In a subsequent memorandum, Hierl explicitly forbade members of the Labor Service to attack the churches or church-goers: BAP NS 6/341/65-66 (9 May 1943: Führerhauptquartier).

matter of concern, and segments of the party sought to have them expelled. But even here their continued presence in the Nazi movement was ultimately affirmed. One case involved a Professor Anrich of Bonn. Anrich's situation was rather unique: the son of a pastor, he had studied at Tübingen and had founded there the Ernst Wurche Academic Guild, whose members came out of the Bible Circle and who were closely associated with the Confessing Church. As the judge for his case reported, Anrich had also been active in the Nazi Party, having been its caucus leader in the Bonn Student Chamber in 1930. He entered into the leadership ranks of the NSDStB shortly thereafter, but almost immediately came into conflict with Baldur von Schirach, then its head. As a result of an intrigue against Schirach, Anrich was expelled from the party the next year. After the seizure of power he attempted to regain his membership without success. He tried once more, however, after he had been invited to the tenth anniversary of the NSDStB as one of its co-founders. This time he succeeded, and within a few months was made deputy leader of the Bonn branch of the Nazi Lecturers' League. His judge pointed out that he was solidly National Socialist. His affiliation with the BK was noted, but it was not regarded as grounds for denying his readmission into the party.⁵⁴

Another, more complicated case, was that of the school teacher Walter Hobohm of Halberstadt. Like Anrich, Hobohm was a member both of the NSDAP and the Confessing Church. In June 1937 he denounced Rosenberg's teachings to party authorities, declaring that they led to "a sort of racial materialism" (something Rosenberg would have strongly denied).⁵⁵ The responsible party bureaucrats in the Reich Education Ministry began proceedings to have him expelled from his post, stating that "[u]nreserved support for the National Socialist state and National Socialist ideology cannot be expected" of Hobohm. The case was forwarded to the

⁵⁴ IfZ MA 1160 (5 April 1939: Düsseldorf).

⁵⁵ Martin Broszat, *The Hitler State: The Foundation and Development of the Internal Structure of the Third Reich* (London, 1981), 231.

Reich Chancellery in January 1939, where Lammers, consistent with his attitude toward the expulsion of pastors, sought out a second opinion. Whereas one branch of the Chancellery supported the recommendation, a constitutional expert in the Chancellery argued that the only reason to come to this decision “would be the fact that the official in question rejects Rosenberg’s conceptions in so far as these conflict with the Christian faith. It does not seem feasible to retire officials ... solely on this ground. ... [S]uch a decision would not be without considerable objections in view of Article 24 of the Party program and the guarantee of freedom of worship.” Lammers also sought the council of his personal advisor von Stutterheim, who believed that “belonging to the Confessing Church is also in my opinion no reason for imposing retirement according to Article 71 of the DBG.”⁵⁶ Lammers agreed with this opinion, and approached Bernhard Rust with the matter. Eventually Hobohm was reinstated in his post, with the condition that he could no longer teach history.

The separation of church and party, then, was a tenuous and contested affair. There was nonetheless one region under Nazi control that proved the exception to the rule. In the territory conquered from Poland, Nazi anticlericals fashioned a *tabula rasa* which, unhampered by the legal and social restrictions felt back home, presented a canvas on which to paint the ideal Nazi society. Known as the Warthegau or Reichsgau Wartheland, it is generally regarded as the testing ground for the implementation of a pure Nazi utopia. Unhindered by state authorities, Bormann’s Party Chancellery was given a free hand to shape the Warthegau, in association with its Gauleiter and Reich Governor, Arthur Greiser.⁵⁷ In November 1940, Bormann ordered that Kerl’s authority as Church Minister was not to reach into the Wartheland: instead, Greiser and

⁵⁶ Ibid., 232.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 127; John Conway, *The Nazi Persecution of the Churches* (London, 1968), 311-12; Georg Denzler and Volker Fabricius (eds.), *Christen und Nationalsozialisten: Darstellung und Dokumente* (Frankfurt a.M., 1993), 108; Jochen von Lang, *The Secretary — Martin Bormann: The Man who Manipulated Hitler* (New York, 1979), 191.

Bormann would handle jurisdiction over ecclesiastical matters.⁵⁸ In spite of objections from the Reich authorities, including Frick, no state authorities from Germany proper (the *Altreich*) would be included in the decision-making process. Ecclesiastical authorities, too, were denied jurisdiction over Warthegau's churches.

What exactly Greiser had in mind for religious life in his Gau was made clear in a memorandum written the next month. In thirteen points he laid out the new church situation in Wartheland. Most importantly, the churches were no longer state churches, but voluntary, independent church societies. As well, these churches were to have no institutional relationship with churches outside the Gau, and no legal or financial connection with the Reich Church or the Vatican. No church taxes would be collected, with financial backing coming only from member contributions. Only adults who gave their consent could become members of a church body. All secular organizations of the churches, such as youth and welfare groups, were forbidden. Germans and Poles were to use separate churches. Church property was to be limited to church buildings. All monasteries and cloisters were to be abolished since they worked "against German morality." Only those native to the region, who furthermore had an additional occupation, could be clergy.⁵⁹

These measures were finally made legal in an ordinance of September 1941, which also listed the new churches for the area: the Posen Protestant Church of German Nationality in Wartheland; the Litzmannstadt Protestant Church of German Nationality in Wartheland; the Protestant-Lutheran Church of German Nationality in Wartheland West; and the Roman Catholic Church of German Nationality in Reichsgau Wartheland. There was no provision for any Polish churches.⁶⁰ Greiser added to this ordinance a decree that all government officials in the Gau had

⁵⁸ BAP R43 II/150a/97 (1 November 1940: Berlin).

⁵⁹ Denzler and Fabricius (eds.), *Christen*, 311-12.

⁶⁰ BAZ Schu 245/1/4-5 (13 September 1941: Posen).

to withdraw from the churches. In January 1942, this order was extended to all party members moving into the Gau, who were even compelled not to rejoin the church should they return to the *Altreich*. Bormann was proud to claim co-authorship of this idea with Greiser.⁶¹ The last clause caused considerable protest within the party. Rosenberg's voice was among them: under the banner of religious tolerance, which he exhibited as well in the Niemöller trial, Rosenberg told Bormann that he thought it impossible to "require someone never to join a church organization again."⁶² This portion of the law was withdrawn in July 1944.⁶³

The "blank slate" of the Warthegau suggests what the fate of the churches would have been in a "pure" Nazi state, unsullied by the forces of political reaction or public opinion. The Wartheland churches were restricted in a way unknown in any other party of Nazi Germany. But just as noteworthy as the stringent prohibitions taken by Nazis is the simple fact that the churches were allowed in: they were given a place in the Nazi paradise. In contrast to the razing of churches or their conversion to museums of atheism in the neighboring Soviet Union, here church life continued, though totally separated from the state. Greiser explained his church policy in a lecture to party members in Kiel in 1942, specifically referring to the Catholic Church: "If we have taken away the property of the Polish Church, this is not to punish faithful Catholics, but rather because economic resources for the political struggle against the German people were derived from this property. That is why there are no more monasteries and no more church properties left in the Reichsgau Wartheland."⁶⁴ Carefully precluding any pro-clerical forces from adding their brushstrokes to the Wartheland palette, regional Nazi leaders still painted the Christian churches, even if in minimal form, into their picture.

⁶¹ BAZ NS 8/187/122-23 (27 July 1942: Führerhauptquartier).

⁶² BAZ NS 8/187/150 (15 July 1942: Berlin).

⁶³ Conway, *Persecution*, 453, n. 95.

⁶⁴ Quoted in *ibid.*, 319.

Persistent Christians

Tensions over the presence of Christians in the Nazi movement were felt not just in the party rank-and-file. They were a source of conflict in the party leadership as well. One of the starkest examples was the case of the Catholic Josef Wagner, who, as we saw in Chapter Two, had been prominent in the *Kampfzeit* as a spokesman for his party's economic platform. Being the only Gauleiter with two Gaue (Westphalia and Silesia), and having been appointed the Reich Commissioner for Price Setting (*Preisbildung*) in 1936, he had certainly established his ideological reliability in the eyes of the party leadership. His unapologetic adherence to Christianity, which he had always publicly proclaimed, seems not to have diminished his credentials.⁶⁵ Wagner barred all antireligious measures in his own areas, and went so far as to criticize such measures among other party leaders.⁶⁶ This too might have gone unnoticed were it not for Wagner's personal religious practices, which caused offense to Bormann and Himmler in particular. First, Wagner and his wife had forbidden their daughter Gerda to marry a member of the SS, because the prospective groom had left the church. Frau Wagner sent a letter to her daughter that contained several passages compromising to her husband. Second, and certainly more damning, Wagner sent his own children to a convent school in Breslau, and did not enroll them in the local SA.⁶⁷ These and other disturbing facts — Wagner's wife had genuflected to the Pope at a Vatican reception — were taken very poorly by Bormann, who worked to have Wagner expelled in November 1941. Wagner appealed his case to Buch's party court, defending

⁶⁵ Chapter Two, n. 109.

⁶⁶ Lang, *Secretary*, 244.

⁶⁷ IfZ MA 327 (14 April 1942: Führerhauptquartier). Himmler was firmly convinced that Wagner's wife was the driving force behind these acts.

himself by referring to Point 24 of the party program, and insisting that he had known nothing of his wife's letter or behavior towards the Pope. Buch and the six members of the party jury, all of them Gauleiters, accepted Wagner's defense and reversed the expulsion order. But Hitler refused to ratify the decision, thereby upholding Wagner's expulsion. Buch believed that it was his son-in-law Bormann who was really responsible.⁶⁸

If Wagner's case constituted an attack against Christians in the party, other Gauleiter no less friendly to Christian institutions continued in their offices unhindered. One who was especially contemptuous of Bormann in this regard was the Gauleiter of Schwaben, Karl Wahl. Raised a Protestant, he had married a Catholic and had his children baptized Catholic. He may not have sent his own children to convent schools, but Wahl did have a remarkably close relationship with the Catholic diocese of Augsburg, specifically its second in command, Bishop Eberle. Augsburgers could observe the two openly walking together "deep in conversation."⁶⁹ When Wahl received an emissary from Bormann complaining that not enough had been done against the churches in Gau Schwaben, Wahl responded by asking whether Bormann was "out of his mind" for wanting to damage public morale in wartime. The emissary responded that the attack on the churches was Bormann's "hobby horse," and Wahl quietly let the matter drop.⁷⁰ He chose to mitigate Bormann's orders whenever possible until, he reported, "one day I just cut loose and threw everything that had Bormann's name on it into the fire, unread."⁷¹

Aside from the case of Josef Wagner, whose particular attachment to confessionalism was highly unusual in the party leadership, there was a continuing adherence to an unconfessional Christianity, noted by paganistic party members with dismay. The most notable

⁶⁸ Lang, *Secretary*, 245-46.

⁶⁹ Edward Peterson, *The Limits of Hitler's Power* (Princeton, 1969), 349.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 352.

⁷¹ Lang, *Secretary*, 242. This picture of Wahl's disregard for Bormann, seemingly without consequence, is confirmed by Peterson, *Hitler's Power*, 350-54.

leader in this regard was Göring, who did not leave the church and displayed no sign of rupture in his religious feelings. Indeed, for the duration of the Third Reich, his convictions appear to have continued unabated. On several public occasions Göring demonstrated an unapologetic adherence to Christianity. In one instance, party paganists expressed alarm when Göring presided over the February 1939 consecration of a nondenominational church in Faßberg, a town on the Lüneberg Heath. As one unhappy official in Gau Düsseldorf wrote to Rosenberg in his monthly report: “Now that the excitation caused by the baptism [of Göring’s daughter] in the Karin hall has died down, *Volk* comrades have something new to talk about. ... In wide circles of party members there is little understanding for the action of the General Field Marshal. ... From the circles of *Gottgläubigen* one hears the question: ‘Why a church, why not a festal hall or a community house?’ It will be increasingly difficult to reject an alien Christianity when, on the other side, Christianity is promoted by the highest powers of state.”⁷² Had Göring’s participation at this event been purely for propaganda purposes, this party official would have been duly informed not to take it seriously.

The year before a photo of Hermann and Emmy Göring was published, showing them at the dining room table at Karin hall with a cross hanging prominently above them in the corner. The *Völkischer Beobachter* published it with the caption: “All ornamentation, arranged with artistic good taste, is German folk art [*Volkskunst*].”⁷³ In Rosenberg’s Office a question mark was penciled in next to the cross. The Christian *Kommende Kirche* also published the photo, stating: “As this true paladin of the Führer modestly demonstrates in his home, Christianity and National Socialism are not opposites.”⁷⁴ This was not just wishful thinking on the part of the

⁷² “Die Stiftung einer Kirche durch den Generalfeldmarschall,” BAP 62 Di 1/106/104 (February 1939). A similar complaint came from Gau Hessen-Nassau: BAP 62 Di 1/106/111 (March 1939).

⁷³ *VB*, 13/1/38 (in BAP 62 Di 1/106/103).

⁷⁴ *Kommende Kirche*, 30/1/38 (in BAP 62 Di 1/106/102).

Christian press. In his memoirs Baldur von Schirach wrote: “Of the leading men of the party whom I knew, everyone interpreted the party program differently; ... Rosenberg mythically, Göring and some others in a certain sense Christian.”⁷⁵ Even Rosenberg, who was prone to delusions of grandeur about his place in the movement, made no mistake about Göring’s attitude. In August 1939, Göring confronted Rosenberg point blank, asking him: “Do you believe that Christianity is coming to an end, and that later a new form created by us will come into being?” When Rosenberg said he did think this, Göring replied he would privately solicit Hitler’s view.⁷⁶ No record exists of Göring asking Hitler this question, but there is little doubt Hitler would have rejected Rosenberg’s contention.

Goebbels, too, exhibited little change in his religious attitudes. In an October 1937 speech, he stated unambiguously:

The churches still preach today what their master said 2000 years before. We deal with the same principles, with that great ideological structure which has passed through history. We therefore assemble the *Volk* around us again and again, we preach again and again the ideals through which we became great, not only in order to keep our generation National Socialist, but rather to keep generations centuries after us National Socialist. We do nothing to harm the churches. On the contrary: We accept from them the work which they truly must manage themselves.⁷⁷

Here Goebbels flatly stated that, even if the churches failed in their work, the Nazis’ goals were synonymous with theirs. He touched on this point again later in the speech: “They no longer have a proper relationship with the *Volk*, because they no longer understand how to speak to them. A *Volk* that has gone through four years of war and fifteen of Marxism can no longer muster the energy to follow theological hair-splitting. It wants to see an active Christianity, and sees it better embodied in something like Winter Relief than in the theological disputes of the so-

⁷⁵ Baldur von Schirach, *Ich glaubte an Hitler* (Hamburg, 1967), 87.

⁷⁶ Seraphim (ed.), *Tagebuch*, entry for 22/8/39.

⁷⁷ *VB*, 11/10/37 (in BAZ NS 22/542).

called Confessing Front.” While we can raise serious doubts about Goebbels’ estimation of church unpopularity, what he said is nonetheless important because it displays a consistent attitude: low regard for the churches and high regard for Christianity. Consistency also characterized Goebbels’ low regard for the mysticism enjoyed by many anti-Christians. In June 1941, Goebbels banned all public performances of an occultist, telepathic, astrological or “supernatural” nature — exactly the sort of religious expression Himmler dabbled in.⁷⁸

Whatever Goebbels believed about the church losing members, it did not apply in his case: he stayed in the church. But beyond this, according to his aide Werner Stephan, Goebbels told his staff not to leave the church either. He always emphasized his continuing church membership to other party members, and, like Göring, had his children baptized.⁷⁹

The struggle over ideology

The expulsion of pastors from positions of power in the party, together with the withdrawal of party members from the churches, paints an unambiguous picture of increased hostility between Nazism and Christian institutions after 1936. On the other hand, Christian party leaders persisted in their beliefs and behaviors, in most cases unhindered. Repeated contests arose over the place of Christianity between rival Nazi offices that staked various claims over worldview. Nearly all these disputes pitted Rosenberg’s Office for Ideological Information not only against Goebbels’ Reich Propaganda Office (distinct from the Reich Ministry of Propaganda), but also against a commonly overlooked office: the Party Examination Commission for the Protection of National Socialist Literature (*Parteiamtliche Prüfungskommission zum Schutze des NS-Schrifttums*, or

⁷⁸ BAP NS 6/334/122 (3 June 1941: Munich).

⁷⁹ Werner Stephan, *Joseph Goebbels: Dämon einer Diktatur* (Stuttgart, 1949), cited in Lang, *Secretary*, 128-29.

PPK). Philip Bouhler, the Chief of the Chancellery of the Führer, headed the PPK. These disputes also brought in other high-ranking Nazis, such as Bormann and Kerl. As we shall see, the quarrels that took place directly addressed the continued presence of Christians and Christian discourse in the movement.

A man with literary ambitions, Bouhler apprenticed with several publishers after the war while studying philosophy at the University of Munich. In 1922 he joined the staff of the *Völkischer Beobachter*, and after 1925 took on the distinctly unliterary job of Business Manager of the NSDAP. After the seizure of power, Bouhler refocused on his intellectual ambitions, attempting to acquire control over the policing of Nazi literature. Named the Delegate for Culture to the Führer's Deputy in January 1934, Bouhler approached Goebbels and Max Amann, the head of the Nazis' Eher Publishing House and President of the Reich Press Chamber after 1933, with the idea of expanding his competence. Three months later he was made head of the newly-established PPK, which was invested with the power to inspect all political, economic, cultural, historical and biographical works for ideological purity.⁸⁰ (Ultimate power to censure books remained in the hands of the Propaganda Ministry.) Hitler's confidence in Bouhler's abilities as a Nazi were confirmed when he was put in charge of the "T-4" action, the euthanasia campaign that, in its bureaucratic and administrative *élan*, served as a precursor to the "Final Solution."

Bouhler's office brought him into direct competition with Rosenberg over the domain of ideological "protection." It is no coincidence that Bouhler received the backing of Goebbels, who appointed the head of the Literature Department in his Propaganda Ministry, Karl Hederich, as deputy director of the PPK.⁸¹ But the antagonism between Bouhler and Rosenberg was not

⁸⁰ Hans-Walter Schmuhl, "Philipp Bouhler — Ein Vorreiter des Massenmordes," in Ronald Smelser et al (eds.), *Die Braune Elite II: 21 weitere biographische Skizzen* (Darmstadt, 1993), 42-43.

⁸¹ See the biographical sketch of Hederich in "NS-Schriftum im Kampf," *Bremer Zeitung*, 19/5/35 (in BStA PAS 946).

purely a rivalry over “turf.” They also had real differences of opinion, above all on questions of religion. This became evident when Bouhler discussed boundaries of competence with Rosenberg in 1936. Rosenberg was eager to see Bouhler’s office absorbed into his own, contending that his authority outweighed Bouhler’s in this sphere, since he was the Führer’s delegate, whereas Bouhler was the Führer’s Deputy’s delegate. Bouhler responded by suggesting that if Rosenberg were to take over main responsibility for the protection of literature, “in confessional camps this would be considered the beginning of a *Kulturkampf*, simply because through your work, you are strongly considered to be a stumbling block for the Christian worldview.”⁸² That Bouhler had no intention of being a stumbling block himself was made evident in his assessment of a book called “The Goal of Religious Education in the National Socialist School,” written in 1936 by a party member named Elbertzhagen. The author argued in the positive Christian vein that a religious renewal of the *Volk* had to take place on the foundation of an unconfessional Christianity. Nazi education, this author contended, should start with the personality of Jesus, and should regard Martin Luther not simply as the reformer of the Church, but as the reformer of the religious education of the *Volk*.⁸³ Whereas Rosenberg’s office stated that an endorsement of its contents was “not justifiable,” Bouhler’s PPK approved the work for publication.⁸⁴ Rosenberg and Bouhler parted company once again over a 1938 book by Friedrich Andersen, whose earlier work, “The German Savior,” was a signal contribution to German Christian theology during Weimar.⁸⁵ Now Andersen received Bouhler’s stamp of approval for his new book, *Geschichte des Meisters von Nazareth ohne Legende und*

⁸² BAZ NS 8/178/84-85 (3 March 1936: Berlin).

⁸³ See the appraisal report of Elbertzhagen’s *Das Ziel der religiösen Erziehung in der nationalsozialistischen Schule* in: BAP 62 Di 1/23/6-11 (19 December 1941: Berlin).

⁸⁴ BAP 62 Di 1/23/39 (21 August 1936: Berlin).

⁸⁵ See Chapter Four, n. 165-67.

theologische Zusätze (“The History of the Master of Nazareth without Legends or Theological Amendments”). As far as Rosenberg was concerned, such a book had nothing to do with the Nazi *Weltanschauung*. Rosenberg complained to Hess that by endorsing this book, Bouhler was infringing on his own domain of ideological oversight.⁸⁶ These differences of opinion lasted well into the war.⁸⁷ Even though Bouhler’s office had nominally been subsumed into Rosenberg’s Ideology Office by 1943, Bouhler retained and even strengthened his control over the supervision of literature. When Rosenberg complained about this, he was told by Bormann that this had been Hitler’s own decision, adding that Rosenberg’s new post as Reich Minister for the Occupied East (which provided him with as little real power as his other positions) “was itself a lifetime occupation.”⁸⁸

Rosenberg also took Bouhler to task for the relationship he was developing between his PPK and Kerrl’s Church Ministry. In 1938 Rosenberg learned to his horror that Kerrl wished to have a representative from the Church Ministry work in the PPK to assist in the evaluation of religious literature, and complained about it to Hess. Bouhler explained that he tackled the problem of religious literature “with the greatest restraint,” but did not believe that “one can refuse party member Kerrl participation in the literary work that falls within the boundaries of his jurisdiction. ... I have therefore granted to the Reich Church Minister his wish that his representative be appointed.”⁸⁹ Rosenberg protested in “the strongest terms” against this cooperation, claiming it was not the task of Bouhler’s office to determine the “church-ideological” position of the movement, but rather that of his own Office of Ideological

⁸⁶ BAZ NS 8/182/139-140 (21 August 1939: Berlin).

⁸⁷ See the case of Hermann Schwartz, whose book *Ehre, Volksgemeinschaft, Vaterland* was considered too Christian for Rosenberg’s officials (it denounced racialist “biologism”), but which received the PPK’s approval: BAP 62 Di 1/23/67 (3 June 1943: Berlin).

⁸⁸ Lang, *Secretary*, 175.

⁸⁹ BAZ NS 8/180/70-71 (4 November 1938: Berlin).

Information. In a letter to Hess, he made plain his opposition to Kerrl and his ministry, and suggested that polycratic infighting in this sphere would undermine party unity. Rosenberg considered Bouhler's actions "sabotage," and warned Hess that he would go straight to the Führer if Bouhler were not reminded of Rosenberg's ultimate authority in ideological matters.⁹⁰ Bormann wrote Bouhler, asking that he refrain from appointing a member of Kerrl's ministry to the PPK, adding that Rosenberg was the one to address the party's position to religion. He furthermore asked Bouhler to henceforth send all books touching on the relationship between party and church to Rosenberg's office for examination.⁹¹

Bouhler ignored this order, as was demonstrated the next year when Hanns Kerrl was preparing to publish a manuscript titled *Weltanschauung und Religion — Nationalsozialismus und Christentum* ("Worldview and Religion — National Socialism and Christianity"), which not only suggested a strong ideological relationship, *contra* Rosenberg, but also upheld the idea of a Protestant Reich Church. Anticipating certain hostility, Kerrl neglected to have the book evaluated by Rosenberg's office, but did get approval from Bouhler's office. Rosenberg and Bormann were immediately opposed, with the latter sending an angry letter to Kerrl instructing him to push off publication until the Führer gave his decision.⁹² Given his rejection of Kerrl's church policies, Hitler banned the book. In October Rosenberg's office sent a letter to Goebbels — whose ministry oversaw censorship — informing him to halt all advertising.⁹³ No apparent action was taken, and two months later Bormann wrote to Goebbels, complaining that Kerrl's book had made its way into the Christmas catalogue of a Protestant bookstore in spite of Hitler's

⁹⁰ BAZ NS 8/180/40-41 (23 November 1938: Berlin).

⁹¹ BAZ NS 8/180/17 (8 December 1938: Munich).

⁹² Lang, *Secretary*, 391-92.

⁹³ BAZ NS 8/182/84 (25 October 1939: Berlin).

wishes.⁹⁴ Rosenberg for one could not have viewed this as a mistake. In a letter to Hess the year before he had described as “grotesque” the acquiescence of Bouhler and Goebbels (and their go-between Hederich) in the proliferation of literature friendly to the Catholic Church.⁹⁵ Bouhler defended his position in a letter to Bormann, stating that he did not believe that the questions raised by Kerrl’s book could not be asked.⁹⁶

Rosenberg and Bouhler confronted each other again when Rosenberg learned that Bouhler was about to set up an office for the handling of complaints. This episode also brought the direct intervention of Göring against Rosenberg. In October 1939, Rosenberg and Göring agreed that, since the war amounted to a “spiritual struggle” against Germany’s enemies, they needed to do all they could to secure the inner unity of Nazism. Both men agreed that the time had come to bury their differences.⁹⁷ Only two months later, however, Rosenberg wrote angrily to Göring, who as Chairman of the Ministerial Council for Defense of the Reich had given Bouhler his commission. Rosenberg conceded that this office would most likely handle economic and social complaints, but he worried that it would serve the churches as a “wailing wall” against him. Rosenberg therefore requested that Göring notify Bouhler “in writing” that his office could not handle concerns relating to worldview, that this was his jurisdiction alone.⁹⁸ Bouhler completely disregarded Rosenberg’s counsel, however, and began taking on complaints from Christian organizations. One such group, the “League for Determined Christianity” (*Bund für entschiedenes Christentum*), sent a letter of complaint about anticlerical activity in the Hitler Youth to Bouhler. Rosenberg wrote to Göring, reminding him again that affairs touching on

⁹⁴ BAZ NS 8/182/9 (19 December 1939: Munich). Goebbels replied that this could not be helped, since catalogues came out before Hitler’s ban: BAZ NS 8/183/133 (8 January 1940: Berlin).

⁹⁵ BAZ NS 8/180/63-65 (21 November 1938: Berlin).

⁹⁶ BAZ NS 11/10/29-31 (13 December 1939: Berlin).

⁹⁷ BAZ NS 8/167/104 (2 October 1939: Berlin).

⁹⁸ BAZ NS 8/167/95 (8 December 1939: Berlin).

ideological or confessional disputes went through him alone, and were not included in Bouhler's competency.⁹⁹ Bouhler assured Göring that he would no longer take on such cases.¹⁰⁰ Göring then wrote to Rosenberg: "In ideological matters I have proceeded in accordance with your wishes." But he reserved for himself one area of immense importance to the churches:

Only in one instance must I naturally reserve the right to decide on complaints myself, and in such cases possibly call upon you for an opinion; namely in those cases in which somebody in acute circumstances complains to me, as Chairman of the Ministerial Council, about the church minister or police actions or the actions of the education minister. For example: the police dissolve a confessional association, and this association complains about it to me. In this case, which concerns the administrative actions of the police, naturally only I can make a direct decision.¹⁰¹

Such a move can only be seen as an effort to save the churches from Rosenberg's anticlerical agenda by bringing them under Göring's jurisdiction. What was given to Rosenberg with one hand was effectively taken away with the other.

Suffering continual challenges to his authority as the Führer's Delegate for Ideological Training, Rosenberg sought to reinforce his authority — and in the process seek reassurance from Hitler — by attempting to elevate his position from a purely party office to a more powerful state office. A circular of 19 December 1939 stated the parameters of Rosenberg's proposed authority. Kerrl, whose book had been rejected for publication just a few days earlier, saw an opportunity for revenge and immediately protested, pointing out the damage this would do to the morale of the German people, especially in wartime: "Over the past years the name of Rosenberg has become for broad sectors of the people — rightly or wrongly I will not say — a type of symbol for hostility to Church and Christianity."¹⁰² Rust also stood opposed to such an

⁹⁹ BAZ NS 8/167/73 (25 June 1940: Berlin[?]).

¹⁰⁰ BAZ NS 8/167/68 (25 July 1940: Berlin).

¹⁰¹ BAZ NS 8/167/70 (14 July 1940: Berlin).

¹⁰² IfZ Fa 199/47/75-76 (23 December 1939: Berlin).

appointment, because he felt it would essentially elevate Rosenberg to the position of a minister, thereby infringing on his own domain.¹⁰³ He was careful to protect his power, but was also interested in preserving the “positive Christianity” he helped shape. Another source of opposition was Baldur von Schirach.¹⁰⁴ Rosenberg’s hopes were diminished as more voices against him were heard. In January, Lammers conducted a straw poll of the party leadership. Of the twelve who responded, only five supported Rosenberg: Reich Health Leader Leonardo Conti; Reich Armaments Minister Fritz Todt; Adolf Hühnlein, the head of the National Socialist Motor Corps; Fritz Wächtler, who upon Hans Schemm’s death in a plane accident in 1935 was made head of the NSLB; and Viktor Lutze, Röhm’s replacement as SA chief of staff. With the exception of Wächtler, none of them had an official interest in ideology. As Lammers’ notes put it, Goebbels, Frick and Himmler “voiced criticisms and desired changes.” Rust and Walter Schultze, the Reich Leader of University Teachers (*Reichsdozentenführer*) were “substantially more reserved.” Bouhler and Robert Ley, the man who provided Rosenberg with his Führer’s Delegate title five years before, were totally opposed.¹⁰⁵ Rosenberg’s opponents not only included defenders of Christianity: more important was the fact that all of them, to varying degrees, staked their own claim to ideological oversight. Ley was certainly no friend of Christianity, but he was active in the erection of Adolf Hitler Schools. Even Himmler, who of any party leader was the most in tune with Rosenberg’s ideas, was clearly apprehensive.

To resolve the question of Rosenberg’s appointment, Hitler convened a meeting on 9 February 1940. Present were Rosenberg, Lammers, Goebbels, Rust, Kerl, Ley, Bouhler, Heydrich and a representative from Ribbentrop’s Foreign Ministry. The most persistent

¹⁰³ Reinhard Bollmus, *Das Amt Rosenberg und seine Gegner: Studien zum Machtkampf im Nationalsozialistischen Herrschaftssystem* (Stuttgart, 1970), 131.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 131-32.

¹⁰⁵ IfZ Fa 199/47/81-82 (January 1940: Berlin).

opponent was Kerrl, who noted that “the Third Reich needs Christianity and the churches because it has nothing to replace the Christian religion and Christian morality. ... His appointment will result in marked unrest among the *Volk*, which is precisely what we must avoid during the war under all circumstances.” Goebbels raised unspecified concerns, and the Foreign Ministry pointed to the impact such an appointment would have in relations with the Vatican.¹⁰⁶ In the following days, Hitler mulled over his decision. Significantly, he cited Kerrl’s concerns as the most compelling for canceling Rosenberg’s new post. As Lammers wrote: “The Führer did not share the foreign policy objections of the Reich Foreign Minister. With the objections raised by the Reich Church Minister the Führer reluctantly agreed.”¹⁰⁷ When Hitler explained his decision to Rosenberg, he professed that “Mussolini asked him three times to undertake nothing against the Church.”¹⁰⁸ But Rosenberg made it clear in a letter to Lammers that he suspected Kerrl was behind the decision.¹⁰⁹

Confined to his existing offices, Rosenberg continued to do battle with his opponents. As we have seen, one particularly hostile adversary was Goebbels. Whereas Goebbels had found countless opportunities to pour derision on Rosenberg, he directly contested Rosenberg’s authority as the Führer’s Delegate through his power to prohibit publication. One particularly noteworthy case concerned a short book by Hans Blöthner entitled *Gott und Volk* (“God and People”). It was a strongly anti-Christian book, published anonymously. Almost as soon as it came out, party members began to complain about it. One letter addressed to Rosenberg

¹⁰⁶ IfZ Fa 199/47/85-89 (10 February 1940: Berlin).

¹⁰⁷ IfZ Fa 199/47/95-96 (21 February 1940: Berlin).

¹⁰⁸ Seraphim (ed.), *Tagebuch*, entry for 3/3/40.

¹⁰⁹ IfZ Fa 199/47/98-99 (9 March 1940: Berlin). There is some uncertainty surrounding Bormann’s role in this episode. Conway claims that Bormann was particularly favorable to Rosenberg’s quest for state power, and makes no mention of the fact that Rosenberg actually lost this battle: John Conway, *Persecution*, 250-51. On the other hand, Jochen von Lang states that Bormann was against Rosenberg, and furthermore contends that Bormann carefully manipulated events to ensure Rosenberg’s defeat: Lang, *Secretary*, 132. However, neither the primary sources, nor the two main Rosenberg biographies, Cecil’s *Myth of the Master Race* and Bollmus’ *Das Amt*

attacked the book on the grounds that “the power source of our belief in the Führer, in Germany, in the victory of truth and righteousness ... is the positive Christian faith in the sense of Point 24 of the party program, but never the dogmatic beliefs of the confessions and other international sects falsified by the Jews.” Revealing himself to be a member of the German Christians, this party member asked that the book be withdrawn.¹¹⁰ Another party member, describing himself as a “Christian and National Socialist,” regretted that the book had received the endorsement of Ley’s organization. As much as he agreed with some of the attacks made against the churches, he counseled against “pouring the baby out with the bath water [*dem Kind mit dem Bade auszuschütten*].” At the very least, this Nazi estimated, it would offend the religious sensibilities of 95 percent of the German population.¹¹¹

In August 1941, Rosenberg’s Office of Ideological Information appraised the book. The reviewer noted the following passage as particularly relevant: “We respect this Jesus of Nazareth. But we do not love him. As our leader [*Führer*] we reject him.” The reviewer disagreed with another passage, “How should we educate our children? As if they had never heard of Christianity,” adding that one can only fight an enemy by knowing him. The book was nonetheless certified “acceptable” for the party’s educational work.¹¹² Soon free copies were made available to soldiers of the Wehrmacht. A flood of complaints written by non-party members soon surfaced, one of them complaining that Roosevelt’s comments about Nazism being anti-Christian looked to be coming true.¹¹³ By December 1941, Goebbels had the book banned. In June 1942, an official from the Propaganda Ministry informed Rosenberg’s office

Rosenberg, make any reference to Bormann’s opinion or his role in the decision-making process.

¹¹⁰ BAP 62 Di 1/37-1/128 (24 June 1941: Dresden).

¹¹¹ BAP 62 Di 1/37-1/116 (15 August 1941: Neustadt i.Sa.).

¹¹² BAP 62 Di 1/37-1/76-78 (19 August 1941: Berlin).

¹¹³ BAZ NS 8/204/165 (12 November 1941: Munich[?]).

that the book could only be reissued if large sections were rewritten, and the manuscript sent over to his offices for inspection.¹¹⁴ The Office of Ideological Information complained that this was an infringement on their territory.¹¹⁵

The activities of the Reich Propaganda Office (RPL) also point to a positive attitude towards Christianity and the continuing presence of Christians in the party. One such example was the case of Kurt Lehmann, a party speaker who worked for the office. In 1938 Lehmann wrote a short book entitled *Deutschtum und positives Christentum* (“Germandom and Positive Christianity”). Conforming to the basic contours of German Christian theology, it upheld the need to reject the Old Testament, firmly defended the New Testament against attacks from pagans, and argued that Jesus was an Aryan.¹¹⁶ Shortly after the book was published, however, an officer in the RPL revoked the author’s speaking privileges. Lehmann immediately began to defend himself, pointing out that approval to publish the book had been granted by Bouhler’s PPK, adding that both the Deputy Gauleiter of Berlin, Arthur Görhlitzer, and the Gau Propaganda Leader had found nothing objectionable in the book.¹¹⁷ His case was discussed further, and Goebbels’ personal views solicited: Lehmann was given his job back.¹¹⁸

Obstructed anti-Christians

Martin Bormann, though never a “paganist,” emerged as one of the leading anticlericals and anti-Christians in the later years of the Third Reich. As a party functionary working almost entirely

¹¹⁴ BAP 62 Di 1/37-1/19-20 (15 June 1942: Berlin).

¹¹⁵ BAP 62 Di 1/37-1/21-22 (n.d.[1942]: Berlin)

¹¹⁶ BAP NS 18/94 (7 October 1942: Berlin).

¹¹⁷ BAP NS 18/94 (10 October 1942:Berlin).

¹¹⁸ BAP NS 18/94 (8 February 1943: Berlin).

behind the scenes, he was totally unknown to the German public. For most of the Third Reich he was chief of staff for Rudolf Hess, the Führer's Deputy. Hess, while nominally behind only Hitler and Göring in the party hierarchy, was largely uninfluential. Acting only in accord with Hitler's wishes, he represented no particular tendency and had no ideological agendas himself. As someone largely uninterested in power politics, Hess left the field to Bormann, who was interested in little else. Through his personal control of increasing portions of the bureaucratic machinery of the party, Bormann was able to accrue more and more power to himself. After Hess' eccentric flight to England in 1941, Bormann became head of the newly created Party Chancellery, a position that increased his power further. As Hitler's secretary, Bormann had control over Hitler's appointments, deciding who could see the Führer and who could not. One of Bormann's biographers has gone so far as to suggest that it was Bormann, and not Hitler, who ran Nazi Germany in its last years.¹¹⁹

Bormann, an ideological dilettante even by Rosenberg's standards, undertook to fulfill his vision of Nazi religious policy. Many of the anticlerical policies initiated by the party after 1937 were conceived by him. As we have seen, he took part in the removal of Josef Wagner from office, and he was intimately involved both in the banning of party leaders from holding office in religious organizations, and in the attempted expulsion of pastors from the party. He is almost universally regarded as one of Nazism's most extreme opponents of the churches.¹²⁰ As Albert Speer recalled: "He was the driving force behind the [anti-church] campaign, as was time and again made plain at our round table."¹²¹ While still Hess' chief of staff, Bormann led the campaign to seize Catholic church property, most notably the monasteries that lay in the newly

¹¹⁹ See the rather sensationally-titled biography of Jochen von Lang, *The Secretary — Martin Bormann: The Man who Manipulated Hitler* (New York, 1979). Von Lang relies in good part on the characterizations of Bormann found in Albert Speer, *Inside the Third Reich* (New York, 1970).

¹²⁰ Beside Lang, *Secretary*, 125-132, 182-191, see Joachim Fest, *The Face of the Third Reich: Portraits of the Nazi Leadership* (New York, 1970), 132-33; Conway, *Persecution*, 188-89, 255-58; Speer, *Inside*, 95.

¹²¹ Speer, *Inside*, 125.

annexed territories such as Austria. These measures then reached into the *Altreich*, including Bavaria and the Rhineland.¹²² Bormann was also in the forefront of attacks on religious instruction. By incremental measures he sought to remove Christian influence. As he wrote to Rosenberg in February 1940: “Christianity and National Socialism are phenomena that originated from entirely different causes. Fundamentally both differ so strongly that it would not be possible to conduct a Christian teaching which would be completely compatible with the point of view of the National Socialist ideology.”¹²³ When Adolf Wagner, Schemm’s successor as Bavarian Minister of Education and Culture, attempted in 1941 to remove religious iconography from the schools in the famous “Crucifix Affair,” Reich Governor Epp noted: “Wagner wanted in his way to give visible effect to the teaching handed down by Reich Leader Bormann, that National Socialism and Christianity are irreconcilable opposites.”¹²⁴ For Wagner it was an incredible blunder; the action provoked such unrest that Hitler personally interceded to reverse the order, threatening Wagner that he would send him to Dachau “if he should do anything so stupid again.”¹²⁵

Just a month after taking over from Hess and being named head of the new Party Chancellery, Bormann wrote a secret circular on his view of the Christian religion, distributed only to Gauleiter. In it he made clear that he was justly regarded as the leading anticlerical force in Nazism:

¹²² E.D.R. Harrison, “The Nazi Dissolution of the Monasteries: A Case-Study,” *English Historical Review* 99 (1994), esp. 325-327.

¹²³ BAZ NS 8/183/54-57 (22 February 1940: Berlin).

¹²⁴ Quoted in Ian Kershaw, *Popular Opinion and Political Dissent in the Third Reich: Bavaria, 1933-1945* (Oxford, 1983), 353. The Crucifix Affair is covered in detail in idem., 340-57 and Peterson, *Limits*, 216-21. For a similar episode in northern Germany, see Jeremy Noakes, “The Oldenburg Crucifix Struggle of November 1936: A Case of Opposition in the Third Reich,” in Peter Stachura (ed.), *The Shaping of the Nazi State* (London, 1978).

¹²⁵ Peterson, *Limits*, 219.

National Socialist and Christian conceptions are incompatible. The Christian churches build on peoples' uncertainty and attempt to maintain this fear in the widest possible section of the population, since only in this way can the Christian churches keep their power. By contrast National Socialism rests upon *scientific* foundations. Christianity has inalterable foundations, which were established almost 2000 years ago and which have stiffened into dogmas alien to reality. On the other hand, National Socialism, if its task is to be fulfilled, must always be geared towards the newest findings of scientific research. ... It follows from the incompatibility of National Socialist and Christian concepts that we are to reject a strengthening of existing Christian confessions. A distinction between the various Christian confessions cannot be made. For this reason the thought of creating a Protestant Reich Church through a union of the various Protestant churches has definitely been given up, because the Protestant church is just as hostile to us as the Catholic church. ... [T]he church must never again be permitted to influence the guidance of the *Volk*.¹²⁶

According to Joachim Fest: "Before the ideology of National Socialism [Bormann] was as helpless as before intellectual matters in general. ... National Socialism meant to him not so much a faith as an instrument of his ambition.... It was this will to power too, and not any ideological opposition, that made him one of the most extreme opponents of the churches."¹²⁷ It is true that Bormann displayed no particular animus against the churches early in the party's history. Unlike Rosenberg, he did not leave the Protestant church until 1936. Bormann certainly seems to have been unaware of the vast range of attitudes toward science among the Christian confessions, and toward modernity in general. If he made life difficult for many Christians in the party, and perhaps unsurprisingly counted Himmler among his few friends, he was also on very good terms with Erich Koch.¹²⁸ But regardless of his true motives, or what he thought he knew about Christianity, he remained the most active opponent of clerical influence.

That Bormann was by far the most radical of anti-Christians in the NSDAP is made clear in his relations with other leading Nazis, including Rosenberg himself. Whereas he often overruled nominal colleagues in forcing through his agenda, more adept party leaders were

¹²⁶ BAP NS 6/336/18-22 (9 June 1941: Munich). Also reprinted in Conway, *Persecution*, 383-86.

¹²⁷ Fest, *Face*, 132.

¹²⁸ Lang, *Secretary*, 170-71, 318-19. No where in his book does Lang mention Koch's church activities.

effectively able to obstruct his anticlerical and anti-Christian zeal. A case of the former was Bormann's involvement in education. Before the seizure of power, the Nazis made no pretense that they were in favor of confessional schools. Some Nazis displayed a preference for the Protestant over Catholic school, but this was only in relation to those areas of Germany, like Bavaria, with a clear Catholic majority.¹²⁹ In Bavaria particularly, Nazi authorities saw to it that Protestants retained control over the school system. Against this background it is no accident that Hans Schemm became the first Protestant ever to hold the portfolio of Bavarian *Kultus* Minister. At the same time they forced through "deconfessionalization," party leaders insisted that the "German State School" would retain a Christian element. Leading school policy-makers such as Bernhard Rust and Schemm (via the NSLB) were equally insistent that the new school in Germany, if no longer confessional, would still be positive Christian. Even after Schemm's death, when his offices were taken over by more anticlerical comrades, there was agreement that Christian instruction would retain its presence.¹³⁰

Bormann, however, contested the qualified Christian mien of the Nazi school, and did battle with Rust in the process. Rust in turn tried to forestall Bormann's measures where he could. For instance, in November 1938 the NSLB declared that the murder of ambassador Rath in Paris at the hands of a young Jew had filled them with a desire for revenge. This event was used throughout Germany as a pretext for *Kristallnacht*; the members of the NSLB reacted by "spontaneously" deciding they would no longer conduct Christian religious instruction in school, thereby indicating that they considered Christianity equivalent to Judaism.¹³¹ Given their history under Schemm, this seemed like an incredible step for the NSLB to take. Even its new head,

¹²⁹ See Chapter Two, "Institutional relations: the schools."

¹³⁰ For Adolf Wagner's Gau, see "Das Ende der Konfessionsschule im Gau München-Oberbayern: in Zukunft nur mehr christliche Deutsche Volksschule," *VB*, 21/6/37 (in BAZ NS 26/1323).

¹³¹ BAP R43 II/157/83-85 (26 November 1938: Berlin).

Wächtler, had rejected the idea of removing religious instruction from the curriculum when the German Faith Movement had suggested it two years before.¹³² Rust, asked by Kerrl to look into the matter, was informed by Gauleiter Kaufmann of Hamburg that the “spontaneous” action had in fact been ordered by Bormann.¹³³ A few days later Rust counteracted Bormann and ordered that religious instruction in the schools was to continue as before.¹³⁴

Bormann tried again the next year, when he informed Rust that he wanted to see theological faculties at universities phased out. If legal obstacles got in the way, preventing such faculties from being eliminated altogether, Bormann instructed that they at least be cut back substantially.¹³⁵ Bormann’s power had already grown since the murder of Rath, and Rust found it harder to fight him off this time. He tried through negotiations and bureaucratic red tape to delay this action, and according to Jochen von Lang, “knew that Göring, for one, was on his side, and so, to some extent, [was] Goebbels.”¹³⁶

There were similar confrontations with other Nazi leaders. Bormann attacked Baldur von Schirach for leaving Sundays open in the Hitler Youth for church services, and later for being too friendly with clergy in his new office as Gauleiter of Vienna.¹³⁷ Albert Speer also ran afoul of Bormann’s anticlericalism. Undertaking the remodeling of Berlin according to Hitler’s grandiose plans, Speer contacted Protestant and Catholic authorities to discuss the location of churches in what would be the new sections of the capital. Bormann reprimanded him,

¹³² BAP R5101/23139/443 (2 February 1936: Bayreuth).

¹³³ BAP R43 II/157/103-104 (2 December 1938: Berlin).

¹³⁴ BAP R43 II/157/105-6 (2 December 1938: Berlin).

¹³⁵ BAZ NS 8/184/208 (27 April 1940: Berlin).

¹³⁶ Lang, *Secretary*, 130. See BAP R43 II/157/143 (26 April 1940: Berlin) for the plan, which specifically mentions Göring’s approval.

¹³⁷ Chapter Seven, n. 156-57.

instructing him that there were to be no new churches in the rebuilt areas.¹³⁸ Speer found a way around Bormann's animosity after church buildings started to receive damage in bombing raids. Certain Gauleiter wanted to take the opportunity to raze such churches as "citadels of reaction." Speer was able to preserve them, however, by stating that they were "historically and artistically important monuments." It was an argument that worked again when Bormann criticized Speer for devoting material to the repair of these buildings.¹³⁹

Astonishingly, even Rosenberg came in for Bormann's criticism. We have seen that Rosenberg's hostility to Christianity was far from consistent. Nonetheless, judging from his own battles with other leaders and offices, he could hardly be seen as too soft. Several enlightening exchanges between Bormann and Rosenberg demonstrate how Bormann went beyond the pale of conventional paganist thinking on this subject. In January 1940, Rosenberg had described as "excellent" a new book written by Reich Bishop Müller for German soldiers. A few days later, he received a testy letter from Bormann: "I feel differently, since, through this book, soldiers who were lost to Christianity will be reacquainted with partially disguised Christian ideas." He then went on to suggest that Rosenberg's office was not doing its job properly.¹⁴⁰ Rosenberg defended himself by reminding Bormann that it was written, after all, by a Protestant cleric: had a Reich or Gau Leader written it, then his reaction would have been more justified.¹⁴¹ A month later, Rosenberg received another chilly letter from Bormann, this time accusing him of inviting Müller to help him develop a party plan for religious education in the schools. Bormann rejected this as an attempted synthesis with Christianity.¹⁴² Rosenberg wrote back, assuring Bormann that

¹³⁸ Speer, *Inside*, 177.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 314-15.

¹⁴⁰ BAZ NS 8/183/153 (18 January 1940: Berlin).

¹⁴¹ IfZ MA 544 (20 January 1940: Berlin).

¹⁴² BAZ NS 8/183/54-57 (22 February 1940: Berlin).

at no point had he approached Müller with such an idea.¹⁴³ Rosenberg took the opportunity to return fire the next year after Bormann came out with his confidential anti-Christian tract. Almost immediately after it was released, Hitler suppressed it, ordering Bormann to retract his statements and recover all the copies he had sent out. Others in the party, particularly Goebbels, castigated him for writing such an inopportune attack on the churches.¹⁴⁴ Rosenberg added his voice as well, insisting that any discussion of religious matters was his responsibility alone, and coolly noting that the piece “contains several misconceptions.”¹⁴⁵

Bormann did not relent in his attempts to outdo Rosenberg. One occasion concerned an institute established in 1939 by the Protestant church, called the Institute for the Study and Eradication of Jewish Influence on German Church Life. Established in Eisenach under the leadership of New Testament scholar Walter Grundmann, the institute was run in conjunction with both Protestant church and Reich governments.¹⁴⁶ Even though Grundmann had been critical of Rosenberg in a book published in 1933,¹⁴⁷ Rosenberg supported the work of the institute. Bormann wrote to Rosenberg, suggesting that he was getting himself unduly involved in church affairs.¹⁴⁸ Bormann also wrote to the Church Ministry, suggesting that state authorities should cut their formal association with the institute, since it was a purely ecclesiastical undertaking.¹⁴⁹ Bormann also criticized, and undercut, Rosenberg’s actions in the field of religion as Reich Minister for the Occupied East. Looking for ways to endear the Slavic

¹⁴³ BAZ NS 8/183/43-45 (27 February 1940: Berlin).

¹⁴⁴ Lang, *Secretary*, 189.

¹⁴⁵ IfZ MA 545 (8 September 1941: Berlin).

¹⁴⁶ See Susannah Heschel, “Nazifying Christian Theology: Walter Grundmann and the Institute for the Study and Eradication of Jewish Influence on German Church Life,” *Church History* 63 (1994): 587-604.

¹⁴⁷ Walter Grundmann, *Gott und Nation: Ein evangelisches Wort zum Wollen des Nationalsozialismus und zu Rosenbergs Sinndeutung* (Berlin, 1933).

¹⁴⁸ BAZ NS 8/187/160 (1 June 1942: Führerhauptquartier).

¹⁴⁹ BAZ NS 8/187/52-54 (25 September 1942: Führerhauptquartier).

population to Nazi rule, in February 1942 Rosenberg suggested that religious tolerance be reintroduced into the conquered territories.¹⁵⁰ This was part of Rosenberg's larger scheme to create a system of satellite states under Nazi suzerainty. Nearly all other Nazis, however, wished to exploit the occupied east ruthlessly, and, viewing Slavs as *Untermenschen*, had little regard for their religious liberties. Bormann voiced objections to Rosenberg's plan, specifically the idea of resurrecting the Orthodox Church, since this would likely turn into a locus of resistance. Instead, Bormann suggested that religious bodies would remain local in scope, undercutting the potential of a united front. He furthermore suggested that the local Nazi potentates sign the decree, and not Rosenberg, since his signature on the document would give encouragement to the churches back in the *Altreich*.¹⁵¹

The two Nazi who could effectively obstruct Bormann on matters of Christianity and the churches were Goebbels and his aid Walter Tiessler, the head of the "Reich Ring" for National Socialist Peoples' Enlightenment and Propaganda within the Reich Propaganda Office. As the contact person between Goebbels and Bormann, Tiessler was well-placed to act as Goebbels' *agent provocateur* in heading off Bormann's extremism. One of the first such opportunities arose with the strong denunciation of euthanasia which came from Bishop Galen's sermon of August 1941. On 13 August, ten days after Galen spoke, Bormann declared that Galen deserved the death sentence. The local Gauleiter suggested that he be imprisoned for the rest of the war. There was a general feeling among party radicals that, if Galen did not receive punishment in some way, the prestige of the party and state would suffer.¹⁵² However, Goebbels intervened against this group, warning: "[I]f anything were done against the bishop, the population of

¹⁵⁰ Robert Cecil, *The Myth of the Master Race: Alfred Rosenberg and Nazi Ideology* (London, 1972), 205-06.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 206.

¹⁵² Conway, *Persecution*, 281. See as well Friedrich Löffler (ed.), *Bischof Clemens August Graf von Galen: Akten, Briefe und Predigten 1933-1946*, 2 vols. (Paderborn, 1996).

Münster could be regarded as lost to the war effort, and the same could confidently be said of the whole of Westphalia.”¹⁵³ Goebbels won the day: nothing was done against Galen.

Of the many party voices to be heard against Galen, Tiessler’s was perhaps the most damning; he recommended that Galen should be hanged. Scholars usually regard this sentiment as the most radical of any that were expressed over the affair.¹⁵⁴ In fact, Tiessler, working with Goebbels, had an entirely different motive for making this statement. In a post-war interview, Tiessler maintained that: “Goebbels’ method was one of involving very sensitive and timely psychological devices to corner Bormann, by pushing, even forcing him to retreat from his radical positions on [church] questions.” According to Tiessler, Goebbels knew that the most radical voice against Galen would be Bormann’s, who had little sense of restraint when it came to attacking the churches. To prevent his views and influence with Hitler from prevailing, “Goebbels then set Tiessler loose with his cat and mouse ruse by having his man express the most radical opinion possible, thus forcing Bormann to back down. Bormann answered that there was no sense in taking this matter to the Führer, he would never agree.”¹⁵⁵ In this way, according to Tiessler, Goebbels was able to outmaneuver Bormann and prevent a public relations disaster.

Because Tiessler’s version of events was given in a post-war interview, there is good reason to suspect his interpretation. Like many fellow party members interested in salvaging their reputations, he professed himself innocent of any malevolent motives. There is ample proof, however, that Tiessler and Goebbels truly sought to undo Bormann’s agenda. Claiming that the burdens of war brought a special need for lightness in popular entertainment, in Autumn

¹⁵³ Quoted in Jeremy Noakes and Geoffrey Pridham (eds.), *Nazism 1919-1945: A Documentary Reader*, 3 vols. (Exeter, 1983-88), 3: 1039.

¹⁵⁴ Cf. Conway, *Persecution*, 281; Michael Burleigh, *Death and Deliverance: 'Euthanasia' in Germany 1900-1945* (Cambridge, 1994), 178.

¹⁵⁵ IfZ ZS 2327 (30 July 1970: Munich) (original report in English).

1942 Bormann ordered that the performance of religious music should cease for the time being. In place of performances of Christian music, “many more concerts with beloved, beautiful German music” should be performed.¹⁵⁶ Just a few months before, Goebbels had revealed his own view on the issue when he granted permission for church music to be played over state radio.¹⁵⁷ It was Tiessler’s opinion that church music had to be respected and valued as “our cultural and musical inheritance.” Goebbels, he noted, also wanted this music to be respected, for instance totally rejecting one Nazi’s suggestion that the Matthew Passion be abolished. Tiessler was even able to evoke Hitler’s listening habits in his argument: “Goebbels points out that he finds the Führer in full agreement with him. ... If the Führer as a non-Christian nevertheless possesses enough piety to go to the Bayreuth *Festspielhaus* every year and listen for six hours to *Parsifal*, a completely ‘Christian’ work, then we as National Socialists need be no more negative [about religious music] than the Führer himself.”¹⁵⁸ Another officer in the RPL pointed out that Bormann’s reference to church music as “heavy” left open the question of what constituted “light” music. In the end Bormann’s idea was rejected.¹⁵⁹

Perhaps the most revealing case of how far removed Bormann’s religious ideas were from the rest of the party leadership concerned the publication of a book called *Unser Glaube* (“Our Faith”), written by an SS man named Greismayr. As one officer in the RPL discovered, the publisher, Nordland Verlag, was owned by Himmler. The book itself took the form of a religious catechism for Nazi ideology. Among other things, its author maintained that in National Socialism there could be no belief in a Hereafter. Pointing out that only a “small circle

¹⁵⁶ BAP NS 18/529 (16 December 1942: Berlin).

¹⁵⁷ BAP R43 II/151/38 (14 September 1942: Berlin).

¹⁵⁸ BAP NS 18/529 (3 December 1942: Berlin). Whereas Rauschnig interpreted *Parsifal* as a story of “pure blood” versus “corrupted blood,” and Thomas Mann believed that it was “a dramatization of proto-Nazi racialist thinking,” Nietzsche denounced the work, claiming Wagner “sank down before the cross.” See Robert Michael, “Wagner, Christian Anti-Jewishness and the Jews: A Re-examination,” *Patterns of Prejudice* 26 (1992), 88-89.

¹⁵⁹ BAP NS 18/529 (n.d., n.p.).

within the party” believed this, and that Germans “since the old Teutons” have believed in a Hereafter, this officer inquired as to whether the book should be banned.¹⁶⁰ Tiessler passed this matter on to Bormann, who stated that it was not the task of the party to ban the book. Since Germany was a land of “religious freedom,” in which everyone could find fulfillment in his own fashion, he had nothing to say against such beliefs. Bormann told Tiessler not to overlook the fact that it was the Christian churches, after all, that had always strongly emphasized belief in the Hereafter.¹⁶¹ Tiessler then solicited the views of Goebbels’ long-standing enemy, Rosenberg. He informed Rosenberg that Goebbels wanted the party to make a declaration as to whether a German could still be a National Socialist while believing in a Hereafter. As Tiessler saw it, two issues in particular needed to be addressed: “Is it un-German to believe in a Hereafter? Is it the task of National Socialism to determine the answer to this question, or is it more correct to let everyone find salvation in his own way?” He warned that “if National Socialism demands of every German that he not believe in any kind of Hereafter, then I see this as an incredibly great danger for the future.” Nazism was only concerned with matters of earthly existence, Tiessler insisted, and had no prerogative to cast judgment on the existence of an afterlife. He added that if the party formally declared that members could believe in a Hereafter if they wanted to, it would rob the churches of one of their most important arguments against certain elements of Nazism, and therefore expose their real — political — opposition to it.¹⁶² In a subsequent letter, Tiessler also pointed out that Hitler himself had proclaimed in *Mein Kampf* that “a religion in the Aryan sense cannot be imagined which lacks the conviction of survival after death in some form.”¹⁶³ Rosenberg responded, unambiguously stating that belief in a Hereafter was up to the

¹⁶⁰ BAP NS 18/140 (24 November 1941: Berlin).

¹⁶¹ BAP NS 18/140 (14 January 1942: Führerhauptquartier).

¹⁶² BAP NS 18/140 (16 January 1942: Berlin).

¹⁶³ BAP NS 18/140 (12 February 1942: Berlin); Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, trans. Ralph Manheim (Boston, 1962),

conscience of the individual National Socialist, and that denying this right would only lend credence to propaganda about Nazism wanting to destroy religion.¹⁶⁴ Since Bormann as head of the Party Chancellery had the final word, however, no such decree was issued.

The evidence suggests that Bormann was indeed motivated not by a committed ideological opposition to Christianity, but by an attempt to outdo other Nazis, to shame them and thereby bring them under his control. His extremism transgressed the views of radicals like Rosenberg, and even Hitler himself, and seemed at times to flirt with atheism. In his attempted forays into ideology, he never mentioned Jesus, Luther or positive Christianity. He seems to have outdone the party's anti-Christians at their own game. Given the many attempts within the party to curb him, it is safe to conclude that, without Bormann, Nazism would not have received quite the same anti-Christian reputation as it developed. He remained a party functionary first and foremost. His obsession with the churches, though very real, was as much about asserting his position in the party than it was about a true ideological commitment.

Reinhard Heydrich was, along with Bormann, one of the regime's most proficient technocrats and adamant anticlericals. When two Free Czech agents killed Heydrich in Prague in 1942, Nazi anticlericalism lost one of its most effective partisans. But his hatred of the churches was not regarded as a necessary precondition to succeed him as head of the Reich Security Main Office. Ernst Kaltenbrunner, the head of the Austrian SS, took over this position in 1943 and considerably relaxed Heydrich's anticlerical campaign. According to one of his former associates, Kaltenbrunner did not understand how Heydrich "could harbor such a deadly hatred of the [Catholic] Church."¹⁶⁵ If Kaltenbrunner was not a practicing Catholic, neither had he left the church. In fact, of all his brothers — all involved in the Nazi movement like him —

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¹⁶⁴ BAP NS 18/140 (21 February 1942: Berlin[?]).

¹⁶⁵ Quoted in Peter Black, *Ernst Kaltenbrunner: Ideological Soldier of the Third Reich* (Princeton, 1984), 146.

he was the only one *not* to leave the church.¹⁶⁶ Though Kaltenbrunner persecuted clergy who attacked the Nazi state, and professed his opposition to “political Catholicism,” he had no patience for Heydrich’s anticlerical schemes. At the same time he was busily doing his best to bring the Final Solution of the Jewish Question to fruition, he disbanded Department IVB (“religious opponents”) within the Gestapo, established by Heydrich and headed by Albert Hartl, and ex-priest who had turned against his church. Hartl’s activities included penetration of Catholic circles and the collection of intelligence. As part of his resentment for being defrocked, he also conjured up schemes for infiltrating the Catholic Church, including sending Nazis into the priesthood to nazify the clergy from within. Kaltenbrunner dismissed the plan as “ridiculous.”¹⁶⁷

Ambiguous paganists

During the war, Himmler continued to exhibit the same ambivalence that had marked his pre-war attitude. At a 1942 speech delivered to the SS and German police leadership, Himmler spoke of the struggle of the races, and the need to fight off the Asiatic horde. Even while he attacked the “perversity” of Christian morality, he took a favorable view of the Catholic teaching that a childless marriage was the “greatest sin of all.” Himmler stated his belief that “the decline in our birthrate around 1900 coincided with the time when the German people began to inwardly free themselves from their very keen commitment to the churches.” This aspect of Christian orthodox teaching, Himmler declared to the assembled party members, “we can only welcome

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 148. On Kaltenbrunner’s furtherance of the Final Solution, see *ibid.*, 149ff.

from a biological and racial point of view.”¹⁶⁸ Beside the declining birthrate, Himmler credited the Catholic Church with fighting another nemesis of Nazi ideology: Freemasonry. As he put it in 1940 to his confidant Felix Kersten, “Only *one* power has not allowed itself to be deceived, the Catholic Church. She is the inexorable enemy of all Masonry. It is certainly known to you that any Catholic is automatically excommunicated the moment he becomes a Mason.” In this same eulogy, Himmler was less charitable to the Protestants: “Only the foolish Evangelical parsons have still not realized what is at stake. They join the Masons without realizing that they are digging their own graves.”¹⁶⁹ Having heard this, and possibly being aware of his other felicitous remarks about certain aspects of Christian ideology, Kersten asked Himmler point blank: “Why have you at one and the same time made implacable enemies of the Jews and Masons on the one side, and their professed enemy, the Catholic Church, on the other ...?” On this occasion, Himmler was evasive, simply responding: “[T]hat is a thing which the Führer alone had to decide. To talk about it, now that the die has been cast, is quite pointless.”¹⁷⁰

Kersten would have opportunity to once again confront Himmler with his own ambiguity. In 1942 he heard of something incredible from an SS leader who had been invited to Himmler’s house: “Himmler’s small daughter said grace before lunch in his presence. He [the SS leader] had gazed at the Reichsführer in astonishment, not being able to understand how he — so hostile to the Church — could allow prayers to be said in his own house. It argued some discrepancy in Himmler’s outlook.”¹⁷¹ Kersten prodded Himmler to discern his real attitude. When he asked how the Catholic Church could best be described, Himmler answered: “As a joint-stock company from which the chief shareholders — since its foundation and for nearly two thousand years —

¹⁶⁸ IfZ F 37/3 (16 September 1942: Feldkommandostelle Rußland-Süd).

¹⁶⁹ Felix Kersten, *The Kersten Memoirs 1940-1945* (New York, 1957), 31 (emphasis in the original).

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 32.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 148.

draw a hundred or a thousand percent profit and give nothing in return. Insurance companies which always say that it's not in the contract whenever you make a claim are mere novices in the art of deception compared with this gigantic swindle."¹⁷² Here was a vituperous hatred for the institution of Christianity, but nothing as yet on the religion itself.

Kersten knew of Himmler's dabbling in non-Christian forms of religion and interest in mysticism, and went so far as to read eastern religious texts himself to better parry Himmler's religious thrusts. As he told Himmler: "I've read the Bhagavad-Gita, which you so prize, and other Indian writings and found in them much the same teaching as Christianity offers in the Sermon on the Mount. The Ten Commandments recur in a slightly different form in Buddhist doctrine, in the Vedas and Rig-Vedas. There's no doubt that the spirituality is the same, except that Christianity adds belief in a personal God who judges men after their death. It's the actual putting into practice of this teaching which would really make the difference." To this Himmler responded: "That's true enough, and I've nothing against Christianity in itself; no doubt it has lofty moral ideas." Himmler then proceeded to disclose the real reasons for his enmity: "[W]e have to be on our guard against a world power which makes use of Christianity and its organization to oppose our own national resurrection by methods of which we're everywhere conscious."¹⁷³ Confronted with the distinction between hatred of Christian institutions and Christian ideology, Himmler stated that he was really an anticlerical, not an anti-Christian. When Himmler let loose with an apparently anti-Christian statement, "Then we'll unfrock these priests — neither their God nor their Virgin Mary will be able to do a thing for them then," Kersten immediately took him to task: "But you're surely not opposed to the Virgin Mary, Herr Reichsführer?" Again, Himmler conceded the distinction: "No, not at all. To link womanhood

¹⁷² Ibid., 149.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 155.

with religion is a noble idea. It suits our Germanic outlook.”¹⁷⁴

There was even less ambiguity in Himmler’s attitude towards Luther and Protestantism. In a secret speech to assembled SS leaders in May 1944, Himmler lectured on German history: “Only when the picture of history is placed before our eyes,” he claimed, “does our mission for the future become clear.” Himmler touched on one of his favorite subjects, the churches, and indicated that his hatred was really aimed at the temporal power of Catholicism: “[If] the Christian Catholic Church had remained what it was, fulfillment of the soul, the mediary to the Lord ... that would have been fine.” But the church acquired temporal ambitions, and came into constant conflict with emperor and state. In Himmler’s view, Germany suffered for centuries from this dilemma, especially since the Jews had infiltrated the church in order to dominate the German *Volk*. But after a long period of oppression and persecution at the hands of this power, the German spirit rose up in defiance: “A Luther, a Zwingli, a Calvin rose up, individual voices in this conflict of the spirit. The Germanic spirit protested, and for their newly founded confession they took the name Protestant. [Such struggle] has always been a hallmark of Germanic blood or German blood.”¹⁷⁵ Like Rosenberg and Günther, Himmler made Protestantism secondary, a function of Germanness. But as a signifier of nationhood, both in blood and spirit, Protestantism remained exalted nonetheless. This is especially evident when Himmler tellingly referred to the Frenchman Calvin as “Germanic.” As in Günther’s reference to the “blondes” of La Rochelle,¹⁷⁶ Himmler here not only revealed his belief that to be Protestant is to be Germanic, but also that to be Germanic is, among other things, to be Protestant.

This attitude was revealed on other occasions as well. For instance, when discussing the

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 155-56.

¹⁷⁵ “Rede des Reichsführers-SS am 24.5.44 in Sonthofen vor den Teilnehmern des politisch-weltanschaulichen Lehrgangs (Generale),” BAZ NS 19/4014/10-33 (24 May 1944: Sonthofen), here 10-13.

¹⁷⁶ See Chapter Three, n. 114.

Confessing Church, Himmler explicitly detached Niemöller from Protestantism. As he wrote sardonically but nonetheless revealingly to Walter Buch: “It is Niemöller’s intention to convert to the Catholic faith.”¹⁷⁷ Just as Protestantism was a marker of national feeling, Catholicism was a marker of national betrayal: if a Protestant pastor stood against the Nazis, Himmler intimated, he must no longer be Protestant. Himmler had high regard for Luther as well. In March 1940, shortly before the beginning of the Final Solution, he held a conversation on the Jewish “problem” with Kersten. Himmler the historian proclaimed that Judaism had infected Catholicism, that in Luther’s day the Vatican had been run by “Jew-Popes.” But whereas the Catholic Church was blind, Luther saw and understood the Jewish peril: “You should read, moreover, what Luther said and wrote about the Jews. *No judgment could be sharper.*”¹⁷⁸ This is a clear indication that Himmler read Luther’s notorious “On the Jews and their Lies,” and believed it sanctioned Nazi antisemitism.¹⁷⁹ Himmler held Luther in such esteem that in January 1941 his personal secretary wrote: “The Reichsführer-SS wishes to be remembered at the Luther Archive in Wittenberg after the war.”¹⁸⁰

As we saw in previous chapters, pagans rather consistently showed preference for Protestantism over Catholicism, even going so far as to make it a barometer of Germanness. At the same time they rejected Christian doctrine, they admired the spiritual struggle which they believed Protestantism represented. This tendency was demonstrated by another paganist prominent in the latter years of the Reich: Alfred Bäumler. Along with Heidegger, Bäumler was

¹⁷⁷ IfZ MA 327 (14 April 1942: Führerhauptquartier).

¹⁷⁸ Kersten, *Kersten Memoirs*, 35 (emphasis added).

¹⁷⁹ See Chapter Five, n. 45. Himmler’s claim that “no judgement could be harsher” could only have been a reference to the passage in Luther’s tract: “We are at fault in not slaying them.” Since Himmler freely admitted to reading this tract at a time when genocide against the Jews was in its conception, Luther’s impact on the later development of the Holocaust cannot completely be discounted.

¹⁸⁰ BAZ NS 19/712/2 (10 January 1941: Berlin[?]). What form this remembrance would take is not indicated in the files.

one of the most notable philosophers to back the Nazi regime with his intellectual prestige. Shortly after the seizure of power, he was appointed to a newly created chair in philosophy and political pedagogy at the University of Berlin. Present at the infamous book burning in Berlin's Opera Square in May 1933, he went so far as to deliver his inaugural lecture just before this event.¹⁸¹ Bäumler served as a liaison man between Rosenberg and the German universities, and in 1942 became head of the Academic Division in Rosenberg's office. As Hans Sluga puts it, "Bäumler was ... more than any other German philosopher, the typical fascist intellectual."¹⁸²

Bäumler's greatest claim to fame was the "nazification" of Friedrich Nietzsche. Two years before the seizure of power, he wrote "Nietzsche the Philosopher and Politician," which sought to cast Nietzsche as the greatest intellectual forefather of Nazism. He emphasized the political style of Nietzsche's thought, the heroic "will to power" of the Nietzsche who had written: "The time for petty politics is over: the very next century will bring the fight for the dominion of the earth — the *compulsion* to large-scale politics."¹⁸³ In the process, Bäumler also undertook enormous distortions of Nietzsche's ideological substance, overlooking or negating the Nietzsche who emphasized the individual over the communal.¹⁸⁴ Regarding Nietzsche's contempt for antisemitism, Bäumler had a great deal of explaining away to do. As Steven Aschheim puts it, Bäumler insisted that Nietzsche's "philo-Semitic comments were an attention-getting device — playing the Jews against the Germans was part of his strategy to get the Germans to listen to him!"¹⁸⁵ His work in Rosenberg's office, and general stature as a leading philosophical "radical" gained Bäumler considerable influence over Rosenberg. Whereas

¹⁸¹ Hans Sluga, *Heidegger's Crisis: Philosophy and Politics in Nazi Germany* (Cambridge MA, 1993), 125.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 127.

¹⁸³ Quoted in Steven Aschheim, *The Nietzsche Legacy in Germany 1890-1990* (Berkeley, 1992), 234.

¹⁸⁴ Alfred Bäumler, *Nietzsche der Philosoph und Politiker* (Leipzig, 1931), 171-72.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 157, as cited in Aschheim, *Legacy*, 250-51.

Rosenberg had made almost no mention of Nietzsche in his early works, his interest in Nietzsche would flourish in the Third Reich “under Baeumler’s skillful tutelage.”¹⁸⁶ Rosenberg in turn increasingly brought Bäumler into his confidence.

Bäumler not only overlooked Nietzsche’s philo-Semitism, but his anti-Christianism as well. Bäumler was an ardent admirer of Luther and the Reformation. Looking back to history as Himmler had done, in 1936 Bäumler published two articles in Ley’s *Schulungsbrief* on the historical significance of the Reformation.¹⁸⁷ In them, he praised Luther as nothing less than the original German, and the Reformation as the liberation of the German soul from Roman theocracy. Bäumler explicitly stated that Nietzsche had erred in condemning Luther: “His thesis on the role of the Reformation in German history is false.”¹⁸⁸ Relating Luther to contemporary Protestantism, Bäumler wrote: “Protestantism is strong when it finds itself engaged in struggle, when it does what its name implies. It is strong when the heroic key of Luther, who mercilessly fought for God’s Kingdom against the Devil’s Kingdom, prevails in it. Outside the context of struggle Protestantism degenerates very quickly into brittle orthodoxy or effeminate pietism.”¹⁸⁹ This criticism notwithstanding, Protestantism was more praised than pilloried: Protestant spirituality was about the inner soul, the personal. Protestantism returned a sense of honor to the worldly calling: “Work in the world is service to God.” Unlike many paganists, Bäumler did not detach Protestantism from Christianity: in his view, it was “the northern form of Christianity.”¹⁹⁰ Luther was also praised as the pioneer of German racial self-awareness: “It is in this setting that

¹⁸⁶ Sluga, *Heidegger’s Crisis*, 224. See as well Rosenberg’s assessment of Bäumler in a letter to Hess: IfZ MA 595 (6 November 1937: Berlin).

¹⁸⁷ Alfred Bäumler, “Der weltgeschichtliche Wendepunkt des Mittelalters,” *Der Schulungsbrief* 3 (October-November 1936).

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 391.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 395.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 429.

his work ‘On the Jews and their Lies’ belongs.”¹⁹¹ As one Catholic party member wrote in response to the article: “The Catholic Church is portrayed as alien, purely Roman and un-German. ... If this really represents the official position of the party, then logically party members will have to leave the Catholic Church, or else whomever chooses to remain true to the church will be requested to leave the NSDAP.”¹⁹² As the case of Josef Wagner would later demonstrate, this was a very prescient observation.

Rereading Hitler's Table Talk

Hitler's own religious views underwent significant change in the latter half of the Third Reich. As we saw in Chapter Six, he gave up on the Protestant Church after three failed attempts to achieve unity within its ranks. It is only in the period after this failure that we begin to see some of the anti-Christian remarks for which he is so famous. In October 1937, Hitler commented privately: “I have been freed, after an intense inner struggle, from the still living and childish imaginings of religion.... I now feel as free as a colt in the pasture.”¹⁹³ This was most likely a reference to a lingering attachment to his original Catholic faith, rather than his disaffection for the Protestant Church.¹⁹⁴ But if Hitler now washed his hands of both confessions, this did not yet imply a turn against certain aspects of Christianity: as he insisted in 1938, he continued to believe in the party's “positive Christianity.”¹⁹⁵

Publicly as well as privately, Hitler's anticlericalism grew. In a Reichstag speech on 30

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 397.

¹⁹² IfZ MA 256 (n.d.[1936], n.p.)

¹⁹³ Max Domarus (ed.), *Hitler: Reden und Proklamationen 1932-1945*, 2 vols. (Würzburg, 1962-64), 1: 745.

¹⁹⁴ William Carr argues similarly in his *Hitler: A Study in Personality and Politics* (London, 1978), 135.

¹⁹⁵ Chapter Six, n. 184-85.

January 1939, the sixth anniversary of the seizure of power, Hitler warned: “[T]he National Socialist state is at any time ready to undertake a clear separation of church and state, as is already the case in France, America and other countries. ... The National Socialist state has not closed a church, nor has it prevented the holding of a religious service, nor has it ever exercised any influence upon the form of a religious service. ... But on one point there must be no uncertainty: the German priest as servant of God we shall protect, the priest as political enemy of the German state we will destroy.”¹⁹⁶ Even though he threatened potential violence against clergy in this speech, this did not extend to religion itself. Furthermore, the “real” servant of God, the one who presumably preached political quietism if not outright enthusiasm for the state, would be protected.

Hitler's Table Talk, a series of wartime conversations he held with his immediate circle of confidants, is universally regarded as *the* source of Hitler's true feelings about Christianity.¹⁹⁷ In contrast with similarly reliable sources for Hitler's “confidential” views, notably Otto Wagener's memoirs, Hitler's “secret conversations” reveal an unmistakable rupture with his previous religious attitudes. This change from the 1920s and early 1930s is attributable to Hitler's feeling of rage at having been defeated in the arena of Protestant church policy, and with it the belief that the Protestant Church *in toto* could not be counted on to support Nazism. If the Niemöllers of the Christian world were the true representatives of Christianity, Hitler possibly concluded, then Christianity itself must be guilty. In July 1941 he harshly condemned the religion he had previously claimed to esteem: “The heaviest blow that ever struck humanity was the coming of Christianity; Bolshevism is Christianity's illegitimate child. Both are inventions

¹⁹⁶ *Frankfurter Zeitung*, 1/2/39.

¹⁹⁷ Ian Kershaw alludes to the questionable nature of the Table Talk as a historical source: see his *Hitler 1889-1936: Hubris* (London, 1998), xiv. However, while Kershaw recommends treating the work with caution, he does not suggest dispensing with the Table Talk altogether (*ibid.*).

of the Jews.”¹⁹⁸

Hitler took aim at specific aspects of Christianity. He was particularly severe in his view of Paul, who “transformed a local movement of Aryan opposition to Jewry into a supra-temporal religion, which postulates the equality of all men amongst themselves, and their obedience to an only god. This is what caused the death of the Roman Empire.”¹⁹⁹ In June 1942 Hitler rejected Luther’s translation of the Bible, since “the whole of the German people should have thus become exposed to the whole of this Jewish mumbo-jumbo.”²⁰⁰ Towards the churches, Hitler was never more abusive. For instance, in February 1942 he prophesied: “The evil that’s gnawing our vitals is our priests, of both creeds. ... The time will come when I’ll settle my accounts with them.”²⁰¹ In short, Hitler seemed to have rejected Christianity once and for all: “Pure Christianity — the Christianity of the catacombs — leads quite simply to the annihilation of mankind. It is merely whole-hearted Bolshevism, under a tinsel of metaphysics.”²⁰²

Nevertheless, as in so many other documented instances of Nazi hostility to Christianity, there are notable moments of ambivalence and outright contradiction in the “Table Talk,” moments overlooked in the secondary literature partly because they are buried in conversations on other topics. Most significantly, and consistent with his previous attitudes, Hitler continued to hold Jesus in high esteem. On one such occasion, he proclaimed: “The Galilean, who later was called the Christ, intended something quite different. He must be regarded as a popular leader who took up his position against Jewry. ... He set Himself against Jewish capitalism, and

¹⁹⁸ Adolf Hitler, *Hitler’s Table Talk 1941-1944: His Private Conversations*, trans. Norman Cameron and R. H. Stevens, intro. by Hugh Trevor-Roper (London, 1953), 7 (11-12 July 1941). Bormann was in attendance on all occasions. Other members of the audience are listed below when noted in *Table Talk*.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 78 (21 October 1941).

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 513 (5 June 1942).

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 304 (8 February 1942). Speer and Himmler are indicated as being in the audience on this occasion.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 146 (14 December 1941). In attendance were Rosenberg, Bouhler and Himmler.

that is why the Jews liquidated Him.”²⁰³ This interpretation of Jesus — as the messenger of a new belief who had been betrayed by a corrupt establishment — was remarkably consistent with the remarks Hitler made about the churches in the *Kampfzeit*: “But the communities that called themselves Christian churches did not understand it [Christ’s idea]! Or if they did, they denied Christ and betrayed him! *We are the first to exhume these teachings!*”²⁰⁴ Hitler showed no willingness to give up on the figure of Jesus, whose status as an Aryan remained unquestioned: “[I]t is certain that Jesus was not a Jew.”²⁰⁵ Hitler’s conception of Jesus’ relevance did seem to change; Jesus’ alleged antisemitism was increasingly emphasized at the expense of other qualities Hitler had previously evoked, such as his “socialism.” But even as late as November 1944, just a few months before his death, he stated: “Jesus was most certainly not a Jew. ... Jesus fought against the materialism of His age, and, therefore, against the Jews.”²⁰⁶

There are other indicators of ambivalence. No matter how much he vituperated against Christianity or the churches, Hitler gave no indication that he was now agnostic or atheistic: he displayed a continued attachment to a belief in God and rejection of materialism. In one revealing passage, he actually compared the religious policy of Nazi Germany with that of the Soviet Union:

It’s senseless to encourage man in the idea that he’s a king of creation, as the scientist of the past century tried to make him believe. ... The Russians were entitled to attack their priests, but they had no right to assail the idea of a supreme force. It’s a fact that we’re feeble creatures, and that a creative force exists. ... [I]t’s better to believe something false than not to believe anything at all. Who’s that little Bolshevik professor who claims to triumph over creation? People like that, we’ll break them. Whether we rely on the catechism or on philosophy, we have possibilities in reserve, whilst they, with their

²⁰³ Ibid., 76 (21 October 1941).

²⁰⁴ Otto Wagener, *Hitler: Memoirs of a Confidant*, ed. Henry Ashby Turner (New Haven, 1985), 139-40 (emphasis in the original).

²⁰⁵ *Hitler’s Table Talk*, 76 (21 October 1941).

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 721 (29-30 November 1944).

purely materialistic conceptions, can only devour one another.²⁰⁷

Hitler's readiness to rely on the catechism in his assault against marxism brings into question his earlier insistence that Christianity and marxism were now equal enemies of Nazism. Hitler's language here makes no specific reference to any kind of personal Christian attachment, striking instead a distinctly theistic note. But Hitler gave no indication that he ceased believing in an active, providential God in favor of the rationalist, distant God typical of theistic thought.

Other moments in the *Table Talk* reveal a more direct attachment to Christianity.

Referring to the Spanish, Hitler said: “[W]hat a queer sort of Christianity they practice down there! We must recognize, of course, that amongst us, Christianity is coloured by Germanism. All the same, its doctrine signifies: ‘Pray and work!’”²⁰⁸ Here Hitler echoes the motif of positive Christianity — a positive appraisal of Christianity, contingent on its compatibility with “Germanism.” On another occasion, he commented positively on one of the basic cornerstones of Christian belief: “The Ten Commandments are a code of living to which there's no refutation. These precepts correspond to irrefragable needs of the human soul; they're inspired by the best religious spirit, and the Churches here support themselves on a solid foundation.”²⁰⁹ Hitler's positive reference here is all the more surprising given that Christianity shares the Ten Commandments with Judaism, a fact that seems to have troubled Hitler not at all.

A particularly noteworthy example of Hitler's ambivalence is provided in a rant against Roosevelt. Hitler derides Roosevelt on several grounds throughout *Table Talk*. On this occasion he responds to Roosevelt's recent claim that Nazism was anti-Christian. In particularly striking form, Hitler revealed the limits of his apostasy: “What repulsive hypocrisy that arrant

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 86-87 (24 October 1941). In attendance was Lieutenant-General von Rintelen.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 46 (27-28 September 1941).

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 85 (24 October 1941). Von Rintelen in attendance.

Freemason, Roosevelt, displays when he speaks of Christianity! All the Churches should rise up against him — for he acts on principles diametrically opposed to those of the religion of which he boasts.”²¹⁰ Hitler makes no claim that he is Christian. But he is nonetheless irritated that his enemy Roosevelt should call *himself* Christian. There is no record of Hitler expressing irritation when Stalin spoke of himself as a marxist. Had Hitler truly given up on Christianity and demoted it to the level of Judaism and Bolshevism, as he professed to do elsewhere, he would have felt no compulsion to protect it from Roosevelt’s “repulsive hypocrisy.” Hitler revealed outright contradiction when he spoke of Luther and his achievements. In July 1941, he hailed Luther and his translation of the Bible as revolutionary: “Luther had the merit of rising against the Pope and the organisation of the Church. It was the first of the great revolutions. And thanks to his translation of the Bible, Luther replaced our dialects by the great German language!”²¹¹

Aside from the “Table Talk,” other sources point to residues of a Christian attitude in Hitler. As Albert Speer recalled: “Even after 1942 Hitler went on maintaining that he regarded the church as indispensable in political life. He would be happy, he said in one of those teatime talks at Obersalzberg, if someday a prominent churchman turned up who was suited to lead one of the churches — or if possible both the Catholic and Protestant churches reunited.”²¹² If true, Speer’s observation would certainly contradict the picture of Hitler’s anticlericalism obtained from other sources. Speer suggested that Hitler often tailored his remarks to suit his audience, something that a host of historians has also argued.²¹³ But pointing to a Janus-faced Hitler no more proves the deceitfulness of pro-Christian remarks than the sincerity of anti-Christian

²¹⁰ Ibid., 125 (11 November 1941).

²¹¹ Ibid., 9 (21-22 July 1941).

²¹² Speer, *Inside*, 95.

²¹³ See *inter alia* Timothy Mason, “Intention and Explanation: A Current Controversy about the Interpretation of National Socialism,” in Gerhard Hirschfeld and Lothar Kettenacker (eds.), *Der ‘Führerstaat’: Mythos und Realität* (Stuttgart, 1981), 33. Mason’s observation is made in the context of Hitler’s military strategy.

remarks.²¹⁴ Speer himself observed: “If in the course of such a monologue Hitler had pronounced a more negative judgment upon the church, Bormann would undoubtedly have taken from his jacket pocket one of the white cards he always carried with him.”²¹⁵

Hitler’s capacity for self-contradiction was enormous. Nonetheless, on some subjects Hitler remained consistent. As we have seen, he never demoted Jesus, regardless of his audience. And, whether in the back rooms of his Berlin headquarters or in tea-time chats at Obersalzberg, Hitler remained consistent in his negative assessment of paganism. In Obersalzberg he said: “A new party religion would only bring about a relapse into the mysticism of the Middle Ages. The growing SS myth showed that clearly enough, as did Rosenberg’s unreadable *Myth of the Twentieth Century*.”²¹⁶ By comparison, the “private” Hitler stated: “I must insist that Rosenberg’s ‘Myth of the Twentieth Century’ is not to be regarded as an expression of the official doctrine of the Party. ... It is interesting to note that comparatively few of the older members of the Party are to be found among the readers of Rosenberg’s book, and that the publishers had, in fact, great difficulty in disposing of the first edition.”²¹⁷ At Obersalzberg as well as “in secret,” Hitler indicated that he still approved the idea of a Christian state church, even though he clearly given up on its practicability in the German case. Publicly he proclaimed: “Through me the Protestant Church could become the established church, as in

²¹⁴ For instance, of the five anti-Christian passages quoted from *Table Talk* above, two were uttered in the presence of Himmler, who was not in Hitler’s audience in any of the passages favorable to Christianity. Himmler was present neither for the pro- nor the anti-Luther comments Hitler made. Bormann, however, was present on all occasions.

²¹⁵ Speer, *Inside*, 95. Speer’s book has been critiqued for myth-making, but this critique has been limited to Speer’s justification of his own role in the Nazi state. None of the authors who convincingly point to the fallacies found in Speer’s memoirs dispute the pictures he paints of other Nazis, and none specifically refers to the portrayal of Hitler’s religious views as spurious. See Gitta Sereny, *Albert Speer: His Battle with Truth* (New York, 1995). See also Matthias Schmidt, *Albert Speer: The End of a Myth* (New York, 1984); Dan van der Vat, *The Good Nazi: The Life and Lies of Albert Speer* (London, 1997).

²¹⁶ Speer, *Inside*, 95.

²¹⁷ *Hitler’s Table Talk*, 422 (11 April 1942).

England.”²¹⁸ And privately, in December 1941: “Against a Church that identifies itself with the State, as in England, I have nothing to say.”²¹⁹

The continued inspiration Hitler professed to gain from Christ as the “original antisemite” points to the possibility of an ongoing Christian element — among other elements — in Hitler’s antisemitism. In *Table Talk*, Hitler makes no direct statement that his antisemitism was religious rather than racial. But his political testament, written days before his death, contains a highly relevant passage about the nature of his hatred: “We speak of the Jewish race only as a linguistic convenience, for in the true sense of the word, and from a genetic standpoint, there is no Jewish race. ... The Jewish race is above all a community of the spirit. Anthropologically the Jews do not exhibit those common characteristics that would identify them as a uniform race. ... A spiritual race is harder and more lasting than a natural race.”²²⁰ With one stroke Hitler discarded the flimsy scientific apparatus used by his followers to prove that Nazi antisemitism, unlike previous forms of Jew-hatred, was objective. In rejecting the notion that the Jews were a race, Hitler rejected as well the notion that his antisemitism was racial (or, as Uriel Tal calls it, “anti-Christian”). As Hitler stated in his secret conversations, Christ understood the danger of the Jew, and led an inspired struggle against them. The increased focus on Christ as antisemite paralleled the increasing exclusivity of antisemitism to Nazi ideology in the last years of the regime. If Hitler made no explicit statement that killing the Jews was revenge for the death of Christ, or for the refusal of Jews to recognize Christ as the Lord, he nonetheless believed that Christ “fought” the Jews, and that they “liquidated” him.

What do we make of the conflicting evidence? In previous years Hitler had always been

²¹⁸ Speer, *Inside*, 95.

²¹⁹ *Hitler's Table Talk*, 143 (13 December 1941). In attendance were Ribbentrop, Rosenberg, Goebbels, Terboven and Buhler.

²²⁰ Adolf Hitler, *Politisches Testament: Die Bormann-Diktate vom Februar und April 1945* (Hamburg, 1981), 64-70.

able to detach Christianity from the churches. Several passages of *Table Talk*, however, reveal no such distinction. We can conclude, therefore, that between these later “conversations” and earlier ones lies a difference of kind as well as degree. But we can see considerable equivocation in Hitler as well. Hitler rejected the German churches in the end. Nonetheless, he made clear more than once that he would have preferred a different outcome — of course on his own terms. In the abstract, therefore, Hitler retained a limited pro-church attitude. Had the Protestant churches fallen into line in the way Hitler had hoped, his wartime discourse would very likely not have been so hostile. But whereas his former comrade Ludendorff rejected Christ along with the churches, Hitler consistently refused to go this far. No degree of hostility toward Christianity could turn him to atheism. Hitler’s personal religion was most probably theistic near the end of his life. But his consistent refusal to turn to paganism leaves open the question of how much he was prepared to destroy Christianity and replace it with something new. Hitler could not have been totally unaware of the contradictions found in many of his statements. For instance, in rejecting Luther’s translation of the Bible, Hitler would also have had to reject Luther’s creation of the German language, which he earlier looked upon as a seminal moment in the birth of German nationhood.

In short: if we read Hitler’s comments on religion “against the grain,” we see a view of Christianity fraught with tension and ambiguity. When Hitler raged against Christianity and the churches, he mobilized the full fury of Nazism’s totalizing discourse. Never accepting the concept of a “loyal opposition,” he chose to interpret the resistance of *some* churchmen to *some* Nazi policies as total opposition to all Nazi policies. But, in moments when he spoke on other issues, whether it was Spain, Roosevelt, or Bolshevik metaphysics, he revealed that he was not quite prepared to destroy his former faith.

Conclusion

In the latter years of the regime, many Nazi leaders expressed a clear antagonism to Christianity. In addition to the paganists who had always expressed their hostility, there emerged a new opponent in the person of Martin Bormann. Due largely to his increasing hold on power, Bormann was able to effect increasingly bold anticlerical actions as the war drew closer. Such measures were largely halted in wartime, but there was little doubt that the Nazi regime had definitively turned against the institutions of Christianity. The mass exodus from the church and the attempted expulsion of clergy from the party demonstrate a fundamental rupture in party-church relations.

As firmly anticlerical as the regime became, there was real and persistent disagreement as to the continuing place of Christians and their religion in the movement. As rival party offices fought with Rosenberg on the terrain of ideological protection, they revealed a more positive assessment of Christianity than did the Führer's Delegate for Ideology. Their differences over religion played an important role in the polycratic struggle for Hitler's favor. Rosenberg, always blocked in his quest for power, was defeated in his final bid for ideological hegemony precisely on the question of Christianity. Party Christians, both prominent and unknown, continued their religious practices, while certain paganists — most notably Himmler — revealed in startling fashion that their hatred of Christianity had less to do with Christian teachings than with the perceived manipulation of religion by potential enemies. The "blank slate" of the Warthegau, the testing ground for the unhindered implementation of Nazi ideology, revealed that church institutions, though totally severed from the state and strongly curtailed in their activities, would nonetheless find a place in the future Nazi utopia. If the failure of the Reich Church had closed Nazi minds to clerical involvement in the state, it did not lead to an effort to destroy or dismantle the churches. Their basic right to exist was ultimately affirmed.

Bormann was the most radical of Nazism's anti-Christians. More than just initiating most anticlerical and anti-Christian actions in the later years of the Reich, Bormann came into direct conflict with other party members — no less committed to Nazism than he — over the escalating campaign against Christianity. It is certain that Nazi anticlericalism would have existed without extremists like Bormann, but it likely would not have taken the same shape or been as harsh. The example of Ernst Kaltenbrunner, in no way as anticlerical as his predecessor Heydrich, shows how the actions of a few Nazi anti-Christians were not necessarily representative of their movement as a whole. Had the “persecution” of the churches been as important to the regime as the persecution of Jews or marxists, Kaltenbrunner's tolerance toward them would have been totally unacceptable.

The contradictions and inconsistencies found in *Table Talk* on many issues make it impossible to claim to know Hitler's mind. Nonetheless, certain tendencies in his thought are discernable. Hitler's change from positive Christian to anti-Christian is arguably the most important example of religious transformation considered in this study. Even though he never converted to paganism, Hitler nonetheless became increasingly opposed to Christian institutions and, on the face of it, to the Christian religion as well. But the process was not as clear as past historical analysis suggests. In fact, Hitler's professed hatred of Christianity was shot through with ambiguity and contradiction. Even as he accused Christianity of being Jewish and Bolshevik, at all times he carefully protected the Jew Jesus from his attacks. According to Hitler, Christ's “original message” could still be detached from what was later called Christianity. In other words, Hitler continued his long-held belief that the unfettered ideas of Christ were different from the ideas of the churches. Elsewhere, Hitler went even further, indicating an appreciation for certain aspects of Christian teaching, and even a remorse that the churches had failed to back him and his movement as he had hoped. Until the end, Hitler continued to put limits on his apostasy.

9 “The Holy Reich”: Some Conclusions

... whoever kills you will think he is offering a service to God. —
John 16:2

The Nazi movement, like all historical phenomena, was about more than one thing. A single synoptic theory to explain Nazism to the satisfaction of the historical profession as a whole is still elusive half a century after Hitler’s death. Paradigms and master narratives explaining the essence of Nazism have come and gone. More commonly, Nazism is used as a case study, a kind of litmus test, to explore the larger problems of human societies. Contemporary debates about the ethical nature of human practices — be they genetic engineering or environmentalism, vivisection or multiculturalism — are often measured against what the Nazis thought or did in these areas. Explanatory models of Nazism, often temporally bound by their larger currency in academia, have held sway at various periods since Nazism came into existence. From the late 1960s to the late 1970s, class explanations of Nazism predominated — as they did in many other fields of historical inquiry. As feminism contested the prevailing historical theories of the late 1970s, a new historiography on women in Nazi Germany emerged. As questions of gender and culture have emerged in academic circles, we can expect to see more work done on the gendered nature of Nazism, the masculine imperative behind Nazi actions. If the ground of Nazism has by now been very well raked over, it remains no less fertile today than at any point in the last fifty years.

The subject of this study — the religious dimensions of Nazi ideology — is also tied to a larger phenomenon: the contemporary reemergence of a religious imperative in human societies. Whether considering the rise of Muslim fundamentalism, the intervention of evangelical Protestantism in South America, or the resurgence of Orthodoxy in eastern Europe, observers today note both the persistence and the modernity of religious expression. They understand

better than a previous generation of scholars that religion is not static, moving unalterable over time, but rather affects and interacts with its secular environment. In the process of fostering change in societies, religion also undergoes change. Past centuries, usually seen through a secular frame of reference, have been increasingly recast in a religious light. By reintroducing religion into their field of vision, historians have been able to add new meanings and new significance to our understanding of past events, without attempting to reject or replace other fields of vision. This study has attempted to do the same for Nazism.

In this study I have argued that two main currents of religious thought, each with their internal nuances and variations, prevailed in the Nazi movement. One of them, “positive Christianity,” proclaimed that Nazism was compatible with, even derived from, varieties of Christian thought. Positive Christians suggested that Nazi ideology were predicated on a Christian understanding of Germany’s ills and their cure. In the eyes of these Nazis, the Jew was an enemy of Christianity as well as of Germany and the Aryan. Marxists and liberals were not simply the exponents of rival social theories, but embodied dangers to the moral and ethical beliefs of “Aryan” Germans. For the positive Christians of the party, radical upheavals of war and revolution in German society required new, radical solutions. In many ways, the extreme answers these Nazis provided went beyond the previous bounds of Christian practice in Germany. Whereas past forms of Christian politics were known to embrace nationalism, antisemitism, antimarxism or antiliberalism, these Nazis took these ideologies to new levels. This did not make them un-Christian, but differently Christian. There were millions of Catholics and Protestants in Germany who did not think Nazism represented their interests or aims; but there were many others who regarded Nazism as the correct Christian response to what they saw as harsh new realities.

The other principal current of religious thought in the Nazi movement was paganism. One finds distinctions and nuances here as well. Nonetheless, the basic ingredient of paganist

belief was the determination to create a new religion that would link the individual directly to God, unfiltered by intermediary, worldly authorities. Proponents of this new religion sought to move Germans' spiritual center from Jerusalem or Rome to Germany, and to introduce new objects of worship to the *Volk*. However, even as these paganists professed their detachment from Christianity and rejection of its "stiffened" dogmas, with marked consistency they appropriated Protestantism as a barometer of Germanism. If they rejected Jerusalem, like many positive Christians they hailed Wittenberg. If they dispensed with Christianity as Jewish, almost to a man they made Jesus into an Aryan. If they despised Christian meekness and humility, they nonetheless found praise for a Christian social ethic. If they rejected most of Christian dogma, they elevated past Christian figures as the intellectual forefathers of their new system. In these ways, they demonstrated an ambiguous, partial and often contradictory detachment from Christianity. Rosenberg in particular, convinced that he had successfully outlined a new religious belief system, salvaged many dimensions of the Christian worldview for his new, un-Christian faith.

Once in power, Nazis undertook to coordinate all aspects of national life into the all-embracing topos of the Nazi worldview. As their totalizing agenda gradually and partially came to fruition, institutional rivals came under increasing attack. The enduring hope among leading Nazis for a Protestant Reich Church — when all other autonomous sources of power in German society were rapidly being suppressed or banned — demonstrates a willingness and desire on behalf of the Nazi leadership to seek cooperation with a variety of institutional Christianity in the building of a new Germany. Those Nazis who sought such a relationship were attempting both to enter and extend an historical coupling of Germanness and Protestantism embedded in nationalist discourse. By 1937, however, the split within Protestantism was recognized by both church leaders and leading Nazis as precluding the possibility of a Reich Church. Only then did the Nazis turn their wrath against all forms of institutional Christianity. Seen in this light, the

anticlericalism of the Nazis was not simply the product of an ideological opposition to Christianity “across the board.” Hitler’s estimation of Christianity undoubtedly diminished near the end. But even while he claimed to be unambiguously opposed to Christianity, he revealed considerable ambivalence and even contradiction in his views on Christian precepts. As well, he betrayed a persistent — if idiosyncratic — affection for Christianity’s founder.

The Nazi party was not a clerical party run by churchmen, even though churchmen were present in its membership. Many of its members expressed clear hostility to Christianity, though frequently this hostility was fraught with tension and ambivalence. Nazism chose to take the form of a secular party instead of an explicitly religious movement, as some of its earliest members had wanted. Nevertheless, among wide circles Nazism was inflected by key elements of Christian discourse. Many Nazi leaders, paganist and Christian alike, revered Jesus as someone whose personal “struggle” against the Jews served as inspiration for their own struggle. Among paganists and Christians both, Luther was cast as a great national hero *and* religious reformer: as the first German, the first Protestant, and, by implication, the first Nazi. Many party leaders demonstrated their belief that Christianity was deeply relevant to Nazi ideology. They did so in their private conversations, their writings and their actions, both before 1933 and after.

Looking to the Holocaust as the ultimate metaphor of Nazi practice, the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman suggests that Nazism should not be viewed as the failure of civilization, but rather its product: “We suspect (even if we refuse to admit it) that the Holocaust could merely have uncovered another face of the same modern society whose other, more familiar, face we so admire. And that the two faces are perfectly comfortably attached to the same body. What we perhaps fear most, is that each of the two faces can no more exist without the other than can the

two sides of a coin.”¹ Bauman continues by adding that “often we stop just at the threshold of the awesome truth ... that every ingredient of the Holocaust — all those things that rendered it possible — was normal.”² The dualism Bauman alludes to was itself predicated on a dualistic understanding of human behavior available in western, Christian civilizations. This dualism was for many Nazis an integral part of their worldview. Nearly all the Nazis surveyed here believed they were defending the good by waging war against evil, fighting for God against the Devil, fighting for the German against the Jew. Many of them, and a substantial portion of Germany’s Christians, were convinced that Nazism did not mean the death of God, but the preservation of God.

¹ Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Ithaca, 1989), 7.

² *Ibid.*, 8-9.

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