

# KIRCHENKAMPF and HOLOCAUST

Conference address by Dr. Franklin H. Littell,  
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In a real sense this International Conference expresses the first major American initiative in an area to which European scholars, especially Germans, have directed diligent effort for some time. The EKID Kommission zur Geschichte des Kirchenkampfes im national-sozialistischen Zeitalter has for well over a decade planned and fostered research of high level, publishing an impressive series<sup>1</sup> of monographs in cooperation with Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht. Among other German efforts at preserving and interpreting the documentation, the work of the Bundeszentrale für Heimatdienst (Bonn) and the Institut für Zeitgeschichte (Munich) should also be mentioned. There was even for three years an American Committee, founded at the 1959 Scholars' Conference called by the Kommission at Tutzing, with a mimeographed Newsletter containing scholarly papers, bibliographical and research notes.<sup>2</sup> In the meantime, the volume of books and articles produced by private scholars--usually working without subvention of any kind--has continued to mount. D. Wilhelm Niemöller, collector of the greatest independent archive on the Kirchenkampf and himself a diligent writer, deserves special note. The historiography of the Kirchenkampf has gone through several stages in the last quarter century,<sup>3</sup> and this Conference can be said to meet in the fullness of time. We are all grateful to Wayne State University for

bringing together representatives of so many different centers and disciplines, and for proposing to help bring order to a field of study which threatens to expand beyond the possibility that any one of us can by private initiative even keep contact with the growing number working in it. Moreover, without a synoptical effort on anyone's part, the volume of specialized research by isolates can miss the main point of the tragedy: the self-destructive bent of alienated and de-humanized man in the 20th century.

The recent work on the Church Struggle is not only of greater volume: it also makes use of critically important materials outside the church's own documentation, such as the captured Nazi Party files, the microfilmed documents of the Sicherheitsdienst, etc. The recent publication of John Conway's The Nazi Persecution of the Churches and Eberhard Bethge's biography of Dietrich Bonhoeffer seem to me to indicate how much further along we are now, both in breadth and depth, in understanding the various ways and contexts in which the Church Struggle has meaning for us.

One of the participants in the 1959 Tutzing Conference was the late Alfred Wiener of London. The Wiener Library was already on its way to become a major center and resource for the documentation of the Nazi "Final Solution to the Problem of the Jews" (Endlösung)-- a dimension of the problematic of religion and the Third Reich of which most Christian scholars were still only dimly aware. In recent years we have had the development of the great official center memorializing the Holocaust: Yad Vashem in Jerusalem. Yad Vashem is a memorial, a file of 6,000,000 murdered persons, and a team of research scholars who--among other things--put out a

scholarly quarterly on the Holocaust,<sup>4</sup> The present lack of coordinated effort, or even of awareness of connection, between the two foci of our Conference is signalized by the fact that--although the first million who perished in the concentration camps were non-Jews, and their records are available at Yad Vashem--no group of Christian scholars, or even a university-sponsored group from the Bundesrepublik, has made any use of the materials.

The Jews have been writing their chronicles and histories--for Jews. Some Christian scholars have been writing about the Church Struggle--for Christians. The deeper meaning of the Holocaust and Kirchenkampf has scarcely penetrated the American scene at all. Jewish leaders assure me that the American Jewish community has not yet come to terms with the Holocaust--for reasons which are certainly easy enough even for an outgroup to understand. Less understandable, however--and especially in view of the rising power of the Radical Right in America, is the failure of the American churches to work through the lessons of the German church struggle. Even the theological schools give it only a passing glance--chiefly, I think, because it does not fit the kind of self-understanding which American Christendom has of itself. Thirty years ago, as the Confessing Church was going to its Synod at Bad Oeynhausen or the German Jews were facing the dreadful portent of the Kristalnacht, there were only two leading churchmen in America who repeatedly and clearly--and with interpretations which still stand the test of time--warned of the true import of Nazism's war against the Jews and the Christians: Reinhold Niebuhr and George Shuster. Today, so far as the churches are concerned, it is only among the students

and younger theologians that the questions constantly arise which the Kirchenkampf and the Holocaust put to traditional religious institutions, even traditional religious language.

It is therefore with great anticipation and gratitude that I welcome Wayne State University's undertaking to develop a major documentation and research center on the Church Struggle, and a North American center on the Holocaust. I am sure that I express the sentiments of this whole company of scholars in uttering this salutation. The Wayne Project signalizes, among other things, the way energetic concern for Religion as an intellectual discipline is moving out of the church ghettos into the state universities. It also gives promise that the most important events of recent generations of religious history may at last get the general attention they deserve. It is not too much to say that the vigorous intellectual and practical work of the Dutch churches, both Catholic and Protestant, and of a substantial sector of the churches in Germany, is a result in good part of their mastery of the lessons of the Church Struggle and the Holocaust. And the confusion on the American religious scene, in spite of fleeting reference to ecumenism and church renewal and inter-faith dialogue from time to time, seems to document that we are still working very largely with the concepts and assumptions of 19th century culture-religion, of the happy time before the flood waters covered the earth.

Most encouraging is the extent to which various aspects of the problematic have caught the attention and inspired the hard work of scholars outside the theological field: historians, political scientists, sociologists, social psychologists, experts in Education

and in Jurisprudence, psychologists. Since a totalitarian system by definition seeks to conquer all aspects of life from Architecture to Zoology, such a broad sweep of academic concern is appropriate.<sup>5</sup> It also signifies another very important theoretical consideration: that the major theological problems may often be illuminated not by professionals--who dig like moles ever deeper into the old and proven veins of sustenance--but by so-called "laymen" working in so-called "secular" disciplines and idioms. The mounting of this major Project, and the response of such an array of scholars with no specific stake in organized religion or official Theology, may help to move Theology in America out of the monologue which still commands its daily work.

#### The Theological Meaning of National Socialism

In theological terms, Nazism was the true--if illegitimate--offspring of a false relationship between the Christian church and the ethnic bloc or nation (Volk). And it has its analogues today in places as distant from each other as Alabama and South Africa, Belfast and Beirut. When ethnic history is infused with "spirituality", and a political program is mounted on disciplined cadres to return a people to a mythical monism of the past, a frontal challenge to the True Church--on pilgrimage and supra-national--is thrown down. The situation is confused, however, because most of the baptized will accommodate--e.g., in Kirchenausschüsse, or apostatize--e.g., in White Citizens' Councils, rather than give the Head of the Church the undivided loyalty the once promised Him.

It was the glory of the Confessing Church to have perceived that a frontal confrontation was involved, and no mere issue of

everyday politics in a disaster area. The fact that some saw the sweeping dimensions of the struggle sooner than others, and that even the Bekennende Kirche did not immediately understand the meaning of hatred of the Jews as hatred of the Jew, Jesus of Nazareth, does not detract one iota from the debt the whole church owes the men of Barmen and what they did. Karl Barth put it directly:

"National Socialism, according to its own revelation of what it is--a self-revelation to which it has devoted all the time and chance till now allowed--is as well without any doubt something quite different from a political experiment. It is, namely, a religious institution of salvation.

"It is impossible to understand National Socialism unless we see it in fact as a new Islam."<sup>5</sup>

And the men who presented the Memorandum of May, 1936 to the Führer of the Third Reich rightly identified the offence to the True Church:

"When blood, race, nationality, and honour are regarded as eternal values the first commandment obliges the Christian to refuse this evaluation. When the Aryan is glorified, the Word of God teaches that all men are sinful. If the Christian is faced by the Anti-Semitism of the Nazi Weltanschauung to hate the Jews, he is, on the contrary, bidden by the Christian Commandment to love his neighbor."<sup>7</sup>

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, martyred as the war was ending, drew one concrete conclusion--but a conclusion on which there is still little guidance in Christian theological literature:

"If we claim to be Christians there is no room for expediency. Hitler is the Anti-Christ. Therefore we must go on with our work and eliminate him whether he is successful or not."<sup>8</sup>

The problem of discerning and defining the Christian obligation and style to resist illegitimate authority, not to mention illegitimate action by legitimate authority, remains one of the most

excruciating agonies of Christians today. The word "Anti-Christ" is the clue: for the Anti-Christ is not the honest and open adversary, but the one who was once numbered within and has now gone over to the opposition. The misery of the Church Struggle is not in the first place battle with an open opposition: it is the apostasy of the baptized, the convulsion of Christendom.

Before the Church Struggle with Nazism, the Christian corpus gave very little guidance on the matter of resistance.<sup>9</sup> Representative government, in which each citizen shares the responsibility (and on occasion the guilt) for policies implemented by heads of state, is too new a thing in human history for any large body of interpretation to have emerged. But the experiences of the Third Reich remind us that not just absolute monarchs who rule by divine right must be warned and confronted on occasion, but perhaps especially those governments which claim to have substantial--if sometimes "silent"--majorities acquiescing in their actions. In a police-state, without free access or egress, the moral burden of national wrong-doing is certainly no greater than in a society which still has some room for organizing public opinion and pressure.

Even in the most strict Marxist areas, however, the lessons of the Church Struggle are bearing fruit. The influence of Bonhoeffer is marked. Western leaders have sometimes criticized Christians in East Germany because they did not denounce Marxism too as a "new Islam" and declare unqualified resistance. In this struggle too, however, the first concern has been for the integrity and authenticity of the church--not to defend an ideological



Christendom. What is at stake is not Christendom vs. a Marxist state-church, but the freedom of a True Church to serve the human person. To this end, the state must be secularized, not re-Christianized--i.e., rendered modest, problem-solving, theologically speaking "creaturely". In this respect, the existence-problem of Christians in a Marxist state is not strikingly different from their problem in a society retrogressively committed to "Christendom"--or, for that matter, different from that of Christians living under sacral governments in the Arab League.

#### Secularization vs. "Spirituality"

It is quite wrong to assume that the Church Struggle was a battle to defend Christian Germany against the false teaching of neo-barbarians, just as wrong as it is to assume that the tragedy of this age is the arrival of a second great age of the persecutions. The tragedy is the wholesale apostasy of the baptized--their eagerness, in the name of "saving the world from atheistic Communism" and "re-establishing law and order" (and let us not forget that Hitler came to popular support and power on these two slogans!), to countenance the most brutal and anti-Christian of political measures to reconstitute a lost age of religious monism. "Apostasy," not "persecution," is the key word. And precisely for this reason the question which comes to us out of the Church Struggle concerns the nature of the Church, the measure of human liberty, the future of the human person.

If we go forward into liberty, we must accept pluralism and voluntarism and the dialogue as the qualities of religious maturity. Consonant to that is acceptance of the secularization process in



significant sectors of society: government, social welfare, public education, higher education, the family.<sup>10</sup> Believing Jews and Christians must learn to distinguish "religion-in-general" (positives Christentum, to use the Nazi phrase) and a formless "spirituality" (Geistigkeit), and here any critical mind can join them, from a faith commitment authenticated by life in history--earthy, concrete. As Hans Buchheim put it in a fine study,

"The claim of the National Socialists that there has never been for a long time so much 'believing' as in some sense in the year 1933 or the time of the war, is not false; yet it was in every respect an emptied faith, a faith false in content, intention and style."<sup>11</sup>

For the Christian, at least, the anchor by which a vague "faith" or "love of humanity" or "spirituality" can be prevented from floating into the maelstrom of demonic ethnic religion (Teutonic, Arab, Anglo-Saxon, African, or pan-Slav!) is precisely his identification with the Israel of God. For him the final version is not Volks-gemeinschaft but the Kingdom of God, in which the peoples and tribes of the farthest corners of the earth shall gather about the Hill of the Lord and hear His voice and do His will.

The Gentiles, however, can apostatize: they can take on the protective coloration of their pre-baptismal identity and disappear back into the tribe and pre-history. And when they do they leave exposed the Jew, the one who--whether he is personally a believer or not--is a sign to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In a way mysterious and awesome, the Jews who perished in Hitler's Europe perished for a truth which the Christians--except for those who stayed Christian and were also hated and persecuted--betrayed: that the Author and Judge of history was made manifest to us out of the Jews.

The tragic truth, a truth which the Christian culture - religionists have not begun to grasp even yet, is the truth that most of the martyrs for Christ in the 20th century were Jews.

The moral claims of "religion-in-general" died at Auschwitz and Theresienstadt. The pretensions of the Christian intellectuals to a love for humanity--quite divorced from love, even compassion, toward specific persons and groups--foundered on the mechanical precision of the Nazi extermination of European Jewry. The German intellectual, overcome by a kind of spiritual vertigo as he contemplated the vast stretch of humanity, settled for national we-feeling, for ethnic (Teutonic) identity which automatically excluded the Jews. And, as Koppel Pinson showed in a fine study thirty-five years ago,<sup>12</sup> the prevailing combination of Protestant Liberalism and Pietism prepared him for that submission to a false particularity. The true particularity, which points at the end to a true humanism, is the truth stated by Pope Pius XI: "we are spiritual Semites", and by Krister Stendahl, "Christians are a special kind of Jews." In a mysterious way, the very particularity of the Jews is the specific against a genocidal folk-identity which follows on regression into ethnicity infused with piety. In this stage of history, the particularity of the Jews is a testimony to universalism; it is the scandal on which all Gentile racism breaks its teeth. The frenetic effort artificially to reconstitute a religious monolith after the gods have died--whether that monolith be the deutsche Glaube or "Christian America" or Islam--invariably leads from hatred of the Jews to the overt forms of attack.

For those who will join me in repudiation of "religion-in-general" and "spirituality" without content or integrity, but are not prepared to accept the Christian theological formulation, let me state it this way: we are so situated, in our various national and racial contexts, that we cannot in fact love humanity without loving concrete, earthy, historic persons and groups. Under pressure, we shall either retrogress to a first love of the Gentile tribe or nation, or we shall love that Israel whose prophets and seers point us toward a day of universal justice and righteousness, mercy and peace. Hatred of the Jews is often the first seismographic reading of the covert emergence of a false particularism, and we must learn to recognize it as such.

Precisely for this reason we bring together Kirchenkampf and Holocaust at this International Conference. For Christians--and not just for the Jewish people!--the Holocaust is the most important event in recent Church History. For working theologians, it has called into question the whole fabric of Christendom, indeed the very language of traditional religion, just as among youth and students it has rendered the churches incredible. For scholars of other disciplines and vernaculars, political Anti-Semitism is a code to identify the totalitarian ideologies and systems which are the curse of the 20th century--whether our eyes are turned toward "the Jews of silence" of Soviet Russia, the Jews of "statehood" which Nasser promised in a public address on May 26, 1967 to exterminate, or the Jews our fellow-citizens who are the special target of the Radical Right.

Reference was made to the false "spirituality" which was so strong in the Third Reich, and against which the men of Barmen and the Confessing Church made their particular stand. In practical terms, the interchangeability of this base ore of devotion was recognized by Hitler himself. He told Rauschning on one occasion:

"There is more that binds us to Bolshevism than separates us from it.... I have always made allowance for this circumstance and have given orders that former Communists be admitted to the Party at once."<sup>13</sup>

For a "true believer" of totalitarian type, one closed system is as good as another!

#### The Treason of the Intellectuals

In theological terms, it is this interchangeability which gives special pathos of the irresponsibility of the German intellectuals. For while the common folk were left to the credulity and quick switch of the "true believer", the liberal academics had been very largely rendered incapable of any unqualified loyalties--especially to institutional religion! Yet in the end they proved as unable to stand against the claims of the Volkgemeinschaft as the most unlettered farmer or laborer. Looking on from the balcony, the men of the universities and professions were quite able to perceive the naive and faulty character of unquestioned obedience to any party or group. But again, when the day of reckoning came they were without moorings to withstand the overpowering demands of the ideological one-party state. As Albert Einstein noted in a famous statement, resistance came not from the universities but primarily from simple Christian laymen and their pastors. The

people of the congregations who remained faithful, and the pastors who held true to the covenant, were living at a level of trust which men who lived from the Fall, from Techné, could neither understand nor identify with.

A "spirituality" which has no relation to a known tradition, a "religious moment" which involves no loyalties to a known alternative, is what contemporary political gnosticism offers us. But the gnosticism--the closed system of secret knowledge--of the 20th century carries political force not noted in the Gnostic heresies which tormented the Early Church.<sup>14</sup> "Faith" which is divorced from Judaism or Christianity, the "faith in faith" of which Will Herberg wrote in his classic review of the American Religion--Protestant/Catholic/Jew (1955), in our day sooner or later finds a political channel.

Let our view of the future, then--and it is precisely the hope of things to come which gives history its meaning and shape--be governed by a clear vision. As Moltmann has written in his Theology of Hope, in criticism of the vague perspectives which mar the contemporary neo-Liberalism, the transposed eschatology of the Greek moment, the Nun, of existentialism, is far different from the promise given Israel.

"It is one thing to ask: where and when does an epiphany of the divine, eternal, immutable and primordial take place in the realm of the human, temporal and transient? And it is another thing to ask: when and where does the God of the promise reveal his faithfulness and in it himself and his presence?"<sup>15</sup>

We are thrust back upon the essential Jewishness of our Heilsgeschichte--in spite of all awareness of the dangers of a linear

view of history, pointed out by contextual ethicists and illuminated by linguistic analysis. The truth is that we shall as a people either look for an epiphany in the American religion, which George Wallace has a better chance to declare than Harvey Cox or Peter Berger or Martin Marty, or we shall confess--however haltingly--the vision of Isaiah for the time to come. The irony of our recent decades as men of education is severe: those who have found the particularity of "Jewish folklore and fable" too confining, too earthy, too finite, have ended in the pitiful vulgarisms of Teutonic or Anglo-Saxon or other Gentile ethnicity.

Gandhi was once asked to state his greatest grief, and he answered, "the hardness of heart of the educated." It may be that Søren Kierkegaard's iconoclastic word can fix the point: "...the greater a man's equipment of knowledge and culture, the more difficult it is for him to become a Christian."<sup>16</sup> --anyway, for the purposes of this discussion, the harder it is for him to accept involvement, commitment. Romain Rolland telegraphed an international congress of philosophers just before the opening of World War I: "Think as men of action. Act as men of thought." This has not been the record: in the face of one totalitarian threat after another, the men of the universities have copped out. Søren Kierkegaard's presentation of "the Professor" certainly remains the most perceptive exposure of that permanent tentativeness, that spectator's stance, wherein the confusion of the scientific objectivity of accurate reporting and the moral objectivity of the irresponsible has reduced technical progress to frivolity and self-destruction. You may recall "the Professor": the professor,

if he could have seen the crucifixion, would have asked if possible to have it repeated, that he could be sure to have an accurate report of all the details! My hope is that at this Conference, and in the Wayne Project, we shall not hesitate to draw some of the necessary, if painful, conclusions to be drawn by study of the Church Struggle and the Holocaust--even when those conclusions come close to home, even when the lessons cast long shadows across the present state of religion and politics in the United States!

Bonhoeffer, of course, knew the academic world well. And he knew the terrible prejudice against involvement (Engagement) in conflict, especially "political" conflict. Many of the opponents of the Gleichschaltung of the universities, and of the Dozent-führer installed by the Party, took the conservative ground: the university, as a reservation for objective scholarship and research, must be kept free of turmoil and conflict. (We hear the same elitist arguments now, from those who criticize in faculty meeting the involvement of their faculty colleagues in anti-Vietnam protests and stop by the office afterwards to pick up their checks for defence research.) The conservatives of the German universities scorned the vulgarization of the Nazi effect, which dishonored the classical standards which had made the German universities and scholarship the center of the literate world. What a difficult decision it was for Bonhoeffer, who knew and loved this Academic--and could have survived the war in a theological faculty in America (while carrying on scholarly work, of course!)--to decide to go back home. Morally, it meant to re-affirm involvement in that



most ambiguous of civil acts: tyrannicide. Professionally, it meant to abandon forever any chance of enjoying the academic preserve of "objectivity", of non-complicity. The decision to oppose Nazism was long since made: the decision to cut off the world of Liberal scholarship, and those who defend its aloofness with such feline passion, was the last and hardest step.

In discussing the lessons of Kirchenkampf and Holocaust for the man of the university we are not only speaking, of course, of university-trained mechanics--technicians with university degrees who were as empty of humane education as the bookkeeper at Dachau or the plumber at Bergen-Belsen, and just as ready to follow orders. We are referring to university men of Humanistic training. Wherein was the treason of the intellectuals?

If we turn to a specific element, to the professors and writers of German Liberal Protestantism, perhaps we shall learn something about the peculiar perils of our vocation, and also gain a clue as to why Liberal Protestantism in America today is so endemically--if usually covertly--Anti-Semitic. For the truth is, and this is the tragedy of the intellectuals in many places during the century, that the academies have proven ineffectual in the face of totalitarian thrusts for power and shatteringly confused in the face of the most inhumane of all modern irrationalities: hatred of the Jews.

Looking back on the Church Struggle, in which he played such an important fraternal part, Josef L. Hromadka once wrote:

"The liberal theology in Germany and in her orbit utterly failed. It was willing to compromise on the essential points of divine law and of 'the law of

nature'; to dispose of the Old Testament and to accept the law of the Nordic race instead; and to replace the 'Jewish' law of the Old Testament by the autonomous law of each race and nation respectively. It had made all the necessary preparation for the 'Germanization of Christianity' and for a racial Church."<sup>17</sup>

Nor is the problem yet resolved in German Protestantism, in spite of the testimony of the Confessing Church. As Samuel Sandmel pointed out in a critical essay on Rudolf Bultmann's treatment of Judaism, the danger point remains exposed. In contrast to the Early Church, where--except for Marcion--Jesus and His message were understood to be a continuation of Judaism, Professor Bultmann presses Judaism into the cramped mold of a distorted view of the Law: he describes "a Judaism that never existed so that he can set a special view of Jesus over against it."<sup>18</sup> The parallel to Arnold Toynbee's rejection of the Jews as a "Semitic fossil" is striking.<sup>19</sup> Both reveal the covert Anti-Semitism of liberal culture-religion. And the references explain why they and their colleagues and followers instinctively respond in opposition to the current manifestations of religious and cultural renaissance in world Jewry.

The problem of Liberal Anti-Semitism is far more dangerous in America, however, for we have here the last major sector of Christendom which still lives relatively undisturbed in the balmy days of 19th century culture-religion. The lessons to be learned from Kirchenkampf and Holocaust have hardly penetrated our Protestant seminaries, our liberal Protestant press, our church literature, the thinking and writing of even our ablest older theologians.

Let me illustrate. There was constituted a few months ago, under the auspices of the National Council of Churches and the

National Conference of Catholic Bishops, a Working Party of twenty eminent theologians to deal with the problematic: "Israel: the People, the Land, the State." First attention was fixed, in an effort to get behind everyday politics and humanitarian concerns, upon these theological issues:

- "1. The Promised Land and Our Responsibilities;
2. Our Responsibility for the Holocaust
  - a. The Significance of Hatred of the Jews in the History of Christianity,
  - b. The Significance of Hatred of the Jews in Islam,
  - c. The Uniqueness of the Holocaust;
3. Our Christian Responsibility for Reconciliation."<sup>20</sup>

Letters were sent to heads of seminaries and graduate departments of Religion, on the chance that somewhere Biblical and church historical studies might be going forward which would widen and deepen the discussion. Shortly thereafter a letter arrived from the dean of a seminary which considers itself the bulwark of American Liberal Protestantism. The relevant sentences are as follows:

"After reading the topics I must say that I am dismayed and wish to register my strongest protest. If the Christian Church is really concerned for reconciliation in the world, not least in the Middle East, I can think of many more fruitful approaches than this kind of question begging and special pleading effort. The topics are so loaded as to be hardly more than one more propaganda effort to put American Christian support behind present Israeli policies. If peace and reconciliation in the Middle East is one of ~~our~~ fundamental concerns why set up programs that tie in the word like "responsibility" to what is a patently Zionist line of thought. The Christian response to anti-Semitism is surely not Semitism."<sup>21</sup>

Probably the last sentence is the most revealing. I have appended my reply to this paper, for such as may care to take the time to read it. For the purpose of this argument the salient points are these:

1. "Objectivity" has led to a rejection of overt involvement in this earthy conflict and the debate which attends it;
2. "Humanity" has become the enemy of any avowed concrete attachments;
3. A general religious and ethical framework has led to rejection of any special holy history, especially any that has to do with the Jews. In consequence, when push comes to shove, the covert Kulturantisemitismus erupts into implied charges that behind the theological study of a group of troubled theologians must lie a sinister Zionist influence.

American Liberal Protestantism is sick, and the theological form of its sickness can be summarized by saying that it stands solidly on the ground but lately vacated by the Deutsche Christen, The German Christians (Deutsche Christen)

The inevitable result of such academic aloofness and doctrinal uncertainty in the German universities and churches was the fatal weakening of the two centers which might have been the chief barriers to the Nazi system. More than that, they predictably produced a generation which came to power amiably inclined toward "spirituality" and "religion-in-general" but ill-informed as to the particular claims of the Christian faith.

Although there were in fact great differences of opinion among the Nazi leaders concerning the church, the result of the Party's emphasis was that an increasing number of members left the churches and registered themselves as "believers" without affiliation (gottgläubig). The leaders who were not hostile appear to have been poorly informed as to Christian doctrine. Many displayed that

emancipation toward historic community and confession of faith which Article 24 of the NSDAP Platform encouraged: "The party as such represents the point of view of a positive Christianity without binding itself to any particular confession. It fights the spirit of Jewish materialism...." Goering's statement during the trial at Nürnberg seems to have been typical:

"I myself am not what you might call a churchgoer, but I have gone now and then, and have always considered I belonged to the Church and have always had those functions over which the Church presides--marriage, christening, burial, et cetera--carried out in my house by the Church."<sup>22</sup>

This is about as clear a statement based on culture-religion as one is likely to find: it implies the privatization of religion, and leaves no doubt as to basic loyalty should conflict arise between state and church.

The most complete formulation of a Christianity which accommodated doctrinally was made by the Deutsche Christen, and the best written statement of that position would seem to be Cajus Fabricius' Positive Christianity in the Third Reich (1937). Basing his rejection of any objective Semitic basis or unassimilatable dogmatic formulae upon the 19th century Liberal tradition of experiential and non-dogmatic religion, Fabricius set out to define the new religion of Germany "in accordance with the basic principles of National Socialism." He is sure that Christianity and National Socialism have the same basic principles because they both have "grown and become as one with the spirit of the German nation throughout the history of centuries." "The living religion of the Volk cannot be confined within a narrow scheme...."<sup>25</sup> Such a

"narrow scheme" would be historical or doctrinal definition which challenged the mystical base of the Volksgemeinschaft--an entity which Hitler said would be the Nazis' greatest contribution,

The men of the Christian resistance did not view holy history or doctrine so light-heartedly, although they did not always speak as bluntly as Hermann Sasse:

"The Evangelical Church has to start every discussion with the avowal that its doctrine is a permanent affront to the morality and ethical feeling of the German race."<sup>26</sup>

Nevertheless, they spoke plainly enough to be accused constantly of "meddling in politics", to be charged with "fundamentalism" for asserting doctrines not negotiable, and to be answered by a swarm of pamphlets like the neo-Lutheran "Ansbach Counsel" (June 11, 1934) which affirmed a general revelation made manifest in the nation and its divinely appointed Führer.

One is inevitably reminded of the ecstatic affirmation of "non-sectarian religion" to be found in Robert Welch's The Blue Book:

"I believe there is a broader and more encompassing faith to which we can all subscribe....And I believe it is an ennobling conception, equally acceptable to the most Fundamentalist Christian or the most rationalist idealist, because its whole purpose is to strengthen and synthesize the ennobling characteristics of each man and the ennobling impulses of his own personal religion."

"It is hard for man to realize that the Infinite still remains infinite, untouched in its remoteness and unreduced in its infinity by man's most ambitious approaches or that all of man's increasing knowledge leaves the Unknowable just as completely unknowable as before. But I think that, being allowed now to grasp this truth, we should cease to quarrel and disagree over how close we are to God. For we are using a term which, in a literal context, or objectively, has no meaning."<sup>29</sup>

This is, from a Biblical point of view, the language of atheism. From the point of view of fascists, it avoids the reproach of outright atheism by appearing tolerant and gottgläubig.

The Deutsche Christen were at least logical enough to press the religion of the ethnic base, infused with "spirituality", through to its logical conclusion: Anti-Semitism. In their 1932 Platform they appealed to all Christians "of German type" and affirmed "heroic piety". Repudiating all confessional parties, they cited the experience of German foreign missions which "have for a long time called to the German nation: 'Keep yourself racially pure.'" They then went on to condemn association with Jews, especially inter-marriage, and even missions to the Jews--"the entryway for foreign blood into our national body."<sup>30</sup>

#### Conclusion

We are returned to the original question: the relationship of Kirchenkampf and Holocaust. When an effort is made to cut Christianity from its essentially Semitic base, when an artificial effort is made to re-establish the myth of Christendom, when the culture-religion of a Gentile race or nation becomes infused with spirituality and historic destiny, we are face to face with the Adversary. Those who attempt to domesticate the church, to make it in corrupted form a mere creature of the state, were of necessity compelled to do two things of grave theological import. For one thing, they were driven to oppose international contacts, to close off all communication with the Ecumene. The importance of the Kirchenkampf and the universal Christian fellowship to each other is an extensive theme, treated on another occasion.<sup>31</sup> Martin Bormann's model program for the "final solution to the church problem", subsequently



published and ably analyzed in the German Kommission's volume on the Warthegau,<sup>32</sup> gives further evidence on how important Bormann--the ablest and most implacable of Christianity's enemies in the Nazi inner circle--thought cutting off contacts with the world Christian fellowship to be. On the second matter, the "final solution to the Jewish problem", the church--even the hard core of the Confessing Church--did less well; and the elimination of European Jewry is the one plank of Hitler's platform in which he could count a major success.

In the final paroxysms of "Christendom", as anxious powers strive to resist the process of secularization and the pattern of pluralism which modernity has thrust upon it, Jews and Christians of the pilgrim church have alike been sacrificed to bad politics and lowgrade Gentile religion. The crisis in credibility faced by the churches, which has alienated the youth and students and driven the younger theologians to seek a new form of words, has created a wasteland where only a few flowers of renewal give color and bring hope. One is reminded of a child's poem which survived from the extermination center at Theresienstadt, where 15,000 Jewish children were murdered.

"Then,  
A week after the end,  
Everything will be empty here.  
A hungry dove will peck for bread.  
In the middle of the street will stand  
An empty, dirty  
Hearse." <sup>33</sup>

Even in America, behind the facade of statistical and institutional success are heard the rumblings of the preliminary stages of a Church Struggle which affects even the budgets of the boards and

agencies. Pathological study of the German Kirchenkampf can teach us a great deal about the political and theological realities of the 20th century. One of these realities is the fact that retrogression to sacral society, to a mythical and therefore false harmony, is accompanied by outbursts against the historical people the Jews--even before "the struggle of the church against the church for the church"<sup>34</sup> sets in. The Jew, who cannot disappear into pre-history, is a surrogate for the Christian, who can.

I have not sought to depreciate the witness of those academics or patriots who as men who loved culture or their country, or both, have fought Anti-Semitism. I was profoundly moved to read Yevgeni Yevtushenko's poem "Babi Yar", to which Elie Wiesel called my attention in his book, The Jews of Silence. A Gentile, Yevtushenko has borne political and social opprobrium for a patriotism which is humane--a rare thing in any part of the world these days!

"Let the 'Internationale' ring out  
When the last anti-Semite on earth is buried.  
There is no Jewish blood in mine,  
But I am hated by every anti-Semite as a Jew,  
And for this reason,  
I am a true Russian."<sup>35</sup>

I am personally convinced, however, that Anti-Semitism can no longer be handled as a humanitarian issue. The very term "Anti-Semitism", which we use because it has become part of the language since the 19th century humanitarian pleas, is inaccurate and misleading--among other things because one of its most violent expressions is mounted in recent decades by "Semites", by Arabs to whom the Holy War (jihad) against the Jews of Israel is a religious obligation. Islam, in dissolution, is producing many of the same frantic

responses as Christendom in decay. Of these the most blasphemous is hatred of the Jews.

For me, the problem is basically theological: it concerns the nature of man, his ultimate loyalty, his final identity, his end-time (eschaton). The nature of the historical process is itself at stake as well as its consummation. Such affirmations cannot be proved inductively, they are not objects of "the historical method," and I do not expect that they will commend themselves immediately to all scholars here assembled. We can, however, establish in negative terms and critical analyses the indissoluble relationship of Kirchenkampf and Holocaust. As for the question whether Jews and Christians share a common future, which may move a theologian to read and think about the evidence--each of us must use his own vernacular, and if we achieve at least a partial pentecost at this International Conference we shall also begin to understand each other's languages in the university and to do something for interdisciplinary cooperation. As we do that, we shall again begin to speak for man--and not continue to contribute to his fragmentation, alienation and de-humanization at the hands of political and academic machines. We shall also perceive that the most awful figure of this century is the technically competent barbarian--especially when he claims the sanction of religion for his politics of pride.

February 10, 1970

Dear -----:

I have your letter of February 5th, and--frankly--I am shocked more than I shall be able adequately to convey in writing.

The Study Project was constituted under the National Council of Churches and the National Conference of Catholic Bishops. Its priorities were fixed by vote of a group of theologians of front rank (both Catholic and Protestant), in an effort to get behind matters of everyday politics and humanitarian concern to a genuinely theological study of Christian and Jewish holy history. In the theological sense, do Jews and Christians share a common future? Are Christians "a special kind of Jews"? Did God's purpose for the Jews end with the appearance of Jesus of Nazareth? Does Christianity have a place in Jewish eschatology? What is the meaning of the Holocaust in Christian (and not just Jewish) history? In the breakup of Christendom and Islam, what is the significance of hatred of the Jews (what 19th century humanitarians called "Anti-Semitism")? What is the role of Christians in inter-faith reconciliation?

To call this theological concern "question begging and special pleading" and "a patently Zionist line of thought" is to reveal a covert Anti-Semitism which is shocking--in the most precise sense of the word. Furthermore, it reveals precisely the kind of Anti-Semitism which infected and neutralized German Liberal Protestantism. The men of the 2nd edition of the RGG helped to prepare the way for Auschwitz and Theresienstadt, and when the Day of Reckoning came in the Third Reich liberals like Seeberg, Hirsch, Harnack flunked their exams. Why?--in good part because they were Marcionite heretics in their repudiation of a special relationship of Christians to the people and scriptures of Israel.

I think by now we should prefer to take our stand with the men of the Confessing Church, who witnessed against (Teutonic) culture-religion, and with Pius XI, who declared the truth that Christians are "spiritual Semites".

In any case, to view a serious theological study of such matters as part of "the Zionist conspiracy"--thank heavens you didn't use that phrase, although your protest has that overtone!--simply indicates the extent to which American Liberal Protestantism occupies the ground but lately vacated by the Deutsche Christen. Nor is this a uniquely Protestant phenomenon: Catholic culture-religion is endemically Anti-Semitic too. Read Oesterreicher's excellent and detailed description of the efforts made at Vatican II to prevent declarations rectifying the wrongs against the Jews--including even resistance to elimination of the deicide calumny (Vorgimler, vol. III.)! Read the Anti-Semitic propaganda, complete with vulgar cartoons, which now issues from the Beirut "Christian" centers!

The truth is that Christendom is sick, sick with so wicked a malaise that the baptized destroyed 6,000,000 Jews in Hitler's

Europe, so sick that many "Christian" leaders were prepared to look on from the balcony while Nasser tried to carry out his threat of a Second Holocaust in June, 1967.

My earnest plea is that before you join the Neo-Nazis, Communists, and black ethnics (not to mention the American Radical Right!) in automatically considering the essential affinity of Judaism and Christianity "patently Zionist", you examine your own theological commitments. The Jews are not Cherokees, and the wrong done them by faithless baptized is not the same thing as the white man's injustice to the American Indians. There is a demonic quality to hatred of the Jews which makes it more than human cruelty: it is blasphemy. By the same token, the guilt of Christians and the obligation to repent and right the ancient wrong is far heavier upon us.

I refuse to admit, personally, that the fact that I love my wife commits me to "special pleading"--or that it diminishes to any degree the love which I owe all womankind. I also deny that the love a Christian owes the Jews is a denial of his duty to humanity. Quite the contrary: I deny that anyone can love at all unless he loves concrete, earthy, historical persons and peoples.

Sincerely yours

Franklin H. Littell  
Professor

Notes:

1. The first volume was a bibliography containing over 6000 items on the Church Struggle published by 1958; Diehn, Otto, Bibliographie zur Geschichte des Kirchenkampfes, 1933-1945 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1958), 249pp.

2. Six numbers were issued before it died out for lack of adequate financing: 10/1/59, 10/15/59, 11/15/59, 8/1/60, 9/15/60, 1/31/61; cf. "Research on Christianity and Totalitarianism," XXIX Church History (1960) 2:225-28.

3. Cf. Conway, John S., "Der deutsche Kirchenkampf", Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte (1969) 4:423-49, and Oppen, Beate Ruhn von, Nazis and Christians", XXI World Politics (1969) 3:392-424.

4. Cf. the report and discussion by Lucy S. Dawidowicz on the Yad Vashem Conference of April, 1968; published in the April, 1969 issue of Commentary, pp. 51-59.

5. Cf. Wild Tongues: A Handbook of Social Pathology (New York: Macmillan Co., 1969), p.93.

6. Barth, Karl, The Church and the Political Problem of Our Day (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1939), pp. 41,43.

7. Martin, Hugh, et al., Christian Counter-Attack (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1944), p. 135.

8. Bonhoeffer, Dietrich, Gesammelte Schriften, ed. Eberhard Bethge (Munich: Chrs. Kaiser Verlag, 1958), I, 297-98.

9. Cf. Pfister, Bernhard, and Hildmann, Gerhard, eds., Widerstandsrecht und Grenzen der Staatsgewalt (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1956)

10. Cf. "The Secular City and Christian Self-Restraint," Ch. VI in The Church and the Body Politic (New York: Seabury Press, 1969).

11. Buchheim, Hans, Glaubenskrise im Dritten Reich (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1953), p. 17.

12. Pinson, Koppel S., Pietism in the Rise of German Nationalism (New York: Columbia University Press, 1936), passim.

13. Quoted in Kellan, Horace M., Secularism is the Will of God (New York: Twayne Publ., 1954), p. 152n.

14. Voegelin, Eric, The New Science of Politics (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952), passim.

15. Moltmann, Jürgen, Theology of Hope, transl. James W. Leitch (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), p. 43.

16. Quoted in Vahanian Gabriel, The Death of God (New York: George Braziller, 1961), p.225.

17. Hromádka, Josef L., Doom and Resurrection (Richmond: Madrus House, 1945), p. 102; for more extensive discussion of this point, with citations, see my "The Protestant Churches and Totalitarianism (Germany 1933-1945)," in Friedrich, Carl J., ed., Totalitarianism (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954), pp. 108-19.
18. Sandmel, Samuel, "Bultmann on Judaism," in Kegley, Charles W., ed., The Theology of Rudolf Bultmann (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), p.218.
19. Toynbee, Arnold J., A Study of History, Somervell abridgement (New York: Oxford University Press, 1957), pp.8, 22, etc.; see the brilliant critique by D. Eric Voegelin in Order and History, I: Israel and Revelation (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1956), p.120.
20. Letter to seminary heads, dated 1/20/70.
21. Correspondence in the writer's possession, dated 2/7/70.
22. Trial of the Major War Criminals (Nürnberg: International Military Tribunal, 1947), IX, 268
25. Fabricius, Cajus, Positive Christianity in the Third Reich (Dresden: Pöschel, 1937), PP. 23-24
26. Cited in Kirchliches Jahrbuch, 1933-1944 (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann Verlag, 1948), p.3. Edited by J. Beckmann.
29. Welch, Robert, The Blue Book (Boston: privately printed, 1959), pp. 68-69, 147
30. Translated in full in The German Phoenix (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1960), Appendix A.
31. "Die Bedeutung des Kirchenkampfes für die Ökumene", XX Evangelische Theologie (1960) 1:1-21
32. Gürtler, Paul, Nationalsozialismus und evangelische Kirchen im Warthegau (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1958), Appendix Doc.8, pt. 4.
33. Volavkova, Hana, ed.,,,I Never Saw Another Butterfly...: Children's Drawings and Poems from Terezin Concentration Camp, 1942-1944 (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1962), p.13.
34. Cochrane, Arthur C., The Church's Confession Under Hitler (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962), p. 19.
35. Wiesel, Elie, The Jews of Silence: A Personal Report on Soviet Jewry (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1966), p. 136.