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The German Christians’ Influence on Barth’s Hamartiology of Pride

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Abstract

In *Church Dogmatics*, IV/1, §60, Karl Barth wrote of “The Pride and Fall of Man,” the first theme in his hamartiology of pride, sloth and falsehood. This thesis will argue that Barth’s conflict with the German Christian Movement served as a source of Barth’s hamartiology of pride. This is specifically evidenced by the reference to Aaron as a man of the “national church” in the lengthy excursus on Exodus 32 in *Church Dogmatics* §60.

Weimar humiliation in Germany had provoked reaction in the movement for a nationalistic church, which Nazism attempted to absorb. Theologians Paul Althaus, Gerhard Kittel and Emanuel Hirsch, among others, provided justification for this. Barth, however, indicted the “German Christians” for the sin of pride, maintaining that in turning people from the God of the Bible to the idolatrous god of the state, they had proudly and sinfully said “No” to God’s “Yes” revealed in Jesus Christ.

Keywords

Karl Barth, sin, pride, German Christian Movement
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# Table of Contents

Abstract .............................................................................................................................................. i
Acknowledgments ........................................................................................................................... ii
Table of Contents .............................................................................................................................. iii

Chapter 1                                                                 ................................................................. 1

1 The Doctrine of Sin .................................................................................................................. 1
   1.1 Introduction .................................................................................................................. 1
   1.2 The German Christian Movement ................................................................................. 6
   1.3 Defining a Doctrine of Sin .......................................................................................... 10
   1.4 Barth’s Doctrine of Sin ............................................................................................... 18
   1.5 German Self Pride ......................................................................................................... 29

2 The German Christian Movement ......................................................................................... 34
   2.1 National Socialist Religiosity .................................................................................. 34
   2.2 The German Christians: An Overview ........................................................................ 39
   2.3 Paul Althaus and Gerhard Kittel ............................................................................ 57
   2.4 Emanuel Hirsch .......................................................................................................... 64
   2.5 Barth’s Reactions to German Christians at the Time ................................................ 71
   2.6 Barth’s Message to the Church .................................................................................. 73
   2.7 Hirsch’s Response ....................................................................................................... 77
   2.8 The German Christian Movement: General Observations ...................................... 83

3 Barth’s Theology of Sin and Pride in Theological Perspective ....................................... 86
   3.1 Sin in a Theology of Reconciliation ........................................................................ 86
   3.2 Reinhold Niebuhr: A Comparative Voice ............................................................... 91
   3.3 The Story of the Golden Calf and the Sin of Pride of the German Christians .... 100
   3.4 Barth’s Theology and the Cold War ....................................................................... 108
Conclusion ................................................................................................................................. 126

APPENDICIES ......................................................................................................................... 134

APPENDIX I Guiding Principles of German Christians .......................................................... 134
APPENDIX II Karl Barth, The Church’s Opposition 1933 ...................................................... 136
APPENDIX III Barth’s Rejection of the German Christian Doctrine .................................... 137
APPENDIX IV Stuttgart Declaration of Guilt ...................................................................... 139
APPENDIX V Darmstadt Statement .................................................................................... 146
APPENDIX VI Petition to the Synod of the Evangelical Church in Germany March 1958 ............................................................................................................................ 148
APPENDIX VIII Theological Declaration of Barmen Section II ........................................ 150

Bibliography .......................................................................................................................... 153
Chapter 1

The Doctrine of Sin

1.1 Introduction

Karl Barth, arguably the greatest Protestant systematic theologian of the twentieth century, represents the foremost voice of the neo-orthodox theology that developed in the aftermath of the Great War. At the centre of Barth’s theology, of course, stands the person of Jesus Christ whose life is not only an historical event, but a present event and a future occurrence as well. Barth thus frames the entire Christian message within the Christological event of the atonement and reconciliation as its foundation. Christianity is God’s covenant fulfilled through the event of Christ, and hence, Barth’s dogmatic approach is Christocentric. The doctrines of creation, eschatology, redemption, consummation, and so on are all encompassed within the circle of ideas radiating from the Christological centre. For Barth, the life, death and resurrection of Christ, is the epicentre from which we must understand all theology. Consequently, this is the approach taken in Barth’s understanding of sin.

A full account of Barth’s theological development of the doctrine of sin, interwoven as it is with these Christological themes, is obviously beyond the scope of this thesis. Barth’s main work, Church Dogmatics, runs to some ten thousand pages alone, representing only about half of his literary output. This argument will narrow the focus to the question of Barth’s theology of sin—not a massive theme in Barth by comparison with some of these
others, but nevertheless one developing over decades through a range of writings, and coming to its fullest expression in Volume IV of his *Church Dogmatics*. Even within the confines of this particular subject, further limitations are necessary. Accordingly, the following argument will focus more narrowly on the specific (and relatively unexamined) question of how this doctrine of sin relates to Barth’s critique of the German Christian Movement. This, it will be argued, is an important aspect of the matter that ought not to be overlooked. For Barth, the doctrine of the person and work of the Word incarnate, or Christology, is the standpoint from which all understanding of everything physical and metaphysical, past future and present is developed. While Scripture as the written Word which bears witness to the incarnate Word is the foundation upon which this understanding must rest, Barth’s theology is also always politically engaged and committed.

One of the great challenges of writing on Barth, beside the sheer volume of material he himself wrote, is the monumental amount of theological material written about him, and in particular, on his *Church Dogmatics* Yet, as stated, there are areas

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1 Alastair McGrath argues that, “For Barth, the standard against which the existent theological constructions must be evaluated is Scripture alone. Since no theological formulation can exhaust the entire teaching of Scripture, every theological formulation must always be in the process of revision”. Chung, *Alister E. McGrath and Evangelical Theology*, 208.

2 Barth, *Church Dogmatics*. Where possible, subsequent references will be given parenthetically as CD in the main text.
which have been overlooked. A literature search through available periodicals\(^3\) yields virtually no material on how Barth’s doctrine of sin applied to the German Christian Movement. This thesis will attempt to address that lacuna in scholarship. To make this practicable, the argument will focus on sin as “The Pride of Man,” as argued in particular in Barth’s *Church Dogmatics* (CD IV/1, 2), which will be treated as a development of Barth’s theological objections to the theological positioning German Christian Movement of the 1930s. Although the scope will be somewhat narrow in face of Barth’s total work, this is required by the nature of the subject. Simultaneously, while attention will need to be given to the relevant religious developments in the 1930s in Germany, it must necessarily be somewhat general at this point, since the German Church Movement was extremely diverse in its theological outlook and development. Since this area has been the subject of massive academic interest, there is insufficient scope within this thesis to consider all the available scholarship.

The argument will proceed as follows. Chapter 1, following these introductory comments (Section 1.1), in Section 1.2, provides a brief examination of the organization known as the “Faith Movement” of “German Christians.” The theology of the group will be explored, via three of the movement’s major theologians: Gerhardt Kittel, Paul Althaus and Emmanuel Hirsch. Barth’s initial reactions to the German Christian

\(^3\) ATLA Database, and Proquest Database search using the terms, “Barth,” “Sin,” “Pride,” “National Socialism,” and “German Church”.
Movement will be outlined within its historical setting. Examination of this period will prove important as background to understanding of his formulation of his doctrine of sin, and provide insight into certain of the key experiential issues which affected his writing. Section 1.3 will consist of a brief overview of the concept of a doctrine of sin, while Section 1.4 provides an overview of Barth’s Doctrine of Sin, and in particular, of his focus on pride. This will be followed by a treatment of the problem of German self-pride in Section 1.5.

Chapter 2 details the German Christian Movement with Section 2.1 describing National Socialist Religiosity, while 2.2 provides an overview of the German Christian Movement featuring some sympathetic theologians. Three of these theologians’ views will be examined in greater detail: Paul Althaus, Gerhard Kittel, and Emanuel Hirsch will be examined in Sections 2.3 and 2.4, followed in 2.5 by Barth’s reaction to the German Christians. Section 2.6 outlines Barth’s message to the church, while 2.7 outlines Hirsch’s response to Barth. Section 2.8 concludes the Chapter with some generalizations about the German Christians as a theological movement.

Chapter 3 focuses on Barth’s theology of sin and pride, with Section 3.1 positioning his hamartiology within the context of his Doctrine of Reconciliation. A brief summary of Barth’s Doctrine of the Church follows in Section 3.2, providing context to an introduction to the theology of Reinhold Niebuhr, generally seen as a fellow neo-orthodox traveller, who had developed a similar understanding of sin based on pride that encompassed both individual and corporate sin. Reinhold Niebuhr’s doctrine of sin and
pride will itself be examined in Section 3.3. Barth’s doctrine of sin will then be examined in Section 3.4, which will allow further concentration on Barth’s understanding of the sin of pride relative to the German Christians. In Section 3.5, this will be followed by an analysis of his hermeneutics of Exodus 32, which will be treated as a parable of his hamartiology, the point being focused on the German Christian Movement. The Chapter will conclude with an outline of Barth’s activities and views following the Second World War, immediately prior to the publication of his Doctrine of Reconciliation in *Church Dogmatics* IV, in order to illustrate the overall coherence of his theology during this period.

As can be seen from this survey, while the focus of this thesis is primarily theological, reference must be made to the historical and political perspective in order to clarify Barth’s approach, even if this perspective will be used mainly to assist in the understanding of the development of Barth’s theology *per se*. As previously noted, a tremendous amount of research exists on this subject, the scope of which lies beyond this thesis, and much of the detail of which is unnecessary for an understanding of the broad theological claims made. Although some of these materials have been used to establish a frame of reference, in short, the thrust of the argument will be theological.
1.2 The German Christian Movement

The “Faith Movement” of “German Christians,” or generally hereafter the “German Christian Movement,” was officially instituted on June 6, 1932 when it announced and published its “Guiding Principles.”\(^4\) Arthur Cochrane, one of the academic pillars of this subject defines their faith loosely as, “a liberal, nationalistic sect which, at the initiative of the national socialist party, formed a union of various schools and groups.”\(^5\) The ideas at its centre had been in circulation for some time prior to 1932. The League for a German Church (Bund für deutsche Kirke), a forerunner of these later developments founded in June 1921, “demanded that the Old Testament no longer be accepted as canonical; that Paul’s rabbinic principle of redemption be done away; and that Jesus’s death be presented as a heroic sacrifice in line with Germanic mysticism.”\(^6\) The radical “Thüringian German Christians,” founded by Julius Leutheuser and Siegfried Leffler in 1928, argued that the “dead orthodoxy” espoused by academic systematic theology was irrelevant to the spiritual life of the church and practical needs of the people. They saw in the National Socialist Party (NSP) a genuine human fellowship and

\(^4\) Cochrane, *The Church’s Confession Under Hitler*, 74.

\(^5\) Ibid.

\(^6\) Ibid., 75.
focal point of nationalistic activism that would enable them to revitalize the church.\footnote{Ibid., 75–76.} Cochrane argues that they went so far as to replace Christ with the \textit{Volk}.\footnote{Ibid., 77.} Cochrane cautions, however, that we should view this action within its context rather than with the incredulity that viewing the past enables.

In the beginning, as is well known, Hitler wanted the people to believe that his party was Christian. The “German Christians,” under the leadership of Pastor Joachim Hossenfelder, was sanctioned by the party for the whole Reich and published its Guiding Principles on June 6, 1932.\footnote{Ibid., 82.} The German Christians saw themselves as seizing a golden opportunity presented by political developments to reawaken spirituality and return the church to its “rightful place at the heart of German society and culture.”\footnote{Bergen, \textit{Twisted Cross}, 2.} Thus, while in their attempt to adapt Christianity to National Socialism, they were strongly anti-Semitic and supported the Nazi agenda as reflection of true German Christianity, their goal was primarily religious as well as political.\footnote{\textit{For the Soul of the People}, 27.}
In the early months of 1933, the Nazi Party itself encouraged Germans to re-join the church. An apparent reversal of the trend of declining church membership resulted, and contextually it thus becomes easier to understand the appeal of Nazism to some churchmen. In 1932, for instance, the state church suffered a net loss of 166,000 members, while in 1933 there was a net gain of 271,000 recorded members. The NSP encouraged support of the German Christians in the Church elections in July 1933 where they won two thirds of the votes cast. Hitler himself, in a radio broadcast, openly supported the German Christians ensuring their momentum and success.

The tide turned somewhat after a national rally of the German Christian movement was held in the Berlin Sportspalast on November 13, 1933. Dr Reinhold Krause, Gauobmann of the Faith Movement in Berlin, standing in front of an audience of twenty thousand clergy and laity, delivered his definition of the new German Protestant church. It was to be neither Lutheran nor Reformed, but rather “one mighty, new, all-

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12 Ibid., 32.
13 Bergen, Twisted Cross, 5.
14 Barnett, For the Soul of the People, 34.
15 “In 1933 approximately 41 million Germans were officially registered as Evangelical (Protestant) and 21 million as Catholic from a total population of 65 million. The Lutheran regional churches embraced nearly half of the Protestants, and the United regional churches the other half. The United churches, the largest of which was the Church of the Old Prussian Union prior to the break-up of Prussia after the Second World War, were shaped predominately by Lutheran practices and traditions even though they had been administered since 1817 as a union of Lutheran and Reformed.” In Hockenos, A Church Divided German Protestants Confront the Nazi Past, 187.
embracing German people's Church”—which would rid itself of “the Old Testament with its Jewish morality of rewards, and its stories of cattle-dealers and concubines.”

JS Conway summarizes Krause’s agenda as follows: “All perverted and superstitious passages were to be removed from the New Testament, and the whole theology of the Rabbi Paul, with its ideas of scapegoats and its sense of inferiority, was to be expunged. Exaggerated views of the Crucified were to be avoided and a ‘heroic’ Jesus proclaimed.”

This rally, however, served both as the pinnacle of the success of the German Christian movement, and the beginning of its decline. Countless less radical members immediately distanced themselves from the movement, primarily as Krause’s proclamation was so identifiably Marcionite in character. Indeed, Krause himself was shortly dismissed as a result of this disaster, and the leadership hastily reorganized. Consequently, this event led to the formation of the Pastors’ Emergency League, the establishment of the “Confessing Church,” the approval of the famous “Barman Declaration” by a Synod of the Confessing Church in 1934, and, significantly, a distinct loss of support for the “German Christians” from the NSP.

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17 Ibid.
It must be understood that the German people had suffered tremendously in the Weimar years, and the success of National Socialism provided hope and a reaffirmation that German society had not been annihilated. By 1935, Hitler had the German economy recovering well, with unemployment falling, and people looked to him for change. Detailed historical context lies beyond the scope of this thesis, nevertheless, our sketch of religious developments following Hitler’s rise must be understood within the parameters of the period, ultimately deferring to historians.

1.3 Defining a Doctrine of Sin

While theologians have been debating the nature of sin since the time of the early church fathers, framing a definition of sin, in a secular postmodern world, becomes increasingly difficult and controversial. Indeed, modern Protestantism’s challenge of defining sin is barely contained by parameters similar to those that Justice Potter Stewart used to define pornography in the United States Supreme Court decision in 1964. To paraphrase, *I don’t know what it is – but I know it when I see it.*

The classic doctrine of sin as espoused in traditional Christianity endeavours to understand humanity’s broken relationship with God through the rebellion of the original human couple. The keystones of the classical understanding of evil were the doctrine of original sin, particularly as understood in the Augustinian tradition, and the extent to which
humankind has free will to enable a choice between good and evil. Original sin is a fault and a corruption of original flawlessness.18

Karl Barth’s education included the standard, Augustinian account of original sin that dominated Latin hamartiology from the patristic to the modern period.19 He was also familiar with the development of the Augustinian thesis in Luther’s theology and in modern Protestantism, which tends to psychologize the Augustinian position, often through some adaptation of Luther’s view of sin, “Humanity is curved in upon itself.”20 A full account of the shape of these treatments of sin from the tradition is, however, again beyond the scope of this thesis. Of greater importance for an understanding of Barth are the developments in the liberal Protestant traditions of the 19th century, as he understood them, beginning with Immanuel Kant’s famous work, Religion Within The Limits Of Reason.21

Operating to a surprising extent in the broad framework of Lutheran orthodoxy, Kant frames the problem of religion in relation to human sinfulness. He had to negotiate the two prevailing views of human nature in his time, namely, the optimistic view of the Enlightenment which advocated human freedom and resisted older religious assumptions

18 Rondet, Original Sin, 40.
20 Jenson, Gravity of Sin Augustine, Luther, and Barth on Homo Incurvatus in Se, 189.
21 Kant, Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone.
concerning a human inclination toward evil, and the more traditional, pessimistic view of
the totality of the corruption of human nature. Kant rejected both of these concepts,
including the Augustinian idea of the inheritance of original sin from our first parents.
The position he developed can, by contrast, be seen as an attempt to negotiate a middle
way between these two standard positions of his time.

On the one hand, Kant argued that practical reason allowed a self-sufficient
understanding of ethics, including one’s fellow human being as a person. Through
recognition of the other, ethical behaviour required no further motive than one’s inherent
sense of duty toward the good, and like many Enlightenment thinkers, Kant held that this
desire was God given. Thus, Kant argues, “that to be committed to the moral life is to
make the practical presupposition of a beneficent being of sufficient power to unite full
virtue and happiness (that is, to bring about the sumnum bonum), and also of the future
state in which the soul will enjoy this union.” Although there was some assurance that
goodness would ultimately be realized, “at the same time he recognized that
consideration of any short-term reward will bias ethical judgment.”

22 Barth, Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century, 252–98.
23 Ferguson, Wright, and Packer, New Dictionary of Theology, 363.
On the other hand, Kant placed the source of sin within the very realm of human free will that he saw as the basis of ethics. He argued that human nature is essentially rational and good, but that we have to recognize nevertheless that this goodness is irrationally perverted through an innate wickedness in our nature. Against the optimism of the Enlightenment, Kant thus argued that that there is something radically wrong with humanity, something that has to be held to precede our actions, so that our natural propensity towards rationality and goodness is warped. Humankind is thus a victim of a “moral evil in us (which) has no conceivable ground in origin.” For Kant, the tragedy of humankind is its inability to reach its potential perfection. Thus our finitude, which includes our inability to transcend these limitations, is bound up with the reality of sin.

As received in the outlook of the nineteenth century, the theory emerging from Kant’s position was that a genuinely free will, the moral law, and the will of God would be one and the same. A holy person, through their innate perfection, would by nature and rational necessity conform to the moral law. Humankind’s propensity to sin is therefore not due to any defect in the human person, beyond sheer weakness or imperfection of will. People of weak will cannot do what they ought, and therefore commit sin. Villains are not determined to sin, but are unfortunate victims of weak will.

Theological adaptation of such ideas reached an apex in the work of the great Protestant thinker, Friedrich Schleiermacher. Schleiermacher, who attempted in his theology both to do justice to the tradition while also comprehensively transcending it, posited that the original sin event was merely the initiation of a developmental evolution in which the immature couple imagined in the Genesis narrative would develop toward rationality and “God consciousness.” The account of the Fall in Genesis is parabolic rather than historical, and speaks to each individual’s experience in life, rather than to two individuals’ experiences in a remote past. God consciousness, Schleiermacher argues, does not emerge in childhood or youth, but only in adulthood. He maintains that there can be a similar progression in society. As humankind progresses through history, and in particular as it reaps the benefits of Enlightenment progress, it may achieve a significant movement towards perfection through the emergence of a complete God consciousness. Thus no direct culpability seems apparent for sin. For Schleiermacher, humankind’s current state of sin results from what could be characterized simply as incomplete personal and social developmental growth.

Barth’s theology is frequently constructed in antithetical tension with themes from the work of Schleiermacher, and his theology of sin is no exception. At the same time, Barth is clearly not simply an advocate of the old orthodoxy, whether as mediated

through Protestantism or any other tradition. Barth’s argument is notoriously complex, but its most general quality is that it focuses on a definition of sin that is only possible in the light of the covenant and the Christ event. Whereas most theologians define sin and evil as oppositional to good, Barth argues that sin in reality is nothingness. God is the creator and created only light, *ex nihilo*, whereas the darkness is made possible by the very creation of light. In the Genesis narrative, when God created the world, it was good. The opposite of good is not, therefore, an evil that “exists” in creation alongside of the good. It is, rather, nothingness—nothingness that stands by virtue of the fact that it is a paradoxical “No” made possible only by God’s “Yes” in covenant, creation and reconciliation. And as such, nothingness is a force to be reckoned with in life, since its power is, in a manner of speaking, perversely proportional to the strength of God’s good purpose.

While the subtleties of this position, developed as it is through the labyrinthine pages of Volume III/1-4 of *Church Dogmatics*, lie well beyond the scope of this thesis, a brief summary of Barth’s *das Nichtige* (nothingness), will provide at least some context for the treatment of sin as pride:

> That which God renounces and abandons in virtue of His decision is not merely nothing. It is nothingness, and has as such its own being, albeit malignant and perverse. A real dimension is disclosed, and existence and form are given to a reality *sui generis*, in the fact that God is wholly and utterly not the Creator in this respect. Nothingness is that which God does not will. It lives only by the fact that it is that which God does not will. But it does live by this fact. For not only what God wills, but what He does not will, is potent, and must have a real correspondence. What really corresponds to that which God does not will is nothingness. (CD III/3, 352)
This is not a Gnosticizing concept of cosmic duality, but rather, according to Barth’s East German disciple Wolf Krötke, it is something that must be “‘estimated’ to be as weak as possible with respect to God,” and “as great as possible with respect to the human creature.”

Foundational to Barth’s theology lies his argument that God is “Wholly Other,” and without creaturely analogy, so that his works and ways can therefore be understood only through themselves. Even human sin may only be understood and recognized through the covenant of grace, which comes to fruition in the event of reconciliation through Jesus Christ. Here the condescension of God in obediently becoming a servant, in what Barth calls the “humiliation of the Son of God,” as “the judge judged in our place,” stands against and reveals the prideful sin, disobedience and self-judgment of the human race.

Barth’s theology at this point is so comprehensively dependent on the Christ-event that even the particular decisions, dispositions and disobediences of the creature seem occasionally not to matter. He writes: “The devil can then be denied or described as the last candidate for the salvation which is due to him” (CD III/3, 300) through the Christ event. God conquered sin through creation in the person of Jesus and therefore all are

27 Krötke, Sin and Nothingness in the Theology of Karl Barth, 25.

28 Ibid., 57.
seemingly not simply candidates for salvation, but (at times, it would seem) its beneficiaries. The unique aspect of this conception of sin is that there is no characteristic emphasis of blame or oppression, but only recognition of a decision, which is the decision that God has made before all time to be “God for us,” “Emmanuel.”

Traditional theologians, particularly in the Protestant tradition, frequently begin from either the human species’ broken relationship with God, or from the individual’s separation through sin, as encountered psychologically in guilt. There are, however, problems with such approaches that are overcome in Barth’s theology. Not the least of these is the fact that, when we examine the relationships between oppressors and oppressed, guilty and innocent, suffering or advantaged, and victims and their conquerors in the light of their relationship with God, a single elegant definition of sin becomes untenable. At the phenomenological level, sin simply weaves itself through human experience in too subtle a fashion to be reducible to any one thing. It is, furthermore, on Barth’s account, in itself strictly a “nothingness” that is comprehensible only on the basis of God’s grace. By understanding sin instead as the “No,” in effect, spoken in face of God’s “Yes,” Barth thus allows for an alternative approach. The vanity of past Christian theologians, including those of the Enlightenment, in their ambition to somehow understand and thereby overcome sin, has proved more successful in emphasizing the limitations of mankind than comprehending God from whom we are separated is seen by Barth as a fundamental error. Barth’s position concerning God as being “wholly other,” therefore, and so incapable of becoming sequestered within the bounds of reason, mandates a certain sense of humility, which is required in the approach to a formulation
of a doctrine of sin. Any attempt to understand sin without the Christ event at the centre is thus hopelessly mistaken, as we will see more closely in the next Section.

1.4 Barth’s Doctrine of Sin

Barth actually wrote his key account of the doctrine of sin as the “Pride and Fall of Man” under the chapter heading, “Jesus Christ, the Lord as Servant,” which articulates one of the leading themes of his entire Doctrine of Reconciliation. Like all of his theology, Barth’s doctrine of sin developed in this context is, then, Christologically defined. The first part of the account in question is entitled, “The Man of Sin in the Light of the Obedience of the Son of God.” Not only is the reconciliation of humanity here firmly placed within the context of the covenant, but so is the question of alienation from God by virtue of sin. The latter, in short, is “nothingness” in itself and therefore cannot be understood out of itself. It can only be understood by reference to that to which it says its futile utterance, “No.”

The reference to the concept of “covenant” here and occasionally in the foregoing is clearly important, and may bear some clarification – though again, this is a massive theme in Barth, developed over many hundreds of pages of text produced across several decades, and which therefore cannot be treated in any detail. The one key point that needs to be made, perhaps, is that, for Barth, the concept of the covenant refers in the first
instance to a determination made by God of God’s own being, that he will be from all eternity “God for us.” The double thrust of the argument is that, owing to the covenant by which God determines himself to be God for us, there is first of all no God without humanity, and, correlatively, no “Godless” human either. The latter’s “No” is made possible only because God’s covenantal “Yes” was triumphantly spoken, before time began, and even more triumphantly and astonishingly realized in time in the birth, life, death and resurrection of Christ. The relationship of God and humanity of which Barth speaks, a relationship grounded in the God-man, is therefore not something based on some purely human “decision” to embrace Christian faith, but is instead that without which there would be neither faith, nor humanity, nor indeed a world or a cosmos at all. The relationship of God and humanity in Christ, therefore, is not so much something we choose as it is a universal fact of life, to which Christian proclamation bears witness. In Barth’s theology, famously, it is the truest thing about us, whether we believe it or not, and whether we are obedient to it or not.

Central to the Christ event, as alluded to earlier, is the dramatic story of the cross, in which, as Barth puts it, the “Judge” is “judged in our place.” When we ask the

29 Barth, Church Dogmatics, II/1, §28; II/2, §§32-35. The theme is of such importance to Barth that it is restated at the outset of the Doctrine of Reconciliation again, a decade and some thousands of pages later, in Church Dogmatics, IV/1, §57.

30 Barth, Church Dogmatics, IV/1, §59.2.
question, “How is Jesus ‘God for us’?” the radical answer from Barth’s theology is that in Jesus, God makes himself one with humankind in such a way that there is “no reservation in respect of His solidarity with us,” and so that He becomes “the brother of man, threatened with man…with him in the stream which hurries downwards to the abyss, hastening with him to death, to the cessation of being and nothingness.”31 Barth carries his Christological argument consistently, maintaining that the human nature assumed by the Son of God in the incarnation was sinful human nature, “sarb” in the full Biblical sense of the term (referring to John 1:14). 32 Since there is no other Judge, and no other judgment than what happens when the God-man takes our place on the cross, the twofold implication is firstly, the exaltation of humankind, in the sense that “the fact that Jesus Christ judges in our place means an immeasurable liberation and hope,” and simultaneously “the abasement and jeopardizing of every man,” in the sense that we are deprived of our supposed divine likeness in presuming to be capable of judging ourselves. (CD IV/1, pp. 232-233) According to Barth, “if this man is my divine Judge, I myself cannot be judge any longer. I have forfeited the claim to be it and the enjoyment of being it. In the history of this man it came to pass that I was relegated from the sphere

32 Barth, Church Dogmatics, IV/1, pp. 165ff.
in which I wished to judge and placed in the sphere in which I can only see and hear and learn what the judgment really is by which I have to judge myself.” (CD IV/1, 233)

In light of Barth’s account of reconciliation, the sin of humankind is thus revealed as judgment of themselves, and of others. Persons are not only presuming to be equal to God full in the knowledge of good and evil, but pridefully denying the humiliation of the Son of God, by which we are displaced as judges, and by which God’s good judgment is triumphantly realized. To theologians who would question the radical character of these claims, and on the basis of an older orthodoxy hold out for the notion of God as a stern Judge whom one has always to fear in the light of the Biblical message because of pervasive human guilt and sin, Barth’s response is very simple: “A division of God into a God in Christ and a god outside Christ is quite impossible. We cannot start from such a division even in our question concerning the basis of the knowledge of human sin.” (CD IV/1, 363) Barth again emphasizes in this context, “nor is it clear how it can be otherwise than a doctrine of sin which precedes Christology and is independent of it should consciously or unconsciously, directly or indirectly, move in the direction of this idol and his claim.” (CD IV/1, 365) Clearly his focus is on redemption and the covenanted grace of Jesus Christ, but his theological method is also to begin with grace and to move from it to an understanding of sin, rather than to begin with sin and move from sin to grace.
Theology maintains a duty and function to the Church, and ensure that its being is “Jesus Christ: God in His gracious revealing and reconciling address to man” (CD 1/1, 4). Barth defined dogmatics as “scientific reflection on the Word of God,” where the word “scientific” has the Germanic sense of ordered, rational academic discourse. Responding to liberal theology’s insistence that God must be understood exclusively through human experience and historical reasoning, Barth argues that the faith of the believer and the life of the church have their origin in an action originating from the Trinitarian Godhead. The faith and life of the church cannot be understood separately from God’s action in Jesus Christ, and is inconceivable in its full Biblical contours on a purely anthropological model. (CD 1/1, 41). The Word of God is ‘God in his revelation’ with the participation of all persons of the Trinity, for the purpose of reconciliation to humankind, the created. For Barth, “the task of theology is, therefore, the explication of the content and event of the self-presentation of God as the ground of created reality and as the realization of its reconciliation.”

Barth’s theology, surprisingly, thus claims that only in the light of Christology is an adequate understanding of sin possible. It is not just that humanity lacks the ability to

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33 Schwobel, Christoph, “Theology.”
34 Barth, The Göttingen dogmatics, 6.
become self-aware of its sinfulness otherwise, or that the Bible teaches us the nature of sin, or that we are sinners. Nor is it simply that, when confronted by the awesome truth of the Godhead, we recognize our disobedience to God and see ourselves naked, and vulnerable in disobedience to the Creator and outside the community of Christ. (CD IV/1, 362) It is, rather, much more narrowly and consistently Barth’s argument that inevitably there can be no doctrine of sin exclusive of Christ, since sin is the “No” to precisely this “Yes,” to Jesus Christ as the one in whom the judgment is executed and humankind and God reconciled. Any current theological doctrine of sin which is independent of Christology, therefore, even when the theology in question concerns God and his law, consciously or unconsciously moves in the direction of an idolatry, and tends towards that very particular form of idolatry that is modernity’s ideal of reason. (CD IV/1, 365)

Accordingly, in his treatment of sin as pride, Barth defines sin in very strict terms, making reference to the particularity of God’s action in Jesus Christ. He writes as follows:

In sin, man does that which God does not will, which, seeing that God is over him and he is the creature and covenant-partner of God, he ought not to do. Sin is the act of man in which he ignores and offends the divine majesty. Sin is, therefore, disobedience. And this disobedience rests on man's self-alienation from the particular character of the majesty of God, which does not consist in the empty transcendence of a quite different being which is absolutely superior to man and raises an absolute claim on him, but which is rather the majesty and sovereignty and omnipotence and freedom of His love and goodness. Man sins in that he ignores and despises the redemptive significance of the divine command, and the promise which he has to lay hold of in obedience. (CD IV/1, 414)
This command and obedience, however, are what are at stake in the proclamation of Jesus Christ. As Barth goes on immediately to say, any general account of sin as “disobedience” needs further concretion:

What sin is, what the unbelief is which gives rise to disobedience, is revealed in man’s relationship, his confrontation with Jesus Christ. Man’s sin is unbelief in the God who was “in Christ reconciling the world to himself,” who in Him elected and loved man from all eternity, who in Him created him, whose word to man from and to all eternity was and will be Jesus Christ. In Him there is revealed that which is most inward and proper to the being and existence and all the works of God, His free grace and therefore His majesty which demands faith and the obedience of faith. In Him God Himself is revealed as the One who commands in goodness, the One that He always was and will be, the One in whom—He was never any other—He confronted and will confront the men of every age. The disobedience and therefore the sin of man was revealed at Golgotha as unbelief in this God—but only revealed, for in fact (in Israel or among the nations) it was never anything else but unbelief in this God, and whenever and wherever there may be men it will never be anything else but unbelief in the Word, the Son, in whom God made them His and Himself theirs, unbelief in Jesus Christ. … What God wills is revealed in what He has done in Jesus Christ. What He wills of man is that which corresponds in its human way to His own divine action in Jesus Christ. The sin of man is the human action which does not correspond to the divine action in Jesus Christ but contradicts it. (CD IV/1, 414-15)

Eberhard Busch interprets, “Sin was thus strictly understood as a counter-movement against the action of God; as a contradiction not against an abstract, general law but against God’s grace; as a contradiction which in truth cannot be known without grace, a
contradiction which fundamentally comes too late and cannot do away with God’s grace.”

Although sin in Barth’s theology is pride, falsehood and sloth, each aspect of which is pursued at length through the pages of Church Dogmatics, Volume IV, pride is arguably the fundamental sin for Barth, just as divine humility is the fundamental theme of Barth’s Christology. “Sin in its unity and totality is always pride,” Barth writes, issuing in concrete its delineation in the disobedience and “unbelief” of humankind. (CD IV/1, 413-414) While the treatment of sin as pride is unique in Barth, an interest in the sin of pride is pervasive in the Christian theological tradition of Augustine, Luther and Calvin who all provided inspiration for Barth’s hamartiology.

Pride plays the lead role for Augustine, for example, who in his City of God spoke of the genesis of original sin in the following terms:

Our first parents fell into open disobedience because already they were secretly corrupted; for the evil act had never been done had not an evil will preceded it. And what is the origin of our evil will but pride? For “pride is the beginning of sin.” And what is pride but the craving for undue exaltation? And this is undue exaltation, when the soul abandons Him to whom it ought to cleave as its end, and becomes a kind of end to itself.  


37 Augustine and Dods, The City of God, 460.
Augustine sees this sin as a disease, passed from one generation to the next, a power which holds us captive, defined by inherited guilt.\textsuperscript{38}

Equally, the theme emerges in the theology of the Reformation. Luther’ concept of *humilitas* in his early lectures on the Psalms and Romans can be noted to start. *Humilitas* is essential in the spirit of a Christian. Matt Jensen summarizes and quotes Luther from the American edition of *Luther’s Works* (Philadelphia and St. Louis 1955-86):

The tearing down of pride and establishment of humility is the whole purpose and intention of the apostle in this epistle, which means to … break down all righteousness and wisdom of our own, to point out again those sins and foolish practices which did not exist (that is, those whose existence we did not recognize on account of that kind of righteousness), to blow them up and to magnify them (that is, to cause them to be recognized as still in existence and as numerous and serious), and thus to show that for breaking them down Christ and His righteousness are needed for us.\textsuperscript{39}

The theme that the pride of man must be broken and replaced by Christ’s humility is in fact central to Luther’s theological development. Distinct from Barth, however, Luther argues that it is the Law that “exposes and arouses” the *old man* to recognize his sinfulness and repent.\textsuperscript{40} A similar interest in pride emerges in the theology of John

\textsuperscript{38} McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 445–46.

\textsuperscript{39} Jenson, *Gravity of Sin Augustine, Luther, and Barth on Homo Incurvatus in Se*, 60.

\textsuperscript{40} Ibid.
Calvin. When describing original sin in the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Calvin writes:

Hence infidelity was at the root of the revolt. From infidelity, again, sprang ambition and pride, together with ingratitude; because Adam, by longing for more than was allotted him, manifested contempt for the great liberality with which God had enriched him.  

But while both Calvin and Luther strive for humility to counter pride and therefore sin, neither anticipate the radical character of Karl Barth’s treatment of pride, or his claim that the doctrine of sin is only possible in the strict sense in a Christological framework. This is a uniquely Barthian position, which is consistently thought through, and yields new possibilities, other than can be seen in the traditional orthodoxies.

An implication of Barth’s position, for instance, is that humility is not advocated in any moralistic fashion as a remedy for sin, or as defence against temptation. In fact, one of the distinct strands of argument encountered in Barth has been that the kind of displacement of the self as judge that comes from the astonishing encounter with Christ in his theology yields a certain exaltation, in that the theme is reconciliation rather than condemnation. Thus Barth’s approach provides more nuance than the possibilities of previous theologies, and is not simply a recapitulation of these older positions. This is

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important to remember as we begin now to transition to the question of the sin of pride implicit in the German Christian Movement for Barth. Barth’s response to it is by no means moralistic, nor does he consider humility as a type of virtue in face of the pride of the German Christians. Rather, he sees the pride of the German Christians as a characteristic of sin in the light of his Christology.

One can view the question of pride and humility as a major issue in the ethos of the times, particularly in Germany following the Great War. The German nation subsequent to the War felt deep humiliation and guilt; indeed, arguably it was forced upon them by the terms of the peace. Scholder sums up, “So it was impossible to insult and humiliate the conquered Germans more deeply than by forcing them in the Peace Treaty to acknowledge that they alone were to blame for the war.”\textsuperscript{42} It is within this dynamic that we need to understand the emerging demand in Weimar Germany for a rediscovery of German pride. We turn to this question now, first by way of a concluding Section in the present Chapter, and more fully by way of a treatment of the German Christian Movement in Chapter 2.

\textsuperscript{42} Scholder, \textit{A Requiem for Hitler}, 79.
1.5 German Self Pride

Between 1890 and 1914, the German population exploded from 49 to 66 million, and the German economy grew faster than any other country in Europe.\(^{43}\) Germany’s industrial strength facilitated the development of a sophisticated military with the sixth largest naval fleet in the world. The years in question were a period of empire building by the European powers, of course, and the Kaiser Wilhelm wanted to make Germany a major imperial power.\(^{44}\) The nationalism of the Social Democratic Party\(^ {45}\) included a rejection of the rights of man, democracy, liberalism and individualism, replacing them with supposedly “German” values such as duty, discipline, law and order. Order was to replace the libertarianism of the politics of the Enlightenment as they developed in much of Europe and the world in the 1800s, and instead, solidarity as a means of freedom was to be embraced.\(^ {46}\)

Germany went into the Great War with great ambitions. Its leaders, emboldened by their defeat of France decades earlier, and bolstered by the technological and numerical advantages of the German military, were convinced of impending victory,


\(^{44}\) Ibid., 4.

\(^{45}\) The Social Democratic Party had obtained the highest number of votes in national elections in 1912.

resulting in the elevation of Germany to a preeminent position as a world superpower. German Chancellor, Bethmann Hollweg, outlined the German war objectives in 1914: to weaken France such that it could never again be a great international power; to break Russian domination within Eastern Europe through German conquest; to achieve German economic supremacy in central Europe through the creation of a vast customs union; and to establish a large central African German empire.\(^\text{47}\)

Against this background, the tragedy of the defeat of the German people in 1918 was exacerbated by the actions of the Allied victors in the Treaty of Versailles. Germany lost 13\% of her territory, populated by around 6 million subjects; the Austro-Hungarian empire was dismantled, such that Austria was not allowed to join the German Reich; and Germany lost all of its colonies. The German army under the peace of Versailles was limited to 100,000 men who were deprived of offensive weapons. The Navy and Air Force were annihilated. Allied troops were to occupy parts of the Rhineland for at least 15 years to assure the terms of the Treaty were met. All overseas German investments were confiscated by the Allies, as was the German Merchant Marine. As if all of this were not enough, reparation payments were devastating.\(^\text{48}\)


The Allies justified the devastating financial reparations through Article 231 of the Versailles Treaty. This was the “war-guilt clause” which obligated the German People to accept full responsibility for the outbreak of the war. “In Article 231 of the Peace Treaty of Versailles the Germans had to sign the statement ‘that as the originators of the war, Germany and her allies are responsible for all losses and damage which the allied ... governments and members of their states have suffered as a result of the war forced upon them by Germany's attack.’”49 Because most Germans knew little of the enormity of the German defeat, and believed that Germany had requested an armistice, they “greeted the terms of the Treaty of Versailles with varying degrees of anger, horror and disgust.” The German signatories of the treaty were ridiculed by nationalists as “the criminals of 1919.”50

In the ensuing years, as the post-War crisis spiralled out of control, most Germans considered the Treaty to be responsible for the ensuing social, economic and political disasters of the Weimar Republic. With the ravaged economy and political instability, the German people felt that they had been deliberately and unjustly humiliated by the international community. The old empire, in the German imagination of the time, was envisioned as a lost utopia of order and progress.

49 Scholder, A Requiem for Hitler, 24.
Ultimately the imposition of such sanctions fuelled a revival of German nationalism, accompanied in the context of the post-War era, by a fear of Marxism. Germans were desperate for a return to the greatness of a nation which had produced Beethoven, Goethe, and the greatness of the Prussian military. In due course, National Socialism, and Hitler, would promise all this and more.

While all this is familiar, most people are less aware of the extent to which these movements fused in a range of German nationalism after the Great War with religious ideas. Such ideas came to expression in the 1920s, and finally to grotesque fruition in the 1930s in the context of the German Christian Movement, in which pastors assisted actively in mediating the Nazi ideological trajectory, as they offered public reassurance that Nazism and the church held shared values. Susannah Heschel argues,

The fusion of Protestantism and Germanism was read into Nazism by German Christians, and Jesus was viewed as prefiguring Hitler, who in turn was imagined as an avatar of Martin Luther; [Siegfried] Leffler declared in 1935 that Hitler stood in a direct line with Luther. Both had brought about a national revival that Leffler interpreted as a part of religious history, and the two were conflated: “So we cannot think of Adolf Hitler without Martin Luther.” Through Nazism, Christianity could achieve its own revival; Leutheuser wrote in 1931:

In Adolf Hitler we see the powers again awakening which were once given to the Savior. For the National Socialists there is the experience of joy that finally one can sacrifice his life for something that will remain.... Our way is rough, but one thing we know, that we shall as a result maintain a pure soul. Golgotha is followed by the resurrection. We are still standing on the way to Golgotha. Some
will remain on it, but the soul, it cannot be stolen. Into your hands we commend our spirit, for Adolf Hitler we will gladly die.\textsuperscript{51}

\textsuperscript{51} Heschel, \textit{The Aryan Jesus}, 283.
2 The German Christian Movement

Political leaders throughout history have claimed divine right when they went to war. In Manichean oversimplification, they have sacrilized themselves and demonized their opponents. The essential message to their subjects and citizens was that injustice had been done to them: they had suffered attack, unjust treatment, invasion or similar, and were at risk of further imminent injury. Such is the nature of political rhetoric in its invocation of just war theory, the strength of which is sufficient for leaders to invoke God or the gods as justification for their use of violence. Rulers have further used and continue to optimize propaganda to solidify these convictions, and with it, to vilify their opponents.

This pattern is certainly exemplified in the rise of the National Socialist Party in Germany, following the enforced depredations and active failures of the Weimar Republic. It helps to explain the fact that the rise of the Nazis was closely allied with religion, and as the present Chapter will argue, with the creation of a new national political identity in which religion featured massively.

2.1 National Socialist Religiosity

Karl Schmidt, the German political philosopher whose ideas massively influenced the Nazis, asserted circa 1922 that, “all significant concepts of the theory of the modern state are secularized theological concepts,” thus cementing in Nazi thought the notion that a renewed
religion and the renewal of the Reich need to be held together.\(^{52}\) It is well known that Hitler wanted to replace the “decadent” liberal pluralist democracy of the Weimar Republic with a “Volksgemeinshaft” that, in the Fascist manner, would be “inwardly characterized by ‘harmonious’ unity and outwardly characterized by belligerent heroism.”\(^{53}\) Less understood is how and why German religion embraced Hitler, or the extent to which Hitler looked to religious sources for support, or guidance.

Many historians\(^ {54}\) contend that the Nazi Party itself became a religion and that the unofficial National Socialist philosopher, Alfred Rosenberg, represents this development. “Rosenberg in particular, convinced that he had successfully outlined a new religious belief system, salvaged many dimensions of the Christian worldview for his new, un-Christian faith.”\(^ {55}\) Ian Kershaw contends that Nazism was unique in its “implementation of the politics of national salvation,” in which Hitler’s “charismatic authority,”\(^ {56}\) said to be God-given, exploited a “messianic” impression among the public which created a notion of an idealized


\(^{53}\) Bucher and Pohl, *Hitler’s Theology*, 5.

\(^{54}\) A succinct article which compares the secular religion approach in contrast to Richard Steigmann-Gall’s refutation thereof, may be found in Babík, Milan, “Nazism as a Secular Religion,” 375–96.

\(^{55}\) Steigmann-Gall, *The Holy Reich*, 262.

\(^{56}\) Kershaw, “Hitler and the Uniqueness of Nazism,” 245. Kershaw explains, “A constant theme of my writing on Hitler and National Socialism has been to suggest that they are best grasped through Max Weber’s quasi-religious concept of ‘charismatic authority,’ in which irrational hopes and expectations of salvation are projected onto an individual, who is thereby invested with heroic qualities.”
“mission” (Sendung) to bring about “salvation” (Rettung) or “redemption” (Erlösung), not only for the German people, but eventually for Europe as a whole.\textsuperscript{57} Kershaw labels this the “Führer myth.” A similar approach is taken by Michael Burleigh, who defined Nazi ethics in the following stark terms: “everything that serves the preservation of the nation is morally good; everything that in the slightest degree threatens its fidelity is wrong and abominable.”\textsuperscript{58} The religious implication of this is clear: Hitler is made a redeemer figure, the redeemed are the suffering and humiliated members of the Aryan race, and the millenarian expectation of the eschaton is provided by the dream of the thousand year German Reich. These connections may seem bizarre to contemporary theological readership, however, these ideas held massive appeal, so much so that Catholic theologian Rainer Bucher insists that, even today, they cannot he ignored. He summarizes, “it is unnecessary to disprove Hitler's theology: it did that itself. But it is necessary to study it.”\textsuperscript{59}

The Glaubensbewegung Deutsche Christen (GDC), or German Christian Movement, was founded in 1931 by Protestant church members who tried to actively integrate Hitler’s developing political movement with their faith. Surprisingly, one of their main thrusts was to introduce “positive Christianity” into the emerging state. In German parlance, the phrase “positive Christianity” is better interpreted as “revealed Christianity,” so that the implicit

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., 249–50.

\textsuperscript{58} Burleigh, \textit{The Third Reich}, 254.

\textsuperscript{59} Bucher and Pohl, \textit{Hitler’s Theology}, 5.
claim is that the Nazi Protestant outlook is divinely-mandated. The background, in part, is a rejection of the theological liberalism that was allied with the ideals of the Weimar democracy, and an endorsement of a much more nationalistic outlook. Their traditional anti-liberal understanding endorsed the National Socialist Party’s own claim, “We stand on the basis of positive Christianity. We confess ourselves to be for an affirmative Christ-faith, appropriate to our type, corresponding to the German Luther-spirit and heroic piety.” As is well known, they believed Jesus to be Aryan—heroic, and manly. However, there was also a distinct commitment to Luther. In a representative statement, one German Christian Movement pastor identified Luther as the foremost interpreter of Christianity, while maintaining that the Germans were set apart from the rest of mankind:

He among us who understands the voice of the blood knows that repentance and the love of freedom—the will to self-determination, to free sovereign decisiveness, and self-reliant responsibility, together with attachment and affirmative fidelity—belong together as the basic structure of the German. If we name two other essential characteristics, unconditional truthfulness and unflinching courage, then we have named the four pillars of German, Nordic life. Naturally, one can find these virtues and the results of these virtues among other peoples. The peculiarity of the structure of the German, Nordic religiosity is their primacy and the way they work together, so that one characteristic relies on, and is contained by, the other. And this spirituality is incorporated in a wonderful way in Luther the German.  

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61 Ibid.
These kinds of overtly religious claims have too often not been taken seriously in assessments of Nazism, and historically, the area has been under-researched. However, in a controversial book published in 2004, Richard Steigman-Gall expounds on the faith of several high profile Nazi leaders, paying close attention to their thinking. He describes in unnerving terms, for instance, the Reich Minister of Propaganda Joseph Goebbels’ “fascination with the person of Christ [as] more than just an appropriation meant to dignify Nazism with pious allusions to the Bible,” and maintains that it “bordered on a type of evangelism.” Goebbels characterized Christ as “harsh and relentless.”

Steigman-Gall quotes Dietrich Eckhart, Hitler's mentor: “in Christ, the embodiment of all manliness, we find all that we need.” He similarly writes of Hitler himself: ‘In a nearly evangelical tone, Hitler declares that the “true message” of Christianity is to be found only with Nazism.’

Mark Edward Ruff summarizes Steigman-Gall’s argument: “Nazism, he emphasizes, was not a political religion but, in certain ways, a perverse extension of Christianity. In other writings, he argues even more forcefully that Nazism cannot be interpreted as a political religion at all.”

Ruff states: ‘At the most fundamental level, Steigman-Gall’s work raises

63 Steigmann-Gall, The Holy Reich, 21.
64 Ibid., 18.
65 Ibid., 28.
the question of Canonicity. Believing oneself to be a Christian, he ultimately argues, is tantamount to being a Christian.” At this point, however, Ruff takes exception to Steigman-Gall’s case, maintaining that Christianity has to be more strictly defined: “But Steigman-Gall’s redefinition is ultimately too loose to be especially useful. It is reminiscent of postmodern definitions of art that defines art as that “which the artist says it is,” claims that can easily lead to fruitless controversies.”

Essentially, however, the theological dimensions of Nazism were more than superficial. While there are obvious reasons for challenging their own claims as representative of the “true message” of Christianity, as Hitler himself put it, there are also good reasons for thinking that religious ideas genuinely mattered to the Nazis, and that what was partly at stake in the German Church Struggle was a full-scale theological battle for the soul of Christianity in Germany during the Nazi era. A better understanding of its internal dynamics is therefore needed.

2.2 The German Christians: An Overview

The majority of literature concerning the German Church Movement tends to demonize all of its adherents, and tends to make little distinction between the Nazi fanatics occasionally found at its centre, more moderate supporters, and those who were broadly

68 Ibid.
supportive on the periphery, well beyond sphere of influence. This wealth of material, and particularly its politically concentrated focus, provides a perspective on the German Christian Movement which depicts it as exerting much greater influence on ordinary congregants than it deserves. Many average members of the historic Protestant *Landeskirchen* in Germany were simply seeking a revival or awakening in the Church in an increasingly secular world, following their defeat in the Great War and in the context of the imposed Weimar Republic. The effects on political and religious psychology of the public anger and the multiple humiliations experienced in the context of economic depression ought not to be minimized. Such ordinary Germans saw Hitler as a light of hope, and likely welcomed his seemingly pro-church rhetoric. The German Church of that period was endemically, though neither universally nor uniformly, anti-Semitic, such that sufficient pockets of the like-minded provided a setting in which Nazi ideas could thrive. In consequence, as one source puts it, “The Church did not want Hitler but it also did not stop him.”69

Emmi Bonhoeffer, the sister-in-law of the theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, reflected on the uncertainty of the time:

We were very, very unhappy that the other countries supported our republican government so poorly. In that respect, the pressure of the Versailles conditions was so foolish. … They put their thumbs down so hard that no respectable government could have held out. People were filled with scorn for this incapable government. The misery of unemployment was so extensive that even my father-in-law, who really can't be suspected of being a Nazi, said, “When Hitler puts bread on the tables of the

69 Bucher and Pohl, *Hitler’s Theology*, 5.
first million unemployed, I’ll put the flag out, too.” He never hung it out, because he saw the means with which Hitler did it. But I tell that to explain how great the pressure of the unemployment rate was. It is so easily shrugged off, but it was truly dreadful.70

In this context, it must be emphasized that most ordinary Germans, who lived and moved in contexts less politically reflective than did Emmi Bonhoeffer, who believed themselves to be faithful Christians while living under the Nazi regime never considered themselves to have become heretical amid all their nationalism. As late as 1940, no less than 95 per cent of all Germans belonged to a Christian church.71 Church leaders, who might have been expected to take a clearer lead, were fearful of the danger of schism between factions of the church, not least as some of the greatest minds of the century preceding had laboured so hard for ecclesiastical unity. Furthermore, under Nazi policy, the burgeoning international ecumenical community did not reach beyond the national borders, nor were German church leaders permitted to attend international ecumenical gatherings. Traditionally in Liberal Protestantism, there was a drive to recognize and affirm religious individualism, minimize doctrine in order to reduce differences, ensuring church unity. The underlying anti-Semitism of over 300 years continued to provide a potential source of divisiveness, but equally, so did multiple other political, moral and theological factors of the day.

70 Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 20.

71 Bergen, “One Reich, One People, One Church,” 40.
The German Christian Movement is best understood as a church “party” (as initially intended in 1931), comprising relatively small numbers of ideological purists wanting to influence the world of affairs, rather than as a mass movement of all Protestant Christians in Germany at the time. Nevertheless, its influence was considerable, and its achievements illustrative of the church itself endangering its purpose under God. Traditional scholarly treatment of the relationship between the German churches and National Socialism has tended to depict the churches as being actively persecuted by the Nazi state. Seminal sources on the German church struggle like JS Conway's *The Nazi Persecution of The Churches*, Arthur Cochran's *The Church's Confession Under Hitler* and Klaus Scholder’s *The Churches and the Third Reich* focus on the German church struggle against political pressure. The underlying principle is that the church, if not actively resistant to the government, was certainly not allied with state doctrine.

More recent scholarship, as discussed, has asserted that the Nazi movement was more closely intertwined with the church than expected. Steigmann-Gall’s work on the religious

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73 Conway, *The Nazi Persecution of the Churches 1933-45*.

74 Cochrane, *The Church's Confession Under Hitler*.

75 Scholder and Bowden, *The Churches and the Third Reich: Volume I Preliminary History and the Time of Illusions 1934 [Die Kirchen Und Das Dritte Reich]*.
thought of leading Nazi figures in The Holy Reich\textsuperscript{76} has already been mentioned. We can extend this by reference to Doris Bergen's book The Twisted Cross,\textsuperscript{77} which relates less to the Nazi leadership than to how the German Christian Movement in the Third Reich attempted to take over the existing state church structure—which was, effectively, a wing of the German civil service. Bergen, drawing upon a wide variety of historical documentation, outlines the rise of the German Christian Movement as a group of German pastors and church leaders which endeavoured to align Nazi ideology and eventually Nazi hegemony with Protestant practice and belief. Once attaining power, German Christians under Ludwig Müller (1883-1945), a leading member of the German Christian Movement appointed Reichsbischof under Adolf Hitler in 1933, sought to remove any “non-Aryan” influences from scripture, Aryanize Jesus, and base the faith on \textit{Blut und Rasse} (blood and race)\textsuperscript{78} rather than scripture and traditional confessional orthodoxy, creating a state religion uniting with National Socialist values and norms. In practice, they used theologian Adolf von Harnack (1851-1930) to justify their call to eradicate the Old Testament from the canon and furthered their anti-Semitic agenda by declaring that it was unscientific and had been superseded by the New Testament. They could appeal also to living sources of the day, major Protestant thinkers who

\textsuperscript{76} Steigmann-Gall, \textit{The Holy Reich}.
\textsuperscript{77} Bergen, \textit{Twisted Cross}.
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid., 41.
were prepared, for example, to make an academic case for the notion of an “Aryan” Christ. The influence of such thinkers on rank and file Nazi leaders was considerable. In 1932, the prominent Nazi women’s activist Guida Diehl declared: “Our people need a new encounter with Christ, without a detour through Judaism.” Supporters argued that National Socialism was to complete a German Volkskirche reformation continuing from Luther’s work Against the Jews and Their Lies. Bergen argues that the German Christians were a group of politically motivated churchmen whose ambition was to Aryanize Protestantism in Germany forging a natural union between the church and the National Socialist state.

While Bergen maintains that the German Christian agenda did not follow traditional Christian ideas and values, and represented instead a heretical schism, Steigmann-Gall argues that Nazism was authentically based on a range of standard German Christian ideals, and essentially conformed to Christian precepts. The case made is perhaps more sociological than theological, but its force needs to be reckoned with more seriously—within the present context, since the argument of this thesis is that Karl Barth took the claim at stake very seriously indeed, and continued to do so well beyond 1945. As Steigmann-Gall puts it, “We

79 It should perhaps be noted in this context that the idea of a Christianity purified of the Old Testament, and of a Jesus abstracted from Judaism, is a pervasive theme of Enlightenment philosophy of religion. Though without any taint of anti-Semitism as such, much of the argument appears, for example, in the great Kant’s Religion Within the Limits of Reason. Seen in this light, it was not such a great leap from the theology of modernity to the theology of Nazism as is commonly imagined.

80 Bergen, Twisted Cross, 144.

81 Ibid., 159.
have come to realize with growing empirical certainty that many Christians of the day believed Nazism to be in some sense a Christian movement."\(^{82}\) He argues that the Nazi Party’s worldview “was not created in a void, but rather was the product of a particular sociocultural context, one shared with a great many other party leaders.”\(^{83}\) That sociocultural context included German Christianity and German Christian thought.

Beginning in 1931, the Nazis took an active role in Protestant affairs and helped organize the Movement. As events progressed, the “German Christians” infiltrated all of the major Protestant churches, and pressed an agenda of ultra-nationalism and anti-Semitism while vilifying Marxists (and occasionally Catholics). Once Hitler was granted absolute power, most Catholic and Protestant clergy hailed their new dictator. Hitler publicly stated that both of these Christian denominations would be “the most important factor for the maintenance of our society” and that “the rights of the churches will not be diminished.”\(^{84}\) Privately, Hitler’s views are harder to gauge. At one point, he explained to intimates that he was willing to tolerate the churches temporarily for political reasons. “But,” he added, “that won’t stop me from stamping out Christianity in Germany, root and branch. One is either a Christian or a German. One can’t be both!”\(^{85}\)

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83 Ibid., 10.
84 Constable, George, *The New Order*, 123.
85 Ibid.
Doris Bergen, in her authoritative work, *Twisted Cross: The German Christian Movement in the Third Reich*, describes the German Christian movement as composed mainly of,

Protestant laypeople and clergy, [who] regarded the Nazi revolution that began in 1933 as a golden opportunity for Christianity. National Socialism and Christianity, the German Christian movement preached, were not only reconcilable but mutually reinforcing. Along with other Protestants, members of the group expected the National Socialist regime to inspire spiritual awakening and bring the church to what they considered its rightful place at the heart of German society and culture.  

At the beginning of his political career, Hitler wanted the people to believe, and perhaps believed himself, that his Party was indeed Christian, a view endorsed by the German Christians themselves. For Hitler, the value of religion was in attracting more followers to the Nazi movement. Hitler was extremely hostile to all religious groups and intended to replace them with National Socialism. As a pragmatic politician, however, realized that his party must accommodate the established church so as not to risk the alienation of large numbers of ordinary Germans. While beyond the scope of this thesis, Hitler’s hostility toward the church is evident in the many Christians in Nazi Germany, like Martin Niemöller, who were arrested and detained in concentration camps because of their beliefs or more commonly because they spoke out against Hitler and Nazism. Barth

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himself was forced to resign from his professorship at the University of Bonn in 1935 for refusing to swear an oath to Hitler — whereupon Barth took up a new academic post in his home city of Basel, where he continued to work until his retirement.\footnote{Refer to the works of Doris Bergen, John S. Conway, Robert P. Ericksen and Susannah Heschel listed in the bibliography.}

The National Socialist goal of unifying the regional Protestant churches into a central body was met early in the Nazi era. Operating under the influence of the ideas of the new Nazi regime, Lutheran leaders by 1933 had organized the twenty eight provincial churches into one Reich Church, to operate under the banner, “one Reich, one People, one Church,” demonstrating the movement’s amalgamation of politics and religion.\footnote{Bergen, “One Reich, One People, One Church,” 2.} This has very particular associations, however, as, “[T]heir goal was a people’s Church - a \textit{Volkskirche}—not merely in the sense of an assembly of the baptized, but as an association of “blood” and “race,” as we have seen. Further illustrating the importance of religion to Nazism, on July 14, 1933 Hitler further had his cabinet approve a treaty with the Vatican, alongside the constitution of the Reich Church.

These resulting developments proved jarring to many. According to one source, ‘On August 1, [1933] an appalled Swedish journalist watched 200 German Christian clergymen convene a local synod “in brown uniforms, riding boots, body and shoulder
straps, with all sorts of swastikas, badges of rank and medals.” 89 The same group ended the synod with the “Horst Wessel Song,” the Nazi Party Anthem. At the same time, it was observed that some Catholic Priests adorned their churches with Swastikas, sang the “Horst Wessel Song” in church services, and praised Hitler from the pulpit. Further illustrating the point that pro-Hitler sentiment was by no means restricted to Protestants in Germany, “Catholic University students pledged their loyalty to the Führer and learned to execute the stiff Nazi salute.” 90

Although the aims of the German Christian Movement aligned with the Nazi goal of solidarity, and claimed to be positive Christianity or revealed religion for the German people, Bergan usefully argues that they defined their aims largely in negative terms: “its people’s Church would be anti-dogmatic, anti-Jewish, and anti-feminine.” 91 Realistically, the so called “People’s Church,” was a diverse group in terms of beliefs, educational, and adherence to a specific church. It appealed variously to aspects of Hitler’s Mein Kampf, to Nietzsche’s concept of the Übermensch, to Wagner’s romantic heroism, and to the overtly anti-Semitic Protocols of the Elders of Zion. The primary goal was the view that

89 Constable, George, The New Order, 125.
90 Ibid.
91 Bergen, “One Reich, One People, One Church,” 5.
National Socialism and Christianity could be mutually reinforcing, with racist anti-Semitism one of the key amalgamating forces.

A crucial initiative of the German Christians was the incorporation into canon law of the “Aryan Paragraph.”\textsuperscript{92} The incorporation of this law to the church was, perversely, somewhat reasonable, since German pastors in the state church were effectively civil servants, with salaries paid by tax revenues. However, the inclusion of the paragraph generated controversy in the church, becoming a focal point of opposition which led to the emergence of the Confessing Church, under the leadership of Barth and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, among others, during the Nazi years. This emotional question agitated the general population, and festered by the wound of defeat in the Great War, Weimar humiliations and by crass prejudice, it remained one of the signature causes of the German Christians. A Westphalian signpost succinctly, although crudely, summarized the anti-Semitic sentiment of the German Christian Movement: “Baptism may be quite useful, but it cannot straighten a nose.”\textsuperscript{93} In order to rebuild the church as an association of blood and race, the German Christians strove to purge Christianity of any Jewish

\textsuperscript{92} The Aryan Paragraph introduced in Civil Service legislation in 1933, and barred Jews and those of Jewish descent from civil employment.

\textsuperscript{93} Bergen, “One Reich, One People, One Church,” 350.
influence,\textsuperscript{94} by creating a racially “pure” church which would embrace all true Germans in a “Spiritual homeland for the Aryans of the Third Reich.”\textsuperscript{95}

The extent to which this “purification” of Jewish elements led to controversy about the very canon of the Bible, which came under attack in the German Christians’ rejection of the Old Testament. The extremist, Reinhold Krause, as already encountered, in a speech at the Sports Palace rally in November, 1933 entreated, “We must win over the flood of those returning to the church…. For that to happen, those people need to feel at home in the church. The first step in developing that feeling of belonging is liberation from everything un-German in the worship service and the confessions….\textsuperscript{96} The speech drove many from the arms of the unified “church” he envisioned, but this radical dismissal of the Old Testament and the writings of the “Rabbi Paul” had followed a logical progression from certain elements found in the German Liberal Protestant tradition.

Barth’s former professor, Adolf von Harnack, for example, was a strong proponent of the scientific method believing that scripture could be interpreted solely through the use of historical knowledge and critical reflection, which he determined

\\textsuperscript{94} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{95} Bergen, “Storm Troopers of Christ,” 42.
\textsuperscript{96} Bergen, \textit{Twisted Cross}, 145.
“indispensable if we are to avoid naïve Biblicism.”

Harnack’s theology implied, in essence, that the religious significance of Jesus can only be properly understood to the extent that he can be separated from his Jewish historical context. The peculiar argument, emerging from Enlightenment religious thought, was that the moral message of Jesus was a universal, rational message – in Harnack’s theology, a message about the “Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man” – which was held to have little or nothing to do with the primitive, tribal cult of which we read in the Old Testament. It was this attachment to Enlightened reason that led Harnack, upon hearing a lecture outlining his former student Karl Barth’s new “dialectical” theology in the 1920s, to state, “There was not one sentence, nor one thought, with which he could agree.”

Harnack’s interpretation, not only of the relation between historical study and theology, but also between Jesus Christ and Enlightenment reason, represented precisely the kind of theological approach from which Barth was distancing himself.

Harnack’s scientific theology was perverted by National Socialists, and at no point did he advocate anti-Semitism as a political polity. Harnack himself was a rational republican during the Weimar years, and supported democratic government. In fact,

97 Hunsinger, _Disruptive Grace_, 321.
98 Ibid., 320.
99 Harnack, named as the first president of the Kaiser Wilhelm Society for the advancement of science, was in no way a proto national socialist.
Martin Rade, his most prominent student, openly opposed National Socialism.  

The subsequent pseudoscience which led the Aryanism of the church, and in particular, the German Christian Movement’s developed view of Jesus, was something new and ought not to be confused simplistically with the more urbane and tolerant position advocated by Harnack. Barth, however, insisted that there was a key thread of continuity between the tradition of Protestant Liberalism and the German Christian Movement, which he identified as natural theology.

The extent to which the German Christians were prepared to twist their theological tradition towards its own end is nicely illustrated by Doris Bergen, in an excerpt of a proposition from a 1937 meeting of German Christians in the Rhineland: “A demon always resides in the written word. The devil values the printed page and stretches it out to demand signatures, while God reaches out to his hand. Whereas the Jews were the first to write out their faith, Jesus never did so.” What is evident in such a statement is the capacity latent in the movement to not only reject traditional confessional theology, but openly oppose the content of scripture, for their own purpose.

How can we more precisely define the theology of the German Christian Movement? Perhaps we come closest to it in a document entitled, ‘The Guiding

100 Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 134–44.
101 Bergen, “One Reich, One People, One Church,” 66.
Principles of the Faith Movement of the “German Christians,”¹⁰² which dates from June, 1932, and is the closest thing to a written confessional statement to emerge from the group. Appendix I of the thesis provides the complete text of the document. From it, we can draw the following conclusions. The German Christians wanted a complete reorganization of the church (Principle 1). In 1933, General Superintendent Wilhelm Zollner announced, “German Christians have thrown a stone into the church. It is drafty now, but fresh air is coming in.”¹⁰³ Their goal is a national church that will express all the spiritual forces of the people, that spirit being of the German spirit of Luther and a heroic piety (Principles 2-3). They will stage “an all-out fight against atheism and Marxism and the more moderate Centre party.” Or again, “The way into the kingdom of God is through struggle, cross, and sacrifice, not through a false peace.” (Principles 5-6) There is a peculiar resort made to a version of the doctrine of creation, though one clearly tainted by the “scientific” racism of the era, in that orders of “race, folk, and nation, [are] orders of existence granted and entrusted to us by God” and the mission field has taught the German people: “Keep your race pure” and that “faith in Christ does not destroy one’s race but deepens and sanctifies it.” Vital Christianity, for its part, is based on deeds and the reliance in religious life on pity, charity and a guilty conscience “makes people soft” (Principles 7-8) Jews are “a grave danger to [German] nationality. It is an entrance

¹⁰² Cochrane, The Church’s Confession Under Hitler, 222–23. See appendix 1
¹⁰³ Bergen, “One Reich, One People, One Church,” 53.
gate for alien blood into our body politic.” “Holy Scripture is also able to speak about a holy wrath and a refusal of love.” (Principal 9) They “want an evangelical Church that is rooted in our nationhood.” The concepts of ecumenism, a holy Catholic Church, and pacifism are alien to their purpose. (Principle 10)

The “Guiding Principles” document is somewhat crass and unsophisticated theologically, nevertheless, the movement was able at the time to garner support and impact public life. Although the German Christians were a minority within the total Protestant population, they were vocal, active, occasionally well-connected, which enabled them to exert substantial influence disproportionate to their size.¹⁰⁴ Between 1932 and 1945, the Movement developed through a series of phases: ascendancy, fragmentation, regrouping, ambiguous success, and reintegration.¹⁰⁵ And at the peak of their influence, Hitler himself endorsed the German Christians in a special radio message, prior to the 1933 Protestant church election in which they dominated.¹⁰⁶

It is important to recognize that not all religious supporters of the Nazi regime operated at the intellectual level of the “Guiding Principles” document. There were German Protestant theologians who were prominent intellectuals and internationally

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.
¹⁰⁶ Ibid.
recognized University Professors, who also supported Hitler. Robert Erickson outlines the contributions of three of the most important, and these will serve as representative figures in the argument that follows. Gerhard Kittel (1888-1948), from Tübingen, was an expert on Judaism and its status in the New Testament. His specialization was a significant resource in the Third Reich.\(^{107}\) Erickson labels Kittel’s contribution, “to make anti-Semitism spiritual rather than biological.”\(^{108}\) Paul Althaus (1888-1966), the “moderate” from Erlangen, who was also a New Testament scholar, is often more generally identified as a proponent of the German Lutheran tradition, which was, indeed, an important undercurrent in Nazi thought.\(^{109}\) Emanuel Hirsch (1888-1972), the most important of the three and “the Nazi Intellectual,” was a systematic theologian from Göttingen who “attempted to distil the philosophical heritage of the nineteenth century to produce for the contemporary world a philosophical-theological foundation for society.”\(^{110}\) Erickson comments: “None was a Nazi prior to 1933, and none can be relegated to the radical fringe of Nazi fanaticism. However, they are unified in that each supported Hitler openly, enthusiastically, and with little restraint.”\(^{111}\)


\(^{108}\) Ibid., 74.

\(^{109}\) Ibid., 1.

\(^{110}\) Ibid.

\(^{111}\) Ibid.
The following two Sections will examine the theologies of Althaus and Kittel together, followed by a separate treatment of Hirsch, as the most important of the three. Their theology, by way of a very brief summary, is anthropological, with theological anthropology being the central theme, and with history moving toward what might be described loosely as an Übermensch eschatology. God is, of course, to be understood within the bounds of the historical critical method, which is not a radical emphasis, but what is much more striking about their theologies is the extent to which grace becomes exclusionary, embedded in question of nationality, blood and soil. God speaks not only in special but in natural revelation, which implies that “unnatural” traits that are endemic in race, religion, or in mental and physical impairments, which are seen to be inherently evil therefore destroyed. There are, however, shades and gradations in the extent to which each writer is prepared to endorse these ideas, with Althaus being at one end of the spectrum, and Hirsch at the other.

As we have seen, the theology of the German Christian movement was not unified, but unifying factors in all three of these figures would appear to be Luther’s two kingdom doctrine, the supposedly Germanic nature of Luther’s theology, and natural theology. The first of these is of special importance, and will be defined more precisely,
since much of what follows can be read as a bizarre extension of the two kingdoms approach. The two kingdoms doctrine in theology approaches the relationship between church and state. “The twofold Reign of God in Lutheran doctrine expresses the notion that God acts through both the Word and the sword, i.e. through love and persuasion in the church, through force in civil government. Both have the task, each in its own way, of opposing the kingdom of Satan, ‘the outward and inward reign of evil’ in the world.”114 The aforementioned theologians adapted the two kingdoms theology to their own through developing views that approved Hitler’s rise to power as an expression of God’s action through the sword. This approach provided support to the broad Nazi strategy to bind church and state together in a single complex. This helps to explain why neither Althaus, Kittel, nor Hirsch saw their political commitments as anything other than flowing from their native Lutheranism, and why none thought it necessary to attempt to provide a new creed or formalized doctrine for the movement. It was, in their view, implicit in their own theological tradition.

2.3 Paul Althaus and Gerhard Kittel

Paul Althaus was not only a biblical scholar but an authority on Martin Luther, whose later works, The Theology of Martin Luther (1962, ET 1966), and The Ethics of Martin Luther (1965, ET 1972), continue to be recognized as standard works in Luther

scholarship. While a Professor at the University of Erlangen, he welcomed the 1933 Nazi seizure of power as “a gift and miracle of God” and an “Easter moment.” He is also associated with that institution’s response to the Barmen Declaration’s criticism of the Aryan paragraph. In 1934, together with his theological colleagues, he signed the Ansbacher Ratschlag (commonly known as the Erlangen Opinion), written by Werner Elert on behalf of the Erlangen theological faculty. This document argued that while the Jewish Volk are to be included in the kingdom of God, the church must capitulate to the state in the exclusion of faculty and pastorate “in view of its special biological-historical situation.”

While this may not embody full-blown Nazism, Klaus Scholder rightly maintains that Althaus emphatically linked Christianity with the völkische movement at this time. The foundations of the völkische movement were legitimized by Althaus and declared “a distinctive order, specially raised up and singled out by God.” To justify this stance, Althaus argued, from the concept of “natural revelation,” that there are “orders of creation” given by God, which he defines as indispensable forms of the social life of

115 Solberg, A Church Undone, 366.
116 Ibid., 365.
117 Green, Lutherans against Hitler, 137.
people, within the historical context of humanity.\textsuperscript{119} He was, however, not prepared to go to the extent of Kittel or Hirsch in his support of the Nazi polity. Althaus’ record was mixed with regard to his anti-Semitic tendencies, and while nationalistic, he was unwilling to accept the extremes of the most fervent German Christians. In his 1935 work \textit{Political Christianity: On the Thuringian “German Christians,”}\textsuperscript{120} he argued against the excesses of the Thuringians, using the Lutheran two kingdom approach. Althaus was particularly unconvinced that Germany should be regarded as the object of salvation history. Indeed, he thundered, “The attempt to appoint the German people as the people of God of the new covenant, is a bald-faced theological heresy.”

Althaus realized that the two kingdoms theology could cut both ways in the context of 1930s German Lutheranism: “A messianic ideology erases the real worldliness of political events and political will, the dignity of a simple German necessity of life…. For [the National Socialist project] what matters is the life of Germany, and nothing else. We are not a world-savior….\textsuperscript{121} He quotes disapprovingly from Julius Leutheuser’s 1935 mission statement: \textit{Die deutsche Christusgemeinde: Der}

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\textsuperscript{119} Solberg, \textit{A Church Undone}, 366. \\
\textsuperscript{120} Althaus, \textit{Politisches Christentum: Ein Jil Ort Uher Die Thuringer "DeutscheChristen}. \\
\textsuperscript{121} Solberg, \textit{A Church Undone}, 367. 
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In Leutheuser's view, Germany, beginning with the wars of liberation, has recognized and taken up its God-given calling, to fight God's battle in the world against the powers of death and for the Reich, the German Empire, in which God's Reich [kingdom] will take historical form. “God's kingdom and the German Empire made a covenant.” But now, according to God's will, the chosen people must walk the “way of the cross,” the path of suffering and death. “The World War became the Golgotha of the German Empire.” God did not want Germany's death. We threw away our faith in Germany’s eternal mission, but God made Adolf Hitler his “instrument of faith in Germany.” “Because of Adolf Hitler's faith, the Germans’ road of suffering and death could be transformed into resurrection. And so, through Adolf Hitler's faith, the Golgotha of the World War became the path to resurrection for the German nation.” This is the German Easter and at the same time its Pentecost. “The Spirit of God has again fallen like fire from heaven, and has come to rest on at least one people of the earth, our German people.” “This is German salvation history.” “It is written over Germany: 'A crucified people, a people resurrected.'”

Althaus, however, rejects the exaggerated view of Germany’s importance in the divine plan represented by Leutheuser’s (and Hitler’s) rhetoric, arguing that it represented a clear “confusion between the Gospel and a national faith.” Althaus, in short, is too much a conviction theologian to confuse Golgotha simplistically with the tragedy of the Great War, or to present Hitler as the saviour of the German nation. However, Althaus maintained that Lutheran Christianity can legitimately take an interest in political life,

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122 Leutheuser, Julius, Die Deutsche Christusgemeinde: Der Uieg Zur Deutschen Nationalkirche.
123 Solberg, A Church Undone, 371.
124 Ibid., 368.
because, on the basis of the two kingdoms doctrine, it is “responsible for both the people and the nation—not just for the spiritual well-being of individual souls, but rather for the people and the state in general, for the preservation of God’s creation and order.”

Although Althaus was committed to German nationalism, he never became a member of the Nazi Party nor of any other German Christian organization. Relatively untainted, Althaus eventually was installed as University President at the University of Erlangen by the US military in 1945, responsible to them in facilitating the denazification process of the faculty. Althaus’ leniency, however, and ultimately his involvement with the Erlangen Opinion, resulted in his discharge from his position at the University in 1947 as part of the US military’s third phase of the denazification process.

Coincidentally, this is the same year that Gerhard Kittel published the first volume of his key work, the Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, a work which remains, to this day, a staple of New Testament research. Earlier, Kittel had been

125 Ibid, 369.
126 Althaus served in the Great War and lost two sons in the Second World War.
127 Green, Lutherans against Hitler, 346.
sympathetic and contributed to the Nazi movement. According to Robert P. Ericksen, during the Nazi era, Kittel intended “to raise the discussion of the Jewish question above the level of slogans and vulgar racism and give it a moral, Christian basis.”

Kittel’s infamous contribution to Nazism falls into this category, as he was a charter member of the Reichsinstitut fur Geschichte des neuen Deutschlands (founded in 1935), which pursued and funded “pseudo-scientific, racial-political studies aimed at underpinning the anti-Jewish policies of the National Socialist state.” In an organization responsible for legitimizing the anti-Semitism of the state academically, Kittel was a key resource person for research on the “Jewish Question.” His visible participation ultimately resulted in his imprisonment for seventeen months by the French authorities, from May 1945. Kittel was not merely an underling in a large operation; he was a leader.

Positioning himself as both a German and Christian thinker, Kittel argued from a stance of “positive Christianity,” maintaining that revelation emphasizes an “active,” heroic Christ. Furthermore, he proposed in his work for the Reichsinstitut that there are four possible solutions to the Jewish Question: extermination, Zionism, assimilation,

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129 Ericksen, Theologians under Hitler, 32.
130 Solberg, A Church Undone, 201.
131 Ericksen, Theologians under Hitler, 28–29.
132 Solberg, A Church Undone, 204.
and alien (guest) status. His argument proposes that the only morally acceptable solution is alienation, in which the Jewish population is able to return to what he argues is its own distinct, unique religious culture and tradition, which had been lost in the process of their assimilation into German society. Again, while Kittel could not be branded a fanatical Nazi, he nevertheless blamed the emancipation of the Jews for much Germany’s problems and alleged that mixed marriage had resulted in *Mischlinge* (mixed-bloods) infiltrating and diluting pure German Christian “blood.”  

Kittel reasons that Judaism “cannot sink roots in any culturally appropriate way into the *Volkstum* [German culture]” and repeats the Christian Anti-Semitic mantra, “This is his tragedy and his curse.” Further, the resultant decadence from assimilation is a “poison that is eating its way like a monstrous sickness through the body of the *Volk*” and subverts “all the genuine religious, cultural, and national ideas that emerge from the *Volkstum* ... because it saps energy and infects—a dangerous resignation that eats away at the marrow of a people ... a cold, calculating, even self-tormenting and self-lacerating relativism ... a wild agitation and demagoguery that holds nothing sacred.”

Clearly, in the religious ideas of Gerhard Kittel, we have moved a good deal

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133 Ibid.
134 Ibid., 215.
135 Ibid.
closer to full-blown Nazism. Unlike Althaus, Kittel was a Nazi Party member (joining in 1933), and participated enthusiastically in the movement. In our final theologian, however, we come to the greatest of the Christian intellectuals who supported Nazism, Emanuel Hirsch, whose contribution to Nazi ideology outflanks the others.

2.4 Emanuel Hirsch

It must be emphasized that the German Christian Movement was on the whole anti-intellectual. This does not mean, that there were not well respected academic theologians who were in agreement with their principles, or were supporters of Nazism generally.

If there was a single theologian who could be used as a representative of the German Christian Movement, it would be Emanuel Hirsch. A Lutheran who taught Church history and then systematic theology at Göttingen University, Hirsch eventually became Dean of its Faculty of Theology. A recognized authority on both Martin Luther and Søren Kierkegaard, he became a leading member of the German Christian Movement early in its history, and personally counselled Ludwig Müller. Hirsch was later than Kittel in embracing Nazism, but he joined the Nazi Party in 1937, and became a Patron

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Ludwig Müller was Hitler’s specific choice for Reich Bishop of the German Church
Member (i.e., financial supporter) of the Schutzstaffel or SS, the paramilitary wing of the Nazi Party.\(^{137}\)

Hirsch’s prominence is such that he had served, with Harnack, as editor of the prestigious journal, *Theologische Literaturzeitung*, and he went on to do major work on German Idealism, Luther, and Kierkegaard, as well as the history of early Christianity. His great work is arguably his five volume history of modern theology, the *Geschichte der neuern evangelischen Theologie im Zusammenhang mit den allgemeinen Bewegungen des europäischen Denkens*, which linked the development of theology to the history of culture and the phenomenon of secularization.\(^{138}\) A theologian who was aware of developments in political philosophy, in 1923 and 1924, he wrote reviews of three of Karl Schmidt’s books, approving of Schmidt’s claim that “all significant concepts in the modern doctrine of the state are secularized theological concepts.”\(^{139}\)

Hirsch, one of the first self-declared political theologians, had lived through four distinct types of regime in Germany. He was born and raised in the opulence of the Wilhelmian monarchy during the height of Prussian military power, understanding himself in the context of its Protestantism and culture. Following defeat in the Great War he anguished through the fall of the House of Hohenzollern caused by the 1918 socialist

\(^{137}\) Solberg, *A Church Undone*, 205.

\(^{138}\) Stroup, John, “Political Theology and Secularization Theory in Germany, 1918-1939: Emanuel Hirsch as a Phenomenon of His Time,” 338.

\(^{139}\) Ibid., 339.
revolution. Hirsh was dismayed by the irresponsibility of the Weimar Republic and saw its instability as the antithesis of the ideal of a stable monarchy. He saw in Hitler an opportunity for Germany to rebuild the national prominence into which he was born. Hirsch’s position was that all truth is an expression essentially of historical human consciousness, and that Christian theology too needs to be understood in this light.  

It is interesting and important that Karl Barth and Emanuel Hirsch were, for a time, academic colleagues and friends. Barth was appointed to the University of Göttingen in 1921 (1921–25), while Hirsch worked at Göttingen throughout 1921-45. During Barth’s years in the Göttingen post, the two built a relationship which was “intimate and stimulating” as they engaged in “lively battles” meeting in their studies or on walks. In his correspondence, Barth described Hirsch as “an opponent who had to be taken with the utmost seriousness”; “a learned and acute man, a skilled dialectician and acrobat with a profound knowledge of Luther and Fichte” who was a “German nationalist to his very fragile bones.”

Hirsch’s early theological study, through “critical theology,” focused on the historical development of Christian doctrine in a search for “the final meaning and

140 Seban, Jean-Loup, “The Theology of Nationalism of Emanuel Hirsch,” 159. Hirsh was a disciple of Karl Holl (1826-1926), who initiated a “Luther-renaissance” which emphasized conscience and faith in Idealist fashion as distinct forms of consciousness, a student also of Harnack and a later collaborator with him in editorial work, and a man conversant with Fichtian Idealism and intellectual currents in German nationalism.

141 Busch, Karl Barth, 134.

142 Ibid.
content of traditional Christianity." As A. James Reimer states, “Hirsch considered himself neither liberal nor orthodox-conservative, but tried from an early age to combine a certain traditional piety with a strongly critical perspective. He was an independent thinker who, influenced greatly by the modern critical method (theological liberalism), was intent on reinterpreting traditional concepts for the modern age without losing a traditional sense of religious piety.”

A committed monarchist, Hirsch struggled to develop a theology of nationalism during Weimar years as forced democracy, he felt, clashed with the German mindset.

Given Hirsch’s grounding in Fichtian Idealism, his interpretation of Luther’s view of the two kingdom relationship of Law and Gospel fused with Germany’s socio-political complications during the war and post-war period. Hirsch responded to the catastrophe of the Great War in his 1920 book, Deutschlands Schicksal, or Germany’s Fate, where he articulated an increasingly political theology of concrete action and a theory of the nation-state emphasizing uniquely German aspects of human, national and

144 Ibid., 10 "Hirsch considered the significance of Fichte to exist in the fact that he developed a philosophy of religion defined by logical stringency, inner decisiveness and value for all areas of life." Fichte overcame the last residue of dogmatism in his theory of knowledge. Particularly important for Hirsch was Fichte’s understanding of God in relation to personal and social morality, “a morality which could not be described merely in formal categories, but could also be condensed into a material ethic”. Theologische Gewissensethik, pp. 54-55, 55/n. 9.
145 Fichte’s philosophy is in essence a moralistic reading of Kant, in which praxis takes us closest to reality, and it was the question of praxis, justified by the two kingdoms doctrine and inspired by the social and political turmoil of the time, that preoccupied Hirsch.
Christian relationships.\footnote{147}{Ibid., 26.} A. James Reimer notes, in his study of the debate between Hirsch and Tillich, that in the period between 1914 and 1921, Hirsch ‘became increasingly more committed to the renewal of national dignity and to a “political theology” which would take seriously its task and responsibilities at the vortex of the nation.’\footnote{148}{Ibid., 22.} In correspondence with Barth on August 9, 1921, Hirsch clearly had not yet joined a political party and was “opposed to every international-type of party that undermines a sense of nationhood and statehood.”\footnote{149}{Ibid., 27.} Hirsch eventually joined the German National People’s Party, a Weimar era conservative political party and moved toward a political theology which Klause Scholder described as having “the responsibility for the national community as a decisive theological task, which theology and the church could not withdraw from under any circumstances.”\footnote{150}{Ibid., 28.}

Between 1914 and 1933, Hirsch intensively studied Luther’s theology, rationalizing his own theological and political orientation during this period of national crisis.\footnote{151}{Ibid., 24.} Hirsch asserted that politics, religion, mores, and culture were intertwined so that actions in one orbit impacts the others. Hirsch, argued that nineteenth-century theologians failed to provide Germans with a suitable world view, resulting in the failures

\begin{itemize}
\item \footnote{147}{Ibid., 26.}
\item \footnote{148}{Ibid., 22.}
\item \footnote{149}{Ibid., 27.}
\item \footnote{150}{Ibid., 28.}
\item \footnote{151}{Ibid., 24.}
\end{itemize}
of Weimar. Hirsch determined that Hitler should intervene politically where liberal Protestantism had failed. He wrote:\textsuperscript{152}

\begin{quote}
I have sought to teach about the way everything connected with the Volk borders on the hidden (\textit{verborgnen}) divine Majesty; I have tried as a thinker and preacher to express as seriously ... as possible the Gospel ... on the basis of divine judgment. ... Not once have I had ... the feeling of being in conflict with the will of the Führer to build up a Volk united in worldview (\textit{Weltanschauung}) and order of life (\textit{Lebensordnung}). On the contrary, there, in the place where it was proper for me to be, I understood myself as a helper in the work now going on among us Germans.\textsuperscript{153}
\end{quote}

Hirsch’s high academic profile, and clarity of purpose, ensured the attraction of those opposed both to his views and Hitler’s regime, and Hirsch’s main intellectual opponent was none other than his old friend, Karl Barth. In response to Barth, Hirsch shows his frustration with Barth, exclaiming that, “there is no talking with Karl Barth,” and complaining that Barth saw German Christians as “openly wild heretics”.\textsuperscript{154}

Eberhard Busch, Confessing Church member, student of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and later one of Barth’s main biographers, describes their collegial relationship in the early 1920s as very friendly, with Hirsch attending several of Barth’s lectures. Although they perhaps shared certain interests (e.g., Kierkegaard), Hirsch’s historicism in Biblical

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\textsuperscript{152} Hirsch, Emanuel. \textit{Christliche Freiheit und politische Bindung. Ein Brief an Dr. Stapel und anderes}, Hamburg, 1935.

\textsuperscript{153} Stroup, John, “Political Theology and Secularization Theory in Germany, 1918-1939: Emanuel Hirsch as a Phenomenon of His Time,” 339.

\textsuperscript{154} Solberg, \textit{A Church Undone}, 104.
interpretation was fundamentally opposite to Barth’s theological methodology.\footnote{Busch, \textit{Karl Barth}, 135.} Busch quotes Barth, referring to his early alliance as a dialectical theologian with Paul Tillich, in the following terms: “Hirsch took pleasure in setting us against each other, denouncing Tillich to me as un-Christian and me to Tillich as unscholarly.”\footnote{Ibid., 138.} When Barth publicly announced his position counter to the German Christians, the collegiality ended, and upon writing an open “Letter to France” at the end of 1939, exhorting the church and its leaders to steadfastness, Hirsch accused Barth of being “the deadly enemy of the German people.”\footnote{Ibid., 305.}

Hirsch argued, “the church was not a timeless ordo that could not essentially change with, and react toward, historical circumstances.”\footnote{Zabel, \textit{Nazism and the Pastors}, 120.} Rather, it must adapt to its particular historical circumstances, and tailor its proclamation to practical ends. Against the view that the church is static, which he (wrongly) associated with Barth, Hirsch complains, “That is the life-destroying lack of a sense of history that characterizes all legal religion, including a Christianity that makes the Gospel into a new law.” The German Christians, he said, believed that the Gospel could help to bind the church and Volk together in new ways.” Hirsch, in the end, thus maintained that the justification for
the church’s close cooperation with the National Socialist state was that “the revival of
the Volk had been willed by God.”

2.5 Barth’s Reactions to German Christians at the Time

When colleague Friedrich Gogarten (1887-1967) aligned himself with the
“German Christians” in 1933, Barth resigned from the editorial board of the periodical
Zwischen den Zeiten, which Barth, Gogarten and Eduard Thurneysen had founded in
1922 (the last issue appearing in October 1933). Barth regarded the German
Christians as the culmination of the worst excesses of modern Protestantism, particularly
in their endorsement of political thinker Wilhelm Stapel’s oft-cited statement that God's
law was identical to that of the conscience of the German people. For Barth, saw this was
treachery against the gospel and the apex of the anthropocentric religion of the
Enlightenment, reinforced through the theologies of the Harnack-Troeltsch period.
Klaus Scholder summarizes Barth’s position, referencing Barth’s Theological Existence
Today! (Theologische Existenz heute) of June 1933:

159 Ibid.
160 Moseley, Nations and Nationalism in the Theology of Karl Barth, 114.
161 Cochrane, The Church’s Confession Under Hitler, 69.
Karl Barth explains it very clearly: ‘Our existence as theologians is our life within
the church, and, of course, as appointed preachers and teachers within the church.’
And that means, as he explains a little later, ‘our attachment to God's Word and
plying our calling particularly to the ministry of the Word.’

But what is the danger of forfeiting this theological existence? It consists in the
possibility that we may ‘no longer appreciate the intensity and exclusiveness of
the demand which the Divine Word makes as such when looking at the force of
other demands; so that in our anxiety in the face of existing dangers we no longer
put our whole trust in the authority of God's word, but we think we ought to come
to its aid with all sorts of contrivances,’ ‘That under stormy assault of
‘principalities, powers, and rulers of this world's darkness,’ we seek for God
elsewhere than in Jesus Christ and seek Christ elsewhere than in the Holy
Scriptures.  

These views illustrate to explain the position articulated in the Barmen
Declaration of May 1934, written primarily by Karl Barth himself and issued in the name
of the Barmen Synod of the Confessing Church. Hubert Lock points out that Article One
of the Declaration, which has at its heart the famous statement, “Jesus Christ, as he is
attested for us in holy scripture, is the one Word of God which we have to hear and which
we have to trust and obey in life and in death,” is a direct assault on the “Führerprinzip”
espoused by Nazism.  

Hitler wrote in Mein Kampf that decisions should be “made by
one man...only he alone may possess the authority and the right to command.”  

Barth, in the Barmen Declaration, rejected that the church can recognize any other “events,

162 Scholder, A Requiem for Hitler, 79.
163 Locke, The Church Confronts the Nazis, 4.
164 Ibid. from Mein Kampf, 1943 English Translation, pp. 449-50
powers, figures, and truths as God’s revelation”\textsuperscript{165} other than Jesus Christ, the “one Word of God,” insisting, essentially, that Hitler had elevated himself as a false god.

### 2.6 Barth’s Message to the Church

Upon acquisition to political power, the Nazis began to implement their ideology of race towards “social outsiders.”\textsuperscript{166} On April 7, 1933, the Nazi state passed the aforementioned “Aryan paragraph,” or more accurately, the “Law for the Restoration of the Civil Service,” in which state employees “of non-Aryan descent” were to be compulsorily retired.\textsuperscript{167} Protestant clergy, technically members of the civil service, came under the scope of the act.\textsuperscript{168}

Barth responded to these events in \textit{Theological Existence Today!} on June 25, 1933. The publication sold 37,000 copies before distribution was halted, and available copies were confiscated by the Nazi government in 1934.\textsuperscript{169} Barth protested the German Christians’ recognition of the “glory of the National Socialist state” and the Nazi pretension of being a “sign of God’s providential engagement in earthly events.”\textsuperscript{170} He

\textsuperscript{165} Cochrane, \textit{The Church’s Confession Under Hitler}, 238–42. The text is reproduced for convenience in Appendix VIII

\textsuperscript{166} Evans, \textit{The Third Reich in History and Memory}, 82.

\textsuperscript{167} Hutton, \textit{Race and the Third Reich}, 91.

\textsuperscript{168} Barnett, \textit{For the Soul of the People}, 128.

\textsuperscript{169} Barth, “Theological Existence Today!,” 81.

\textsuperscript{170} Ibid., 82.
chidingly begins, “What must not happen under any circumstances is that, in our enthusiasm for something we believe is a good thing, we abandon our theological existence.”

Barth, in his typical rhetoric crescendos, warned of the threat of “technical rape by the ‘German Christians,’ together with the resulting danger of spiritual famine and poisoning,” and asserted that, “if we do not repent immediately,” “the Word of God [might] be taken away from us altogether.” Rejecting the claim the German Christian Movement was the work of the Holy Spirit, Barth responds flatly that, “The Holy Spirit needs no “movements,” and by far most of the “movements” are probably inventions of the devil….”

Barth quotes two documents published by the German Christians in May of 1933. “It appears,” they say, “that the German people, reflecting on the deepest sources of its life and strength, wants also to find its way back to the church. The German churches have therefore to do anything they can to make this happen.” According to the German Christians, “the church has to prove itself the church for the German people by “helping them to be able to recognize and fulfil the calling that God has given them,” and “the ultimate goal of the present government.” Barth’s objections to this vision are

171 Ibid., 84.
172 Ibid., 95.
173 Ibid., 96–99.
174 Ibid., 88–89.
outlined in several key points. He argues that the Christian Church does not have to do absolutely *everything*, and compromises its mission by riding the coattails of the politically successful National Socialists in 1933, to call the German people back to the church. The church must be built, not on any nationalist agenda, but on the Word of God through its proclamation to all kingdoms of the world. The Church’s mission is not to serve human beings, nor is church membership determined by blood or race; it is determined by the Holy Spirit and baptism. Whereas the German Christians envisioned their future church as being exclusively for “Germans of Aryan descent,” Barth’s response is clear: “If the German Protestant Church were to exclude Jewish Christians or treat them as second-class Christians, it would have ceased to be a Christian church.”

German Christian theological teaching, Barth argues, when closely examined, is heretical; it and predominantly “consists of a small collection of specimens from the great theological garbage can of the now widely disparaged 18th and 19th centuries.” He cites the boorish and dangerous example of a scholarly paper shouted down at a preachers’ conference by a mob of pastors at political odds with the speaker. He recognizes the variety of motives found both among the membership of the German Christians, and

175 The text is reproduced for convenience in Appendix III
176 Barth, “Theological Existence Today!,“ 89.
177 Ibid., 91.
178 Ibid., 92.
those prepared to tolerate them in the wider state Protestant church, “But one and all capitulate to a cause that bears the stamp of error so clearly on its forehead….”

Barth ended the essay optimistically, maintaining that the church, through standing on the Word of God, would survive this internal attack and all external threats. He encouraged pastors and theologians to claim their “theological existence” as preachers and teachers and to avoid the temptation of a political alliance with the Nazis. Barth called the church and academy to action to preserve the pastoral goal of proclamation:

“This is why, in a totalitarian state, neither the church nor theology can hibernate, nor can they put up with a moratorium or being forced into line …. [The church] is by its nature the limit of any state, even the totalitarian state. For even in a totalitarian state the people live from the Word of God, whose content is “the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting.”

179 Ibid., 92–94.

180 Ibid., 99. A brief reference to Barth’s doctrine of the church might be useful at this point, using Colin O’Grady’s standard work on the subject as guide (since a separate account of Barth’s ecclesiology is beyond the scope of this thesis), in order to clarify Barth’s criticism of the German Christians. In Barth’s threefold development of ecclesiology, the church is first of all an event, a gathering in response to a call, in a definite place; secondly, it is both visible and invisible—visible to the world at large but invisible in its existential bond to the Holy Spirit; and thirdly, the community is the body of Christ in that it is the earthly-historical form of the existence of the risen Jesus. (Colin O’Grady, The Church in the Theology of Karl Barth, vol. 1 (London, Dublin, Melbourne: G. Chapman, 1968), 250-258.) The Church is thus comprised of believers who are “awakened and gathered by the Holy Spirit in faith, quickened and upbuilt in love, called and sent in hope”. (Ibid., 250) In this living community, “Jesus Christ has formed and continually renews His body” as the “one holy catholic and apostolic Church.” (CD IV/1, 683) What is striking about this is how clearly “theological” the tone is that Barth sounds. Having said this, Barth recognizes that the state is the church’s most important partner, but the law of the Church and state (Staatskirchenrecht) never can be the law of the Church neither can it be acknowledged nor accepted as such. (O’Grady, The Church, 1, 297) Like many before him, Barth maintains that the state needs a free Church to restrain it from turning toward anarchy and tyranny—an argument curiously similar to arguments concerning the need for a free press—and it is only on condition of this freedom that the Church can permit its integration into the mandate of the
2.7 Hirsch’s Response

Emanuel Hirsch’s response to *Theological Existence Today!* began with words already encountered:

For us German Christians there is no talking with Karl Barth. He calls us “openly wild heretics.”... He calls German Christians the “bad guys,” warning that the church must withstand the temptation they represent. For us there is no talking with Karl Barth. Though aware of his responsibility to the church, he has closed his ears.

To speak with others—those before whom he makes such an effort to blacken our good Christian name—is difficult. Reading what he has written, one is seized by a longing for the conscientiousness and thoroughness with which the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century theologians of our church fought against heresy. There, every judgment was grounded in hard, clean work. There it was possible to seek clarification of the disputed questions. Karl Barth makes his condemnation of us “explicitly and emphatically, but still only in passing.” It suits his ecclesiastical sense of responsibility to dispense in this way with a church movement to which a state. (Ibid., 298) In its proper existence, however, Church is entirely distinct from the state and must rely on its own basic law “in obedience to its Lord”. The community has to “seek and establish and execute of itself, in complete independence of the law of Church and state; and without even the slightest interference on the part of national authority (in the form of constitutions or establishment).” (CD IV/1, 689-90) It is imperative, therefore, that the leadership of this community seeks to serve only the Lord regardless of pressure to amalgamate with political interests.
whole host of people confess they have committed themselves, for God’s sake and the sake of the gospel.\textsuperscript{181}

Hirsh’s argument aligns with Nazi principles, in that, “the German Spirit” resides in the purity of “good, old, and pure German blood,”\textsuperscript{182} and again, “if the blood is tainted, the spirit also dies” in both \textit{peoples} and individuals.\textsuperscript{183} He asserted that this blood bond was nearly undone in 1933, and that, within a further fifty years those with this blood inheritance would be in the minority in Germany.\textsuperscript{184} Embracing a peculiar version of natural theology, Hirsch argues that Barth’s appeal to the \textit{Word} as being found solely in the Holy Scriptures is an error. God also speaks through political history, and in the voice of the \textit{Volk}: “Which is the Word of God through which Christ rules his Church, in which he is present? Only what is written in the book that is the Bible? No—rather, every living word of the gospel witness that goes from mouth to ear and, in the miracle of the Spirit, from heart to heart.”\textsuperscript{185} Hirsch maintains that Lutheran teaching on justification as something that must be heard and received by each believing conscience requires a “new and concrete teaching about a Christian way of life in the present situation and

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\textsuperscript{181} Hirsch, “What the German Christians Want for the Church,” 104.  \\
\textsuperscript{182} Ibid., 102.  \\
\textsuperscript{183} Ibid., 109.  \\
\textsuperscript{184} Solberg, \textit{A Church Undone}, 109.  \\
\textsuperscript{185} Hirsch, “What the German Christians Want for the Church,” 107.
\end{flushright}
responsibility of the German people.”186 It will be possible for the Protestant and National Socialist morality and praxis to fuse, he argues, allowing Germans to be more fully and authentically Christian.187

Hirsch’s response thus rejects Barth’s insistence on Sola Scriptura, which is treated as unrealistic and unhistorical hyperbole. Hirsch argues that God can be known through revelation via creation, or alternatively, in the classic Confessions of the faith. Conversely, God can be known inwardly, as Calvin says—"every individual will not only be driven by knowledge of himself to seek God, but also led by the hand to find him,"188 (thus quoting Calvin against Barth as a Reformed theologian). Rejecting Barth’s emphasis on the one Word of God, Hirsch adds that German Christians demand “a new and more concrete teaching about the Christian way of life in the situation in which people really find themselves today.”189 Christianity must be seen and taught from an historical perspective which continuously renews itself with language, images, parables and in the light of experience, to accurately render and interpret God’s character, claim and purpose.

186 Ibid., 108.
187 Ibid.
188 Ibid., 106.
189 Ibid., 108.
Hirsch also rejects Barth’s characterization of German Christian historical religiosity merely as a progression arising from Teutonic paganism. Germanic Christianity must be proclaimed within the framework of the clear historical continuum of the life of the Volk. Hirsch associates this union between Christianity and the German character as bound up in “blood,” and claims that it is something that needs to be revived in order for the German people to move ahead. The church must be open to “rekindling the sense of ought and loyalty to our blood and willingness to bear children in all members of our people – even and especially the educated classes which are most resistant.”

Hirsch, however, distances himself from the pagan revival also found in some of the National Socialist movement, arguing that within the Protestant church, “Germaness and Christianity must encounter each other in a deep intimacy that will determine the historical shape of both.” He warns that the kind of hostility represented by Barth’s intellectual posturing drives young people from the church into the arms of “half pagan movements.” Barth is limiting the church’s effectiveness in its teaching on “natural

190 Ibid., 110.
191 Solberg, A Church Undone, 111.
192 Clearly, this is not a reference to the German Church [Deutschkirche] or the German Faith Movement [Deutsche Glaubensbewegung], but to the forms of overtly pagan revival advocated by some of the Nazis in the early years of the regime.
man, natural law, the natural experience of God,” which is ethnically specific and “something different for Germans than it is for the people of India.”

Hirsch argues that a distinctive, natural German knowledge of God is inborn through culture, history and “blood” in the Volk. Hirsch’s theology relates all of this intimately to the teachings of Martin Luther, who is said to have stripped Moses of the Hebrewisms, imbued the Psalms and Paul’s teachings with German alliteration, thus providing the gospel with a uniquely German natural-historical character. Since it is God who creates, sustains and guides nations and individuals to worship Him, so must the culture, values and history of the people be taken into account in a theology of revelation. “He makes himself known to us in all the inexhaustible depth and richness of life around us; in the wonderful history of Nations and humanity; … in the particular form and task He has given to each individual nation and to each individual man.”

In Hirsch’s theology much is familiar, and much seems twisted: Hirsch’s claim that God speaks in ordinary history and experience is not particularly unusual, despite Barth’s rejection of it. Hirsch also aligns himself at crucial points with Lutheran orthodoxy: he affirms the limits of humankind in the understanding of God, and

193 Solberg, A Church Undone, 112.
194 Ibid., 114.
195 Ibid., 115.
emphasizes “that the power of sin and death were broken on Jesus Christ” – that only through the Son’s sacrifice is the Christian community reconciled with God, and able to understand that He is the Lord. Hirsh acknowledges that the scriptures of the Christian church must include the entire canon, i.e., both the Old and New Testaments, and claims that a theologian’s occupation is to “interpret the Scripture correctly and through it to help overcome all the power of human error and foolishness in our community.” However, he defines the church not primarily in theological terms, but as a “natural community in order, as marriage partners, parents, and children, as co-workers, as comrades in arms, in the blood bond of our nation, in the common destiny of our state.” Hirsch’s theological outlook is thus grounded in historical method, in Enlightenment rationalism, in culture, and in theological anthropology. Hence he is committed to the belief that Christianity must be understood “with the particularity of its historical context and the völkish and spiritual life that surrounds it.”

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196 Ibid., 116.
197 Ibid., 118.
198 Ibid.
199 Ibid.
2.8 The German Christian Movement: General Observations

Since the German Christian movement was not seen by its advocates as a movement away from traditional Lutheranism, but rather, as the completion of the Reformation, perhaps its theology can be best understood, as Barth suggested, in this context, and in particular, in terms of the history of 19th and early 20th century Lutheranism. In point four of their “Guiding Principles,” they “profess an affirmative and typical faith in Christ, corresponding to the German spirit of Luther and to a heroic piety.”\textsuperscript{200} They take a concrete pro-Nazi political stand and despite positioning themselves as not being a political party, the fifth of their “Guiding Principles” is a commitment to “an all-out fight against atheistic Marxism and the reactionary Centre party.”\textsuperscript{201} Although the German Christians vilified Marxism as the “enemy of religion,” which may represent a religious stance, nevertheless they claim in their sixth Guiding Principle that the “way to the kingdom of God is through struggle cross and sacrifice, \textit{not through a false peace}.” Although purporting to follow Lutheranism, in fact the line here between the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of this world becomes increasingly blurred. Luther is elevated virtually to the position of a prophet, and is not even

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item[\textsuperscript{200}] Cochrane, \textit{The Church’s Confession Under Hitler}, 222.
\item[\textsuperscript{201}] Ibid., 222–23. The text is reproduced for convenience in Appendix I
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adequately understood, as their theology includes little of Luther’s critique of natural theology, or of the qualitative distance that separates gospel and law, and with it the two kingdoms, in his thought.

Although the existence of God, as argued through natural theology, is not foundational to the German Christian Movement, their concept of divine revelation through political history, and their concept of state redemption through the Führer principle, constitute the very spine of the movement. Their nationalism is not restricted to geographical boundaries, or state institutions; rather it is bound together with ancestry and race, particularly as expressed in their commitment to “blood and soil.” “We see in race, folk, and nation, orders of existence granted and entrusted to us by God. God’s law for us is that we look to the preservation of these orders.” Race as an order of creation becomes a massive theme, which, inevitably, sharpens their desire for the German people to keep their race “pure.” Its centrality to their religion is reflected strongly in the fact that, for the German Christian Movement, faith in Christ deepens and sanctifies one’s race.

The German Christians did, of course, reference the idea of Christian duty and Christian love, expressed in particular toward the helpless. Ironically, however, they

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202 Ibid.
203 Ibid.
demanded that the nation be protected against the “unfit and inferior,” which appears to militate against this love for the needy. Their anti-Semitism is particularly clear, including in the demand that home missions do not contribute to the “degeneration of our people.” Implicitly they perceive any mission to the Jews especially as a grave danger to German nationality. The goal is not to allow “alien blood into our body politic.” The movement distorts scripture to justify a holy wrath, and a refusal of love against the danger of racial degeneration, in particular, through marriage between Jews and Germans.

Finally, in the tenth of the Guiding Principle of the German Christians, we see a withdrawal from the universal church and from the international ecumenical community. The nation is asserted to stand at the centre of the German Church, while German blood is the baptism of the community. Thus they isolate themselves from the “degenerating spirits” of pacifism, internationalism, atheism, evangelism and democratic capitalism.
3 Barth’s Theology of Sin and Pride in Theological Perspective

3.1 Sin in a Theology of Reconciliation

Barth’s theology comes to focus in the divine act of reconciliation, the Christ event. As George Hunsinger writes, “All the differentiated, living, and actualistic forms constituting the whole were unified by the unique and once-for-all form of the event alive at their center—Jesus Christ himself.” Barth views reconciliation as existing in God “before the foundation of the world”; ultimately, it is a pre-temporal event, since the doctrine of reconciliation is rooted in the “being of the one who loves in freedom”—the triune God who chooses from all eternity to enter into covenant with humankind, so as not to be who He is without us. This pre-temporal decision is the very basis of created time, and finds expression in it as God continually reconciles Himself to his creation, placing humanity in relationship to Himself.

As seen, Barth defines evil and sin in terms of humankind’s “No” to this, God’s “Yes” of acceptance. Barth certainly discusses what he calls, “the man of sin, man as he wills and does sin, man as he is controlled and burdened by sin,” (CD IV/1, 358) and has an interest in this question, but it is not the starting point of his theology, nor even the

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204 Hunsinger, How to Read Karl Barth: The Shape of His Theology, 108.
starting point in his Doctrine of Reconciliation.  

Sin is a disruption of the relationship between God and humans, implicit within the covenant (or “election”), and it is the covenant which is the foundation of the entire account. Barth acknowledges that prior dogmatic theologians mistakenly began their hamartiology with a definition of sin, and then resolved the dilemma of sin through arguments based on the incarnation and atoning death of Jesus Christ. (CD IV/1, 359) Barth’s perspective reverses this focus on sin, so that the primary focus is Christ’s obedience to the Father in accepting His verdict in our place.

To summarize, we may say that since God’s decision to be Emmanuel precedes the creation of humankind, the doctrine of reconciliation logically precedes the doctrine of sin. A proper knowledge of sin is thus possible only in the knowledge of God’s relationship with humankind. (CD IV/1, 362-363) For Barth, the focus must be the reconciliation of God and humanity while not elevating the nothingness of sin to undue importance.

In older orthodoxy, Barth argued, anthropology effectively superseded theology. The same error appeared particularly in 19th century Neo-protestant theology, wherein the

205 The “problem” to which reconciliation is the answer, as it were.

206 “A division of God into a God in Christ and a god outside of Christ is quite impossible. We cannot start from such a division even in our question concerning the basis of the knowledge of human sin” (CD IV/1, 363)
resulting conception of sin was “simply a matter of self-communing, [in which] man becomes his own lawgiver and accuser and judge.” The written Word of God was studied as literature, with the human spirit its focus, while the fundamental theological protagonist became the alienated religious individual rather than God. Barth characterized the “tradition of the nineteenth century as anthropocentric in a basically antitheological way, to the extent that it was concerned with the act of faith rather than with the object of faith, [and in response] he engaged in a prolonged examination of the nature and methods of theology, and of its content, as grounded in God's action in Jesus Christ.”

For Barth, God is not to be encompassed by human intellectual calisthenics but rather discovered in obedience to the revelation of God as the Wholly Other. Barth understood how the God of revelation had been compromised by 19th century theology in uncompromising terms: “This God who is the free partner in a history which he himself inaugurated and in a dialogue ruled by him—this divine God was in danger of being reduced to a pious notion: the mythical expression and symbol of human excitation oscillating between its own psychic heights or depths, whose truth could only be that of a monologue and its own graspable content.”

207 Badcock, Light of Truth and Fire of Love, 110.
208 Green, Karl Barth, 48.
Superficially, making theological anthropology foundational would seem to enable theologians to concentrate on the problem of sin, but, for Barth, the situation was the reverse. Barth claimed that the true tendency in 19th century theology was to reduce sin’s importance, seriousness, and scope, since in it, humans had been elevated to be their own judges. Barth writes: “Is it not inevitable that the man who has arbitrarily attained to these offices will be able, and will certainly be ready, to acquit himself, to pronounce himself, if not wholly, at any rate relatively just?” (CD IV/1, 388-389) Sin is rendered relatively innocuous when it is seen, not as a “No” to God, but rather some frustration or limitation inherent in the human condition. The human being at the centre as judge, “leads inevitably to the idea that its evil thoughts and words and works are external, accidental and isolated.” (CD IV/1, 404) Anthropocentric theology holds humans primarily responsible to themselves rather than to God. For Barth, however, in sinning, “What man himself does is totally and exclusively a contradiction of the faithfulness and grace of God.” (CD IV/1, 406)

Barth emphasizes the absurdity of sin, its contradictory and paradoxical character, in his hamartiology. Humanity, while shaking its fist and shouting “No” at God in an impotent attempt to deny God’s covenant, is, to Barth, absurdly attempting to reject the very foundation upon which it exists. In Christ, God has chosen for Himself as well as

\[\text{209} \quad \text{And with it, indeed, God’s own being as “God with us”}.\]
for the creature. Sin, Barth argues, can only be truly understood as a futile attempt to reject the very “relationship to God and all other structured relationships in which God created them.” Summarizing the argument of several hundred pages of dense, Barthian prose, one commentary succinctly relates:

In his presentation, sin appears as an absurd, essentially impossible—and yet actual—human turning against the care of God for his creatures in Jesus Christ. The true God, Jesus Christ, humbles himself for the benefit of sinful humanity. The sinner in his arrogance wants to be God (IV /1:413-78). The truly human one, Jesus Christ, exalts the human race to true humanity in the relations created by God within which it exists. The sinner in his sloth resists such an honoring of his humanity (see IV /2:403-82). The true witness, Jesus Christ, testifies to himself. The proud and indolent sinner evades this witness and falsifies it with the lie (see IV /3.1:434-60). While Barth has all human beings in view in his account of arrogant and slothful humanity, his characterization of sin as falsehood points to the specifically Christian form of sin (IV /3.1:451). Here the doctrine of sin becomes a critique of Christian religion that, as religion, strives to dispose of the free event of God's grace for sinful humanity.

Barth declares this sinful behaviour as an “impossible possibility,” affirming the self-contradictory character of “the man of sin.” For ultimately, the creature can not turn against its Creator.

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211 Ibid., 203.
For Barth, sin has no positive basis in God, His being, His life, nor any positive part in His will and work, including the creation. Sin is not a creature of God, and arises only as the expression of what God has not willed. It is the expression of that which absolutely “is” not, or which “is” only as God does not will it, or of that which “lives” only as what God has rejected and condemned and excluded. Barth thus insists on the absurdity of the “impossible possibility” represented by sin. For sin is not something which humankind has from God. The possibility that a person can sin does not belong, therefore, to humankind’s freedom as a rational creature. (CD IV/1, 409) It must be understood as something that has its foundations solely in the paradoxical and self-destructive “No” to God’s “Yes,” the “No” that is in Barth’s theology the genesis of all evil.

### 3.2 Reinhold Niebuhr: A Comparative Voice

A useful foil to the theology of Karl Barth is his contemporary Reinhold Niebuhr (1892-1971), arguably the most important American theologian of the 20th century, who developed a distinctive approach to Christian Social Ethics, generally called Christian Realism, which integrates culture, politics, science, economics and religion in a single

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212 Contrary to what is often argued in the “free will defence” of theodicy.
Like Barth, Niebuhr’s father was a clergyman, his early church experience as a pastor was in a congregation in an industrial area, and he separated himself from the liberalism of the 19th century in face of the turmoil of the early 20th century. Although Niebuhr is commonly labelled as a neo-orthodox theologian, his theology is of a very different character than Barth’s, and indeed, he viewed Barth’s theology as far too ethereal to be either true or of genuine practical use. In 1951, Niebuhr wrote that “modern Barthians blithely disregard the evidences of modern science as if they did not exist.”

Niebuhr shares with Barth, however, an interest in the problem of sin as pride, and with it, the concept of an “impossible possibility,” for which reason alone Niebuhr provides a useful reference-point in this thesis.

At the outset, Niebuhr’s theology may appear to mirror the German Christian tendency to align politics and religion very closely within the life of a people. Niebuhr, however, could not only be critical of politicians, but also supportive and heavily involved with them in their work. Even today Barack Obama has named him as his “favorite philosopher.” Kenneth Morris Hamilton writes, “Niebuhr was perhaps the

215 Particularly in the Roosevelt era.
last theologian who would exercise an influence of any gravity over the politics of America. Theologians today no longer have the cultural credibility that would land them on the cover of Time Magazine or qualify them as recipients of the Presidential Medal of Freedom (1964) or, for that matter, garner much interest from politicians and political theorists whatsoever.  

There is another important difference. While Barth’s treatment of sin as pride is located within his theology of reconciliation, Reinhold Niebuhr’s understanding of sin as pride is highly psychological in character, and his theology crystallizes equally around the themes of Christian selfhood and political commitment. Niebuhr is inclined to treat sin as a necessary primary starting point in theology, rather than as something purely secondary and derivative. For Niebuhr, a theology of the kingdom of God is impossible without an appreciation of the universality of sin in history and of God’s thoroughgoing judgment of human vice and pretension. Holton P. Odegard, reflecting in Sin and Science: Reinhold Niebuhr as Political Theologian, speaks of hamartiology as Niebuhr’s “central overwhelming idea,” and labelled him a “political philosopher worth

217 Ibid., 4.
218 Patterson, “Reinhold Niebuhr’s Relevance,” 89.
219 Scott and Cavanaugh, The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology, 183.
observing.”²²⁰ More properly described as a social ethicist than a theologian per se, Niebuhr is thoroughly concerned with the theological theme of anthropology and political life.²²¹ Niebuhr, in short, is more concerned with the practical application of Christian thought than with pure theology.²²² Further, Niebuhr’s model of “applied Christianity” was specifically contextualized within the American social experience.

The two nevertheless agree on many issues, and most importantly, on the rejection of Nazism (and Fascism generally), and in their stringent theological commitment to preaching resistance and military engagement against it. Even Niebuhr’s magnum opus, The Nature and Destiny of Man, was based on Gifford Lectures delivered in Edinburgh in 1939, only a year after Barth’s own Gifford Lectures were delivered in Aberdeen. In them, Niebuhr rejected the concept of inherited original sin and built instead upon Kierkegaard’s concept of Angst to explain how, through “anxiety,” “we are tempted to turn to sinful self-assertion—to transmute our finiteness to infinity, our weakness into strength, our dependence to independence—rather than to trust in the ultimate security of God’s love.”²²³

²²⁰ Odegard, Sin and Science; Reinhold Niebuhr as Political Theologian., 12.
²²² Ibid., 6–7.
²²³ Grenz and Olson, 20th Century Theology, 104.
Niebuhr believed that it is the sheer denial of human limitation (creaturehood) and the desire for independence that constitutes the sin of pride.\footnote{Anxiety, in Niebuhr’s doctrine of sin, leads to either pride or sensuality, which we might in principle usefully compare with Barth’s harmartiological themes of pride and sloth. Both sensuality and sloth, however, are beyond the scope of this thesis.} Commentators Grenz and Olson note that Niebuhr further categorizes pride as, “the pride of power…, the pride of knowledge… and the pride of virtue…, leading to spiritual pride.”\footnote{Grenz and Olson, \textit{20th Century Theology}, 104. These are the defining features of the four types of pride: power, grasping for power as an attempt to experience security; knowledge, claiming as final and absolute what is only finite knowledge; virtue claiming absolute status for one’s own relative moral standards; and spiritual, endowing our partial standards with divine sanction.} Within Niebuhr’s anthropological theology, sin becomes definable in humanity’s self-contradiction, which is a view comparable to Barth’s, except that, at best, the consciousness of faith is of importance here, whereas God enjoys a diminished role.\footnote{Hamilton and Barter Moulaison, \textit{The Doctrine of Humanity in the Theology of Reinhold Niebuhr}, 54.}

In Niebuhr’s political theology, the importance of pride is not limited to individuals, but increasingly manifest in groups, for “the group is more arrogant, hypocritical, self-centered, and ruthless in the pursuit of its ends than the individual.”\footnote{Niebuhr, \textit{The Nature and Destiny of Man; a Christian Interpretation …}, 208.} Niebuhr’s sin of pride “is found among individuals or groups wielding extraordinary social power who imagine themselves ‘secure against all vicissitudes’ or among those less established who seek ‘sufficient power to guarantee their security’ always ‘at the
expense of others.’ In the later 1930s, a historically secure but too confident Britain, and an insecure and aggressive Germany, symbolized such pride.”

Like Barth, Niebuhr thought Nazism’s religious dimension to be crucial to understanding it, and Niebuhr branded Nazism as a religion unto itself. His contemporary and colleague Paul Tillich has similarly identified the vacuum left by secularism, which churchmen had tried to fill with a mix of Liberal Christian humanism, and which Nazism tried to fill in a very different way. Niebuhr wrote:

In Germany therefore we have the interesting phenomenon of a religious controversy no longer between secularism and religion but between a primitive religion and Christianity. The church which failed to do justice to what was valuable in modern secularism on the political level is now forced to withdraw its concessions to modernism on the cultural level in order to confront a demonic nationalism with the vigor which only a non-liberal dogmatism can supply. It is a rather unhappy ending of the struggle between traditional religion and secularism.

In 1933, Niebuhr was disappointed with the German church’s failure to attack the anti-Semitism of the Nazis and expressed his outrage, complaining that, “probably 75 per

228 Brown, Niebuhr and His Age, 78–79.
cent of the church population is avowedly Nazi.”

Niebuhr wrote that German church theology at the time was clearly a new religion, in which the “Hitlerites speak of ‘mysticism of the blood’,” and where obedience to Hitler is “enjoined as a religious tenet rather than a council of pragmatic politics.”

He continues, “Like all religion, Nazi religion has a jealous God who declares ‘Thou shalt have no other Gods before me’,” demanding the faithful to love their nation “with all thy heart and with all thy mind and with all thy soul.”

Niebuhr notes how the values of Volk und Blut are being resisted stubbornly “to a very great degree by the leadership of the great Swiss theologian, Karl Barth, whose ‘dialectical theology’ insists on the transcendence of God in terms so consistent that the Christian is unable to affirm any historical or political movement as a Christian.”

Critiquing Barth, however, he argues that such emphasis on a “wholly other” God will prove politically ineffective.

In the summer of 1937, Niebuhr despaired: “Here in the centre of Europe, a nation has been subjected to a mad leadership, which subordinates all the energies of a once cultured people to the terrible task of military destruction. The nation is one tremendous
armed camp. No bordering nation feels safe.”

Nazism’s success and effectiveness surprised Niebuhr, who wrote in late 1938 that no one had “any idea that matters would move quite as rapidly as they have,” and that their invasion of Austria marked the “final destruction of every concept of universal values upon which western civilization has been built.”

Niebuhr identified the Nazi movement as a tribalistic, pagan dictatorship where “every social strategy is supported by a complete Weltanschauung or world view and every political attitude is developed into a religion.”

Thus, although disappointed at minimal resistance of the Lutheran church and critical of Barth’s contribution, he positioned the sin of organizational pride primarily on the National Socialist political movement in the political arena and not on the German Christian Movement within the Church.

Like Barth, Niebuhr also used the phrase “impossible possibility,” in his hamartiology—although very differently from what is found in Barth. Interestingly, Niebuhr is so much more pessimistic than Barth; as George Hunsinger puts it, “Niebuhr exemplifies the kind of theology which thinks in terms of the real and the ideal,” whereas

235 Brown, Niebuhr and His Age, 97.
236 Ibid., 95–96.
“Barth characteristically [thought] … in terms of the “real” and the “unreal.” Thus Niebuhr regarded Christian love as an impossible ideal, by which we are commanded to live, that can never be realized due to the ubiquity of sin. In Niebuhr, therefore, it is love that is the “impossible possibility,” as no matter how hard people try, they will always fall short of its demands. To think otherwise is to submit to the characteristic “heresy” of Enlightened theology, emphasizing human greatness and succumbing to the sin of pride. For Niebuhr, this was the sin of the Nazis and potentially much error in American history, its inevitable potentiality continually arising in each generation’s experience.

Barth, by contrast, found nothing whatever “ideal” or “unrealized” in the concept of God’s love, which is what is ultimately or metaphysically real. Human sinfulness, including the pride which refuses to bend to where God makes himself humble, i.e., to Jesus Christ, is by comparison the “unreal.” In Niebuhr, sin is anthropocentric, ironically distorting of human greatness, whereas in Barth’s theocentric view, prideful humanity is ultimately unreal. It has no existence in itself, except as the paradoxical and absurd rejection of God, and of God’s great cause with humanity in Jesus Christ.²³⁹ Pride thus appears in Barth’s theology as the self-assertive rejection of our own existence, a

²³⁸ Hunsinger, How to Read Karl Barth, 38.
²³⁹ Ibid., 39.
rejection which is attached to rejection of the reality of God—which is, for Barth, ultimately futile.

Such comparisons are useful to establish Barth’s hamartiology of sin as pride, as it applies to the German Christian Movement. Despite the commonalities between him and Niebuhr, Barth appears to be arguing a unique case—one certainly less commonly familiar than Niebuhr’s account, and one with which it ought not to be confused.

3.3 The Story of the Golden Calf and the Sin of Pride of the German Christians

Barth’s *Church Dogmatics* numbers over six million words in thirteen volumes, yet in his exposition of pride as a primary component of sin comprises a mere sixty-five pages of the whole. However, these pages are framed by the key discussion of the servanthood of Christ within Barth’s massive exposition of the Doctrine of Reconciliation, and is juxtaposed with an account of sin within the structure of Law, which also serves to emphasize the importance of the theme. Within those sixty-five pages, however, Barth devotes nine pages to the story of the Golden Calf in Exodus 32, which will be the focus of what follows in this Section. (CD IV/1, 423-432)

Barth’s treatment of Exodus 32 is, I suggest, a parable referring implicitly but clearly to the German Christians. It provides an analogy in which the leaders of the German Christian Movement became like Aaron, fashioning a god of and for the people, to bring the nation together, and meet the perceived immediate needs of the people.
Essentially, Barth likens the sin of pride exemplified in the German Church Movement to the transgression of Israel in Exodus 32.

Barth’s exegesis of this passage runs parallel in a number of ways to his observations concerning the sin of the Church during the rise of National Socialism. Although the point is not made explicitly, in Barth’s exposition of the story of the Golden Calf, the comparison is so striking that it is difficult not to think that the actions of the German Church came to mind in his writing. The irony that the German Christians mimicked the very people they despised in substituting themselves as the chosen people of God is not lost upon the reader.

Aaron, according to Barth, strayed from the difficult path of obedience and fell away from revelation and redemption, into the mire of national religious experience and opinion. He turned from God, his sin exemplified in the creation of the Calf itself, its virility empowering the people. Israel worshipped and celebrated this idol, just as the National Socialists celebrated the Reich, and did so, with a “noisy song like a sound of war.” Particularly important is Aaron’s service to the people: “He listens to the voice of the soul of the people and obeys it,” as Barth puts it, or again, “He has simply accepted the vox populi as the vox Dei and acted accordingly.” (CD IV/1, 429) Barth designates Aaron in this immediate context as “the man of the national Church, the established
Church,” providing a significant claim for our argument.\footnote{Barth, Kirchliche Dogmatik, IV/1, 475, using the German and English phrases: “Er ist der Mann der Nationalkirche, der established church.”} This statement indicates that Barth’s awareness of the dangers to the church that emerged in the German Christian Movement was still present two decades later in his writing. Aaron put on the mantle of a “creator Dei,” giving Israel its new god, just as the German Christian Movement effectively deified the Volk, setting the nation, and with it their national leader, Adolf Hitler, in the place of God.

Barth, expectedly, stresses the parallel between Aaron’s rejection of Moses as mediator and revealer, and the rejection of Christ in the sin of pride of the Nationalkirche. Barth identifies Moses as a representation of Christ, in that Moses alone, separate from, but responsible for the nation of Israel, communed with God, just as Jesus did with the Father. It was Moses who received the tablets of the Decalogue. Moses brings God’s law; Jesus brings God’s grace. Moses, in another instance of mediation, turns representatively to God: “the Israelite himself now, liberated out of Egypt, brought into the wilderness, sustained in it, brought back into the land of his fathers, a member of the covenant people elected and called and infinitely preferred and therefore infinitely responsible and committed before all other peoples, turns to God.” He alone appeals to God for the salvation of the people, “O Lord, let my Lord, I pray thee, go among us; for it is a stiff-necked people; and pardon our iniquity, and our sin, and take us for thine
inheritance,” in response to which God hears and answers, “I will do this thing that thou hast spoken: for thou hast found grace in my sight, and I know thee by name.” (CD IV/1, 426-8)

In the Exodus account, Moses had disappeared, and the people, seeing no evidence of him, accordingly saw no evidence of the God in whose name Moses had led them out of bondage in Egypt. The people found themselves abandoned, with no tangible sign of God’s salvation. It was in this dilemma, Barth suggests, that the image of the Calf sprang from the imagination of Aaron, negating the need to further hear the word of God through Moses. What matters is the people, and Aaron is a man of the people, who understood people’s wants, like the German Christians who wanted a church for the people. The Israelites were ready to move on from Moses’ disappearance toward their destiny, without further need for Moses’ authority:

All that remained now was they themselves, with the reservation which they had had for a long time in respect of Moses and His God; they themselves as a race of men, including Aaron the priest and his priestly wisdom and craft, listening and looking in the void with empty ears and empty eyes; they themselves with their historical existence, their past and their future, their needs and necessities and hopes, the greatness and the problematical nature of their being. Nothing more. (CD IV/1, 430)

Aaron, correctly surmising their mood and religious needs, responds by forsaking the word of God and creating the cult of the Golden Calf to affirm and realize these ambitions. (CD IV/1, 431) Aaron, the “man of the national church,” is an essential element in the account, signifying for Barth the problematic ambiguity latent in institutional religion. Accordingly, Aaron does not rise above the impending sin of the
people: ‘On the contrary, he both takes part in it and he is the exponent of it…. He shows the people how to proceed and he takes the initiative. … He is not above but under and actively in the activity of which Israel is guilty.” (CD IV/1, 429-30)

Barth illustrates that the sole requirement the substitution of the false god of nationalism for the true God of the Bible was an appropriate “cultus.” In the false religious consciousness resultant from this rejection of Moses and Moses’ God:

The bull-god and therefore Israel's own knowledge and power will now continue and improve what [Moses] has done. Above all, his proclamation of Yahweh, his exposition of the grace and holiness and covenant and commandments of God, the whole mystery about His person are no longer indispensable, indeed they have become antiquated and redundant and even destructive. It was now necessary that the whole mystery about His person should be explained clearly and simply as the mystery of the Israelite himself, that the consciousness of God should become a healthy self-consciousness, that the expectation of help from God should be transformed into a resolution boldly to help oneself, that the holiness of God should be understood as the dignity of Israel's humanity, the grace of God as the joy of thinking and acting in its own fullness of power, the covenant of God as its own understanding of its historical destiny, of its national nature and mission and the future development of it, the commandment of God as the cheerful will to live out its singular life. (CD IV/1, 431)

Moses, in short, was now “passe” and “a new epoch in the religious and political history of Israel, had now dawned, and for this epoch Moses had no message.” (CD IV/1, 432)

The allusion here both to the German Christians and the theological lessons learned, is clear. The German Christians saw themselves as the chosen people, and held themselves to have fundamental religious importance as an order of creation. They had survived the journey in the wilderness of the Weimar Republic, and by 1933, they found themselves, metaphorically, at the base of Mount Sinai, seeking leadership, and a tangible
God upon whom they could bestow worship. For them, the ascension of Hitler as Chancellor provided the smoke, fire, and trumpet blasts that proceeded their entrance to the promised land. Rather than earrings, rings and gold to make the idol, Aryan blood and Nordic history became the treasure which was to be taken from the people. Just as only pure gold was used to create the Golden Calf, any dross found among the German citizenry would need to be burned off to ensure a pure Reich.

In this man-made idol, the logical constructs of the Liberal theology of the 19th century were embraced, resulting in a self-made god, worshipped by self-made men who sought control of their own destiny. In Barth’s account, therefore, the fundamental features of the German Christian Movement echo the account of Exodus 32. The Calf allows Israel, in itself, to believe it can see and understand, through the mystery of the power of its own existence, its *redemptor* at work. The claim is that it is still Yahweh the Liberator, Helper and Lord, the hope of their future, whom they worship in the Calf. They do not, therefore, outwardly plan any apostasy, despite the fact that this is “the deepest and most faithful and fitting interpretation of their actions.” (CD IV/1, 428) It is not to an *idol* that worship is offered and sacrifice made, ‘No: what Aaron called them to … was a “feast to the Lord,” … a feast to Yahweh as now at last he was known and made present and existentially perceptible in his true form, to Yahweh as the champion and work and possession of Israel, to Yahweh the bull…. This was the breach of the covenant, and Israel regarded it as the supreme fulfilment of the covenant, an act of concrete religion.’ (CD IV/1, 428)
In Barth’s view, it was this same idolatrous dynamic, masquerading as true Christian piety and as responsible and obedient theological scholarship, that came to fulfilment in the age of the “Aryan Church,” not simply in worship, but in war, blood sacrifice and racial purification. The German Christian Movement created their own Golden Calf whose virility and fertility echoed and reflected the National Socialist program of German greatness and for the ultimate victory of the Aryan race. Just as Aaron strayed from the path of orthodoxy and became mired in popular opinion, so did “men of the national church” like Althaus, Kittel and Hirsch.

Reflecting upon these events in a 1938 essay for *The Christian Century*, Barth wrote that he had added nothing new to his outlook in his interventions in Germany a few years earlier: “At that time I said rather just what I had always tried to say, namely, that beside God we can have no other gods, that the Holy Spirit of the Scriptures is enough to guide the church in all truth, and that the grace of Jesus Christ is all-sufficient for the forgiveness of our sins and the ordering of our lives.” This message, however, had inspired resistance to the Nazification of German Protestantism. Barth was reluctantly drawn into the “very midst of church politics, engaged in collaboration in the deliberations and decisions of the Confessional Church which had been assembling since

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241 Barth, *How I Changed My Mind*.

242 Ibid., 46.
Their task was to “hold fast” to the immutability of God’s sovereignty and to stand upon the basis of Holy Scripture, under all circumstances against the National Socialist state. Barth and his colleagues fought Nazi oppression, not only of the Christian church but of human rights and freedoms. Crucially, their protest against “the antichristian and therefore antihuman essence of National Socialism,” against “[t]he lies and brutality, as well as the stupidity and fear” that it represented, was for Barth a strictly theological protest. Without theology, Barth contended, the dangers of Nazism could neither be understood nor rejected. Thus, in an essay addressed (via the Christian Century) to English speaking Christians, he writes:

And Europe does not understand the danger in which it stands. Why not? Because it does not understand the First Commandment. Because it does not see that National Socialism means the conscious, radical, and systematic transgression of this First Commandment. Because it does not see that this transgression, because it is sin against God, drags the corruption of the nations in its wake.

For Barth, the struggle with the German Christians in the mid-1930s remained theologically important, through the 1950s and even into the 1960s, as he concentrated on the question of Christology in the vast project that is Church Dogmatics, volume IV.

243 Ibid.
244 Ibid.
245 Ibid.
246 Ibid.
Barth remained interested in politics and became important as a theologian who spoke meaningfully during those decades about the Cold War. As we will discover in the next Section, the same issues faced in the German Church Struggle reappeared, and themes developed during his critique of the German Christian Movement continued to play a major role in his activities and writings.

3.4 Barth’s Theology and the Cold War

In the years immediately following the fall of the Third Reich, Barth concerned himself with helping the German people to recognize their guilt, take responsibility through confession, and repent. He helped frame the Stuttgart Declaration of Guilt in October 1945, and strongly supported the Darmstadt Declaration in 1947, both of which are reproduced in Appendices IV and V of this thesis.\footnote{Busch, The Great Passion, 35.} Eberhard Busch argues that Barth was “fighting for a needed and patient learning of democracy ‘from below’ in Germany.”\footnote{Busch, Karl Barth, 35.}

Hannah Arendt wrote that Allied denazification assumed objective standards such as length of party membership, date of first entrance, offices held, etc., which could clearly distinguish stages between Nazi sympathizers on the one hand and obvious war
criminals on the other. This proved an impossible strategy in encompassing an entire population, millions of whom were displaced and impoverished. Popular attitudes in immediate post-war Germany encompassed the redirection of blame to the occupying powers, the denial of events following 1932, as well as overly dramatic self-recrimination. The primary goal of most people was a return to normalcy, and thus a primary characteristic of post-war life in Germany was the rapidity with which everyday life returned and energies refocused to the reconstruction of Germany. Arendt theorized that:

The lies of totalitarian propaganda are distinguished from the normal lying of non-totalitarian regimes in times of emergency by their consistent denial of the importance of facts in general: all facts can be changed and all lies can be made true. The Nazi impress on the German mind consists primarily in a conditioning whereby reality has ceased to be the sum total of hard inescapable facts and has become a conglomeration of ever-changing events and slogans in which a thing can be true today and false tomorrow. This conditioning may be precisely one of the reasons for the surprisingly few traces of any lasting Nazi indoctrination, as well as for an equally surprising lack of interest in the refuting of Nazi doctrines. What one is up against is not indoctrination but the incapacity or unwillingness to distinguish altogether between fact and opinion.

250 Ibid., 345.
251 Ibid., 344.
Barth was disappointed in the Church in Germany, and was particularly critical of how superficially it took the need to repent. Many Church leaders complicit in Nazism regained their former positions, in many cases were favoured by occupying forces as allies in denazification. Worse still, the Protestant church was given special privileges to conduct its own process of denazification—through which members of the German Christian Movement were vilified, while the church in general justified itself. Bishop Theophile Wurm (1868-1953), for instance, led an effort to re-establish Christian values throughout Germany in order to rebuild Church membership, while Martin Niemöller (1892-1984), jailed by the Nazis, became a hero figure as an exemplar of Christian resistance to Nazism.

Niemöller became a significant voice in post-war German religious culture, seeking a new theological settlement in the Lutheran two kingdoms debate. When interviewed by an American Army chaplain about the role of the post-war church, he announced that,

Yes, the Church has now learned that she has a responsibility in public life, a responsibility she did not recognize before. It is because of this blindness—among other things—that the Church did not speak out as loudly and as clearly as she should have. For the Church saw well enough where Hitler was leading the


253 Woltering, “‘We Went Astray’ Protestant Church Leaders Reevaluate Church and State in Postwar Germany from 1945-1950,” 36.
German people, but she kept quiet, because she believed she should not get mixed in politics, which was certainly an error, and even a catastrophic error. I think this will not happen again.254

Niemöller was obviously referencing the broad church rather than the German Christian Movement, which could hardly be said to have “kept quiet” about 1930s politics. Interestingly, Niemöller, as a major Christian post-war leader, saw the need for the recovering church to re-engage with politics.

In nascent West Germany the re-engagement involved the recovering church supporting a particular political party, the Christian Democratic Union (CDU).255 In Barth’s judgment, however, such commitment risked committing the sins of the past in a new form. Barth found the church’s alignment with a particular political party repugnant. Writing in 1954, he explicitly decried the formation and institution of the CDU. He asked:

Can there be any other “Christian” party in the state but the Christian fellowship itself, with its special mission and purpose? And if what we want is a political corollary of the church in political life, can anything else be permissible and possible but—please do not be scared!—a single state party excluding all others, whose program would necessarily coincide with the tasks of the state itself, understood in the widest sense (but excluding all particularist ideas and interests)?

254 Niemöller, Of Guilt and Hope.

255 Church leaders, specially its bishops, supported, in the spirit of Niemöller’s vision of a more “Christian” Germany, the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), which is to this day a major political force in Europe.
Indeed, according to Barth:

The church’s supreme interest must be that Christians shall not mass together in a special party, since their task is to defend and proclaim, in decisions based on it, the Christian gospel that concerns all people. They must show that although they go their own special way, they are not in fact against anybody but unconditionally for all, for the common cause of the whole state.²⁵⁶

Barth held equally strong views about West German rearmament and Christian participation in the Cold War. He diametrically opposed the logic of the Roman mantra, “If one wants peace, one must prepare for war” (*Si vis pacem, para bellum*), and argued that this actually *provoked war*. That logic, “whose inhumanity is really true godlessness,” was especially exemplified for Barth in atomic armaments. The proponents of nuclear weapons were prepared to “accept the destruction of everything which they promise to ‘protect.’”²⁵⁷ Barth countered the Cold War threat with a revision of the mantra, “*Si non vis bellum, para pacem,*” (CD III/4, 452), arguing that the issue was neither armament nor disarmament, but rather “restoration of an order of life which is meaningful and just”—in correspondence with God's reconciliation (CD III/4, 459).”


²⁵⁷ Busch, *Karl Barth*, 37.
The Christian attitude to Communism, for Barth, could not be based on a doctrinaire political stance, but could only be a question of “the positive defense of the creation of just and tolerable social relations for all classes of the population.” Consequently, Barth was troubled by the abstract anti-communist stance of many Christians during the Cold War years. This, as might be expected, was interpreted by his opponents as betraying the hard fought ideals from the 1930s, and led to their stigmatizing Barth as a communist sympathizer.

Notable theologians, particularly Brunner and Niebuhr, were horrified by Barth’s refusal to openly support Cold War Western interests. Brunner, specifically, argued the impossibility of politically neutral Christianity, defining the state again as an “order of creation,” with democracy being the most Christian solution for the order and preservation of the state. Niebuhr, who by the 1950s had become a major voice in American public life, argued that there was an expression of monstrous sinful pride in the Soviet threat, which required the formulation of a massive military alliance to defend against it. He decried the impracticality of Barth’s “otherworldliness,” as before, but in the late 1940s and early 1950s increasingly, while maintaining that Barth’s theology offered “no guidance for a Christian statesman for our day.”

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258 Busch, The Great Passion, 37.
259 Dorrien, The Barthian Revolt in Modern Theology, 135.
One of the major occasions for this public disagreement sprang from Barth’s month-long visit to Hungary, undertaken in 1948. The Soviets had taken Hungary and the region, mercilessly cleansed the remnants of Nazism, and instituted a Communist satellite state. Barth was invited to speak to a gathering of the Hungarian Reformed Church in the spring of 1948, and made an extended speaking tour in the country. He reported in *Kirchenbote*, a popular church publication, that he had returned feeling illuminated and encouraged. Despite the political situation being “anything but pleasant” behind the Iron Curtain, Barth was impressed by the positive “attitude,” “convictions,” and “work, external and internal, of the Reformed Hungarians.” In contrast to his visit in 1936, where Barth found the people to be ultra-nationalistic and “foaming with hatred for the Czechs and Rumanians,” he reported:

I came across more calm and serene people there than in Basle. I found them preoccupied with genuine, serious and burning questions. But I discovered that they did not share that nervousness about the Russians, the ‘peoples’ democracies’ and the whole problem of Eastern Europe which some people in our own country apparently regard as inevitable. I came across much impressive humility and patience, alertness and bravery, a faith that holds out and a closeness to the eternal things such as one does not meet here. […] It impressed itself on me—I thought not without sadness of what most Germans lack today—that a real Calvinism can still prove itself a virile, solid and practical affair today.  


261 Ibid., 102–3.
Barth was impressed with the courage shown by the Reformed Church in Hungary, in following the “narrow path” between noncompliance with the demands of the state, while also resisting the “stronger temptation of entering into opposition as a matter of principle.” He elaborated:

… I met no responsible Reformed Hungarian who considered it right from a Christian point of view to take the line of fundamental, out and out political resistance. My impression is that they will not be silent when they are forced to speak. But they are too well aware of the mistakes of the past and the consequences that flowed from them to want to launch out in the opposite direction. They are now too open to new ideas, particularly in the social sphere, to be able to commit themselves to a complete rejection of Communism. They know the weaknesses of the West at any rate well enough not to feel themselves obliged to throw in their lot with that side.

He concluded:

What convinced me most of all was rather that I found them occupied not primarily with the problem of East and West, with memories of the Russian atrocities and the rights and wrongs of their present government, but with the positive tasks of their own Church, and again, not with the denominational, constitutional and liturgical questions which are the subject of so much laborious enquiry in Germany, but with a new preaching of the old Word of God which cannot be undertaken without thorough theological preparation and reflection; and occupied with the evangelisation of their own congregations as the presupposition of all further work that is to be fruitful. If only the Church had started with all its forces concentrated on this primary task in Germany!

262 Ibid., 104.
263 Ibid.
264 Ibid.
What is clear here is the basic insistence found throughout Barth’s theology on relating two essentials between the church and state. First, it is essential that the church recognize its foundations in the Word of God and the power of the Spirit rather than in any legal relationship with the state. Secondly, the church is obligated to take the state seriously, and to speak the Word of God to it and in face of it fearlessly when necessary. In an essay entitled, “The Christian Community in the Midst of Political Change,” a situational reflection on Europe at the time, Barth re-states this fundamental conviction. In a way surprising to our eyes today, he writes, “One cannot in fact compare the Church with the State without realizing how much weaker, poorer and more exposed to danger the human community is in the State than in the Church.” Nevertheless, just as the church must remain the church, so the state should be permitted to be the state. Barth accordingly argued that while the mission of the church involves bearing witness to Christ alone, the church should nevertheless support the constitutional state, except where it degenerates into tyranny or anarchy, neither of which he had experienced in Hungary.

Brunner, incensed by Barth’s account of the Hungarian situation, responded in an open letter, stressing his displeasure that Barth did not support Brunner’s essential

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265 Ibid., 17–22.
premise that totalitarianism is inherently illegal, inhuman and anti-Christian.\textsuperscript{266} Barth disagreed that Communism had violated Eastern European countries as severely as Nazism, or that the new “puppet governments of Russia, the Baltic, Poland and the Balkans” were consistently totalitarian.\textsuperscript{267} Brunner, by contrast, argued that National Socialism was an immature reflection of a “fully matured” totalitarian Communism. Political options in the mid-20\textsuperscript{th} century had been narrowed to either capitalism or Communism, and so Brunner pressured Barth to publicly declare sides, arguing that he must involve himself in a “life-and-death struggle against communism.”\textsuperscript{268}

Brunner’s premise was that the totalitarian state, by its very nature, is inherently unjust, and that communist totalitarianism is fundamentally atheistic and anti-theistic, claiming total allegiance from its population. Brunner offers concrete examplars: the Russian state from 1917 to 1948, and the Nazi state from 1933 to 1945; the internment of and slave labour by millions; the brutality of the Gestapo; and the utter uncertainty of law under anything but a democratic system. He asserted that the church must take a stand as definitely against Soviet Communism as it did against the “amateurish Nazi State.” He accused Barth of abdicating ethics and surrendering to the brute force of reality.

\textsuperscript{266} Ibid., 107.
\textsuperscript{267} Ibid., 108.
\textsuperscript{268} Ibid., 109.
However, Christians must not capitulate in the face of “historical necessities.” Brunner allowed that although he had not personally visited post-war Hungary, he was well-informed about their current situation, in which many members of the Reformed Church, feeling that through inaction, they were “betraying the cause of freedom, human rights, justice and humanity.”

Brunner challenged Barth:

I simply cannot grasp why you, of all people, who condemned so severely even a semblance of collaborationism on the part of the Church under Hitler, should now be making yourself the spokesman of those who condemn not merely outward, but even inward spiritual resistance, and why you should deride as ‘nervousness’ what is really a horror-struck revulsion from a truly diabolical system of injustice and inhumanity; why you, who were only recently condemning in the most unsparing terms those Germans who withdrew to a purely inward line in the struggle against Hitlerism, and maintained that the Christian duty was simply to proclaim the Word of God under whatever political system, why you now suddenly advocate the very same line and commend the theologians in Hungary who are ‘occupied not with the rights and wrongs of their present government but simply with the positive tasks of their own Church.’ Have you returned, after a fifteen years’ intermezzo of theologically political activism, to that attitude of passive unconcern in which, in the first number of Theologische Existenz heute, you summoned the Church to apply itself simply to its task of preaching the gospel, ‘as if nothing had happened’?270

Ostensibly, Brunner seems to have a point, but Barth’s response to Brunner in June of 1948 is interesting. Barth answers that the church would profit more by following the first article of the Barmen Declaration than from any emphasis on the sheer

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269 Ibid., 113.
270 Ibid.
“objectionableness of ‘totalitarianism’.” What mattered at Barmen was the identity of God, Christ and the church, whereas in Hungary, the controversy surrounded mere politics. Hence, he suggests, an honest comparison between the two is impractical. Barth argued that theology must stand apart from politics, and refuse to be defined by it:

The Church must not concern itself eternally with various ‘isms’ and systems, but with historical realities as seen in the light of the Word of God and of the Faith. Its obligations lie, not in the direction of any fulfilling of the law of nature, but towards its living Lord. Therefore, the Church never thinks, speaks or acts ‘on principle.’ Rather it judges spiritually and by individual cases. For that reason it rejects every attempt to systematise political history and its own part in that history. Therefore, it preserves the freedom to judge each new event afresh.

Such occasionalism often features in Barth’s ethics, and in this instance, Barth maintained that whether or not the core of National Socialism consisted in the “isms” of totalitarianism, nihilism, barbarism, anti-Semitism, or militarism, the real problem was its power to persuade Germans to believe in its lies and to join in its evil-doings as a matter of divine right. “We were in danger of bringing, first incense, and then the complete sacrifice to it as to a false god.” In the 1930s, Christians therefore had to resist “a godlessness which was in fact attacking body and soul, and was … effectively masked to

271 Ibid., 117.
272 Ibid., 114.
273 Ibid., 115.
many thousands of Christian eyes.” But the political situation in Europe in 1948 was different, since no false gods were on offer.

Not only theologians Brunner and Niebuhr supported Western War policy, but most famously, President Harry S Truman gained the support of Pope Pius XII, with both maintaining that the Church must take sides in the division of East and West. Barth could not support them. Reinhold Niebuhr took up the fight again, following the failed Hungarian Revolution of 1956, in *The Christian Century* in April of 1957. Although he did not consider Barth to be a “communist sympathizer,” he must nonetheless be criticized “for adopting a complacent attitude toward communist tyranny, particularly in Hungary.” Further, Barth should have admitted an “error of judgment in which he refused to equate or compare Nazi and communist tyranny.” For Niebuhr, events in Hungary were “ample proof” that “an absolute monopoly of irresponsible power creates grievous injustices under any system.” He quoted Barth disapprovingly: “My point was that ‘looking at every event afresh in the light of the Word of God’ defrauds us of the lessons from the analogies and experiences of history. Not theology but *common sense and historical experience* ought to persuade us....” Niebuhr concluded with an admonition to Barth’s followers, not to rely on theological abstractions.

274 Green, *Karl Barth*, 299.

275 Niebuhr, “From Dr. Niebuhr in New York.”
Barth had relatively little interest in American theology, and would quite possibly have dismissed the lingering ideas of American Manifest Destiny that appear in much of Niebuhrian theology as an expression of sinful pride. For Barth, the church’s sole mission is to act as a faithful witness to Christ, whereas, like Brunner, Niebuhr argued that Christian realism demanded of post-war Christians their commitment to stand against anti-western godlessness and totalitarianism. But the self-sufficiency of the stance thus taken amounted to the sin of pride, in Barth’s view, so much so that the subtlety of the temptation it presented during the Cold War actually made it harder to be a Christian in the West than it was in the East.

Barth argued, for instance, that the West German churches had quickly reverted to their old ways in presenting themselves as holding the moral high ground against the “godless” East. His views were taken up by Wolf Krötke, who maintained that the atheism of the regime in East Germany was to be characterized primarily as an indifference to God and the church, and that, as such, it was very unlike the excesses of Nazism.\textsuperscript{276} Krötke, echoing Barth, characterized Eastern European atheism as “impassioned by the call for freedom or liberation.”\textsuperscript{277} Ironically, it was the community of non-believers that was trapped, as Krötke put it, in a “fairy tale of isolation,” whereas a

\textsuperscript{276} Krötke, “‘A Jump Ahead’: The Church as Creative Minority in Eastern Germany,” 440.

\textsuperscript{277} Ibid.
genuine theology of freedom could serve as a defence against political self-deception: “In the simplest sense, God’s being unknown allows those who believe and who speak about God to be responsible.” 

That is to say, the right is not simplistically reducible to any political platform or polity, but is always something transcendent to which we are summoned and to which we must be obedient. It follows that it is not reducible either to Communism or to Democratic Capitalism.

Barth’s theology enjoyed wide appeal in Eastern Europe by Christian (especially Protestant) theologians during the Cold War, and Barth clearly saw affinities between his own approach and what was said from places like East Berlin by theologians such as Krötke. Barth was extremely critical of the West German church’s support for the 1950s Cold War policy, resulting in the hostility of both the Swiss and West German press for his support of the East German church. Barth countered, in an article in The Christian Century in 1958, that while he had no inclination whatever toward Soviet Communism, the Western approach seemed to be something worse:

I regard anticommunism as a matter of principle an evil even greater than communism itself. What kind of Western philosophy and political ethics—and unfortunately even theology—was it whose wisdom consisted of recasting the Eastern collective man into an angel of darkness and the Western “organization man” into an angel of light? And then with the help of such metaphysics and

278 Ziegler, “‘Taken out of Context’: Freedom and Concreteness in the Theology of Wolf Krötke,” 87–89.
mythology ... bestowing on the absurd “cold war” struggle its needed higher consecration?  

Barth thus refused to conform to the Western political agenda and was an outspoken critic of the nuclear arms race. He reacted to pro-armament Christian platforms through taking a clear line, not only “that the church’s position was a categorical No to nuclear war,” but that its support for preparations for it was a concrete denial of the gospel rather like that of the German Christian Movement.

Further, Barth contributed to the Anfrage (petition) of March, 1958, drawn up by small groups of like-minded clergy called Bruderschaften, and addressed to the Synod of the Evangelical Church in Germany, demanding that the West German church’s support for the Cold War polity be withdrawn. The petition addressed nuclear armament in ten articles which “set loose a flood of debates, expositions, declarations, and counter declarations in the church and secular press.” Although Barth was unable

279 Barth, How I Changed My Mind, 63–64.
280 Yoder, Karl Barth and the Problem of War, 133.
281 Green, Karl Barth, 319.
282 This was the federative body then encompassing most of the Protestants of both Germanies.
283 Yoder, Karl Barth and the Problem of War, 134. The text of the petition is reproduced in Appendix VI.
284 Ibid., 136.
attend the Synod, he wrote a supportive letter clarifying his own commitment to the

*Bruderschaften’s cause:*

The West-German Bruderschaften, having their origin in, and belonging together with, what happened 25 years ago, should be assured that I am with them wholeheartedly and stand behind them, always, but especially in the concern which disturbs them now, and that I shall continue to do so in the future all the more joyously, the more they continue the pathway upon which they have entered, free of all profundity and despair, clear and decided, uncompromisingly and consistently. What was the rumor spread about in Germany's newspapers “that Professor Barth is not theologically in agreement with the Ten Theses of the Petition”? You may say to all and to everyone, that am in agreement with these Theses (including the 10th!), as if I had written them myself, and that I desire nothing more earnestly than that they should be maintained and interpreted worthily, convincingly and joyfully, but in principle unbendingly, in Frankfurt and thereafter in all the Evangelical Church in Germany.²⁸⁵

Barth argued that nuclear annihilation would be humanity’s ultimate “No” to God’s “Yes.” That humans, through pride, should place themselves so audaciously in judgment on their fellows in preparing for nuclear war—together with the sheer ability of nuclear was to destroy the world for which Christ died—meant that the possibility of nuclear war set the church in the *status confessionis*, meaning that it must position itself either for or against the basic confession of faith in God. For Barth, Cold War ideology was not a legitimate option for the church.

²⁸⁵ Ibid., 136–37. Yoder relates that Barth was a contributor to the original draft of the ten articles.
What is evident in all of this is a consistent line, pursued by Karl Barth through an academic life in theology, through church politics, through proclamation and service, and through a witness that was always engaged with public life, that the church needs to be faithful to the first commandment, “Thou shalt have no other gods before me.” Though the sources of this conviction lie deep in Barth’s struggles with theology during and after the Great War, they came to particular expression in Barth’s theology while working in Germany in the early 1930s, before his expulsion from Germany by the Nazis, and his return to Switzerland in 1935. His life experience through early Nazism, and his response to the German Christian Movement, sharpened his theology, leading to a range of precisely defined, theologically-laden assertions which inspired resistance to Hitler, and carried through the Cold War years into the later Barthian system. These same ideas proved to be both controversial in Western theological circles during the Cold War, and simultaneously inspirational to Christians in the East. The basic claim made by Barth, is throughout consistent with the exegesis of Exodus 32 in Church Dogmatics IV/1, in which the sin of pride as the denial of God’s “Yes” to the creature in Jesus Christ is presented as a persistent temptation for the church, and as one to which the German church succumbed under the influence of Hitler.
Conclusion

Given the vast scale of Karl Barth’s work, it is difficult to think that a single, fixed conclusion concerning him is actually possible. The secondary scholarship on Barth alone now exists on such a scale that no one thinker—certainly not the present writer within the confines of a Master’s thesis—can possibly ever even read it all, much less take it all into account. We may, however, be moving in the right direction if we were simply to ask the question: Of what abiding importance is Barth’s doctrine of sin? In particular, is there any point in continuing to use the German Christian Movement as a theological touchstone for thinking about church and state relationships, in the way that Barth clearly did?

I would like, by way of a conclusion, to suggest that we currently would benefit by listening more closely to Karl Barth, for two basic reasons. The first deals with the continuing problem of the relations of church and state in the “Christian” world—or the world which not long ago called itself Christian—and with what might become of church-state relations in the new centres of Christian influence in Africa, Asia and elsewhere. The second deals with new forms of religiously-inspired totalitarianism that exist in our world, with which many millions are only too familiar, as the media daily informs us.

In response to the first issue, it has to be acknowledged that the relevant events took place long ago. Barth himself wrote the first instalment of his doctrine of sin, “The Pride and Fall of Man,” long after the German Christians proposed their agenda to
control the Protestant churches of Hitler’s Germany. Barth was vehemently opposed to their movement at the time, but when reading Church Dogmatics IV/1, and especially his exposition of Exodus 32, one continues to see the troubling shadow of the “positive” Christianity of the National Socialists lingering across Barth’s thinking.

At our own historical distance from events in Germany in the 1930s, it can be difficult to see why such a national political movement was seen by many leaders of the church as presenting important possibilities for revival and renewal, and perhaps difficult to see why Barth’s response to it matters. Its importance, truthfully, appears from the fact that many current political movements are endorsed by Christian leaders as the work of God. Whether the political movement represents a particular version of political correctness, or the priorities of the gun lobby in the United States, movements in favour of physician-assisted suicide, or our continuing reliance on nuclear armaments, Karl Barth’s careful theology reminds us that, in its witness and teaching, the church is to be faithful rather than merely “relevant.” Indeed, it is only as it is obedient to the first commandment that it might prove to have anything genuinely relevant to say. That it too often is neither faithful, obedient, nor truly relevant—that much is obvious, and since it is
a problem so deeply engaged by the theology of Karl Barth, his work ought to be of continuing interest.286

A great strength of Barth’s approach is that it simply does not lead us to retreat from the world into some private or sectarian religious bubble, for in Barth’s theology, the gospel is addressed first to the world rather than the church. Its theological discourse not only takes place in the world, instead, it takes place for the world’s sake. If it speaks authentically of and to the world when it speaks obediently and faithfully of the one God, then it necessarily addresses the world all the same—as with the world, it also addresses the state. As articulate and profound a theology as Barth’s is not something that we should neglect or ignore as a means for considering these issues, even today.

The second theme is no less obvious. As this thesis is being written, political unrest resulting from religious fundamentalism appears in the headlines on a daily basis. There has been a remarkable return to despotic, supposedly “theocratic” politics, while religiously-driven, violent political movements threaten the stability and peace of the world. The secular West not only misunderstands such movements, dismissing them as ignorant or pre-modern, but also apparently cannot grasp the notion that religious faith is

286 As Kimlyn J. Bender puts it, “When the church seeks to be something more than a witness, it paradoxically does not become something more but something less (CD IV. I, 657). For Barth, the glory of the church exists precisely in giving God the glory, and the true and rightful glory of the church exists in its humble witness and service to its inner basis in the Spirit.” Bender, Karl Barth’s Christological Ecclesiology, 179.
capable of making a responsible claim on the political aspect of life. In a recent CNN news interview that I witnessed, a wide-eyed presenter asked a guest, in essence, how it was possible for an educated person to be associated with religiously-motivated political activism.

Amid the arid and depressing intellectual vacuum that surrounds, it is good to remember that it is possible to turn to Barth’s theology for insight. While one might not agree with him on every page, Barth provides a sophisticated and nuanced approach, fit to challenge the dominant assumptions of our age about the marginal role of theology and the purely private place of God in the world. There are those who recoil from the sheer detail, the power and consistency of Barth’s approach. I submit that we should do no such thing. We need the detail, the height and depth, the breadth of Barth’s vision. John D Godsey, in a description of Barth as a teacher, quotes an amusing anecdote about him:

After the service in a parish church where Barth had been preaching one Sunday, he was met at the door by a man who greeted him with these words: “Professor Barth, thank you for your sermon. I’m an astronomer, you know, and as far as I am concerned, the whole of Christianity can be summed up by saying ‘Do unto others as you would have others do unto you.’” Barth replied: “Well, I am just a humble theologian, and as far as I am concerned, the whole of astronomy can be summed up by saying ‘Twinkle, twinkle, little star, how I wonder what you are.’”

287 Hunsinger, For the Sake of the World, 211.
Even if, in some church circles, it is the astronomer’s view of theology rather than Barth’s that has prevailed, it is good to know that it is still possible to take one of the heavy, and occasionally dusty tomes of *Church Dogmatics* off the shelf—and sit down to read.

Barth’s hamartiology specifically is important for one final reason, however, with which we will end this thesis. Modern Western secularism is, undoubtedly, turning people away from God, but its implication, that we live in a world in which the human person is self enthroned, carries with it the sense that we have thus fallen in our very pride. In our rejection of the humble God who does not choose to be who He is without us, and in our rejection of the humanity that can never be “godless,” we can unfortunately foresee history repeating itself. Sinful pride necessarily deceives, fostering the illusion that we are equal to God in the knowledge of good and evil. The German Christian Movement defied the first commandment, and even as it prided itself on its wisdom, it embraced and buttressed what Barth in 1948 called “a gigantic revelation of human lying and brutality on the one hand, and of human stupidity and fear on the other.”288 One worries that history will repeat itself in this respect as well, and that we will find ourselves endorsing the same excesses once more. If we do, then is it too much to

288 Barth, *How I Changed My Mind*, 44–47.
suppose that at the centre we will find “the man of the national Church,” an Aaron of this or that sort, orchestrating a sacrifice of praise to the new gods of the age?

We have seen how, desiring social relevance, the church under Nazism lost its capacity to hear and speak the Word of God. This too was reflected in academic scholarship, and not simply at the level of religious demagoguery or popular opinion. Amid the peculiar stresses imposed by German experience after the Great War, Gerhard Kittel, Paul Althaus and Emanuel Hirsch were serious scholars who were intellectually rigorous and well respected. Some of their research, beyond what is overtly political, or written after 1945, even stands the test of time. Apparently, they sincerely believed in the message of Christianity and in the mission of the church, which they served through their labours. They were, as Barth put it—and Barth can seldom be accused of being careless when choosing a phrase—“men of the national Church.”

They had, however, lost sight of the one thing needful. Barth’s hamartiological claim is that only when we become aware of our place within the covenant in Jesus Christ, can we acknowledge that we are sinful, but never lost. In this reconciled relationship to which we are summoned, there is, as Jenson states, a “freedom in which we have been set, where space has already been cleared for true (the only true) human
action.” But in this freedom, we are also responsible, and apart from this, we live in falsehood. As Barth puts it:

The error of man concerning himself, his self-alienation, is that he thinks he can love and choose and will and assert and maintain and exalt himself—*se propter seipsum*—in his being in himself, his self-hood, and that in so doing he will be truly man. Whether this takes place more in pride or in modesty, either way man misses his true being. For neither as an individual nor in society was he created to be placed alone, to be self-controlling and self-sufficient, to be self-centred, to rotate around himself. Like every other creature he was created for the glory of God and only in that way for his own salvation ... He is a man, himself, as he comes from God and moves towards God. He is a man as he is open to God, or not at all. If he chooses himself in any other way, *incurvatus in se*, in self-containment, then he misses the very thing that he seeks. (CD IV/I, 421)

Barth warns that not only is humankind susceptible to such sin, but so is the Church. The German Christian fall into sin must be remembered as the Church today struggles with the question of its identity. Facing numerical collapse in the West, it faces, paradoxically, the temptation of pride: pride in its own beliefs and in how they are managed and relativized; pride in its purportedly ethical superiority over others; pride still in its prosperity (for its bank accounts are robust enough); pride in its leadership; and pride even in celebrity and in the subtle influences that come with cultural pedigree. But these are poor substitutes for faithfulness—and we should rightly fear that we may become like Aaron, in the absence of Moses forgetting the covenant with God and

289 Jenson, *Gravity of Sin Augustine, Luther, and Barth on Homo Incurvatus in Se*, 151.
embracing instead only ourselves, as self-controlling, self-sufficient, and self-deifying,

“the man of sin in this … form of his pride.” (CD IV/1, 432)
APPENDICIES

APPENDIX I Guiding Principles of German Christians

THE GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF THE FAITH MOVEMENT OF THE

“GERMAN CHRISTIANS,” JUNE 6, 1932

1. These guiding principles seek to show to all believing Germans the ways and the goals leading to a reorganization of the Church. They are not intended to be or to take the place of a Confession of Faith, or to disturb the confessional basis of the evangelical Church. They are a living Confession.

2. We are fighting for a union of the twenty-nine Churches included in the “German Evangelical Federation of Churches” into one evangelical State Church. We march under the banner: “Outwardly united and in the might of the spirit gathered around Christ and his Word, inwardly rich and varied, each a Christian according to his own character and calling!”

3. The “German Christian” ticket is not intended to be a political party in the Church in the ordinary sense. It pertains to all evangelical Christians of German stock. The time of parliamentarianism has outlived itself even in the Church. Ecclesiastical parties have no religious sanction to represent Church people and are opposed to the lofty purpose of becoming a national Church. We want a vital national Church that will express all the spiritual forces of our people.

4. We take our stand upon the ground of positive Christianity. We profess an affirmative and typical faith in Christ, corresponding to the German spirit of Luther and to a heroic piety.

5. We want the reawakened German sense of vitality respected in our Church. We want to make our Church a vital force. In the fateful struggle for the freedom and future of

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290 Ibid., 222-23.
Germany the Church in its administration has proven weak. Hitherto the Church has not called for an all-out fight against atheistic Marxism and the reactionary Center Party. Instead it has made an ecclesiastical pact with the political parties of these powers. We want our Church to be in the forefront of the crucial battle for the existence of our people. It may not stand aside or even turn its back upon those fighting for liberty.

6. We demand that the Church pact [political clause] be amended and that a fight be waged against a Marxism which is the enemy of religion and the nation and against its Christian social fellow travelers of every shade. In this Church pact we miss a confident daring for God and for the mission of the Church. The way into the Kingdom of God is through struggle, cross, and sacrifice, not through a false peace.

7. We see in race, folk, and nation, orders of existence granted and entrusted to us by God. God's law for us is that we look to the preservation of these orders. Consequently miscegenation is to be opposed. For a long time German Foreign Missions, on the basis of its experience, has been calling to the German people: “Keep your race pure,” and tells us that faith in Christ does not destroy one's race but deepens and sanctifies it.

8. In home missions, properly understood, we see a vital Christianity based on deeds which in our opinion, however, is not rooted in mere pity but in obedience to God's will and in gratitude for Christ's death on the cross. Mere pity is charity and becomes presumptuous, coupled with a bad conscience, and makes people soft. We know something about Christian duty and Christian love toward those who are helpless, but we also demand that the nation be protected against the unfit and inferior. In no event may home missions contribute to the degeneration of our people. Furthermore, it has to keep away from economic adventures and not become mercenary.

9. In the mission to the Jews we perceive a grave danger to our nationality. It is an entrance gate for alien blood into our body politic. It has no justification for existence beside foreign missions. As long as the Jews possess the right to citizenship and there is thereby the danger of racial camouflage and bastardization, we repudiate a mission to the Jews in Germany. Holy Scripture is also able to speak about a holy wrath and a refusal of love. In particular, marriage between Germans and Jews is to be forbidden.

10. We want an evangelical Church that is rooted in our nationhood. We repudiate the spirit of a Christian world-citizenship. We want the (degenerating manifestations of this spirit, such as pacifism, internationalism, Free Masonry, etc., overcome by a faith in our national mission that God has committed to us. Membership in a Masonic Lodge by an evangelical minister is not permissible.
APPENDIX II Karl Barth, The Church’s Opposition 1933

The Church’s Opposition 1933

FUNDAMENTALS

1. Our protest is directed against the teaching of the German-Christians, represented by the government of the German Church, because it is false doctrine and has become the prevailing teaching in the Church through usurpation.

2. Because the doctrine and attitude of the German-Christians is nothing but a particularly vigorous result of the entire neo-protestant development since 1700, our protest is directed against a spreading and existent corruption of the whole evangelical Church.

3. Our protest against the false doctrine of the German-Christians cannot begin only at the “Aryan paragraph,” at the rejection of the Old Testament, at the Arianism of the German-Christian Christology, at the naturalism and Pelagianism of the German-Christian doctrines of justification and sanctification, at the idolizing of the state in German-Christian ethics. It must be directed fundamentally against the fact (which is the source of all individual errors) that, beside the Holy Scriptures as the unique source of revelation, the German-Christians affirm the German nationhood, its history and its contemporary political situation as a second source of revelation, and thereby betray themselves to be believers in “another God.”

4. Our protest against the usurpation of the German-Christians cannot begin only with the cause of suspensions “and similar isolated interferences by the German-Christian Church governments. It must deny the legality of these Church governments as such in view of the events of June 244, of the Church elections of July 235, of the setting-up and also of the resolutions of the synods in August and September.”

5. Our protest must, in each single action, keep the nature and the extent of the Church’s sickness in mind. It can, whether on individual points or as a whole, only be raised meaningfully, seriously and forcibly when we are clear and united about the nature and extent of this sickness and when, therefore, we wish to fight it in its nature and as a whole.

6. Whoever is of “another opinion” in anyone of these five points himself belongs to the German-Christians and should not be permitted to disturb a serious opposition by the Church any longer.

291 Barth, The German Church Conflict., 16.
APPENDIX III Barth’s Rejection of the German Christian Doctrine

Barth’s Rejection of the German Christian Doctrine

1. The church does not have to “do everything,” in order that the German people “find its way back to the church,” but instead must do everything so that the German people may find in the church the commandment and the promise of the free and pure Word of God.

2. The German people receives its calling from Christ and to Christ through the Word of God, to be proclaimed according to the Holy Scriptures. This proclamation is the task of the church. It is not the church's task to help the German people along the road to recognizing and fulfilling a “calling” different from the one from and to Christ.

3. The church is absolutely not there to serve human beings, and not the German people, either. The German Protestant church is the church for the German Protestant people, but it serves the Word of God alone. It is God's will and his work if through his Word humanity and thus also the German people are served.

4. The church believes that God has established the state as the agent and guardian of the public order among the people. But the church does not believe in a particular state, and thus not in the German state, nor in a particular kind of state, hence not the National Socialist kind. The church preaches the Gospel in all the kingdoms [Reiche] of this world. It also proclaims it in the Third Reich, but not under it, nor in its spirit.

5. The creed of the church, if it is to be further developed, must be so developed according to the standards of Holy Scripture and in no case according to standards set by the positions or negations of a particular world view, whether political or other-not even the National Socialist worldview-that may be regnant at a particular time. It does not have to supply either “us” or anyone else with “weapons.”

6. The community of those who belong to the church is not determined by blood and so also not by race, but rather by the Holy Spirit and by baptism. If the German Protestant church were to exclude Jewish Christians or treat them as second-class Christians, it would have ceased to be a Christian church.

7. If the office of national bishop [Reichsbischof] in the Protestant church were even possible, then, like every church office, it would be filled not according to political viewpoints or methods (primary election, party membership, etc.), but rather by official

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representatives of the appropriate offices of the congregations from the point of view of what is suitable for the church.

8. The formation and guidance of pastors is not to be transformed in the interest of “bringing them closer to daily life and greater solidarity with the community,” but instead in the interest of greater discipline and substance in the carrying out of the task that has been commanded and entrusted to them, namely, the proclamation of the Word according to the Scriptures.
APPENDIX IV Stuttgart Declaration of Guilt

(Evangelical Church of Germany council, October 1945)

The Council of the Protestant Church in Germany welcomes representatives of the World Council of Churches to its meeting on October 18-19, 1945, in Stuttgart.

We are all the more thankful for this visit, as we know ourselves to be with our people in a great community of suffering, but also in a great solidarity of guilt. With great anguish we state: through us has endless suffering been brought to many peoples and countries. What we have often borne witness to before our congregations, we now declare in the name of the whole Church. We have for many years struggled in the name of Jesus Christ against the spirit which found its terrible expression in the National Socialist regime of tyranny, but we accuse ourselves for not witnessing more courageously, for not praying more faithfully, for not believing more joyously, and for not loving more ardently.

Now a new beginning can be made in our churches. Grounded on the Holy Scriptures, directed with all earnestness toward the only Lord of the Church, they now proceed to cleanse themselves from influences alien to the faith and to set themselves in order. Our hope is in the God of grace and mercy that He will use our churches as His instruments and will give them authority to proclaim His word, and in obedience to His will to work creatively among ourselves and among our people.

That in this new beginning we may become wholeheartedly united with the other churches of the ecumenical fellowship fills us with deep joy.

We hope in God that through the common service of the churches the spirit of violence and revenge which again today tends to become powerful may be brought under control in the whole world, and that the spirit of peace and love may gain the mastery, wherein alone So in an hour in which the whole world needs a new beginning we pray: “Veni Creator Spiritus.”

Bishop Wurm
Bishop Meiser
Superintendent Hahn
Bishop Dibelius
Professor Smend
Pastor Asmussen
Pastor Niernoller
Landesoberkirchenrat Lilje
Superintendent Held
Pastor Niesel
Dr. Heinemann

293 Hockenos, A Church Divided German Protestants Confront the Nazi Past, 187. Matthew D Hockenos, A Church Divided German Protestants Confront the Nazi Past (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 187. Hockenos, A Church Divided German Protestants Confront the Nazi Past, 187.
APPENDIX V Darmstadt Statement

Statement by the Council of Brethren of the Evangelical Church of Germany Concerning the Political Course of Our People (Darmstadt Statement, August 1947)

1. We have been given the message of the reconciliation of the world with God in Christ. We must listen to this Word, accept it, act upon it and fulfill it. We are not listening to this Word, nor accepting it, nor acting upon it, nor fulfilling it, unless we are absolved from our common guilt, from our fathers' guilt as well as our own, and unless we follow the call of Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd, leading us out of all the false and evil ways into which we, as Germans, have strayed in our political aims and actions.

2. We went astray when we began to dream about a special German mission, as if the German character could heal the sickness of the world. In so doing we prepared the way for the unrestricted exercise of political power, and set our own nation on the throne of God. It was disastrous to lay the foundations of our state at home solely on a strong government, and abroad solely on military force. In so doing we have acted contrary to our vocation, which is to cooperate with other nations in our common tasks, and to use the gifts given to us for the benefit of all nations.

3. We went astray when we began to set up a "Christian Front" against certain new developments which had become necessary in social life. The alliance of the Church with the forces which clung to everything old and conventional has revenged itself heavily upon us. We have betrayed the Christian freedom which enables us and commands us to change the forms of life, when such a change is necessary for men to live together. We have denied the right of revolution; but we have condoned and approved the development of absolute dictatorship.

4. We went astray when we thought we ought to create a political front of good against evil, light against darkness, justice against injustice, and to resort to political methods. In so doing we distorted God's free grace to all by forming a political, social and philosophical front, and left the world to justify itself.

5. We went astray when we failed to see that the economic materialism of Marxist teaching ought to have reminded the Church of its task and its promise for the life and fellowship of men. We have failed to take up the cause of the poor and unprivileged as a Christian cause, in accordance with the message of God's Kingdom.

6. In recognizing and confessing this, we know that we are absolved as followers of Christ, and that we are now free to undertake new and better service to the glory of God and the welfare of mankind. It is not the phrase “Christianity and Western Culture” that the German people, and particularly we Christians, need today. What we need is a return to

294 Ibid., 193–94.
God and to the service of our neighbor, through the power of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

7. We have borne witness, and today we do so once again: “Through Jesus Christ we experience a joyous liberation from the ungodly fetters of this world for free and grateful service to all whom he has created.” We therefore pray constantly: Do not let yourselves be overcome by despair, for Christ is the Lord. Say good-bye to the indifference of unbelief; do not be led astray by dreams of a better past or by speculations about another war; but in freedom and all soberness realize the responsibility which rests upon us all to rebuild a better form of government in Germany, that shall work for justice and for the welfare, peace and reconciliation of the nations.

This translation is from the Ecumenical Press Service 31 (12 September 1947), 215.
APPENDIX VI Petition to the Synod of the Evangelical Church in Germany March 1958

Petition to the Synod of the Evangelical Church in Germany March 1958

I. The Evangelical Church confesses that in Jesus Christ she finds “joyous liberation from the Godless bonds of the world unto free, thankful service to His creatures.: (Barmen Thesis 2.) This forbids to her not only any approval of or collaboration in an atomic war and its preparation, but also her tacitly letting it happen. This awareness demands that in the obedience of faith ... here as in every issue ... we ourselves must take the first step to hold back the threatening destruction and to trust more in the reality of the Word of God than in the “realism” of political calculation. The first step is the act of diakonia which we, as Christians, owe to the menaced and anxious world of today. Let the faithless hesitate ...; we as Christians may and must dare it in trust in God, who created this World and every living creature in East and West for the sake of the suffering and victorious Jesus Christ, and will preserve the same through Christ and the preaching of His Gospel until His Day.

II. If the Synod finds itself unable to assent to this confession, we must ask how the Synod can refute it on the grounds of Scripture, the Confessions, and reason.

For the sake of the men and women for whom we are responsible, and for our own sakes, we must insist upon receiving an answer to this question. We owe it to the Synod to remind it of its spiritual responsibility, since it is in the shouldering of this responsibility that it shows itself to be the legitimate authority in the Church. It is our conviction that in the face of this issue the Church finds herself in the status confessionis.

If the Synod agrees with us, that an unreserved No is demanded of Christians facing the problem of the new weapons, must she not also say promptly and clearly to the State, that the true proclamation of the Gospel, also in the Chaplaincy, includes the testimony that the Christian may not and cannot participate in the design, testing, manufacture, stocking and use of atomic weapons, nor in training with these weapons?

III. We, therefore, ask the Synod whether she can affirm together with us the following ten propositions, for the instruction of consciences concerning Christian behavior with regard to atomic weapons:

1. War is the ultimate means, but always, in every form a questionable means, of resolving political tensions between nations.
2. For various reasons, good and less good, churches, in all lands and all ages have hitherto not considered the preparation and the application of this ultimate means to be impossible.
3. The prospect of a future war to be waged with the use of modern means of annihilation has created a new situation, in the face of which the Church cannot remain neutral.
4. War, in the form of atomic war, means the mutual annihilation of the participating

peoples as well as of countless human beings of other peoples, which are not involved in the combat between the two adversaries.

5. War, in the form of atomic war, is therefore seen to be an instrument incapable of being used for the resolution of political conflicts, because it destroys every presupposition of political resolution.

6. Therefore, the Church and the individual Christian can say nothing but an a priori No to a war with atomic weapons.

7. Even preparation for such a war is under all circumstances sin against God and the neighbor, for which no Church and no Christian can accept responsibility.

8. We therefore demand in the Name of the Gospel that an immediate end be made to preparations for such a war within our land and nation regardless of all other considerations.

9. We challenge all those who seriously want to be Christians to renounce, without reserve and under all circumstances, any participation in preparations for atomic war.

10. In the face of this question, the opposing point of view, or neutrality, cannot be advocated Christianly. Both mean the denial of all three articles of the Christian faith.
APPENDIX VIII Theological Declaration of Barmen Section II

Theological Declaration Concerning the Present Situation of the German Evangelical Church

According to the opening words of its constitution of July 11, 1933, the German Evangelical Church is a federation of Confessional Churches that grew out of the Reformation and that enjoy equal rights. The theological basis for the unification of these Churches is laid down in Article 1 and Article 2(1) of the constitution of the German Evangelical Church that was recognized by the Reich Government on July 14, 1933:

Article 1. The inviolable foundation of the German Evangelical Church is the gospel of Jesus Christ as it is attested for us in Holy Scripture and brought to light again in the Confessions of the Reformation. The full powers that the Church needs for its mission are hereby determined and limited.

Article 2 (1). The German Evangelical Church is divided into member Churches (Landeskirchen).

We, the representatives of Lutheran, Reformed, and United Churches, of free synods, Church assemblies, and parish organizations united in the Confessional Synod of the German Evangelical Church, declare that we stand together on the ground of the German Evangelical Church as a federation of German Confessional Churches. We are bound together by the confession of the one Lord of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.

We publicly declare before all evangelical Churches in Germany that what they hold in common in this Confession is grievously imperiled, and with it the unity of the German Evangelical Church. It is threatened by the teaching methods and actions of the ruling Church party of the "German Christians" and of the Church administration carried on by them. These have become more and more apparent during the first year of the existence of the German Evangelical Church. This threat consists in the fact that the theological basis, in which the German Evangelical Church is united, has been continually and systematically thwarted and rendered ineffective by alien principles, on the part of the leaders and spokesmen of the "German Christians" as well as on the part of the Church administration. When these principles are held to be valid, then, according to all the Confessions in force among us, the Church ceases to be the Church and the German Evangelical Church, as a federation of Confessional Churches, becomes intrinsically impossible.

As members of Lutheran, Reformed, and United Churches we may and must speak with one voice in this matter today. Precisely because we want to be and to remain faithful to our various Confessions, we may not keep silent, since we believe that we have been given a common message to utter in a time of common need and temptation. We commend to God what this may mean for the interrelations of the Confessional Churches.

In view of the errors of the "German Christians" of the present Reich Church government which are devastating the Church and also therefore breaking up the unity of the German Evangelical Church, we confess the following evangelical truths:

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296 Cochrane, The Church’s Confession Under Hitler, 238–42.
1. “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me.” (John 14.6)
“Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber. . . . I am the door; if anyone enters by me, he will be saved.” (John 10:1, 9.)

Jesus Christ, as he is attested for us in Holy Scripture, is the one Word of God which we have to hear and which we have to trust and obey in life and in death.

We reject the false doctrine, as though the church could and would have to acknowledge as a source of its proclamation, apart from and besides this one Word of God, still other events and powers, figures and truths, as God's revelation.

2. “Christ Jesus, whom God has made our wisdom, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption.” (1 Cor. 1:30.)

As Jesus Christ is God's assurance of the forgiveness of all our sins, so, in the same way and with the same seriousness he is also God's mighty claim upon our whole life. Through him befalls us a joyful deliverance from the godless fetters of this world for a free, grateful service to his creatures.

We reject the false doctrine, as though there were areas of our life in which we would not belong to Jesus Christ, but to other lords--areas in which we would not need justification and sanctification through him.

3. “Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body [is] joined and knit together.” (Eph. 4:15,16.)

The Christian Church is the congregation of the brethren in which Jesus Christ acts presently as the Lord in Word and sacrament through the Holy Spirit. As the Church of pardoned sinners, it has to testify in the midst of a sinful world, with its faith as with its obedience, with its message as with its order, that it is solely his property, and that it lives and wants to live solely from his comfort and from his direction in the expectation of his appearance.

We reject the false doctrine, as though the Church were permitted to abandon the form of its message and order to its own pleasure or to changes in prevailing ideological and political convictions.

4. “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant.” (Matt. 20:25,26.)

The various offices in the Church do not establish a dominion of some over the others; on the contrary, they are for the exercise of the ministry entrusted to and enjoined upon the whole congregation.

We reject the false doctrine, as though the Church, apart from this ministry, could and were permitted to give itself, or allow to be given to it, special leaders vested with ruling powers.

5. “Fear God. Honor the emperor.” (1 Peter 2:17.)

Scripture tells us that, in the as yet unredeemed world in which the Church also exists, the State has by divine appointment the task of providing for justice and peace. [It fulfills this task] by means of the threat and exercise of force, according to the measure of human judgment and human ability. The Church acknowledges the benefit of this divine appointment in gratitude and reverence before him. It calls to mind the Kingdom of God, God's commandment and righteousness, and thereby the responsibility both of rulers and of the ruled. It trusts and obeys the power of the Word by which God upholds all things.
We reject the false doctrine, as though the State, over and beyond its special commission, 
should and could become the single and totalitarian order of human life, thus fulfilling the 
Church's vocation as well. 
We reject the false doctrine, as though the Church, over and beyond its special commission, 
should and could appropriate the characteristics, the tasks, and the dignity of the State, thus itself 
becoming an organ of the State.

6. “Lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.” (Matt. 28:20.) “The word of God is not 
fettered.” (2 Tim. 2:9.) 
The Church's commission, upon which its freedom is founded, consists in delivering the 
message of the free grace of God to all people in Christ's stead, and therefore in the ministry of 
his own Word and work through sermon and sacrament. 
We reject the false doctrine, as though the Church in human arrogance could place the Word 
and work of the Lord in the service of any arbitrarily chosen desires, purposes, and plans.

The Confessional Synod of the German Evangelical Church declares that it sees in the 
acknowledgment of these truths and in the rejection of these errors the indispensable theological 
基础 of the German Evangelical Church as a federation of Confessional Churches. It invites all 
who are able to accept its declaration to be mindful of these theological principles in their 
decisions in Church politics. It entreats all whom it concerns to return to the unity of faith, love, 
and hope.
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