REFORMED AND LUTHERAN OPPOSITION TO NATIONAL
SOCIALISM IN GERMANY, 1933 - 1945

by

D. Wayland Marler

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the
DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of
MASTER OF ARTS
In the Graduate College
THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

1966
STATEMENT BY AUTHOR

This thesis has been submitted in partial fulfillment of requirements for an advanced degree at the University of Arizona and is deposited in the University Library to be made available to borrowers under rules of the Library.

Brief quotations from this thesis are allowable without special permission, provided that accurate acknowledgment of source is made. Requests for permission for extended quotation from or reproduction of this manuscript in whole or in part may be granted by the head of the major department or the Dean of the Graduate College when in their judgment the proposed use of the material is in the interests of scholarship. In all other instances, however, permission must be obtained from the author.

SIGNED: D. Wayland Martin

APPROVAL BY THESIS DIRECTOR

This thesis has been approved on the date shown below:

JAMES DONOHUE
Professor of History

Date: 20 October 1965
ABSTRACT

The historic alignment of Church and State in Germany underwent significant change during the years of National Socialist power. Hitler's attempts to control the life of the churches resulted in their departure from the traditional union of Church and State operative in Germany since the time of Luther.

The process of this change is traceable in the proceedings of the great church councils of the early 1930's, the theological writings of Dr. Karl Barth, the sermons preached by Pastor Martin Niemoeller, and the writings and political activities of Pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

The activity of the councils gave rise to the segment of Protestant opposition to Hitler known as the "Confessional Church." Dr. Barth contributed the ideological basis for the movement. Pastor Niemoeller organized the Pastor's Emergency League (Pfarrernotbund) along Confessional principles, and he preached fearlessly against the evils of National Socialism. Pastor Bonhoeffer gave justification to the Church's stand in his teaching, writing and his participation in intrigue against the Hitler government. The record of these events provides a valuable insight into the nature of the opposition offered to Hitler by Germany's Protestants.
INTRODUCTION

In the years since 1945 the dramatic story of the resistance by Germans to Hitler's regime has received increasing interest. The accounts of members of the underground, eyewitness observers and war historians have brought this little-known phase of the Nazi years forcefully to the world's attention.

The opposition to National Socialism within Germany did not manifest itself in any concerted, organized movement such as appeared in "occupied" countries, for obvious reasons. Further, what opposition was offered came from a variety of groups and individuals whose several viewpoints on the nature of their own struggle hardly allowed for unity of program, nor even of purpose. Therefore, the "resistance" (Widerstand) did not confront the Nazis with any unified, centrally directed effort. Rather, various "circles" (Kreise) developed, whose motives and aims in regard to National Socialism were largely determined by their orientations—organized labor, military, Communist, religious or other.

The reasons for this situation are now understood outside Germany much better than formerly and do not require re-examination here. These facts serve to remind, however,
that the German resistance must be studied under a variety of headings. Our present concern is with that opposition offered by the religious element, specifically, German Protestantism.

Even a cursory examination of the history of this resistance to National Socialism reveals that German Protestants had to face at least three basic problems as they sought to relate themselves to the new national government. These were, briefly:

1. The Protestants were themselves disunited.

2. The National Socialist "world view" (Weltanschauung) posed some serious doctrinal threats to Protestantism's historic faith, and Hitler's concept of the "co-ordinated" (gleichgeschaltet) state was no less menacing in the area of ecclesiastical polity.

3. Evangelical Christianity in Germany stood in the mainstream of a Reformation tradition which, under the imperative of scripture and Lutheran teaching, demanded loyalty and obedience to the existing political arrangements within the national state.

In considering the latter problem, this study endeavors to show that the threat of National Socialism, at once doctrinal and ecclesiastical, forced German Protestants to re-evaluate their historic commitment to support of the state. This re-evaluation resulted in the formation of another organ of "opposition" within Hitler's Germany—the Confessional Church.
The study will include a brief summary of the Protestant position regarding the national government from the time of Luther to the advent of Hitler, the reassessment of that position during the Nazi dictatorship, and, following this, some of the events which attended the process.

These events perhaps focus themselves best in the great synods of the 1930's and in the work of Karl Barth, theologian of Bonn and Basel; Martin Niemoeller, pastor of the Church of Jesus Christ at Dahlem; and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, pastor among London's Germans, seminary director in Pomerania and close associate of Admiral Canaris' Secret Service (Abwehr).

Much of the history of "Confessional" Protestantism is bound up with the synodal movement and with these three personalities. Dr. Barth, the dominant figure in Protestant theological thought for half a century, provided the doctrinal impetus for the "Confessionals" as well as the actual texts for many of their declarations. Pastor Niemoeller, once convinced of the menace to the faith which National Socialism presented, became a tireless and courageous opponent of the Nazis, stirring Germany and the world with his powerful sermons. Pastor Bonhoeffer, a highly regarded young cleric and theologian, firmly resisted National Socialism during the war years, and, from one of Hitler's death cells, gave the world a record of his reflections
which proved a vital contribution to Germany's Protestant conscience.

It is the conclusion of this study, that the work of the synods and the activities of these men reflect a profound change in the Protestant mind concerning the Church's relationship to the State. These "Confessionals" viewed the clash between Protestantism and National Socialism as one involving no less than a basic choice between the Master and the Fuehrer and, therefore, profoundly re-aligned themselves in respect to the government, stoutly affirming in the process, "We must obey God rather than men."

The following special terminology should be noted. The term "Protestant" will be used synonymously with "Evangelical," both denoting, in the grand historical sense, the collective totality of non-Catholic, Christian confessions within Germany. German usage prefers "Evangelical," but the real difference is slight. "Church" will carry the same meaning.

When "churches" is used it will refer either to the state churches (Landeskirchen) or to the local congregations (Gemeinden), and the distinction will be made at that point.

"Confessing Church" or "Confessional Church" will render the terms Bekennenden Kirche or Bekenntniskirche.
Either should be understood as including all Protestants of Germany, of whatever denomination, who adhered to the confessional principles of Barmen and to similar declarations, and who offered opposition to the Nazis on that basis.
CHAPTER I

When Adolf Hitler came to power in 1933, it was with the tacit if not active approval of many of the members of the German Church, who saw in National Socialism possible salvation for a nation plunged in economic and social distress. Nor did the Church lack cause for its optimism. The Nazis had publicly proclaimed themselves champions of Christianity and had labored to create the impression that they stood as guardians against the onslaught of "godless Bolshevism" and the submergence of the ideals and culture of the West.

Gottfried Feder, principle author of the program of the National Socialist Party in 1920, included in that program:

We demand liberty for all religious denominations in the State, insofar as they are not a danger to it and do not militate against the morality and moral sense of the German race. The party as such stands for positive Christianity, but does not bind itself in the matter of creed to any particular confession.

This was the famous "point 24" of the program. In 1924 the German public was presented with these party aims.

In 1926 Hitler declared them to be unalterable.

But the churches of Germany did not place their hopes solely in the party program and its assurances. After all, Herr Hitler had been bidding for power during the twenties and could be expected to placate the fearful. What would he do when he received that power?

Hitler could hardly have made a more auspicious beginning. On March 21, 1933, in the company of the venerable von Hindenburg, the new National Socialist Chancellor of Germany journeyed in formal attire to the hallowed old Garrison Church in Potsdam, where he participated in some most impressive religious and civil ceremonies marking the advent of his regime and the opening of the Reichstag. Solemn services, both Catholic and Protestant, were conducted, in which a glittering assembly, Nazis included, solemnly joined. The blessings of the Almighty were invoked upon the nation and its leadership. Amidst the array of splendid banners and uniforms of the old Reich, and in the presence of the aged president who symbolically embodied the tradition and glory of Germany, Hitler piously entreated in his "inaugural":

May Providence . . . grant us that courage and perseverance of which this spot . . . reminds us and give us . . . the strength to fight for the freedom and greatness of our people.2

But if there were those churchmen who remained unconvinced, Hitler's address two days later was meant to resolve all doubt. With his enabling act safely bullied through a Reichstag purged of leftist elements, he spoke before that body concerning the aims of his new government.

On the Church question he said:

The government being resolved to undertake the political and moral purification of our public life, are creating and securing the conditions necessary for a really profound revival of religious life. The advantages of a personal and political nature that might arise from compromising with atheistic organizations would not outweigh the consequences which would become apparent in the destruction of general moral basic values. The National Government regard the two Christian confessions as the weightiest factors for the maintenance of our nationality. They will respect the agreements concluded between them and the federal states. Their rights are not to be infringed. 3

With these promises from the chief of state, most Protestants in Germany prepared themselves for what seemed to be the renewal of the historic relationship of the German Church to the German State, a relationship carefully constructed in rather rigid patterns since the time of the Reformation, and recently altered in the coming of the Weimar democracy. The Lutheran tradition always aligned the Church in support of the German State. Yet that same

tradition was not without ambiguities—serious problems which developed into a curious spectacle during the Church's struggle in the Third Reich. Both church and state appealed to the authority of Luther in defending their respective positions. The Church regarded the great reformer as its spiritual patron, a fearless rebel against oppression and an unwavering follower of the dictates of his Lord. Hitler viewed Luther as an arch-nationalist, a staunch ally of secular power, and even as an anti-Semite. There was justification for both views.

The background of church-state relations in Germany indicates why 1933 seemed to hold such promise for the Church's future. In medieval Europe temporal government was held to be subservient to ecclesiastical authority, and, at the pleasure of that authority, subject to deposition. The Church and State were closely linked, with the former being nominally dominant. Theoretically, members of the clergy were not responsible to secular officials for their actions, rather, the reverse was true. As an individual entered the fellowship of the Church through baptism, he also became a citizen of the political unit. Excommunication from the Church meant the loss of citizenship as well, though in actual practice this remained somewhat unusual. The heretic possessed no legal rights. The threat of interdict forced secular authorities to obey the Church. The structure of
this system was based ultimately on the thinking of Justinian and, with the exception of a few souls like Dante, had few challengers until the modern period. But Lutheran concepts were entirely different.

German Protestantism may be said to have begun its career with an appeal to the state. Its founder and guiding spirit, the Saxon monk Martin Luther, owed his very life to the good offices of his guardian patron, Elector Frederick, a power among the German princes. Luther seemed to feel in 1517 that his protests against the abuse of indulgences and against other dubious practices in the Roman Church, would find papal approbation. But he was soon disabused of that notion and fled the austere presence of Cajetanus in Augsburg in 1518, when that noted prelate declared the pope's mind.

Casting about for support in his efforts, Luther settled upon an alliance with the princes, which he hoped would both take advantage of whatever nationalistic spirit Germany might possess, and, at the same time, exploit the nobility's jealous guardianship of its own privileged status. As early as the Leipzig Debate of 1519, Luther's own ideas on the church-state relationship were beginning to be recognized and challenged by champions of the Church's traditional view:

Luther . . . declares that ecclesiastical obedience is not based on divine right, but that it was introduced by the ordinance, of men or of the
emperor...when I pressed upon him, "If the power of the pope is only of human right and by the consent of believers, whence comes your monk's costume that you wear?"

But Luther was not to be silenced with semantics or dogmatic hair-splitting. A year later, in one of the most notable of his early works, he began to make clear his hopes for an alliance of Lutheranism with the secular powers:

Forasmuch as the temporal power has been ordained by God for the punishment of the bad and the protection of the good, we must let it do its duty throughout the whole Christian body, without respect of persons, whether it strike popes, bishops, priests, monks, nuns, or whoever it may be, . . . . Poor Germans that we are—we have been deceived! We were born to be masters, and we have been compelled to bow the head beneath the yoke of our tyrants, and to become slaves. Name, title, outward signs of royalty, we possess all these; force, power, right, liberty, all these have gone over to the popes, who have robbed us of them. They get the kernel, we get the husk . . . . It is time the glorious Teutonic people should cease to be the puppet of the Roman pontiff. Because the pope crowns the emperor, it does not follow that the pope is superior to the emperor . . . . Let the emperor then be a veritable emperor, and no longer allow himself to be stripped of his sword or of his scepter.

This calculated appeal to the ambitions of the nineteen year old emperor also made an impression on the

---


princes who were anxious to assert their authority over the clerics in their several domains. Lutheranism appeared on the verge of a powerful alliance with the princes.

While Germans possessed no national government that could unite them in the sixteenth century, they were beginning, through Luther's efforts, to awaken to some recognition of their common heritage. The masses were especially attracted to such ideas as the non-payment of papal taxes, the congregational selection of priests, the rejection of ikons. As late as 1522 it seemed that the Lutherans might win the support of the entire German populace.

But in 1524 began a series of reverses which soon resulted in bitter strife within Germany--strife which mortally divided the people and drove Luther to make an irrevocable commitment of his movement to the keeping of temporal powers.

The first of these setbacks occurred when Erasmus, spokesman for the humanists, attacked Luther's position on the freedom of the will, arguing for an emphasis upon man's freedom to choose God. Lutheran's reply restated his predestinarianism, virtually determinism, and the breach between Luther and the humanists became irreparable.

---


The second threat was posed by a developing radical element within Lutheran ranks, led by such men as Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt and Thomas Muenzer. These leaders took their cause to the masses and formed religious communities which rejected traditional worship, destroyed images, defied both church and secular authority and advocated the forceful eradication of clerical abuses. Muenzer and his followers were later active in the third great crisis for Lutheranism, the Peasant Revolt. 8

The rebellion of the German peasantry in 1524 and 1525 was not entirely due to religious causes by any means. Economic ills and political suppression were more basic factors, but the religious agitation of the day provided a prime vehicle for the expression of popular discontent. The economic roots of the peasant problem were evident in demands set forth by the peasants in March, 1525. 9

But the excesses of the revolt were such that Luther, whose religious reforms were being identified with rebellion in the public mind, decided to issue his famous pamphlet in which he called upon the rulers to ruthlessly crush the revolt. 10 This was done, and the

8. Luther termed them “fanatics” (Schwaermer).
9. For a text of these articles see Kidd, op. cit., pp. 174-179.
10. Against the Robbing and Murdering Hordes of Peasants, 1525. See Works of Martin Luther, trans. C.M. Jacobs (Philadelphia, 1931), IV, 247-256.
masses felt that Lutheranism had betrayed them into the hands of the princes. As a result the Lutheran cause lost much favor with the German people and became even further identified with the privileged classes. By 1525 Luther had fully entrusted the protection of the movement to the German princes.

The natural result of this situation was the firm establishment of the practice by which the prince fixed the religion of his subjects according to his own persuasion. Thus the princes were not only protecting but were propagating Lutheranism as well. This principle, *cujus regio, ejus religio*, was ultimately incorporated into the Peace of Augsburg in 1555. Although its impracticality soon reduced its wide use, the principle nevertheless contributed strongly to the tradition of secular and spiritual unity in Protestant Germany.

When the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 ended the unfortunate Thirty Years War, Protestantism could muster only a fragment of its former strength in Germany. Since the Council of Trent in 1563 the Counter-Reformation had continued to gain ground, augmented by the military success of Catholic troops. Thousands of Protestants fled Germany during these years, and the early eighteenth century saw their establishment in New World colonies such as Pennsylvania.
With the weakness and isolation of the remaining Protestant communities in Germany, a large, united Evangelical Church (the Calvinists had been granted status in 1648) was impossible. The result was the further development of the "territorial system," an attempt at organization made by the several Landeskirchen. These had been brought into existence by Lutheranism but were deprived of the traditional organization of ecclesiastical affairs by that same Lutheranism. Simply, this system provided for a "general superintendent" who would preside over a council of theologians, jurists and public officials and would, in conjunction with the council, order ecclesiastical affairs. Other officials would be charged with the administration of the various dioceses. While this system was not dissimilar to the traditional hierarchical structure of the Roman Church, it possessed one all-important difference. The various officials and councils were to be appointed not by churchmen but by the prince. The ascendency of secular power was firmly established. The "territorial system" was instituted in Saxony in 1527 and became a model for other states in later years. All the German states with any appreciable non-Catholic population, whether Lutheran or Reformed, generally adopted some similar form of polity.

As the Prussian state began a significant rise soon after the Thirty Years War, it may be well to consider
further Protestant development in that state. Under the aegis of Frederick William, the "Great Elector" (1640-1688), East Prussia and Brandenburg (united since 1618 and later simply called "Prussia") began to assume the leadership in religious as well as political affairs.

Frederick William moved effectively to establish an atmosphere of religious tolerance which was far ahead of its time. Roman Catholics found him most reasonable. Huguenots, expelled from France by the Bourbon revocation of the Edict of Nantes, were welcomed and aided by the elector. But the relationship of the Church to the State established in the Reformation had not been disavowed. Frederick William refused to sanction free synods among the Protestants and continued to appoint the high "consistory" or church governing council.

Frederick the First, son of the "Great Elector," showed no disposition to deviate from the policy of central control of the churches, nor did his successor, Frederick William the First. The latter monarch, coming to power in 1713, introduced a rigor into the Prussian scene which laid heavy emphasis upon a regulated state disciplined by extreme militarism and Lutheran Pietism.

A word should be said here concerning the development of Pietism and its influence upon German Protestantism. With the death of Luther and the succession of the Melancthon
humanists (or "Philippists" as they were often called),
Lutheranism rapidly came to be a sterile, dogmatic religion
whose adherents belabored each other over minute doctrines
in an effort to establish a new orthodoxy. The pulpit
became, at times, a sounding board for doctrinal squabble
rather than a voice of comfort and counsel to the faithful.

But the positive light of the Protestant spirit had
not been entirely extinguished. It survived in written
works like Arndt's True Christianity, read by the glow of
campfires between battles of the Thirty Years War; in the
sermons of Grossgebauer and Schupp, and in the mystical
spirituality of men like Jakob Boehme.\[1\]

While pietism expressed itself in several forms,
its every version commonly included at least the following
elements: an emphasis upon simple, objective faith, a
preference for emotionalism over intellectualism, an em­
phasis upon the doctrine of the "new birth" and the
fellowship of the "twice born," a devotional study of the
scriptures, emphasis upon the "priesthood of believers,"
and a quest for personal holiness in the individual life.

The impact of the pietists and their leaders,

\[1\]. For a discussion of these influences see Andrew
Drummond, German Protestantism Since Luther (London, 1951),
Chap. 3.
Spener, Francke and Zinzendorf, left a profound impression on the religious life of Germany's Protestants. Pietism introduced an introspective, "other world" quality which stamped Protestantism a religion of the inner man, to be characterized by personal piety, spiritual reflection and cultivation of individual holiness. Despite the social gospel movement of the nineteenth century, this quality had by no means passed from Protestantism in Germany at the time of Hitler's rise, and it left the Evangelical Church at a distinct disadvantage, when it tried suddenly to realign its relationship to the state.

The skepticism of Frederick the Second and the opening of his court to the French enlightenment further encouraged the "inward" tendencies of Protestant expression (more so among Lutherans than Reformed) while making stronger the official ties of the Church to the State. During this period the clergy came to be regarded as officials of the state, and they assumed certain administrative duties within their parishes in addition to their ecclesiastical functions.

The reign of Frederick William the Second was marked by a severe reaction against the enlightenment and

---

12 Spener's *Pia Desideria*, 1675, is often cited as a model of devotional material and as the real foundation of pietism.
a return to strict standards of state control over the churches. Again, Frederick William the Third enlarged and solidified this control when in 1808, by decree, he transferred the jurisdiction in ecclesiastical affairs to the Ministry of the Interior, a situation which would prevail on into the Third Reich. In 1817 he decreed a union of the Lutheran and Reformed Churches. Never before had the power of the State over the Church been more apparent.

Liberal elements within the Church hoped to alter this situation by allying themselves with the forces in Germany which were working for political reform. When the Revolution of 1848 broke out it seemed to hold the promise of a new day for the Church. There was talk of a Declaration of Rights and a free "People's Church." But when the armed might of Austria crushed the revolution the liberal cause was lost. Individual princes renounced agreements concerning ecclesiastical freedom which had been forced upon them by revolutionary pressures. William the First did carry out certain organizational reforms, but they had little lasting effect, for the monarch remained *summus episcopus*.

William the Second took the responsibility of this "office" quite seriously and literally, and intervened in every area of church life. His great war effort from 1914 to 1918 was marked by considerable religious fervor, a
situation which would have seemed strange indeed during earlier Hohenzollern years. The Church, almost without exception, gave wholehearted support to the Fatherland, and was rewarded by a resurgence of "official" emphasis upon matters spiritual. But in 1918 the whole political structure collapsed.

With the emperor, its protector and patron, removed, and with the princedoms, the power of the traditional alliance, abolished, the Church was at loose ends. With no great support from the masses because of its historical alignment, possessing no political organ such as the party representing the Catholics, and precluded from any strong proletarian alliance by its stance in the social struggle, the Evangelical Church was now adrift, intact within the states but having no substance of national union.

It was in this condition that the historic Landeskirchen assembled themselves at the hallowed Wittemberg Schlosskirche in 1922. Heirs of the cujus regio, ejus religio principle, the "territorial system" of established churches, and the Hohenzollern legacy of strict imperial control, the Landeskirchen formally united themselves under the imposing title of German Evangelical Church Union. In an effort to organize in the spirit of the new Weimar Constitution, whose Articles 135-137 guaranteed liberty of conscience to all citizens and equal rights
and freedom of association to all religious bodies, the Landeskirchen determined to act in concert when desirable, while restricting individual state churches in no way. As this hopeful step was taken at Wittemberg, in Munich, Adolf Hitler had just been elected president of a rabble-rousing, rightist political group, the National Socialist German Worker's Party. The stage was set for Protestantism's sweeping reappraisal of itself and of the Obrigkeit.
CHAPTER IX

The enthusiasm with which many churchmen greeted the coming to power of the National Socialists soon began to give way to apprehension. At least two basic threats to Protestantism loomed almost immediately. The first of these represented both a doctrinal menace to the traditional faith and an ecclesiastical encroachment upon the voluntary association of Landeskirchen within the German Evangelical Church Union. The other danger employed a curious blend of German tradition, Nazi Weltanschauung and the appeal of national resurgence, in seeking to create a religious life and expression appropriate to the new society.

The reaction of the Evangelical Church to these threats expressed itself in a profound reappraisal of the historic relationship between the German Church and the German State. This development took concrete form in the emergence of the synodal movement whose great Church gatherings spoke out on these matters with a resolution which had not characterized their activities since the Reformation. We turn attention to several of these synods after a brief examination of the threats which called them forth.

Hitler's impact on German life did not leave the
Church unaffected. Various efforts soon materialized whose purpose was to reorganize and reorient German Protestantism and bring it more in line with National Socialism. This represented an attempt to extend Hitler's concept of the co-ordinated (gleichgeschaltet) state into the realm of religion. Nazi adherents saw this concept, which was working such profound changes in the economic, political and social order, to be the dynamic needed for religious renewal.

To complicate matters, in 1932 the "German Christians' Faith Movement" emerged as a significant force. It had been founded two years earlier under the leadership of a group of prominent men who were seeking to ally German Protestantism with the rising fortunes of National Socialism. Among these leaders were Prince Eitel Friedrich and Prince August Wilhelm, sons of the former Kaiser and ardent nationalists; Dr. Joseph Goebbels, editor of the party organ der Angriff; Wilhelm Kube, Nazi deputy in the Prussian Landtag; and one Dr. Wienecke, pastor of the cathedral in Soldin, whose contribution to the effort seems to have been development of a design whereby the cross and the swastika could be combined to form a new symbol for the new faith.

The "German Christians" sought to create a non-Catholic confession appropriate to the "new Germany" which would complement and loyally serve the Nazi State while
remaining a vigorous, effective religious force; to them this relationship seemed in no way contradictory.

The program of the "German Christians" varied according to time and locale and was chiefly determined by local leadership and the party line. Arthur Frey remarked:

A complete German Christian theology, or a coherent German Christian creed is not to be found. There are many of them, and they differ greatly in content from one another. The differences come from the difference of accent, some putting it on "German" and some on "Christian." That gives room for all sorts of variations and these do exist. But there were many people also who were convinced that it was possible, as a German Christian, to take one's stand directly on the ground of the Reformation confessions . . . . The number of those who saw from the start that the German Christian Movement meant the "renewing" of the Christian Church on the basis of the National Socialist world-view was relatively small.¹

Despite these differences, however, the "German Christian" program was frighteningly consistent in several basic tenets. These were declared, albeit in extreme form, on November 13, 1933, at the now famous rally in Berlin's Sportpalast. The featured speaker, Dr. Reinhold Krause, a "German Christian" layman, declared these tenets to include (1) a united, "racial" Christianity on the principle "one People, one Reich, one Faith"; (2) the divine revelation of a People's community based upon "blood and soil"; (3) a rejection of "foreign" elements in faith and morals; (4) an

equation of service to the state with service to God; (5) an exclusion of all non-Aryans from the Church. ²

The most disturbing part of Dr. Krause's address was that dealing with the attitude toward the Jews. Extreme anti-Semitism was characteristic of most of the "German Christian" groups. When the struggle for control of the Church became an open one, Reinhold Niebuhr wrote:

It is difficult for an outsider to arrive at fair judgments in all this confusion. The church conflict seems to me to be a clear case of honest Christians trying to save the church from political enthusiasts who want to subordinate the church completely to the state. Furthermore, the "German Christians" who are behind the Nazi program are so impossible in their anti-semitism that my sympathies are naturally with the more Lutheran church leaders. ³

Dr. Krause demanded the rejection of the entire Old Testament with its stories of "cow traders and pimps," the exclusion of Jews from Protestant churches and, he continued:

All superstitious passages must be removed from the New Testament, and in particular a radical revision must be made of the whole theology of the Rabbi Paul. The Church must be built on the pure teaching of Jesus, Love your Neighbor as yourself. We need no God on a distant throne, but Jesus the fighting hero. The places in Germany which have been drenched with holy blood mean more to us.

---

² For comments on this speech see ibid., p. 119.
³ "Notes from a Berlin Diary," Christian Century, L (July 5, 1932), 872.
than distant Palestine, because these places have drunk up the offering of the German struggle for freedom. 4

Needless to say there was a great outcry of protest from the churches against this speech, an outcry in which the more moderate "German Christians" themselves joined. The movement had revealed itself to be a distinct threat to the historic faith of the Church, but few realized how vitally it would affect the course of Protestant history during the Hitler years.

The Fuehrer, wishing a modus vivendi with the Church and facing the necessity to establish a point of contact with the Protestants, gave official encouragement to the "German Christians." He appointed one Ludwig Mueller, a personal friend and ardent Nazi, as their "protector" (Schirmherr). Despite this semi-official status, the "German Christians" hardly existed in sufficient numbers to allow them to speak for Germany's Protestants. 5 Privately, Hitler expressed his true feelings about the whole Church question:

The religions are all alike, no matter what they call themselves. They have no future, certainly none

4. Quoted in Heinrich Schmid, Apokalyptisches Wetterleuchten (Munich, 1947), p. 46. This violent speech was too much for the Nazis themselves in 1933, and, consequently, Dr. Krause received a reprimand and lost his position.

for the Germans. Fascism, if it likes, may come to terms with the Church. So shall I. Why not? That will not prevent me from tearing up Christianity root and branch, and annihilating it in Germany.6

The second major threat to traditional Protestantism in the 1930's was that posed by the new Nazi world view as expressed by Alfred Rosenberg. In 1930 this party seer and high potentate of the cult of blood and race, published his Mythus des 20. Jahrhunderts which soon achieved an importance second only to Mein Kampf as Nazi holy writ. This fantastic jumble of misinterpretation and historical inaccuracy addressed itself to history, anthropology, philosophy and the arts in its effort to marshal most cultural past in defense of the Nazi ethic.

The application of the concepts of "type," "race," "blood," "nation," "Aryan," "Nordic," to the Church could hardly be reconciled in the minds of many churchmen with:

Therefore as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have taken on Christ. In this state there is neither Jew nor Greek, in this state there is neither slave nor freeman, in this state there is neither man nor woman; because you are altogether one in Christ Jesus.7

In his attempt to discredit Christianity Rosenberg used one of the devices which is as old as Christianity's.


earliest critics, i.e., to make a distinction between the nature and work of Christ and the interpretations of that nature and work made by his followers through the centuries. Modern Christianity has often been charged with Paulism in contradistinction to "Jesus-ism." In simpler terms, the present faith is a creation of the Apostle Paul, rabbi and mystic, rather than a legacy from the Teacher of Nazareth. This view is carried to its logical conclusion, the discredit of Paul and the Jewish basis of Christianity, by Rosenberg in his first chapter. If this accurately reflected National Socialist theory, then the Church in Germany seemed destined for difficult days.

These two threats, the "German Christian" movement and the new theology of Rosenberg, called forth a response from the Church in the form of a basic rethinking of its historic relationship with the state. It is necessary now to look at several of the significant occasions on which this was done. They are known collectively as the Synodal Movement.

As early as January 11, 1933, while Hitler was involved in desperate intrigues in Berlin, twenty-one pastors assembled at Altona and, under the leadership of Pastor Hans Asmussen, issued a statement entitled, "A Word and Confession to the Need and Confusion in Public Life." Its message was one of definition and delineation of the Church's nature and
function. In five articles, the assembly declared the Church to derive from God with Christ as its Lord. Thus the nature and activity of the Church cannot be determined by any other power, be it state, party or Weltanschauung. The Church exists for all redeemed men regardless of social class or racial background. The Church is not to be used for garish displays of party pomp or nationalistic rallies. Nor can Church dogma be determined outside the context and teachings of holy scripture. This was a direct answer to the Nazi practice of investing certain party and folk heroes with virtual sainthood.

The significance of the Altona conference lay in two facts. First, the assembly had re-affirmed the reliance of the Church on its historic Reformation confessions. From this emphasis would soon arise the term "Confessing Church." Its second importance was that Altona represented the first notable attempt by a synodal group to define the Church in its new circumstances and repudiate National Socialism's designs to control it. Though Altona was later overshadowed by larger, more famous efforts, it should be seen as a vital beginning.

But, on April 3, 1933, the "German Christians"

opened a three-day congress in Berlin. Among other things it professed a "racial faith" in Jesus Christ and approval of Luther's "heroic piety." It also accepted the "Aryan Paragraph" as being applicable to church offices. In addition to a call for a Reichskirche and the Fuehrerprinzip it said, "Adolf Hitler's state calls to the Church, the Church must hear the call."9

But all was not in the nature of a positive program. The "German Christians" charged that the present Evangelical Union (organized among the state churches in 1922) was now operating in an unholy alliance with Marxists and the Catholic Center Party. "German Christians" further rejected any parliamentary church government as well as the Christian concepts of "world citizenship," pacifism and internationalism. A news account of this gathering quietly observed that, "The meeting ended with a solemn thanksgiving for the Lord's gift of Hitler to Germany."10

The effect of this congress upon other German Protestants can be imagined. The historic faith had been viciously attacked, the German Evangelical Church Union publicly denounced, an open bid made to tie Protestantism


to the National Socialist ideology, and all this done by a group claiming to speak for all German Protestants!

In the face of the mounting tension, Dr. Otto Dibelius, General Superintendent of the Mark of Brandenburg, wrote a letter to his pastors in which he reminded them that the doctrine of the inviolable Gospel was to be defended at all cost. He declared:

We are united in affirming that the Gospel stands in opposition to every human ideology, whether nationalist or socialist, liberal or conservative, and must not be subservient to the selfish wishes of men, but must judge, . . . 11

The divided Protestants now faced the necessity of finding some kind of unity and of establishing some official basis for their relationship to the Nazi government. While Hitler insisted on some form of union, he had no intention of permitting it within the framework of the organization most appropriate to the task, the Evangelical Union. The attitude of the Chancellor toward the Union was one of antipathy and distrust. 12

Dr. Kapler, president of the Evangelical Union, confronted with the sudden disintegration of the ten-year confederation and the hostility of the Nazi sponsored "German

12. For quotations revealing this attitude see Schmid, op. cit., p. 15.
Christians," valiantly attempted to function in this impossible situation. Near the end of April he called for a constitutional reform of the Church and for a firmly established union on the basis of the Confession.\textsuperscript{13}

Professing a keen interest in this reorganization, Hitler sent Mueller to "assist" the Evangelical Union in preparing a plan. Dr. Kapler and his colleagues, Bishop Marahrens of Hanover representing the Lutherans and Dr. Hesse of Elberfeld speaking for the Reformed churches, received Mueller graciously and let him participate. Officially he sat as a representative of the "German Christians," but actually he was little more than a political commissar.

At Loccum in May, the committee announced it had reached a compromise agreement. The proposed new Evangelical Church of Germany would be founded on the basis of the Confession. It would be headed by a \textit{Reichsbischof} who would have the assistance of a Spiritual Ministry (a sort of ecclesiastical cabinet) and a National Synod composed of the leading churchmen of all Germany. This compromise agreement between the spiritual position of the Confessionals and the ecclesiastical position of the "German Christians" did seem a promising solution. But it immediately became obvious that the key to power would lie in the office of the \textit{Reichs­­bischof}.

\textsuperscript{13} For a text of Dr. Kapler's statement on these matters see Hermelink, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 35.
On the 26th and 27th of May, the council nominated and elected Dr. Friedrich Bodelschwingh to this position. Beloved among German Protestants and highly respected in world church circles, he was the founder and administrator of the famous Bethel Institute, where his medical and social work in the name of Christ had drawn wide attention.

Mueller, who was seeking the nomination for himself, opposed Bodelschwingh and demanded a bishop from the "German Christians." Hitler supported him.14 A carefully organized flood of telegrams began to urge Mueller for the post. These messages were addressed to Hitler, to president Hindenburg and to Dr. Kapler. Dr. Kapler resigned and, while a synod convened at Eisenach to name a successor, the Nazis tried a new tactic.

Bernhard Rust, whose Education Ministry held nominal jurisdiction over church affairs, appointed one Herr Jaeger as State Commissar for the Evangelical Church of Prussia.

The action was entirely illegal. Recognizing this, Dr. Bodelschwingh resigned in protest, while the Prussian Superintendents refused to recognize Jaeger's authority. He reacted in typical Nazi fashion by placing the Prussian Church under police supervision and summarily dismissing

---

14. Hitler took a personal interest in the "German Christians" until their inadequacy became obvious. A.S. Duncan-Jones credits Hitler with the selection of the name "German Christians" in The Struggle for Religious Freedom in Germany, p. 33.
"hostile" pastors. One of the first of these to be relieved was Dr. Dibelius, the "German Christian's" old foe in Berlin.

Dibelius agreed to suspend his administrative activities pending a settlement of the crisis but refused to cease his duties as minister and bishop. In so doing he enunciated a cardinal principle which the Confessional movement would carefully retain. The latter duties, Dibelius held, were conferred by the Church and were not to be handed over at the demand of secular authority. He declared:

They remain my duties in the sight of God. I must and shall fulfil them--certainly at this time at which true spiritual guidance is needed more than ever by the Church.15

By June 30, the situation had become so chaotic that President Hindenburg felt compelled to intervene. He sent a message to Hitler in which he revealed "earnest concern" as an "Evangelical Christian as well as President of the Reich." He expressed confidence that Hitler would succeed in "restoring freedom to the Evangelical Church, and upon this basis thereby to bring about the desired unity of the various state churches."16

15. Quoted in Duncan-Jones, op. cit., p. 47.
16. For a full text of this note see Hohlfeld, op. cit., Vol. IV, Pt. I, p. 77.
Hitler could not risk a breach with the President so early in the Nazi regime. On July 12, only two weeks after Hindenburg’s note, the government announced that the Church had now completed its constitution, and elections would shortly be held to choose a Reichsbischof to succeed Bodelschwingh.

The constitution was a rather remarkable document to have been achieved under the circumstances. Article One declared:

The indisputable basis of the German Evangelical Church is the Gospel of Jesus Christ, as it is revealed to us in the Bible and interpreted in the Confessions of the Reformation. From this the full authority upon which the Church depends for her mission, will be determined and defined.17

Wilhelm Frick, Reich Minister of the Interior, had been appointed arbiter in the church dispute by Hitler at the time of the Hindenburg note. Frick now conveyed:

... to the United Church of Evangelical Germany the congratulations of the Reich government in that most memorable moment wherein that Church enters into the history of the German people.18

Two days later a law bearing the signatures of Hitler and Frick established the new constitution as the legal basis for Germany’s Evangelical Church. This act

was a fitting climax to the entire effort—an effort which succeeded only in emphasizing the Reformation tradition in Germany, i. e., a Church dependent for its very existence upon the State.

However much the strong doctrinal statements of the new constitution might seem to indicate a Confessional victory in the dispute, the "German Christians" had no intention of abandoning their designs on the leadership and control of the Church. On September 21st, aided by Hitler's radio speech in their behalf, they convened the first national synod under the new constitution and overwhelmingly elected Ludwig Mueller Reichsbischof. In the face of this and the Sportpalast scandal of the previous November, Pastor Martin Niemoeller led in the formation of the Pastor's Emergency League (Pfarrernotbund). This organization would soon prove to be the nucleus of the Confessional movement. It will be discussed more fully in Chapter IV. A week after the "German Christian" rally, the League declared:

We owe it to our congregations and to the Church to resist the falsification of the Gospel. We emphatically recognize the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the unique test of our faith and life and the confessions of our Fathers as the reformed explanation thereof.\footnote{Quoted in Schmid, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 58.}
The rapidly deteriorating relationship between the Church and Hitler's government caused Mueller to issue a declaration on January 4, 1934, forbidding preaching, writing or publishing anything concerning the church controversy. Penalty would be suspension and forfeiture of one-third income. In an immediate session at Halle, the Emergency League condemned this action, and the pastors present agreed to read the condemnation from their pulpits.

By the end of January matters had fallen into hopeless discord. A conference of church leaders with Hitler ended when the Chancellor, in a rage, forced the Lutheran bishops present to sign an agreement in which they declared, among other things:

. . . . their unconditional loyalty to the Third Reich and its Fuehrer. They sharply condemn all insidious criticism of the State, nation, and (Nazi) Movement that is apt to endanger the Third Reich. In particular they condemn the practice of using the foreign press to misrepresent the Church conflict as a fight against the State. The assembled Church leaders close their ranks behind the Reich bishop and are willing to carry out his measures and orders in the sense desired by him, to prevent opposition to them within the Church, and to strengthen the authority of the Reich bishop with all the constitutional means at their disposal. 20

Pastor Niemoeller and other members of the Emergency League refused to sign what they disgustedly considered an

abject surrender of their position. That night the offices of the League were entered and searched. A few days later a bomb exploded in the office. 21

With this chaotic and dangerous situation already looming, a second significant manifestation of the growing synodal movement occurred shortly after the beginning of the New Year, 1934. On January 3rd and 4th, 320 ministers and the representatives of 167 Reformed congregations assembled at Barmen, a name that would soon become synonymous with the Protestant opposition movement. 22 The group adopted a statement called "Declaration Concerning the Right Understanding of the Reformation Confessions of Faith in the German Evangelical Church of the Present." The author of this formidable sounding document was the Swiss theologian Karl Barth. 23

This notable declaration appeared in the form of five articles dealing with various aspects of the Church's nature and mission. Article III "The Church in the World"

21. For a description of these events see Dietmar Schmidt, Pastor Niemoeller. Tr. by Lawrence Wilson (London, 1959), pp. 91 ff.

22. This gathering should not be confused with the larger, more famous synod which met at Barmen later in the year, May 29-31. It will be discussed presently.

23. For an English text of the document see Cochrane, op. cit., Appendix V, pp. 230-234. Dr. Barth's opposition will be discussed more fully in Chapter III.
and Article V "The Form of the Church," are of greatest significance in seeing the Church's relation to the Hitler government.

Article III read in part:

2. In keeping with the instruction of God's word, the Church gratefully acknowledges that changes in the history of mankind and of nations, the political, philosophical and cultural experiments of men, are subject to the disposition (Anordnung) of the divine command and the divine patience. It therefore follows such experiments with its prayers of intercession in sober recognition of their temporal, finite, and limited justice, and also recalling God's kingdom, law and judgment, setting its hope in Him who guides all things in order to make all things new.

The view is thereby rejected that the Church could or should discern in the actual fact of this or that human experiment not so much a proof of divine patience as, rather, an approximation to the restoration of the divine order of creation.

3. The Church exists in the world under Holy Scripture. It serves men and people, State and culture, when it is concerned about being obedient to the Word of God prescribed for it and to his Holy Spirit with respect to its message and its form.

The view is thereby rejected that the Church has to serve man by accommodating its message and form to their momentary convictions, wishes, and purposes or by placing them at their disposal—theby obeying men rather than God.24

This dramatic language revealed a basic new departure from Protestantism's view of its own dependent allegiance to the state. Article V continued to define the nature and function of the Church, rejected the racial concepts of

Nazi doctrine for application to the Church and addressed itself to the now well known Gleichschaltung.

4. On the basis of the instruction of God's Word, the Church sees in the State an ordinance (Anordnung) of the divine command and divine patience, in virtue of which man may and should strive, within the limits of his understanding of reason and history and in responsibility to the Lord of lords, to discover justice and to administer and maintain it by force. The Church cannot deprive the State of this its own office; it cannot permit its message and its form to be determined by the State. Bound to its commission, it is in principle a free Church in a State which in principle is likewise free in being bound to its commission.

The view is thereby rejected that the State is the highest or even the only ("totalitarian") form of a historical reality visibly and temporarily fashioned to which therefore the Church with its message and form also has to submit and conform and into which it has to be integrated.25

These forceful words gave clear definition to the emerging Confessional position. After this declaration the Protestants of Barmen had little room for retreat or equivocation. The lines of struggle were now drawn.

The ultimate significance of this second declaration by the Confessionals should be noted in at least two aspects. First, it represented a confessional statement from the Church itself. The Barmen meeting had wide representation from the laity as well as the clergy. The confession adopted was the desired statement of those present. Secondly, though the assembly involved only those of the

Reformed tradition, the confession adopted spoke to the crisis of the entire Evangelical community and sought a united declaration acceptable for all. This became a reality five months later.

Thus, the time was now propitious for the greater gathering at the same place: Barmen. After a preliminary meeting of the Pastor's Emergency League in Dortmund on April 5th, the first national synod of the "Confessional" wing of the German Evangelical Church assembled May 29, 1934. The results of this meeting would prove decisive for the whole future course of the Protestant opposition to Hitler. The evangelicals at Barmen committed themselves to an allegiance and a statement of doctrine which permitted no compromise or concession. After this synod there remained no possibility of an ideological accord with the "German Christians," even those who were more moderate.27

After a preliminary statement deploring the constitutional situation, the Barmen declaration then addressed

26. For further discussion of this group see Chapter IV.

27. There was a moderate group within the "German Christians." Its position was generally far more orthodox on matters of doctrine than that of the majority. For the most part, these moderates subscribed to the Twenty Eight Saxon Theses as their doctrinal statement. For a text of this statement see Hermelink, op. cit., pp. 57-61.
itself "To the Evangelical Congregations and Christians in Germany." The opening article read in part:

... representatives from all the German Confessional Churches found themselves at one in confession of the One Lord of the One, Holy, Apostolic Church. They aimed neither at founding a new church, nor forming a union, because nothing was further from their intention than the abolition of the Confessional stand of our churches. Their desire was rather, in faithfulness, to resist unanimously the destruction of the Confession of Faith, and therefore, of the Evangelical Church in Germany.

The unity of the Evangelical churches of Germany can only come into being Spirit. Only in such a way does the Church become renewed...

The importance of this statement was not lost upon the German ecclesiastical community. The statement that the churches had no intention, by their coming together, of forming a new church or creating any sort of union, was a subtle but pointed answer to the Nazis' favorite weapon in the struggle with the Protestants—the emphasis upon organization, the founding of a new church. Through this declaration the Evangelicals gave notice that the Church already existed, "One, Holy, Apostolic," that union already existed, "from the Word of God in faith through the Holy Ghost," and that this gathering had convened for the purpose of affirming its collective belief in both that Church and that union.

28. Hermelink, op. cit., p. 108. All statements from the Barmen declaration quoted here are as published in Hermelink, pp. 108-115.
Against the Nazi concept of a "Racial Church" as an extension of the state, the declaration asserted:

The Christian Church is the community of brethren in which Jesus Christ, present as its Lord, acts. . . . . We reject the false doctrine that the Church is permitted to form its message or its order according to its own desire or according to prevailing philosophical or political opinions.

To a German people accustomed by centuries of tradition to a strong central authority, be it a local prince or emperor of the Reich, the declaration took its stand upon a principle implicit in the theology of the Reformation but never practiced to any extensive degree. This significant article declared:

The basis of all churchly office is the execution of service entrusted to the entire congregation. Therefore the Fuehrerprinzip is rejected in the Church.

To clarify the synod's attitude concerning the relationship to secular authority, the document continued:

The duties of State and Church are evident to separate. The State has, in the yet unredeemed world, to concern itself for Law and Peace, but is not the sole and total order of human life and cannot fulfill the Church's mission.

This paragraph was essentially a refutation of the practical basis of the National Socialist view that the State was to be the sole authority in all of national life.

Lest there be any misunderstanding or misinterpretation of the course that the Church was now choosing,
the Barmen Declaration concluded:

The Confessional Synod of the German Evangelical Church declares that it sees in the recognition of these truths and the rejection of these errors the indispensable theological basis of the German Evangelical Church as a Federation of Confessional Churches. It invites all those who are able to accept their declaration to keep these theological principles in mind in their decision in church politics. It asks all whom it concerns to return to the unity of faith, love and hope. 

\textit{Verbum Dei manet in aeternum.}

The great significance of the Barmen document lay in its departure from the Church's customary allegiance to the political authority. In one sweeping statement the Church had re-defined its nature, purpose, and course. It had rejected not only the ideology of the "German Christians" but also the semi-paganism of Rosenberg and his national cultists. The historic faith of the Bible was re-affirmed\textsuperscript{29} and also its interpretation through the Confessions of Augsburg and Heidelberg which had been the foundation of Evangelical Christianity in Germany for four hundred years. In rejecting the \textit{Fuehrerprinzip} for its government, the Church served National Socialism notice that it intended henceforth to order its own affairs in the light of its divine nature and purpose.

But perhaps the most formidable accomplishment of

---

\textsuperscript{29}. The declaration contained six scriptural quotations, one each to form the basis of the six articles in the Theological Declaration.
Barmen appeared in no confession or declaration. The Barmen Synod marked the end of the isolated, sporadic character of the opposition churchmen had heretofore offered the Nazis. Despite various confessional allegiances, the churches had discovered a unity which Hitler would need to weigh carefully in future dealings with the Evangelical Church. Now those who dared defy the Nazis had both creed and fellowship to which they could appeal.

This unity was forcefully emphasized later in the struggle. By May of 1937 a collapse of the Evangelical Union seemed imminent. The Nazis were highly pleased. By their continued meddling in church affairs through a government appointed "committee," they had succeeded in bringing the Confessional Protestants to a crisis. The Church seemed ready to divide on traditional, sectarian grounds. But on May 13, 1937, at the Fourth Confessional Synod in Halle, the Church representatives announced a great victory. The Confession of Barmen had been accorded status with those of the Reformation. Henceforth clergy would vow to be bound by the word of God as recorded in Holy Scripture, witnessed to in the Apostles', Nicene and Athanasian Creeds and in the Heidelberg Confession and

...as, in the face of the heresies of our time, it is newly confessed as binding in the Theological Declaration of the First Confessional Synod of the German Evangelical Church in Barmen.30

This in itself was a significant step, but it was not all. If there is one doctrinal question which had historically divided the two great streams of the Protestant Reformation, it is the question of the nature and purpose of the Eucharist. At Halle the Church declared:

Inter-Communion among Lutherans, Reformed and United is not justified by the situation existing in the Union. Separation among Lutherans, Reformed and United at Communion is not justified by the hostilities of the sixteenth century. Inter-Communion has its basis not in our knowledge of the Communion, but in the grace of Him who is Lord of the Communion. The difference among us about the doctrine of Holy Communion concern the nature and the manner of the self-imparting of the Lord in the Communion. They do not refer to the fact that the Lord himself is the gift of the Communion. Therefore the mutual participation of the other confessions in the Communion observance, just as common observances of Communion among Lutherans, Reformed and United, are not in contradiction to the scriptural administration of the Holy Communion.\(^3\)

The full effect of this declaration is difficult to imagine. The cleft had not only been healed, but a greater solidarity than believed possible had been achieved by the churches. Hitler could no longer be certain of the Protestants. He had been openly thwarted in his effort to control Evangelical Christianity in Germany.

---

\(^3\) Hermelink, op. cit., pp. 400-401.
CHAPTER III

In order to understand the Protestantism of the Confessing movement, it is necessary to examine the work of the man most responsible for its ideological basis—the theologian Karl Barth.

This highly controversial professor made his first impact on Protestant circles when, as pastor of the Reformed Church in the Swiss town of Safenwil in 1918, he published his commentary on the Epistle to the Romans. Re-written for a second edition in 1921, the book caused consternation among the liberal theologians of Europe. But its theology, however fascinating and revealing, cannot concern us here. What is important for our study is the view of the Church and State which Barth held at that time, the period immediately following the World War. In his discussion of the 13th Chapter of the Pauline Epistle, Barth comments:

"Let every man be in subjection to the existing ruling powers." Though subjection may assume from time to time many various concrete forms, as an ethical conception it is here purely negative. It means to withdraw and make way; it means to have no resentment, and not to overthrow. Why, then, does not the rebel turn back and become no more a rebel? Simply because the conflict in which he is immersed cannot be represented as a conflict between him and the existing ruling powers; it is, rather, a conflict of evil with evil. Even the most radical revolution
can do no more than set what exists against what exists. Even the most radical revolution—and this is so even when it is called a "spiritual" or "peaceful" revolution—can be no more than a revolt; that is to say, it is in itself simply a justification and confirmation of what already exists. For the whole relative right of what exists is established in its victory; whereas the relative right of revolution in its victory is in no way established by the relative wrong of the existing order. Similarly also, the power of resistance in the existing order is in no way broken by the victorious attack of revolution; it is merely driven backwards, embarrassed, and compelled to adopt different forms, and thus rendered the more dangerous; whereas the energy of revolution is dissipated and rendered innocuous—simply by its victory . . . . And so, in his rebellion, the rebel stands on the side of the existing order.

With this seemingly damning appraisal of any resistance offered to authority, even a "peaceful" or "spiritual" resistance, how was it that the theology of Karl Barth became the cornerstone of the Confessional movement—a movement which was, in itself, a revolt against the political authority in Germany and an affirmation of principles to which that authority was unalterably opposed?

The answer may lie in the difference between theoretical Christianity as expressed in a book, and personal encounter of a Christian with the Nazi State. From 1928 to 1933, events transpired which pointed Barth in a

different direction, if not theologically, at least practically.

From the pastorate of Safenwil, Barth was called to the university at Goettingen in 1921 where he became Honorary Professor of Reformed Theology. After four years he came to Muenster as Professor of Dogmatics and New Testament Exegesis. In 1930 he was named Professor of Systematic Theology at Bonn, from which position he was soon to clash with the Nazis.

Barth's early opposition to National Socialism, in accordance with his views on the nature of the state, was due not to any hostility toward the movement itself or even toward totalitarianism. In his theology the form of a government was not related to that government's right to claim the allegiance of a Christian subject. But the rise of the new "heathenism" as manifested in Rosenberg and in the German Christian ideology, discussed in the preceding chapter, was an entirely different matter. Barth said:

I am withstanding a theology that is today seeking refuge in National-Socialism, not the National-Socialist ordering of state and society.2

It was essentially this view which Barth expressed in the Barmen Declaration. The significance of a new

---

direction was not so much to be found in the theology of that document, as we have seen, but rather in its political implications. It had rejected outright any notion that "prevailing philosophical or political opinions" could be allowed any voice in the determination of the Church's faith or order. It had also rejected any application to the Church of the Nazi Fuehrerprinzip. It had delineated functions peculiar to itself and denied the right, or even the possibility, of interference in these functions by the political authority.

Despite these rejections of state interference and despite the new relationship of Church and State which was implied at Barmen, the essentially conservative Barthian viewpoint was evident in Article V, which said in part:

Scripture tells us that, in the as yet unredeemed world, the state has by divine appointment the task of maintaining law and peace, by the fullest exercise of human insight and capacity, by means of the threat and use of force. With gratitude and reverence to God, the Church acknowledges the benefit of this order he has instituted. 3

But it was becoming increasingly apparent that the Nazi threat was not limited to creeds or articles of faith. Nazi interference in church polity, the anti-Semitic emphasis, and the curtailment of church rights in matters of finance and property, all these served to undermine Barth's

otherwise basic position of loyalty to the state.

He soon fastened upon the problem of anti-Semitism as the key question in his developing antipathy to the National Socialists. In reply to the German Christians and others who demanded the expulsion of Christians of Jewish ancestry from the Church, Barth wrote in 1933:

Not by blood and therefore not by race is the fellowship of those who belong to the Church determined, but by the Holy Spirit and Baptism. If the German Evangelical Church were to exclude Christian Jews, or treat them as Christians of a lower grade, it would cease to be a Christian Church.4

It was this very point which was to focus much of Barth's further thinking on National Socialism. The Jewish question prompted him to see the nature of the Church's danger as being, indeed, theological, because the position of National Socialism revealed its ideology as a

basically anti-Christian counter-Church. The really decisive Biblical-theological ground for this assertion is to be found not in actions of National Socialism, but in the thing that has been so agitating us in the past few weeks, namely, its anti-Semitism in principle. . . . Here the Christian Church is attacked at its very root and threatened with death . . . . Anti-Semitism is sin against the Holy Spirit. For anti-Semitism means rejection of the grace of God.5

Barth's new views were rapidly taking shape in 1934 and 1935. In 1934 he was hailed before a Nazi court to

4. Quoted in Frey, op. cit., p. 142.
answer a charge that he had refused to take the unqualified oath to Adolf Hitler then required of all university professors. While his case was still before the courts, Barth prepared an address to deliver to a gathering of churchmen in Barmen, but the Gestapo interfered. In June, 1935, while the Barmen group was assembling, Barth was escorted to the Swiss border and instructed never to return to Germany. He had managed to get a copy of the address, Evangeliun und Gesetz, to the meeting, however, and it was read in his absence. The message suggested that Gospel and law are intimately related, that to know God is to keep His commandments, and proclaim Him Lord. The Church must maintain a "prophetic witness for the will of God against all of men's sinful presumption, against all their lawlessness and unrighteousness."  

During these early years of the conflict, Barth had begun to set down his theology in systematic preparation for the publication of a monumental work. It is helpful in understanding the Confessional movement, to examine some of that theology now, for it provided the framework on which the Confessing synods were built. Of

---


the nature of Christ, Barth believed:

God's freedom for us men is a fact in Jesus Christ, according to the witness of Holy Scriptures. The first and last thing to be said about the bearer of this name is that He is very God and very Man. In this unity He is the objective reality of divine revelation. His existence is God's freedom for man. Or vice versa God's freedom for man is the existence of Jesus Christ. 8

Such a belief accepts no folk-hero saviour, no belligerent opponent of "vested Jewry" as some German Christians wanted to picture Jesus. Nor does it permit the substitution of a nearly deified Fuehrer as the cornerstone of the true Church in Germany.

Of the Church itself, he wrote:

The Word of God is God himself in the proclamation of the Church of Jesus Christ. In so far as God gives the Church the commission to speak about Him, and the Church discharges this commission, it is God Himself who declares His revelation in His witnesses. The proclamation of the Church is pure doctrine when the human word spoken in it in confirmation of the Biblical witness to revelation offers and creates obedience to the Word of God . . . this is its essential character, function and duty. 9

Small wonder that the conscientious Confessionals could brook no interference with their freedom of the pulpit!

As the internal situation in Germany grew worse for the life of the Church, Barth's writings from Switzerland

8. Barth, Doctrine, p. 151.

9. Ibid., p. 743.
became more pointed and outspoken on the situation. He counselled the Confessional Church to stand firmly opposed to National Socialism. Of his own early attitude, he remarked:

It will always be a painful recollection for me that I myself, in the last two years, have not been more powerfully behind the direction we now must go. 10

In 1938, with German churches and theology schools being closed down, church properties confiscated, and churchmen arrested and imprisoned, Barth addressed himself to the question of the nature of the state and what may be expected when that nature is altered:

... the State, as such, belongs originally and ultimately to Jesus Christ; ... in its comparatively independent subpurpose, it should serve the Person and the Work of Jesus Christ and therefore the justification of the sinner. The State can of course become "demonic," and the New Testament makes no attempt to conceal the fact that at all times the Church may, and actually does, have to deal with the "demonic" state. 11

He went on to describe such conditions as might be expected to develop within such a state:

... the state becomes "demonic not so much by an unwarrantable assumption of autonomy as is often assumed—as by the loss of its legitimate, relative independence, as by a renunciation of its true substance, dignity, function, and purpose, a renunciation

10. From a letter to a German pastor. Quoted in Community, p. 42.

which works out in Caesar worship, the myth of the State, and the like.12

On the key question, the relationship of the community of Christians to that state, Barth was prepared to say in 1938:

... respect for the authority of the State which is demanded in Romans 13 must not be separated—in theory or in practice—from the priestly function of the Church. It cannot possibly consist of an attitude of abstract elasticity towards the intentions and undertakings of the State. ... the "subjection" required of Christians can not mean that they accept and take upon themselves responsibility for those intentions and undertakings of the State which directly or indirectly are aimed against the freedom of preaching. Of course it must be understood that even then the "subjection" will not cease. But their submission, their respect for the power of the State to which they continue to give what they owe, will consist in becoming its victims, who, in their concrete action will not accept any responsibility, who can not inwardly co-operate, and who as "subjects" will be unable to conceal the fact, and indeed ought to express it publicly, in order that the preaching of justification may be continued under all circumstances. All this will be done, not against the State, but as the Church's service for the State.13

With the theology of Barth, and later of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, making opposition to the Nazi State a spiritual obligation and equating it with the highest possible real service to that State, the Confessional Church was armed with a powerful ideological justification for its existence


13. Ibid., pp. 137-139.
and its activities. At this point Barth is led to entertain certain ideas of action, ideas which are taking shape in the final chapter. These ideas probably express more graphically than anything else the extent to which German Protestants in the Confessional Movement had departed from the traditional Protestant position on the Church's relationship to the German government.

Can serious prayer, in the long run, continue without the corresponding work? Can we ask God for something which we are not at the same moment determined and prepared to bring about, so far as it lies within the bounds of our possibility? Can we pray that the State shall preserve us, and that it may continue to do so as a just State, and not at the same time pledge ourselves personally, both in thought and action, in order that this may happen, without . . . . like Zwingli, reckoning with the possibility of revolution, the possibility, according to his strong expression, that we may have to "overthrow with God" those rulers who do not follow the lines laid down by Christ?14

The implications here are unmistakable. The question of actively opposing the Nazi regime is here tied to the very core of the Church's hopes, i.e., to its prayer for deliverance from oppression. Barth here raised the inevitable question that had to be decided not only by the several churches, but by individual Christians as well. How they answered it determined the extent of their "opposition" to Hitler. From those who were willing to "put feet to their prayers" emerged the Church's

contribution to the German underground. Such was the "re-thinking" of the renewed Church.

At the coming of the war, Barth had some vital things to say concerning its implications, not only for German Protestantism but for world Christianity. In the Fall of 1942 he wrote, chiefly for American readers, an analysis of the situation up to that time. It included the following judgment on the Church which sought to explain partially the Church's failure to come to grips with National Socialism in its early stages:

Protestantism was altogether lacking in the intellectually consistent direction which it had enjoyed in the days of Calvin. For this reason, in the last analysis, the individual churches were left to themselves in their anxieties and problems and in their dangerous vacillation between quietism on the one hand and a secularizing activism on the other. The result was that Protestantism became the voice of one crying in the wilderness, or, more accurately, a voice coming out of a corner.15

Barth felt that the situation had begun to improve at the end of the first World War, and, that the Church was in the midst of at least a modest renewal when Hitler gained power. The coming of National Socialism could have easily meant the reestablishment of the old ties of the Church to the State which had been severed by the four years of war, 1914 to 1918. It could have, that is, if

National Socialism had not taken the ideological direction which it did, resulting in the creation of a new "heathenism" within the nation. As Barth wrote:

Western civilization failed to confront National Socialism firmly because the realization of the Christian revelation among the civilized people of the West (Not only among the Germans!) had become dim. Men did not see the inherent atheism of the Hitlerian system. Hence, they could not be sure whether the antithesis between a legitimate state and a robber state, between democracy and absolute dictatorship, might not simply be a difference in taste, evaluation or political technique.16

Of the Church's primary concern with the interference of National Socialism with its own faith and order, and of his personal agreement with this early view, Barth wrote:

...it is necessary to realize that the fight of the Confessional Church was not directed against National Socialism as such. The latter's innate hostility to all things spiritual, as well as its anti-Christian tendency, were at that time only too well camouflaged. Most of the adherents of the Confessional Church, in fact, thought they could agree to, or at least sympathize with, the political and social aims of National Socialism. Their struggle was confined to the specific question whether the Church could remain the Church, i.e., could preach the Gospel according to the Old and New Testaments, or should be co-ordinated with the new political doctrine and combine its mission with it. Up to the year 1934, while I was in Germany, I myself thought that I could relegate my political opposition to the background and work only along that line.17

16. Barth, The Church and the War, p. 5.
17. Ibid., p. 8.
Barth did not equivocate in his denunciation of the Church's failures, his own included, at this very point. One further quotation, by way of summary, assigns a real blame to Protestant Christianity for the German situation that had been allowed to develop:

It is part of the pattern of things that German theology, which up to the time of the crisis gave guidance to the theologians of all the Protestant churches, should not have retained its leadership but instead should have become instrumental in leading men's souls astray. However, it is likewise part of the pattern of things that those of us who felt called upon to take up the conflict either did so too late or did not know how to find the enkindling and potent word which would awaken the nations and prevent the approaching calamity—although it was clear enough that this word should be spoken and equally clear where it could be found. Furthermore, the Protestant churches, in Germany as well as in all the other countries, with the possible exception of Norway, did not possess the "watchmen" and leaders who might have known how to rouse them. They showed themselves on the whole to be ill-prepared to meet the problems of the time. The steps actually taken thus far have necessarily had a spasmodic, personal, voluntary and therefore often arbitrary origin and character.18

Drawing certain conclusions and principles from the experience of the German Church, Barth prepared a letter in December, 1942, in reply to questions posed by a group of American Christians concerning the role of the Christian in a state such as that created by the Nazis, as well as questions on the role of the Church in wartime. To a question about the conflict of loyalties to a nation state and to

18. Barth, The Church and the War, pp. 15-16.
the Church Universal, Barth gave an answer which is helpful in understanding the later course of the Confessional opposition and of Barth's own developing viewpoint. He said in part:

"... the Christian will not fail to recognize and respect in the national state in which he lives, the essential, the internationally valid order of the true state instituted by God in his patience. Between the universal Church and the true state no essential or inevitable antithesis can exist, ... but he (the Christian) ... will stand consistently for the universal, all-uniting order of the righteous state, even while giving full recognition to the rightly understood interests of the national state in which he lives. Thereby he will seek and further the best interests of his national state likewise. He will ... resist everything in his national state which is incompatible with its character as the true state. He will, to the best of his ability, do his part to be perfect and keep the national state as a righteous state. He will of course be found among those who champion the effort to place international relations more and more completely on a basis on which national states can stand together as true states. A totally national state which serves only national interests ... would thereby ipso facto cease to be a righteous state. In this unrighteous state the Christian can show his civic loyalty only by resistance and suffering."

Of the Christian obligation to the war effort, Barth continued:

"If the Church is really preaching the Word of God, then this will mean active support of the war effort insofar as it testifies, with a clarity

---

19. The reader will note this to be far different from the Barth of Epistle to the Romans (cf. quotation, pp. 43-44 above). A similar change can be observed in the thinking of Dietrich Bonhoeffer as shall be seen.

20. Barth, The Church and the War, pp. 23-24."
consistent with the Word of God, that the carrying through of this stern police action against Hitler's Nihilism is a necessary task of the righteous state; . . . . 21

The full significance of the theology and the intellectual leadership by Karl Barth of the Confessional Church in Germany is not easy to measure or even discover. It is an indisputable fact that he was the foremost theologian of the movement. To what extent he charted the eventual course of the Confessional Movement, or influenced the resistance activities of the Church, is problematical. But it can hardly be denied that, at least in its written declarations and statements of faith, the movement depended heavily on the thought of the Swiss professor. Those documents which he did not actually compose or assist in doing so, still borrowed abundantly from his "dialectical" teachings. His personal experience of encounter with the National Socialists was reproduced on a larger scale in the Church itself. At first critical of the Nazis on matters of Church rights, he became their outspoken antagonist on spiritual and doctrinal grounds, as expressed in the Barmen Declaration. As a result of this opposition, Barth was banished.

21. Barth, The Church and the War, p. 29. In contrasting this statement with those quoted on pp. 49-50 above, it would seem that the war is the crucial factor in the changing stance. This was true with Bonhoeffer later.
Barth's struggle with National Socialism has been somewhat obscured by his post-war involvement in certain controversies concerning the Communist world and the relationship of the Church to that situation. Barth has not always been popular in the West for his outspoken opinions concerning Western Christianity and Western politics. This fact makes doubly difficult the task of making a fair evaluation of his contributions to the Protestant community which opposed Hitler in Germany. As long as this theological giant remains in our midst, vigorous and creative, it will remain almost impossible to assign him any fixed role in relation to the Church's struggle in the world of the twentieth century. For that reason, among others, our purpose in dealing with Barth's thinking, theological, ecclesiastical and political, has been confined to observing how that thought revealed a significant and basic change in the historic relationship between the Protestant Church in Germany and the political power that ruled Germany.

The essential conclusion which permitted Barth, and later Bonhoeffer, not only to oppose the state but actively to resist it, was the conclusion that true allegiance to that state on the part of a Christian or of the Church, consisted in just such resistance. That is, by resisting the state in its unrighteousness, the Christian
is really being true to that state and acting in its interests. His allegiance is to the "true" state or to the essence of the state as understood by the New Testament "state." To Barth this idea finally came to mean that only those Christians who opposed the state were, in fact, loyal to that state. Obviously, this became a powerful justification in the minds of many churchmen for a course of action which they felt to be right, but which seemed to conflict with all German tradition.

By the end of the war, Barth had this principle firmly fixed in mind as being vital to any apology for the Confessionals. After the war he wrote:

The Christian community "subordinates" itself to the civil community by making its knowledge of the Lord who is Lord of all its criterion, and distinguishing between the just and the unjust State, that is, between the better and the worse political form and reality; between order and caprice; between government and tyranny; between freedom and anarchy; between community and collectivism; between personal rights and individualism; between the State as described in Romans 13 and the State as described in Rev. 13. And it will judge all matters concerned with the establishment, preservation and enforcement of political order in accordance with these necessary distinctions and according to the merits of the particular case and situation to which they refer. On the basis of the judgment which it has formed, it will choose and desire whichever seems to be the better political system in any particular situation, and in accordance with this choice and desire it will offer its support here and its resistance there. It is in the making of such distinctions, judgments and choices from its own center, and in the practical decisions which necessarily flow from that center, that the Christian community expresses its
"subordination" to the civil community and fulfills its share of political responsibility.22

It is characteristic of Barth that he was unable to arrive at any such position until he could draw it directly from scripture interpretation. All opposition which he offered was made on this basis, and he held out no hope to the German Church for her success on any other basis. Once he was convinced from the scriptures that the Christian had a mandate to serve the "true" state by resisting the false one, he stood ready to prosecute that resistance to whatever its outcome.

Undoubtedly the best-known figure to emerge from German Protestantism's struggle with the Nazis has been Martin Niemoeller. Just as the theology of Karl Barth offered reflections of the new Confessional concept of the relationship of Church and State, so the sermons of Martin Niemoeller also revealed that new departure from traditional German Protestant thought. As Barth came to be generally recognized as the theologian of the movement, so Niemoeller became its chief spokesman from his pulpit at the Church of Jesus Christ at Dahlem in Berlin. His sermons and his activities in behalf of the opposition to Hitler, caused him repeated hardship and finally, in 1938, imprisonment for the duration of the war. His utterances on the Church-State problem are helpful in tracing the development of the new Confessional viewpoint.

Niemoeller's early enthusiasm for National Socialism is well known. Like thousands of other Germans, he felt that the Nazis offered the best hope of restoring Germany to a place of respectability and influence among the nations. With most of the other Protestant clergy, he opposed the new Germany as envisioned by the Weimar Republic. Shirer observes that traditional conservatism
was not the only factor in this Protestant attitude:

... the Weimar Republic was anathema to most Protestant pastors, not only because it had deposed the kings and princes but because it drew its main support from the Catholics and Socialists. During the Reichstag elections one could not help but notice that the Protestant clergy—Niemoeller was typical—quite openly supported the Nationalist and even the Nazi enemies of the Republic. Like Niemoeller, most of the pastors welcomed the advent of Adolf Hitler to the chancellorship in 1933.¹

But many of these same churchmen would soon be quite disillusioned by the actions of the new regime and by the church policies it initiated. As has been noted, the Protestants began to cast about for some means whereby they might maintain their position while continuing true to the obligations of creed and calling.

Niemoeller was in the midst of this group, and his convictions soon led him into conflict with the government he had welcomed. Like Karl Barth, one of his early points of opposition was the so-called "Aryan paragraph" within the life of the Church. Therefore, as early as October, 1933, he had drawn up an oath to be taken by the members of his Pfarrernotbund (Pastor's Emergency League) which included this important statement:

Under this vow I testify that a violation of the Confessional position is perpetrated by the application of the Aryan paragraph within the Church of Christ.²

While this statement made no moral issue of the Jewish problem as interpreted by the Third Reich and simply addressed itself to the question as it might affect the control of church polity, it was nevertheless significant in that it placed Niemoeller and the Emergency League in direct opposition to the Nazis on a basic issue of the National Socialist philosophy and at a very early date in Hitler's regime.

In that same mind, while observing First Lenten Sunday, Niemoeller declared from his pulpit:

... there has never been and never will be for our German nation any rebirth which is not inwardly based upon a revival of the Christian faith. This nation—our nation—will either be a Christian nation or it will cease to exist.3

This was among the earliest of many such warnings that Niemoeller would sound in the years ahead. In the face of the mounting threats to church freedom that were represented by the "German Christian" movement and the church constitutional crisis, councils of concerned pastors and church leaders had begun to form by the Summer of 1933. At the time of the Sportpalast scandal4 these councils were enlarged and strengthened. They soon passed


4. See Chapter II.
under the nominal leadership of Niemoeller and became known as the Pfarrernotbund.5

On Sunday, November 19, 1933, the pastors who belonged to this league read a condemnation from their pulpits of Dr. Krause's speech and of the "German Christian" position. This pulpit proclamation, largely drafted by Niemoeller, read in part:

We preachers of the Gospel do not wish to bring the reproach of the prophets upon us, to be dumb dogs,6 but on the contrary we owe it to our churches and our people to resist this falsification of the truth. We emphatically recognize the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the unique test of our faith and life and the confession of our Fathers as the reformed explanation thereof.7

Niemoeller carried this theme into his sermons as well. In reply to the "German Christian" call for a National-Socialist oriented Church, Niemoeller avowed:

We cannot set up dividing wall within the community of Christ; we cannot enforce human claims within the community of Christ; we cannot cultivate fanaticism and passion within the community of Christ. If we did so, we should be opposing God's jurisdiction and sacrificing his grace; and we should be betraying our function—the only one we have—for we could not become the stumbling block which would help the seeker after God to find Christ.8

5. For one discussion of this group see Cochrane, op. cit., pp. 106-128.
6. This is an apparent reference to Isa. 56:10, in which the religious leaders of Israel are rebuked in these terms for their silence in the face of abuses.
So through the activities of the Emergency League and through his pronouncements from the pulpit Niemoeller rapidly came to the fore in the developing Confessional movement. The Emergency League would soon become the nucleus for the Confessional synods. It began to be more outspoken in its opposition to Reich Bishop Mueller. The League opposed the concord which was reached by Hitler and the Lutheran Bishops late in January of 1934. On April 5, 1934, the league convened under Niemoeller's leadership at Dortmund. This meeting proved to be a direct preliminary to the convening of a national synod.

Since Niemoeller's work with the league was rapidly helping to establish a climate of Protestant thought that would soon take the form of Confessionalism, it was inevitable that he should fall victim to Nazi attempts to purge opposition. The greatest single source of the government's displeasure with Niemoeller was his outspoken and defiant preaching. Throughout the period of his

9. This was the famous January 25, 1934, meeting with Hitler which ended when the Chancellor flew into a rage over Niemoeller's stubborn insistence upon the freedom of the Church to preach and work unobstructed. The day after the conference Niemoeller wrote an account of it in which he called upon the League for renewed vigor in preaching and ecclesiastical duties. For a text of this document see Wilhelm Niemoeller, op. cit., pp. 47-48. Two days later Niemoeller was arrested, his office searched and many of the League's papers seized.

10. Niemoeller's biographer, Dietmar Schmidt, says of his preaching, "From the start he considered the weekly
leadership of the Church opposition, even after incurring the official wrath of the Reich, Niemoeller continued to preach to capacity crowds at his church in Dahlem. His sermons reveal language designed to encourage and strengthen the faithful in the midst of their ordeal. But his sermons also served to acquaint the outside world with the serious nature of the situation facing Germany's Protestants.

Aside from these aspects, the most significant thing about Niemoeller's preaching for this study is what it reveals of the changing Protestant thinking concerning the Church's relationship to the national state. Just as in Barth's theology, so also in Niemoeller's sermons there is a practical renunciation of the concept of unqualified political loyalty—a concept which had molded the relationship of the German Church to the German State since the time of the Protestant Reformation.

One of the most forceful declarations of Niemoeller's changing views on the church-state question during the earlier days of the struggle, was expressed in a sermon in June of 1934. With the synodal movement already well under

sermon to be one of his most important duties. He never preached extemporaneously, but thought out and then wrote out what he had to say in full, from the first word to the last. Some who came to hear him went away disappointed. Accustomed to the gusty emotionalism of political speakers, they found Niemoeller's style altogether too astringent." Dietmar Schmidt, Pastor Niemoeller. Tr by Lawrence Wilson (London, 1959), p. 84.
way, Niemoeller, the former imperial naval officer, ardent nationalist, foe of republicanism and servant of the established church declared:

... church and nation can and indeed dare no longer be regarded as one. Through the whole nation runs a dividing trench, with the Christian community on one side and on the other—the "world." And the side to which the individual belongs is no longer determined only by the Lord Jesus Christ and by our attitude toward him. Even the fact that we are in the "church" does not exempt us from this decision; for the rift runs even through this church; the world and the Christian community are parting company even in the church.11

As the days passed Niemoeller's preaching began to take on increasing notes of urgency and crisis. He began to address himself to some of the particular ways in which the National Socialist menace was being manifested to the Church. To the "German Christian" call for a Church unity and harmony under the "new order" Niemoeller answered to his congregation:

Friends, there is a talk of peace. Do not believe it! What is meant is that Jesus of Nazareth should share His sovereignty for a time with a new Christ, that the Gospel of the Redeemer of sinners should compromise with the religious complacency of the "racially pure" man, that the old Gospel should fall into line with the new myth which refuses to have anything to do with the Lord Jesus Christ. But that is impossible, the Church will never do that, it does not lie in its power; for He is the Lord and will tolerate no other gods beside Him.12

11. *Here Stand I!* pp. 85-86.
Such a voice could not long hope for tolerance in Hitler's "co-ordinated" state. But despite the vigorous, even belligerent, character of this preaching, as late as the summer of 1936, Niemoeller still apparently harbored some hope that an accord could be reached with the Reich government. On June 4th, at his instigation, there was presented to Hitler a private message from the German Evangelical Church. It is one of the most remarkable documents to come out of the church struggle.\(^\text{13}\)

In April of the previous year, a similar attempt has been made to acquaint the Fuehrer with the Church's dilemma in the hope that he would see fit to help. It received no response.

This new document contained several passages that are indicative of Niemoeller's thinking at this point. After recounting various anti-religious influences at work in Germany, the message observed:

Against such an imperilment of members of the churches, all Church leaders, conscious of their responsibility, must offer strenuous resistance, and to this opposition belongs the clear question to the Fuehrer and Chancellor whether the attempt to de-Christianize the German people is to become the official policy of the government through the further co-operation of responsible statesman or perhaps by simply looking on, letting things take their course.

\(^\text{13}\) For a text of the document see Wilhelm Jannasch, Deutsche Kirchendokumente: Die Haltung der Bekennenden Kirche im Dritten Reich (Zuerich, 1946), pp. 21-31. Further quotations are from this source.
At this point the document pressed Hitler for a definition of "positive Christianity" whose existence he had guaranteed and whose support he had pledged. The message reviewed the activities of Hitler's followers and associates, activities which belied the Chancellor's claims as Christianity's protector. After further recital of abuses, the Church remonstrated:

We beg the government of the Reich to consider whether it can be permanently beneficial to our people that the path taken until now be followed further. The coercion of the consciences, the persecution of Evangelical conviction, the mutual spying and eavesdropping already exert a harmful influence.

This document likewise received no reply.

This last effort preceded Niemoeller's imprisonment by a year, and during that year he continued to preach boldly on all facets of the danger which the Church faced. On the question of a compromise with the Nazis he declared:

Dear brethren, today we are faced with a crisis; to make terms with the enemy will not help us. Everything is at stake; it is the struggle of faith against unbelief, and there can be no yielding.

When strictures and limitations were placed on Protestant pastors, Niemoeller observed:

.. today we are being called to account in a peculiar way: our right to spread the Gospel is being contested. And the more unbridled

---

15. November 22, 1936, God is My Fuehrer, p. 61.
the public attacks against Christianity become, the more they show us that they are not directed against the Old Testament or against the Apostle Paul at all—as people are always trying to make out—but against the one and only Lord in Whom we believe, namely, Jesus of Nazareth.16

Despite an official ban on the discussion of such matters, Niemoeller used the occasion of New Years Day, 1937, to publicly review the hostile acts of the State during the past. He said in part:

... during the past year the preaching of the Gospel has been banished from the public life of our people, in the last few days a violent attack has been launched against preaching within the church, by a general veto on all "Evangelical Weeks". ... the de-Christianizing of the theological faculties has been practically completed ... the self-help of the evangelical community for the instruction of their preachers has been destroyed through the closing by the police of the theological schools and the ban on the compensatory lectures of the Confessional Church;17 and the young student brethren have been threatened with exclusion from all German universities and the loss of all rights to a position in the service of the church. ... any man who on New Years morning prefers to hear that the bad things are not half as bad as they look whereas the good things are fine and promising because "we will manage to win through yet"—Friends, such a man is out of place in our midst; for it is neither our duty to strengthen him in such a hope, nor is it possible for us to do so.18


17. Because of the church-state structure in Germany, the financial weapon was one which the Nazis exploited to advantage. For an excellent discussion of this aspect of the church struggle see Roger H. Wells, "The Financial Relations of Church and State in Germany, 1919-1937," Political Science Quarterly, LII (March, 1938), pp. 36-59.

Niemoeller viewed the focal point of Nazi repression as being the restrictions on preaching. This is evident in the following:

What depressed us as we look back is perhaps not even the fact that thousands of evangelical Christians have made the acquaintance of the police...detained...in prisons and concentration camps...No, what really depresses us is rather the irrefutable knowledge that during these years the Church itself has been made prisoner, that the Church itself has lost its freedom to carry out its mission as it used to do. It would be lying...were we to attempt to assert that the Evangelical Church is today freely permitted to preach the message which it has been ordered to preach.19

It was no accident that Niemoeller chose the sermon as the most appropriate medium to proclaim his thoughts on the church struggle. He was keenly aware of the limitations placed upon clergymen's freedom to preach. An analysis of his sermons of this period reveals that they were strongly Bible-centered, even though they became the highly effective vehicles for social and political criticism. In the atmosphere created by Rosenberg and the "German Christians" Niemoeller declared:

Dear Brethren, the watchword: "Redemption through Jesus Christ," is no new invention. This watchword has already stood under the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ and is nothing new. Scorn and mockery surge over this lonely man, because he has put the sovereignty of God above human will. And it is exactly the same, whether these mockers were

called Pilate and Caiaphas or . . . Rosenberg and Ludendorff.20

and again:

We know how suffering comes today upon the community of Jesus Christ for this very Word's sake. We could, it is true, escape the suffering—as has already been done—by representing Jesus as a noble, virtuous hero, and by forbearing to preach him as the sole and decisive Word of the living God, in which are fulfilled all the promises of the Old Testament. If we gave up this preaching, we should no longer need die or to endure with Him. But what should we have left? We should not then live and reign with Him either!

This way out of our difficulty is barred to us: we shall and we must go through with it, we shall and we must now learn anew that God's Word must remain unbound, so that it may free us; that God's Word must remain unmolested so that it may save us. There is no other Gospel . . . 21

As the time passed Niemoeller became bolder and his arrest seemed imminent. On the 19th of June he read from his pulpit a list of those arrested and evicted. This was a practice strictly forbidden by the government. Niemoeller's days were numbered.

The last few sermons of Niemoeller are somewhat ominous in tone. The progression of his thinking on the Christian commitment to the state may be seen in them. He tried to recognize this commitment in spite of all. He tried to point his hearers, however, to the recognition of a higher commitment, even as Barth did in his theology.

Niemoeller said:

We love our nation: we must love it—we cannot and dare not and must not do otherwise. But when things change so that the sword "reaches into our soul," when the Lord Jesus Christ calls, then we must tear ourselves free of the environment that has denied Him ... we must follow Him and testify and profess to other men and women that we too are with Jesus of Nazareth, that we know of no other kingdom but the kingdom of God.22

But the absolute "coordination" of the state under Hitler allowed no such higher commitment. Therefore, Niemoeller, as did Bonhoeffer later, felt compelled to renounce one commitment altogether.

Our duty today—and we have no other—is that we should be like the Apostles who, when a new embargo was laid upon their preaching, went forth and did not cease to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ.23

On July 1, 1937, Niemoeller was arrested. The government had reached the end of its patience. Niemoeller had not even shied from personal assaults on Hitler when he was finally convinced of the Chancellor's true intentions.

... as long as one man is left in prison, as long as one man remains evicted, as long as one man is forbidden to speak because he has replied to attacks against the Church or because he quite clearly called desertion of the faith desertion, or has been put in prison for collecting offerings, the question as to whether the word of the Fuehrer holds good is answered in the negative.24

---

22. November 8, 1936, God is My Fuehrer, pp. 39, 42.
23. June 27, 1937, Ibid., p. 294. This quotation is from Niemoeller's last sermon, delivered three days before his arrest.
Adolf Hitler did not ignore such opposition.

Confined to Moabit Prison, Niemoeller did not come to trial until the following year. The account of the trial has become widely known. Its results were noted the first week in March by the press. Niemoeller had been charged with various "crimes," chiefly:

... endangering of the public peace, misuse of the pulpit and incitement and challenge against and acts against regulations of the Reich government.

The token penalty of seven months imprisonment, suspended, and 500 RM fine was tacit admission on the part of the court that the government had no case, and this fact was generally recognized. The sordid story of Niemoeller's second arrest on unspecified charges, and his confinement at Dachau as Hitler's personal prisoner, is now well known.

In Dachau Niemoeller continued his preaching ministry to a congregation which he enumerated as "a Dutch cabinet minister, two Norwegian shippers, a British major from the Indian Army, a Yugoslav diplomat, and a Macedonian journalist." 27

To this motley group united by the fortunes of war, Niemoeller continued to preach the Word of God as he had done so effectively outside. Like Professor Barth and Pastor Bonhoeffer, Niemoeller had radically rethought his position on the relationship of the Church to the State and had publicly proclaimed the results of that rethinking. As Barth used theology and Bonhoeffer used conspiracy to express Protestantism's new stance, Martin Niemoeller chose the pulpit to witness to that change.
CHAPTER V

As a final dramatic expression of the new voice of Protestantism as heard through the Confessional movement, the contribution of Dietrich Bonhoeffer must now be examined. Just as Karl Barth had become the movement's master theologian, Martin Niemoeller its most noted and fearless preacher, so Pastor Bonhoeffer provided it with another powerful symbol—that of the steadfast martyr. As Barth may be said to have been the opposition spokesman for the early period through his uncompromising, dialectical theology, and Martin Niemoeller of the middle years with his ringing sermons and defiant leadership of the Pfarrernotbund, so Dietrich Bonhoeffer seemed to stand foremost as the conscience of the "renewed" Church during the last year of the Third Reich. His experiences and their record are a tragic and eloquent witness to the calamity of National Socialism and its impact on German Protestantism.

Despite his comparative youth¹ Bonhoeffer had already taught Systematic Theology at Berlin University for three years when Hitler came to power. Since the prospects

---

1. Bonhoeffer was born in Breslau, February 4, 1906. He was only twenty-four when he became lecturer in Systematic Theology at the University of Berlin in 1930.
for a sincere theologian were not too bright in 1933, Bonhoeffer discontinued his university activities and, in October, went to London where he assumed the duties of pastor to the German congregations at St. Paul's and Sydenham. But he returned to Germany in 1935 to take a position as director of a small seminary near Stettin in Pomerania, where young ministers of the Confessing Church were to be trained.

The situation of the Protestants who adhered to the Barmen Convention was becoming progressively worse during these years. In February, 1935, the Confessional's Provisional Government (Voerlaufige Kirchenleitung) drew up a statement of warning to the nation against the new heathenism which was permeating national life. Confessional pastors read the statement from their pulpits. In reprisal the Minister of Education, Bernhard Rust, reduced the Prussian church tax by 20 per cent. This was a crippling blow to many churches and pastors, the bulk of whose income was provided by the tax. The financial weapon was used quite effectively by the Nazis on more than one occasion.²

But the Nazis were not content to persecute pocket-books. Widespread arrests of pastors who had read the

² For a discussion of the financial situation see Roger H. Wells, loc. cit.
document to their congregations were begun. Among the first to be arrested were Niemoeller and Jakobi. Then on July 19, 1935, the government created another agency within its already unwieldy bureaucracy to handle church affairs. One of Hitler's Ministers-Without-Portfolio, Hanns Kerrl, was appointed the new Reich Minister for Church Affairs. This functionary left hardly a doubt of his authoritarian plans concerning the Church. On September 24th, Kerrl issued a "Law for the Protection of the German Evangelical Church" in which he reviewed the "disorders" within the Church and concluded:

The Reich Minister for Church Affairs now becomes empowered for the restoration of orderly conditions in the German Evangelical Church and in the Evangelical State Churches, to issue decrees with the binding force of law. The decrees will be published in the Reichgesetzblatt.3

This was a blatant denial of the Church's legal position as established in the Constitution of 1933; but all protests proved vain.

In a secret memorandum to Chancellor Hitler, prepared during the Spring of 1936, Confessional leaders sought some concrete committal from the Fuehrer as to his position in the Church's struggle. Apparently, they still harbored some hope that Hitler might not be fully aware of their plight or might be willing to reconsider Nazi church

policies. The document is too lengthy to quote here, but its major points sought Hitler's definition of "positive Christianity," an unequivocating statement as to whether it was the Nazi aim to de-Christianize Germany, an opinion on the growing tendency in German national life to deify the Fuehrer, and what the Church might expect in the future from his regime. The questions went without answers.

While these disturbances racked the life of the Church, Bonhoeffer continued to serve his post as spiritual leader and teacher in the seminary in a faithful manner. But the official pronouncements of National Socialism to the world concerning the Church crisis had long since begun to ring hollow in his ear:

The party never had the intention, and it has not the intention now, of engaging in any kind of hostilities against Christianity in Germany. Our aim has been quite in the opposite direction. We have sought to unite the various regional Protestant churches, whose conditions of existence were impossible, and create one great Evangelical Church throughout the reich, without interfering in the slightest with questions of religious belief or practice.5

The Reich Bishop had this to say:

The incorporation of the churches in the Imperial Church is of two kinds. On the one hand it is external, and the state has no desire to exercise any influence in religious questions. Adolph Hitler, the


5. Hitler, Speeches, January 30, 1934, p. 27.
Leader, has repeatedly emphasized to me that it is not his intention to interfere by means of the authority of the state in internal religious matters. Further, the various other denominations, such as the Reformed Church, for example, are guaranteed freedom of belief, and are, of course, allowed to work without hindrance within the comprehensive organism of the Imperial Church. The religious idea of this Imperial Church is the will to Christianity through our Lord Jesus Christ. The State is furthering the Church in the achievement of its ideals. 6

But, along with many others, Dietrich Bonhoeffer recognized that the Nazis' actions belied their words. By 1937 he had begun to voice his convictions where they could be heard. On the 12th of April of that year a reunion of the clergymen who had established the seminary at Finkenwald was held. Pastor Bonhoeffer was asked to begin each day's session with a study of scriptures on Temptation. The manuscript he prepared for the occasion was preserved. It read in part:

'Whereas the Christian must endure the sufferings of this world, just like the godless, there is reserved for the Christian a suffering of which the world knows nothing: suffering for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ . . . the fact of his suffering on account of his righteousness, on account of his faith, must seem strange to him.' 7

In the midst of wholesale arrests and confiscation of property, this was a highly pertinent and meaningful

---

subject. As he regarded the national scene and the daily increase of the regime's persecution of the Church, Bonhoeffer warned:

Believers suffer the hour of temptation without defence. Jesus Christ is their shield. And only when it is quite clearly understood that temptation must befall the godforsaken, then the word can at last be uttered which the Bible speaks about the Christian's struggle. From heaven the Lord gives to the defenseless the heavenly armour before which, though men's eyes do not see it, Satan flees. He clothes us with the armour of God, he gives into our hands the shield of faith, he sets upon our brow the helmet of salvation, he gives us the sword of the spirit in the right hand. It is the garment of Christ, the robe of his victory, that he puts upon his struggling community.

The Spirit teaches us that the time of temptations is not yet ended, but that the hardest temptation is still to come to his people.8

On the first day of 1937, the Nazis had closed down the theology schools of the Confessing Church. The government had decided that the movement must be attacked at its roots. Furthermore, admitted Confessing students were henceforth to be barred from the German universities. Private schools in homes and churches were likewise to be closed. While Bonhoeffer was to be successful in keeping his school going for another three years, he turned his attention now to the completion of one of his most significant works. In it he would clearly analyze the position of the Church and the State. His restatement of this

8. Temptation, pp. 46-47.
A truth, a doctrine, or a religion need no space for themselves. They are disembodied entities. They are heard, learned and apprehended, and that is all. But the incarnate Son of God needs not only ears or hearts, but living men who will follow him. That is why he called his disciples into a literal, bodily following, and thus made his fellowship with them a visible reality.9

After further discussing the necessity for this "visible reality," i.e., the Church, he continues:

We must now ask whether we have adequately described the visible nature of the Church, or whether it claims further space in the world. The New Testament gives a clear and definite answer. The Church needs space not only for her liturgy and order, but also for the daily life of her members in the world. That is why we must now speak of the living-space (Lebensraum) of the visible Church.

The fellowship between Jesus and his disciples covered every aspect of their daily life. Within the fellowship of Christ's disciples the life of each individual was part of the life of the brotherhood. . . . the Church invades the life of the world and conquers territory for Christ. For whatever is "in Christ" has ceased to be subject to the world of sin and the law. No law of the world can interfere with this fellowship. The realm of Christian love is subject to Christ, not to the world. The Church can never tolerate any limits set to the love and service of the brethren. For where the brother is, there is the Body of Christ, and there is his Church. And there we must also be.10


Bonhoeffer recognized and abhorred the abuses of the State, but he was no rebel, nor was he prepared to sanction resistance to the State, even though it be Adolf Hitler's State:

"Therefore let every soul be subject to the higher powers" (Rom. 13:1 ff). The Christian must not be drawn to the bearers of high office; his calling is to stay below. The higher powers are over him, and he must remain under them. The world exercises dominion, the Christian serves, and thus he shares the earthly lot of his Lord, who became a servant. . . . The Christians are to know that if they would perceive and do the will of God, they must be content with the subordinate place accorded to them by the powers. They are bidden to be of good cheer: God himself will use the powers to work for their good, and his sovereignty extends even over the powers. This is more than an academic statement about the nature of authority in the abstract; it applies to the position of the Christians under the powers which actually exist. To resist the power is to resist the ordinance of God, who has so ordered life that the world exercises dominion by force and Christ and Christians conquer by service. Failure to realize this distinction will bring a heavy judgment on the Christian (verse 2): it will mean a lapse into the standards of the world. How then is it so easy for the Christians to find themselves in opposition to the powers? Because they are so easily tempted to resent their blunders and injustices. But if we harbour such resentments we are in mortal danger of neglecting the will of the God we are called to serve.11

But this was rapidly becoming an untenable position in National Socialist Germany. After the triumphant synod of Halle in 1937, the Nazis heightened their efforts to bring the Confessional Church into subjection. The government intervened in most every area of the Church's life.

The work of the ministers grew more difficult to perform. During this period, Bonhoeffer produced *Nachfolge* and *Versuchung*, both of which began to indicate his growing concern with the relationship of Church to State.\(^{12}\)

When the Nazis closed the seminary in October of 1937, Bonhoeffer attempted to continue his work through informal gatherings at various places. But the situation grew progressively worse. The stages by which Bonhoeffer changed his view from one of passive opposition to one of active resistance are not completely clear. It seems probable that the coming of war in 1939 was the single most important event which fixed his purpose to overthrow the Nazis. He abandoned Germany reluctantly, at the insistence of British and American friends, in June of 1939. But he could not remain away. Reinhold Niebuhr, his friend and colleague in America, quoted Bonhoeffer as saying:

> I shall have no right to participate in the reconstruction of Christian life in Germany after the war if I do not share the trials of this time with my people... Christians in Germany will face the terrible alternative of either willing the defeat of their nation in order that Christian civilization may survive, or willing the victory of their nation and thereby destroying our civilization. I know which of these alternatives I must choose; but I cannot make this choice in security.\(^{13}\)

---

12. See pp. 87-88 above.

To Bonhoeffer the choice was so clear as to be really no choice at all. The question of justification of his resistance was discussed in a series of writings which he produced between the opening of the war and his arrest in April of 1943. These writings were done mainly in Berlin, Kieckow, and in the seclusion of the monastery at Ettal in the mountains south of Munich. It is from these writings that we gain a clearer picture than would otherwise be possible of the new relationship of the Church to the State, as now viewed by the Confessional Church. Of the Christian's relationship to the political order Bonhoeffer wrote:

The claim of government, which is based on its power and its mission, is the claim of God and is binding upon conscience. Government demands obedience "for conscience sake" (Rom. 13:5), which may also be interpreted as "for the Lord's sake" (1Pet. 2:13). This obedience is combined with deference (Rom. 13:7; 1 Pet. 2:17). In the exercise of the mission of government the demand for obedience is unconditional and qualititatively total; it extends both to conscience and to bodily life. Belief, conscience and bodily life are subject to an obligation of obedience with respect to the divine commission of government. A doubt can arise only when the contents and the extent of the commission of government become questionable. The Christian is neither obliged nor able to examine the rightfulness of the demand of government in each particular case. His duty of obedience is binding on him until government directly compels him to offend against the divine commandment, that is to say, until government openly denies its divine commission and thereby forfeits its claim. In cases of doubt obedience is required; for the Christian does not bear the responsibility of government. But if government violates or exceeds its commission at any point, for example by making itself master over the belief of the congregation, then at this point,
indeed, obedience is to be refused, for conscience sake, for the Lord's sake.\textsuperscript{14}

Further, he maintained:

Only the Church brings government to an understanding of itself. For the sake of their common Master the Church claims to be listened to by government; she claims protection for the public Christian proclamation against violence and blasphemy; she claims protection for the institution of the Church against arbitrary interference, and she claims protection for Christian life in obedience to Jesus Christ. The Church can never abandon these claims; . . . \textsuperscript{15}

For the individual Christian, Bonhoeffer asked:

Is there a political responsibility on the part of individual Christians? Certainly the individual Christian cannot be made responsible for the action of government, and he must not make himself responsible for it; but because of his faith and his charity he is responsible for his own calling and for the sphere of his own personal life, however large or however small it may be. If this responsibility is fulfilled in faith, it is effectual for the whole of the polis. According to Holy Scripture, there is no right to revolution; but there is a responsibility of every individual for preserving the purity of his office and mission in the polis. In this way, in the true sense, every individual serves government with his responsibility. No one, not even government itself, can deprive him of this responsibility or forbid him to discharge it, for it is an integral part of his life in sanctification, and it arises from obedience to the Lord of both Church and government.\textsuperscript{16}


\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., pp. 311-312.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., pp. 314-315.
With these views combined of scriptural interpretation, the theological influence of Barth, and his own keen awareness and sense of mission, Pastor Bonhoeffer committed himself to the removal of the National Socialist government and, in so doing, changed from a docile and loyal subject of the regime to an active conspirator working for its downfall. Through his brother-in-law, Hans von Dohnanyi, Bonhoeffer was introduced to the furtive conspiracies which were taking shape against Hitler and the Nazis.

Dohnanyi's post in Admiral Canaris' Abwehr permitted him to operate with a great deal of freedom in travel and contacts. The Abwehr would ultimately become the headquarters for a certain phase of the anti-Hitler conspiracy. It was through this agency that Bonhoeffer entered the struggle against Hitler and became an agent of the Widerstand. The story of the German underground has become rather familiar history since the war. Bonhoeffer's travels on behalf of the conspiracy, his papers furnished by Col. Oster of the Abwehr, are now well known as a result of the trials of resistance leaders and the postwar publication of various memoirs and histories of the underground. We cannot concern ourselves here with the story of these intrigues or even with Bonhoeffer's part in them. It must suffice to observe that by 1943 he had completely involved himself in
these secret activities to the point where his discovery could only mean death.17

On April 3, 1943, Bonhoeffer, his sister Christel, and her husband Hans von Dohnanyi were arrested by the Gestapo. The final ordeal of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and in a sense of the Confessing Church, had begun.

He was taken immediately to the Tegel Prison in Berlin where he was to be confined for some eighteen months. Here began the correspondence and written reflections which were ultimately to constitute one of the most significant documents to come out of the National Socialist period.

Having been forcefully removed from any hope of influencing political events, and from any possibility of carrying on his functions as pastor and teacher, Bonhoeffer set about to evaluate his experience and that of the Church in the light of scriptural truth and of the history of the past decade. In a shattering analysis of the Hitler years and of the opposition to the Nazis, entitled "Nach Zehn Jahren," Bonhoeffer said:

> When men are confronted by a bewildering variety of possible choices the path of duty appears to offer

the safest way out. Here the one commanded will seize upon it as the certainty, and the responsibility for the order lies upon him who gives it and not upon him who carries it out. But in the confinement of the way of duty one never comes to the hazard of a deed done on his own responsibility, which is the only way to strike at the heart of evil and defeat it. The man of duty will finally be forced to render to the devil his due. 18

Still dealing with the question of the Germans' degree of responsibility for their misfortunes, he continued:

What actually is behind the complaint over the lack of civil courage? We have found in these ten years a great deal of bravery and self-sacrifice, but hardly any civil courage, even among ourselves. It would be a too naive psychology to attribute this to personal cowardice. The background is entirely different. We Germans have had to learn, through a long history, the necessity and strength of obedience. In the submission of all personal wishes and thoughts we have seen the meaning and greatness of our life. Our gaze was always upward, not in servile fear but in free trust that saw duty as a call and the call as a vocation. It is a bit of legitimate distrust of our own heart that this readiness to follow a command from above rather than our own opinion of good. Who will deny that the German again and again in obedience, duty and calling has excelled in bravery and self-sacrifice. But the German has preserved his freedom—and who in the world has spoken more longingly of freedom as Germany, from Luther to the idealists?—by seeking deliverance from his own will through service to the whole. Calling and freedom represented two sides of the same matter to him. But in that he misconceived his world, he had not reckoned with the fact that submissiveness and self-sacrifice could be exploited for evil. Once this occurred, once the exercise of the calling itself became questionable, all the ideals of the German must begin to shake. Inevitably the German

was convicted of a fundamental failure; he could not see that under certain circumstances free and responsible action must take precedence over duty and calling.\textsuperscript{19}

These were not things which an outsider could say to the German people. But from one who admitted his guilt with the rest, and who, moreover, could analyze and explain that guilt, they constituted a damning indictment. But Bonhoeffer's message was not only for the individual German. His last months on earth were also spent in an effort to evaluate and understand the Church and her role in National Socialist Germany. He observed:

Our Church, which has struggled through these years only to preserve its own existence, is now unable to speak the word of reconciliation to mankind and to the world at large. So our traditional message must fall powerless and silent, and our Christianity today will consist in two things: in prayer and in deed, serving our fellow men. All Christian thought, speech and organization must be reborn from these prayers and deeds.\textsuperscript{20}

One of the most important sections of the prison writings is an outline of a book which Bonhoeffer would like to have written. His outline notes for the Protestant Church included this passage, perhaps the more eloquent for its brevity:

Pietism as the last attempt to retain Evangelical Christianity as a religion. Lutheran orthodoxy, the

\textsuperscript{19} Widerstand und Ergebung, pp. 13-14.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., pp. 206-207.
attempt to rescue the Church as an instrument for salvation . . . . The general achievement of the Confessing Church: championing ecclesiastical interests, but little personal faith in Jesus Christ. "Jesus" disappearing from view. Sociologically, no effect on the masses—interest confined to the lower and upper bourgeois. Burden of the heavy, traditional thought. The final result: Church on the defensive. Unwilling to risk in behalf of others.21

But the prison documents are not to be understood as a catalogue of melancholy failures. Far from it! There is a triumphant note throughout. The intense, personal faith of a man in his God that will assure final victory, is the ultimate theme of Bonhoeffer's last works:

I believe that God can and will bring good out of evil. For this he needs men who make the best use of all things. I believe that God will give us all the power of resistance we need in every extremity. But he does not give it in advance, so that we will not rely on ourselves but solely on Him. In such a faith all fear of the future must be overcome. I believe that even our mistakes and failures are not useless, for it is no more difficult for God to handle them than to handle what we believe are our good deeds. I believe that God is not simply timeless fate, but that he waits upon and answers true prayer and right action.22

So Bonhoeffer prepared himself for an inevitable fate which came April 9, 1945, two years and four days after his arrest. He was hanged at Flossenberg Concentration Camp only days before it fell into Allied hands.

22. Ibid., pp. 22-23.
Bonhoeffer acted as somewhat of a Confessional conscience. He repeatedly called the attention of the Church to the motives which should prompt her actions and without which her actions were meaningless. He is significant not only as a spokesman for the Confessionals in the latter days, but also because in his personal experience with Nazism he reproduced the tragic pattern of the Church herself. Despising the movement, its ideology and its adherents, nevertheless, he dissociated himself from any attempt to combat it or its influence in the early years. This is a matter for which he may easily be excused by a world to whom the history of National Socialism is much more familiar, but is a matter for which he blamed himself.

Just as the Church itself was aroused to the perils of the situation and took vigorous action so did Bonhoeffer. But only time can judge how appropriate that action was, both in its nature and in its date. And, finally, like the Church, Bonhoeffer was persecuted in the extreme for the course into which his convictions had led him.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was the last great church voice until the end of the war who attempted to interpret the new relationship of Protestantism to the German State, a relationship that Confessionalism had sought to make a reality. Along with Barth, Niemoeller, Bishop Wurm, Bishop Dibelius, Friedrich Bodelschwingh and others, Bonhoeffer came to
recognize a duty that precedes that of loyalty to nation. Only the Germans themselves can decide to what lengths this duty should have led them. This is one of the most obvious truths of the Nazi period, and upon it hinges the entire question of guilt for Germany's debacle.

The result of this concept of a higher loyalty expressed itself in the Church's re-evaluation of her own position and purpose in German life. This reappraisal was declared in the great synods beginning with Barmen, in the theology and writings of Karl Barth, in the challenging sermons of Martin Niemoeller and, finally, in the political activities and quiet reflections of Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

During these years, the Confessing Church came a complete circle. At the end of the Nazi period, the emphasis had changed, once again, to the Gemeinden and the work of local pastors. Persecution had taken its toll. What had begun in crowded cathedrals ended in solitary cells. But that very fact holds the key to an understanding of the Protestant opposition. The true significance of Barmen and Dahlem was only realized at Buchenwald and Dachau. The "heroic" period of the Church struggle had only been a prelude—a time of preparing for the real, personal heroism that would be required of those who followed the Confessional leadership. The reward of those early days would find itself in prison and parish. Those who, in 1932 and 1933, judged
the looming conflict as one involving basic faith and commitment, girded themselves aright for the struggle. Those who allowed themselves to enter the struggle on any other basis were hopelessly overmatched. The genius of its early days enabled the Confessing Church to endure the calamities of its own failures and of the Nazi bloodbath. Therefore, its final word was one of triumph, well expressed in a prison letter from an unknown Confessional pastor who declared:

... we are in the hands of Jesus—here as well as there, and "faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." Heard a thousand times, learned by heart, comprehended with the mind, assimilated as a conviction, now at last it becomes "truth" and the only truth that has life and a strength in it—enough for today, certainly also enough for tomorrow, not because our faith is so strong, but because the Lord is true to us.

The tide of suffering that is overwhelming the Community of Christ is spreading, but the tide of love is an ocean that takes all this into itself, lets it become clear and still. I can do no more than echo the words of St. Chrysostom, "God be praised for everything!"23

---
BIBLIOGRAPHY

PRIMARY SOURCES

Published Documents


Published Sermons, Speeches and Letters


________. *God is My Fuehrer: The Last Twenty-Eight Sermons of Martin Niemoeller.* New York, 1941.

SECONDARY SOURCES

Published Diaries and Memoirs


Books


Bergmann, Ernst. *Die Deutsche Nationalkirche.* Breslau, 1933.

CARMEL'S WAR AGAINST GOD

NEW YORK, 1943

CHANDLER, ALBERT R. ROSENBERG'S NAZI MYTH

ITHACA, NEW YORK, 1945

COCHRANE, ARTHUR C. THE CHURCH'S CONFESSION UNDER HITLER

PHILADELPHIA, 1962

DIBELIUS, OTTO. DAY IS DAWNING

PHILADELPHIA, 1956

DONOHUE, JAMES. HITLER'S CONSERVATIVE OPPONENTS IN BAVARIA

1930-1945. LEIDEN, NETHERLANDS, 1961

DOUGLASS, PAUL F. GOD AMONG THE GERMANS

PHILADELPHIA, 1935

DULLES, ALLEN W. GERMANY'S UNDERGROUND

NEW YORK, 1947

DUNCAN-JONES, ARTHUR STEWART. THE CROOKED CROSS

LONDON, 1940

——. THE STRUGGLE FOR RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN GERMANY

LONDON, 1938

FREY, ARTHUR. CROSS AND SWASTIKA

LONDON, 1938

FRICK, WILHELM. WIR Bauen das Dritte Reich

OLDENBURG I. O/BERLIN, 1934

GISEVIOUS, HANS BERND. TO THE BITTER END

TR. BY RICHARD AND CLARA BARTON. BOSTON, 1947

GODSEY, JOHN D. THE THEOLOGY OF DIETRICH BONHOEFFER

PHILADELPHIA, 1960

GOERING, HERMANN. AUFBAU EINER NATION

2. AUFLAGE. BERLIN, 1934

HEIDEN, KONRAD. A HISTORY OF NATIONAL SOCIALISM

NEW YORK, 1935

HERMAN, STEWART. IT'S YOUR SOULS WE WANT

NEW YORK, 1943

KRAFT, WILLIAM. CHRIST VERSUS HITLER

NEW YORK, 1937

LUDECKE, KURT G. W. I KNEW HITLER

NEW YORK, 1938

MCCRARY, SWITZER. THE NATIONAL SOCIALIST STATE: NOTES ON HITLER AND THE THIRD REICH

DALLAS, TEXAS, 1935


Niemoeller, Martin. *From U-Boat to Pulpit*. Chicago, 1937.

________. *Here Stand I!* Chicago, 1937.


Periodicals, Pamphlets and Newspapers


*New York Times*, April 5, 1933, p. 11.