

The Church in Nazi Germany

Why are we talking about this?

Beware of the Pharisee Paradox!

“Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.’ But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.” (Luke 18:10-14)

Take heed, lest you fall

“Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did...Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.” (1 Corinthians 10:6, 12)

We’re going to answer these questions today:

1. What led to the Church of the Third Reich (Reichskirche)?
2. What was the Deutsche Christen Faith Movement, and why did it matter?
3. What was the Confessing Church Movement, and why did it matter?
4. How did the average Protestant respond to the Nazis?
5. What might we learn from these examples?

“Now what are we going to do with these rejected, condemned, Jewish people?... First, that we avoid their synagogues and schools and warn people against them. And such should be done to the glory of God and Christendom, that God may see that we are Christians... [insofar as we no longer] tolerate such a building for the Jew in which they blaspheme, curse, spit upon and disgrace Christ and us [...] Moses writes in Deuteronomy that where a city practiced idolatry, it should be entirely destroyed with fire and leave nothing. If he were living today he would be the first to put fire to the Jew schools and houses. Secondly, that you also refuse to let them own houses among us. For they practice the same thing in their houses as they do in their schools. Instead, you might place them under a roof, or stable, like the Gypsies, to let them know that they are not lords in our country as they boast, but in exile as captives... - _____

Notes:

1. What led to the Church of the Third Reich (Reichskirche)?

The Legacy of Martin Luther

Luther was viewed as a legendary hero of Germany, and the ideal German citizen and Christian.

"In 297 [1537] Duke Herzog Hans von Sachsen revoked his charter and resolved not to allow the Israelite nation to set foot in any of his lands because of the priest called vile Martin, may his soul and body rot in hell." - Joseph of Rosheim

Though Germans gained from Luther a more biblical view of justification, and the Bible written in their own language, and a greater emphasis on the Scriptures, the list goes on, they also inherited a prescription for the treatment of anyone who called themselves Jewish that was terribly unbiblical.



The Aftermath of WWI

Germans entered the First World War, assuming that it was yet another opportunity for God to prosper them.

German soldiers were praised as God's soldiers; Protestants believed that through their prayers they could keep God on their side...Defeat came unexpectedly...In Protestant circles, [this event] could only be explained as the work of sinister forces: the Liberals and the Social Democrats, and above all, many German Protestants believed, the Jews... Their frustration found a fitting expression in the back stabbing legend. - Hartmut Lehmann

Hitler gave the answer:
The key to German prosperity was a united Volk.



Notes:

The Creation of the Reichskirche



The Reichskirche was created, by Hitler, to rid Christianity of divisions.

He attempted to “unite” the churches of Germany under the philosophy and theology of the Deutsche Christens, which would eventually define the philosophy and theology of the Reichskirche.

2. What was the Deutsche Christen Faith Movement, and why did it matter?

Summary of the Movement:

The Deutsche Christens (“German Christians”) offered a *revised* version of Christianity that they called “Positive Christianity.”

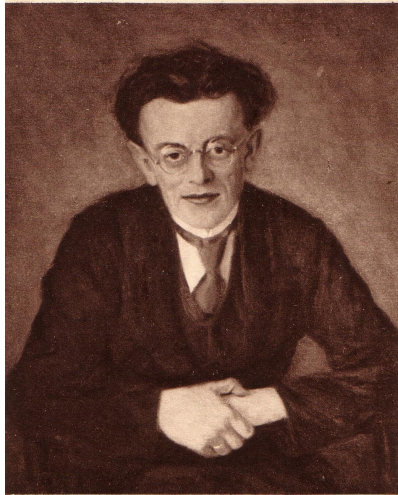
Positive Christinity

Meaning, Christianity was only *positive*, insofar as it supported the Volk. Negative christianity, on the other hand, was anything that would divide the Volk, or hold the Volk back from achieving prosperity. Positive Christianity was a religion for and by the Volk.

Notes:

Key Figures:

Emanuel Hirsch (1888-1972)



University Professor who studied under Adolf von Harnack.

We all thought we must bear this reality, that the taking seriously of simple faith in God and the keeping holy of moral values and discipline would restrict itself to the private sphere of small circles, and that the large masses of our Volk would fall into godlessness and indiscipline, separated from the Christian proclamation as by a wall. Now [with the rise of the Nazi Party] new hope has been given to us. And should our hearts not burn with enthusiasm that the Protestant church now say yes to this moment, that it seize the opportunity to cooperate with redeveloping the order and style of the German Volk? - Emanuel Hirsch, 1933

Ludwig Müller (1883-1945)



He was a chaplain in the Navy in WWI

“Manly Christianity”

Nazi...critics accused Christianity of preaching weakness, humility, and defeatism, feminine traits antithetical to National Socialist values. In their efforts to defend against those charges, German Christians showed how they shared the principles of their attackers. True Christianity, they argued, was not feminine and weak but manly and hard. - Doris Bergen

We want a kind of Christianity--with which one can do something in life, a Christianity of which our youth will say: that is alive, there is heroism there. That is not “only” for old women, but for the life-affirming men of the Third Reich. - Deutsche Christen Flyer

Notes:

Why the Deutsche Christens Matter

The Aryan Paragraph

A godless fellow member of the Volk is closer to us than an alien, even if that alien sings the same song or prays the same prayer. - Joachim Hossenfelder (a leader in the Deutsche Christen Movement)

Without the Deutsche Christens, there would have been no Reichskirche.

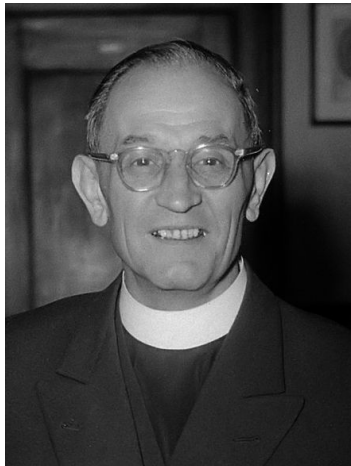
3. What was the Confessing Church Movement, and why did it matter?

Summary of the Movement:

The Confessing Church Movement was a collection of pastors and theologians, from Lutheran, Reformed, and Evangelical Churches, who opposed the Aryan Paragraph, authored the Barmen Declaration, and essentially became a counter-denomination to the Reichskirche.

Key Figures

Martin Niemöller (1892-1984)



Former German U-Boat Commander in WWI.
He refused to surrender his ship after Germany surrendered.
(he was relieved of his duties)

Became a Lutheran Pastor.

At first, he was very supportive of Hitler.

...until he met Hitler.

Became convinced that Christians could not, in good conscience, support Hitler.

Notes:

It was Niemöller who in 1933 assembled the Pastor's Emergency League, to combat the Aryan Paragraph.

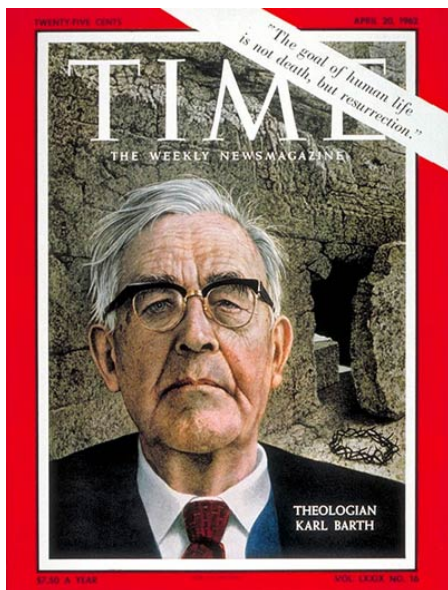
He was arrested for his criticism of the Nazis, and spent 8 years in Nazi concentration camps, until he was freed by Allied Troops from the Dachau Concentration Camp.

He is famous for writing this poem:

*First they came for the communists, and I didn't speak out—because I wasn't a communist.
Then they came for the trade unionists, and I didn't speak out—because I wasn't a trade unionist.
Then they came for the Jews, and I didn't speak out—because I wasn't a Jew.
Then they came for me—and there was no one left to speak for me.*

*Als die Nazis die Kommunisten holten, habe ich geschwiegen; ich war ja kein Kommunist.
Als sie die Gewerkschaftler holten, habe ich geschwiegen, ich war ja kein Gewerkschaftler.
Als sie die Juden holten, habe ich geschwiegen, ich war ja kein Jude.
Als sie mich holten, gab es keinen mehr, der protestieren konnte.*

Karl Barth (1886-1968)



Very famous professor and theologian

Helped author the *Barmen Declaration* (1934)

He was highly critical of the Nazis

Despised the idea that Hitler was being put forward as a Messianic figure

The *Barmen Declaration* was essentially a 6-thesis statement, correcting and responding to the theology of the Deutsche Christens, and, denouncing the idea that Nazi ideology and Christianity could be compatible.

Notes:

The *Barmen Declaration's* 6 Theses:

1. The source of revelation is only the Word of God — Jesus Christ. Any other possible sources (earthly powers, for example) will not be accepted.
2. Jesus Christ is the only Lord of all aspects of personal life. There should be no other authority.
3. The message and order of the church should not be influenced by the current political convictions.
4. The church should not be ruled by a leader ("Führer"). There is no hierarchy in the church (Matthew 20:25).
5. The state should not fulfill the task of the church and vice versa. State and church are both limited to their own business.
6. Therefore, the Barmen Declaration rejects the subordination of the Church to the state and the subordination of the Word and Spirit to the Church.

Barth mailed the Barmen Declaration to Hitler!

He was fired from the University of Bonn for refusing to swear an oath of allegiance to Hitler.

He had to move back to Switzerland (where he was born), and continued to help the Confessing Church remotely.

Dietrich Bonhöffer (1906-1945)



Lutheran pastor who took over when Karl Barth left

Was involved in a plot to assassinate Hitler

- Operation Valkyrie
- He had papers in his house that linked him to the plot
- 7,000 others were linked to the plot and arrested
- 4,980 (including Dietrich) were executed
- Was executed April 9, 1945

He was a leader if not THE leader of the Confessing Church

If you board the wrong train, it is no use running along the corridor in the other direction. - Dietrich Bonhöffer

Notes:

He believed that the Reichskirche, in and of itself, was a wicked institution.

Was instrumental in starting the Pastor's Emergency League and the Confessing Church

Directed an underground seminary that trained Confessing Church pastors

He wrote *The Cost of Discipleship*

- The book pointed to the problems of building a church on a message of cheap grace.
 - "Of course you have sinned, but now everything is forgiven, so you can stay as you are and enjoy the consolations of forgiveness."
 - In other words, you're forgiven...now don't change anything about your life.
- Costly grace
 - An entire life of discipleship. Looked like forgiveness which then compelled a person to submit to the yoke and the Word of Christ.
 - Costly grace was faith that flowed out in good works

The problem with the church in Nazi Germany, in Bonhoeffer's eyes, did not begin when Hitler came to power...but rather, over years of individuals being given a message of cheap grace.

Why the Confessing Church mattered:

The Confessing Church, just to summarize, mattered because they rejected the idea that Christianity and Nazi ideology could be joined together. And those in the Confessing Church led many away from placing their hope in Hitler, and instead to Christ.

Germany would have been worse, if you can even imagine, had it not been for the members of the Confessing Church. And they gave us an example that we should strive to follow.

4. How did the average Protestant respond to the Nazis?

Most supported the Nazis

Many "justifications" have been given.

Wo gehobelt wird, fallen späne.

Where wood is planed, shavings fall.

Notes:

Where wood is planed, shavings fall.
6 million Jewish shavings fell
7 million Soviet civilians
1.8 million Polish civilians
312,000 Serbian civilians
250,000 individuals with disabilities living
in state institutions
250,000 Gypsies
And many more.

Protestants overlooked the “shavings”
and instead looked forward to a
prosperous vision of Germany.

They simply focused on the end, and
chose not to think about the means by
which it was being achieved.



What might we learn from these examples?

Why does the church do nothing? Why does it allow unspeakable injustice to occur? ... What shall we one day answer to the question, where is thy brother Abel? The only answer that will be left to us...is the answer of Cain. ("Am I my brother's keeper?" Genesis 4:9) - Marga Meusel

Notes: