

The Christian Response to the Nazi State – The Legacy of Resistance

Dissertation in fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Master in Theology

Summary

This dissertation focuses on the Christian Resistance to the Nazi Regime and points to lessons in understanding how modern totalitarian regimes might be resisted through the example of the Christian Resistance. In starting with the legacy of the Weimar Republic and the First World War, the dissertation discusses the 'German Christian' movement and how its claims were resisted through figures such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Karl Barth. The synodal meetings – and in particular the Altona Confession and the Barmen Declaration are discussed in relation to their effectiveness, given the divisions existing from 1933 onwards.

The position of the Roman Catholic Church is then discussed, and in particular the ambivalent and hesitant positions of the Roman Catholic Church, in contrast to the stance of some brave individual clerics. The notable contribution of some women philosophers is then discussed.

The legacy of Christian resistance is then discussed in relation to its relevance to modern totalitarian politics, and in particular the ideology which underpins the Russian Orthodox Church.

The final question posed is one posed by people such as Delp and Bonhoeffer in their writings from prison while they awaited execution: 'Was it all worth it? Did they make a difference?'

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'The tyrant dies and his rule is over, the martyr dies and his rule begins'
(Soren Kierkegaard¹) '

¹ Kierkegaard, S and Cru, A (ed) *The Soul of Kierkegaard – Selections from his Journals*. New York, USA Dover publications 2003, 151

Introduction

In an age in which the prevailing political and religious narrative can be seen as increasingly intolerant and authoritarian, can the Christian resistance to the Nazi state be seen as a model with which an alternative narrative to 'Christofascism'² can be understood and articulated? This question is increasingly relevant at a time when aggression towards another country can be seen as the fulfilment of a mystical and quasi-religious destiny for a nation state.

The nearest political equivalent to the rise of the authoritarian modern state is arguably the rise of the Nazi state, even though it can be argued that many local and wider conflicts have their roots in religious ideology. In order to understand Christian resistance to the Nazi state, it is important to discuss not just historical events as they happened but the antecedents which led both to the Nazi state and the Christian resistance to it, particularly in the context of the latter years of the Weimar Republic. The world of German philosophy towards the end of Weimar Republic in the gradual transition from the neo-Kantian narrative to a more authoritarian view of philosophy symbolised by Heidegger in his conception of '*Dasein*' or 'thrownness'.³

This account also needs to be understood in the context of Church/State relations and in particular the traditional historical closeness of the Lutheran Church to State Authorities. Two of the most significant figures in the resistance to Nazi power were Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Karl Barth, the latter known particularly for his opposition to intolerant forms of nationalism. Barth spoke out extensively in the interwar period about his concerns over what he described as the 'age of absolutism' - namely the determination of law by the one who possesses the power. At the same time some courageous Catholics were also speaking out against the evils of the Nazi state.

The development of the German '*völkisch*' movement with its belief in the concept of the 'Thousand Year Reich' played a key role in fostering the myth of Nazi supremacy. The '*völkisch*' movement, developed in the immediate aftermath of the First World War, involved seeing religion as forces of light and darkness – whereby the German Christian could use this belief system to justify their faith in a higher power.

² This term was first used by Dorothy Soelle in 1970 to describe a far right political ideology which encompasses both fascism and Christianity.

³ Heidegger was later to become a member of the Nazi party in 1933 and from then on espoused National Socialist beliefs.

The pronouncements and beliefs of Barth and Bonhoeffer, as well as many other clergy such as Martin Niemöller and Gunther Dehn – both written and spoken – led to the preparation of the Barmen declaration of May 1934 in which Barth as well as Bonhoeffer played a key role. While the declaration provided a clear rationale for the separation of Church and State, it is open to criticism in that it did not provide a clear statement of opposition to the persecution of the Jews and other injustices. Even so any account of the 'timidity' of the declaration needs to be balanced by the risks faced by proponents of a radical theological vision when they could be arrested and put in a concentration camp for being too outspoken.

It is important to note that the Christian resistance led by Barth and Bonhoeffer was only one part of the resistance to the Nazi regime, particularly in the early 1930's. The Catholic Church was less coordinated in its approach and compromised by the signing of the Concordat in 1933 with the Nazi regime but was nevertheless marked by the courage of brave individuals who stood out for their beliefs and were subsequently executed. And even in a time of severe persecution there are documented instances of powerful Jewish resistance, for example the heartfelt calls of the first woman Rabbi in Germany, Regina Jonas, who was later to die in a concentration camp.

The Communist resistance from 1933 onwards was particularly marked and it is estimated that 20000 Communist resisters lost their lives through execution or internment in concentration camps. The examples of resistance by Christians in the 1930's could have provided a model to influence future international developments. Four courageous women who were driven by motives of humanity and justice also need to be acknowledged as part of the resistance. Indeed the international political climate, of which the Cold War was a major factor, was also marked by the Cold War but also promising developments such the growth of European unity and the signing of the Declaration of Human Rights.

There were other Christian groups involved in resistance, for example Jehovah's Witnesses, thousands of whom were interned in concentration camps because of their steadfast refusal to perform military service. Within their belief system there was no room for compromise and approximately 10000 were incarcerated. There were other strands of Christian resistance - the 'White Rose' movement, led by Sophie Scholl and her brother, which originated with students in the University of Munich in 1942, also developed its own ethical frame work which was based firmly on Christian beliefs. The movement distributed thousands of anti-Nazi leaflets across Germany.

The concluding section therefore addresses a key contemporary question - can the witness of the Christian resistance to Hitler serve as a basis of resistance to a modern authoritarian state? Does the resistance provide a model for standing up to dictatorship? Can the legacy of German resistance act as an antidote to the abuse of power of the modern totalitarian state or does it become irrelevant in what might be seen as a religionless age? Have developments in the 21st century, for example 'Trumpism' and 'Christofascism' and the growth of the 'New Right,' have provided a

backdrop within which merely humanist and liberal views may not provide an adequate response. In particular the views of Ivan Ilyin, the Russian theologian who used the Bible to promote his ideas of violence and disorder are also relevant as he was reinterred with honours and promoted by Vladimir Putin as the driving force of 'Holy Russia'. His books have been distributed to Russian generals to motivate them in their conduct of the war against Ukraine.

Furthermore, there is a key question as to whether a new definition of the boundary between Church and State needed to ensure that the traditional Biblical message of peace and justice is not 'twisted' to suit an alternative authoritarian ideology. How might the words of the Lord's Prayer – 'Thy Kingdom come' be interpreted in an age of authoritarianism? These are the existential questions in the light of numerous challenges in our world to which we may well need to find answers as our century progresses. They represent some of the important issues which arise from an uncertain and conflict ridden contemporary world.

Christian Churches and the legacy of the Weimar Republic

In order to review the record of the Churches in opposing the Nazi state, it is helpful to review the record of the Churches in the preceding years of the Weimar Republic in relation to authoritarian tendencies and in particular in opposing the growing tide of anti-Semitism in the 1920's. Did the Churches enter the Third Reich with a 'clean slate'? Or were they compromised already in the Weimar Republic? Was there already a record of Christian resistance to authoritarian ideas in the Weimar Republic?

Heilbronner (2004)⁴ comments that while there was no overt anti-Semitism in the politics of the early 20th century, there was evidence of clear contradictions in German society. The end of the war in 1918 marked a rise in intolerance which gave rise to anti-Semitism and the radical right through the fusion of various nationalist parties. The Jews proved to be convenient scapegoats in the aftermath of the war, particularly as some claimed that they were the instigators of the Weimar Republic. The Protestant Church had close links with the *völkisch* movement and many pastors had nationalist beliefs, underpinned by Luther's Dual Kingdom approach.

In the Catholic Church anti-Semitic sentiments were already part of the traditional discourse which reached its peak on days such as Good Friday. There was a political trend among Catholics in the 1920's to turn to the right and in particular in Bavaria where the nationalist agenda encouraged the spread of anti-democratic ideas. In addition a fear of communism and 'Marxist heresies' meant that many Catholics were likely to embrace a nationalistic narrative. These attitudes, coupled with an anti-Semitic agenda implicit in Catholic theology, meant that resistance to Hitler was likely to be muted if present at all.

⁴ Heilbronner, O 'German or Nazi anti-Semitism?' In Stone, D, (ed) *The Historiography of the Holocaust*. London, Palgrave Macmillan, (2004)

With regard to the Evangelical Churches, the clergy were, for the most part, politically conservative and nationalistic and often hostile to the existence of the Weimar Republic, particularly in the context of what was seen as the injustices of the treaty of Versailles. For many clergy, in the chaos of the later years of the Weimar Republic democracy was a lost cause which would be corrected with the rise of a nationalist such as Hitler. References to the Bible, such as St Paul's *Epistle to the Romans* in Chapter 13, could be used to justify that 'the powers that be are those ordained by God.' The Lutheran belief for absolute loyalty to the State was embodied in this quotation:

'Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore he who resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgement...Therefore one must be subject, not only to avoid God's anger but also for the sake of conscience'. (Romans 13:1)

The seeds of the 'German Christian' movement were already sown through the creation of the '*Bund für eine Deutsche Kirche*' or the 'Federation for a German Church' – this set out to eliminate where possible Jewish influences on the Christian Gospel. Hence for both the Catholic and Evangelical Churches there was little or no institutional basis for opposition to the rise of Nazism.

There was a long tradition of subordination of German Lutheran and Evangelical religion to the State. As the Confessing Church was strongest in Prussia which was highly militarised at the turn of the century, the Church naturally subscribed to traditional values, in particular German traditions and culture. Apart from outspoken pastors such as Paul Tillich who had served on the front line, the First World War had introduced a wave of Christian based nationalism which served as a poor precedent for pacifism in the 1930's. The German princes were heads of their own provincial Churches until 1918.

In this context it was surprising that the clergy were for the most part, unlikely to challenge the authority of the State as the Nazi era approached. . While the Social Democrats and Communists increased their influence in the post war years, this was often in opposition to the Churches as when there were calls for those with similar views to leave the Church. Faced with attacks from the Social Democrats and Communists, it was easy to see how the Churches turned to nationalism in the early years of the 20th century.

The development of a form of 'pastoral nationalism' which helped to explain the easy acceptance of the Nazi regime helps to explain how the German Christian movement could so readily develop in the immediate post Weimar years. Hockenos (2004)⁵ comments that for many Protestant pastors, while not going as far as the German Christians, the advent of Hitler was a welcome relief to the anarchy of the late Weimar years and the attacks on them by the Social Democrats and

⁵ Hockenos, M '*A Church Divided – German Protestants Confront the Nazi past* Indiana University Press
Bloomington and Indianapolis (2004) page 18

Communists which were widespread during the Weimar years. It also explained the acquiescence of the Churches with the growing development of anti-Semitism in which the rejection of the Jewish people by God was taken for granted. Another factor in the development of nationalistic attitudes in the German Church was the feeling after the war of national humiliation. Overall the situation in both the Catholic and Protestant Churches by 1933 was hardly propitious for active resistance.

'German Christians' and their belief system

The rise of the National Socialist ideology in the 1930's was accompanied by the growth of a particular interpretation of Christian belief that found its expression in the key development the growth of the 'German Christian' movement. The ideology of the movement which was formally founded in May 1932 can be summarized in the acceptance speech of the *Reichsbischof* Müller at his inauguration in 1934:

*'The whole German movement for freedom, with its leader, our Chancellor, is for us a present from God, given in a time of decision. When the enemies of Christ were doing their best to destroy our people both inwardly and outwardly; in the triumph of this German freedom movement we hear the call of our God and it is our honourable and sincere duty to listen to this call and act accordingly...the old has passed away. The new has begun. The political struggle in the Church is over. Now begins the struggle for the soul of the people.'*⁶

And in August 1933 a Pastor Leutheuser declared in a sermon, *'Christ has come to us through Adolf Hitler. He was the decisive figure when the people were about to go under. Hitler struck out for us and through his power, his honesty, his faith and his idealism, the Redeemer found us...We know today that the saviour has come...we have only one task – to be German and not Christian'*.⁷

Joachim Hossenfelder who became Bishop of Brandenburg in 1933 described *'Christian Faith as a heroic, manly thing, God speaks in blood'*... - a prescient reminder of how the divine image could be described in bloody terms.

Such a declaration was clear in its conflation of national self-interest and the divine will. This developed alongside a theory of 'Positive Christianity', defined as tolerance and acceptance of different denominations, except that according to one of its earliest proponents, Gottfried Feber, 'it combats the Jewish materialistic spirit within and around us'⁸ For Feber positive Christianity meant standing for an *'inner spiritual renewal of the nation'*. In this way 'Positive Christianity' represented the *'moral feelings of the German race'*. The term was rooted in the *'kulturprotestantisch'* milieu of the early nineteenth century and enabled its proponents to claim that the

⁶ *Evangelische Nachrichten* 21/2/1934 quoted in Niemöller, W. *'Kampf und Zeugnis der Belennende Kirche'* (Bielefeld, 1948)

⁷ Cited in Conway, J.S. *The Nazi Persecution of the Churches* (Vancouver, Regent College Publishing, Van (1968) pages 6-7

⁸ Stackelberg, R and Winkle, S *The Nazi Germany Source book - an anthology of texts* (London and New York, Routledge) page 65

racial question had already existed in Christian the theology and shown the way to a racially justified people.

Buesnel (2020)⁹ comments on the development of the term in the context of a late 19th century tradition which sought to describe Jesus as an Aryan in bitter opposition to the Jews. It was already adopted by the Nazi Party as early as 1920 and conflated the Fuhrer with revelation from God which would redeem the German nation from the defeat of the war. At the same time it validated anti-Semitism through describing Jesus as Aryan. In this way Jesus came not to save mankind as such, but to bring about new human species. Jesus could be transformed from being a peacemaker to being a warmonger for a new '*Volk*'.

In a prescient foretaste of what could later be described as 'Christofascism' a public oath taking ceremony to the new regime was described by a Nazi newspaper in these terms: '*Yesterday witnessed the profession of the religion of the Blood in all its imposing reality. Yesterday saw the triumphant and decisive beginning of our fight to make National Socialism the only racial religion of the German people*'¹⁰

Steigmann-Gall (2020)¹¹ describes the words of Hans Schemm, leader of the National Socialist Teachers league as a version of 'clerical fascism': '*Our religion is Christ, our politics Fatherland*'. This conception of Christ corresponded with the doctrine of '*Schöpfungsordnungslehre*' or the order of creation developed by Paul Althaus which was able to justify what Tafilowski (2017)¹² describes as a '*hierarchical ethnic taxonomy*'.

Another key figure in the development of 'Positive Christianity' was Cajus Fabricius, Professor of Theology at Breslau University who blamed the Jews for their 'international scheming'. He noted that '*The spirit of the Christian Faith has nothing to do with the Judaism which we National Socialists are combatting*'.¹³ Even so these and other pronouncements did not prevent Fabricius from being arrested and held in custody for some months.

Barnett (1992)¹⁴ points to a revivalism during the 1920s which stressed the need for a return to the 'roots'. Hitler's intention to form one single '*Reichskirche*' the concerns of mainstream Protestants was soon realised over the choice of Bishop for the Reich Church and in particular over the choice of Muller who was a member of the Nazi party. The result of this conflict – the placing of the Prussian Church under police surveillance, only deepened the division. The inauguration ceremony for Muller became known as the 'Brown Synod', since so many participants wore SA

⁹ Buesnel, R '*Positive Christianity: Theological rationales and legacies*: in '*Religion Compass*, Volume 14, issue 7 (2020)

¹⁰ Cited in Conway, J.S. Page 146

¹¹ Steigmann-Gall, R '*The Nazis' 'Positive Christianity' a variety of 'clerical Fascism' ?* *Religions*, 8 (2) (2020) 315-327

¹² Tafilowski, R (2017) '*A reappraisal of the orders of creation*' *Lutheran Quarterly*, 31(3) 288-309

¹³ Fabricius, C *Positive Christianity in the new state* , Dresden Hermann Puschel (1936)

¹⁴ Barnett, V. '*For the soul of the People*' Oxford, Oxford University Press (1992) page 26

uniforms. Gerdmar (2009)¹⁵ comments that his goal was to assist Hitler in developing one national Church with a common identity of adherence to Nazi beliefs. Even so the term 'positive Christianity' was capable of a number of interpretations, and, as Koehne (2014)¹⁶ suggests, it had to be set against Hitler's loathing of Christianity.

Nonetheless, in spite of its policies designed to please the Nazis such as the removal of the Old Testament from the Bible, the German Christian movement met with a mixed degree of success. Even if the ideology of the German Christian movement corresponded with the prevailing Nazi ideology, the tactics of the German Christians gradually led to the distrust of Hitler and others in the Nazi leadership.

Alfred Rosenberg had published a violently anti-Semitic book in 1930 which suggested that the German people were surrounded by two sets of enemies - Jews and Christians. For Rosenberg worship of the Cross could not be reconciled with the worship of the German people. As Besier (2017)¹⁷ suggests, while Hitler was often equivocal in his attitude to the Protestant Churches, the clearly stated aim of Rosenberg was to promote a new 'political' religion which would bring together Nordic myths and 'true' Christianity.

Meanwhile Reichsbischof Müller, while trying to meet the demands of the Confessing Church, was forced to compromise with the Nazi regime. He agreed to the integration of the Evangelical Youth Movement with the Hitler Youth. In spite of their ingratiating tactics with the regime, the German Christian clergy was placed under the same restrictions as the clergy of the Confessing Church and so had little or no impact on the Nazi regime's religious policies.

By July 1935 the regime had decided that there needed to be a complete separation of Church and State and that divisions with the German Christians were a purely internal matter for the Church. In a speech in Münster, Frick, the Minister of the Interior had declared: *'We Nazis demand a separation of Church and State in the entire public life of the country....We do not want Protestant or Catholic civil servants, only German civil servants quoted in Conway, page 112'*¹⁸ As Conway also points out, just to be German Christians was not *sufficient* – civil servants had to make a written declaration that they would give up membership of any denominational organisation to which they belonged and that their children would be withdrawn from denominational youth organisations.

¹⁵ Gerdmar, A. 'Roots of theological anti-semitism: German biblical interpretation and the Jews, from Herder and Semler Kittel and Bultmann: in Studies in Jewish History and Culture Volume 20 (2009)

¹⁶ Koehne, S. 'Nazism and Religion: the problem of 'Positive Christianity' Australian Journal of Politics and History: 60, 28-42 (2014)

¹⁷ Besier, G 'The Churches and National Socialism between Hitler's religious equivocation and Rosenberg's myth: Ambiguities, Fascination and Self-Assertion' in Nykvist, M, Gudmundsson, D and Maurits, A (eds) Classic in Northern European Church History over 500 years: Essays in honour of Anders Jarlert. Frankfurt/M: Peter Lang (2017)

¹⁸ Conway, page 112

In combatting the German Christian ideology there were a number of dilemmas. The Lutheran theology of *Schöpfungsordnungen* – or the 'order of creation' – with its implied dualism of Church and State, suggested a way in which the Christian notion of love of neighbour could be reconciled with acts on behalf of the State. Begbie (1985)¹⁹ suggests that the Churches were theologically ill equipped to deal with Nazi ideology as it developed, in particular the of the conception of the 'Volk' as the predominant racial community. This could be seen as a precursor to the modern phenomenon of 'Christofascism'.

Luther's tract 'Against the Jews and their Lies' with its calls to burn down synagogues, had already fanned the flames of anti-Semitism. In addition to the way in which Church and State could be seen to be inter-connected the reliance on the interpretation of Romans 13 failed to take account of what was in effect a criminal State. This fitted with the rise of natural theology which was a belief system based theology outside the revelation of a Christian God. At the same time if the Church stood for order within the Nazi State, it had to be obeyed. Because of this the opposition of the Christian Churches was likely to be fractured and unclear as became apparent by the division of the Church into the 'Confessing Church' and those elements which saw no problem with a compromise with the regime.

The response of Karl Barth and the Confessing Church

The criticism and counter arguments of the association which sought to bring together religion and politics was led by Karl Barth who during the 1920's was developing his views on the dangers of nationalism and patriotism, not least following the bruising experiences of the Great War. He had a formidable task on his hands if he was to counter the decades of the alliance of Church and State. The towering figure of German philosophy in the previous century had been Friedrich Schleiermacher and while Barth took a close interest in his work he was concerned by what DeCou (2013)²⁰ describes as the 'self-deification' of humanity in Schleiermacher's philosophy.

Barth took Schleiermacher to task for his views that Christianity could be absorbed into modern culture and that the *'Kingdom of God is utterly and unequivocally identical with the advance of civilisation'*²¹. From this perspective Christianity and could become too closely linked. (And) In locating religion in the Enlightenment tradition of promoting feeling, the link was lost between the proclamation of truth and consequent human behaviour.

Barth had been particularly affected at the beginning of the war by his mentors Harnack and Hermann signing the manifesto supporting the Kaiser's war aims which

¹⁹ Begbie, J *The Confessing Church and the Nazis - a struggle for Theological Truth* Anvil Vol 2 no 2 (1985) page 114

²⁰ DeCou, J. *'Playful, Glad and Free: Karl Barth and the Philosophy of Popular Culture'* Minneapolis Fortress Press, (2013)

²¹ Barth, K *'Schleiermacher: Sunday sermons'* (1933)

he likened to 'intellectual 42cm cannons'²² (The actual cannons were used to destroy Belgium's defences.) For Barth Christian truth had to be limited to the human subjective process in which God stands apart from humanity in contrast to divine revelation, thus avoiding the temptation to link the experience of culture and politics to the divine will. In this way Barth was able to show how human political and cultural activity cannot and should not be aligned with the will of God.

Barth's critique of the German Protestant Churches was based on his major work '*Protestant Theology in the 19th century – its Pre-history and History*' which was based on lectures delivered in Munster in 1926.²³ He described the 'self-divinisation' of man with its collective form as the nation, as being responsible for the early massacres which occurred in the Great War. In this work he linked the development of what he increasingly saw as 'political barbarism', or to put it another way, the 'age of absolutism'. Barth was also deeply affected on both a personal and professional level by the horrors of the Great War.

The other key influence on his thinking was his major work on Paul's **Epistle** to the Romans in which the legacy of revelation is seen as more important than human self-sufficiency as well as the belief that righteousness can only be measured by law. His key message was that only Christ himself could deliver justice in the world. Romans 1 was clear that **the** power politics of nationalist states **was** 'evil in itself' and 'diametrically opposed to God's intentions'. For Barth the key message of Paul in Romans 12:21: '*Be not overcome of evil but overcome evil with good*' set a framework within which the duty of a Christian is to endeavour to find a way to counter evil with the forces of good.

The shadow of the carnage of the War was the backdrop to the development of a theological narrative which became the *raison d'être* of the resistance to Nazi ideology. Previous to this Barth had become increasingly, convinced that the legacy of the theological justification of Germany's involvement in the Great War would result in an increase in nationalism. Erickson (1985) ²⁴ suggests that the crisis of 'modernity' was seen as partly to blame for the catastrophe of the War. The fear of civil wars and the instability of the Weimar institutions were the backdrop of what could be seen as the protest for certainty and stability in the declining years of the Weimar Republic.

Barth also called his colleagues at the height of the Church/State crisis to beware of false doctrines and false Gods. In response to the message propagated on 'Positive Christianity' by the German Christians he reminded his fellow members of the Church that '*theological existence involves the obligation to be what we are, and true to the*

²² Barth, K. Letter to W. Spoendlin, 4th January 1915

²³ Barth, K. '*Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century*' London, SCM Press New Edition (2001)

²⁴ Erickson, Robert P, *Theologians under Hitler: Gerhard Kittel, Paul Althaus, and Emmanuel Hirsch* (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, (1985) 2

mission entrusted to us to serve the word of God within this nation' (Barth, 1933)²⁵ Later in the same document he reminded his colleagues of their responsibilities, including a reference to the persecution of Jewish Christians, but not going as far as to defend the interests of all Jews: *'The fellowship of those belonging to the Church is not determined by blood, therefore, not by race, but by the Holy Spirit and Baptism. If the German Evangelical Church excludes Jewish Christians, or treats them as of a lower grade, she ceases to be a Christian Church'*. And *'should Muller and the German Christians prevail, disobedience would have to be rendered to their doctrines, their announcements, the Reichsbischof and his prebendaries – and the consequences paid'*²⁶

The philosopher Paul Tillich, who served at the bloody battle of Verdun as Chaplain during the war was also profoundly affected by his experiences. He wrote in his autobiography: *'The experience of those four years of war revealed to me and to my entire generation an abyss to human existence which could not be ignored. If a reunion of theology and philosophy is ever possible it will be achieved only in a synthesis that does justice to this experience of our lives'* (Tillich, 1936)²⁷

Another influence following the Great War was the growth of the *'völkisch'* movement in which the German Volk was seen the recipients of a divinely given mission as victors. The *völkisch* myth was developed on the assumption that Germany's defeat had been based on the presence of dark and secretive forces which in turn were able to provide the justification of developing anti-Semitism. This view was further developed by the theories of ideologues such as de Lagarde who argued that Christianity had been debased by 'Jewish Paulinism'. Such a view had a long history. Watson (1994)²⁸ describes how in the Vienna of Hitler's youth myths abounded that the 'poisoner Paul and his Volk' were the 'archenemies of Jesus' and 'had to be removed from the gates of the Kingdom of Heaven'. Walter Grundmann, a German Christian leader in Saxony, described how: *The swastika is a sign of sacrifice which lets the Cross of Christ shine out for us in a new light.*²⁹

A return to a 'pure' form of Christianity was seen as needed to rid it from all forms of Jewish influence. The *'völkisch'* movement was able to provide de this assurance and provided a return to 'homeland' values. Bergen (1996)³⁰ describes how the development of this movement served as an ideological underpinning of the 'German Christians' in their development in the early 1930's.

²⁵ Barth, K, *'Theological Existence Today: A Plea for Theological Freedom'* London, Hodder and Stoughton, (1933) 83

²⁶ Barth, K 1933- 67

²⁷ Tillich, P *'The interpretation of history'* New York Charles Scribner's sons (1936)

²⁸ Watson, P *The German genius and the 20th century* London, Simon and Shuster, London (1994) page 674.

²⁹ Cited in Jungel, E *Christ, Justice and Peace. Towards a Theology of the State in a dialogue with the Barmen declaration* (Edinburgh, T and T Clark (1991) page 223

³⁰ Bergen, Doris L. *Twisted Cross: the German Christian movement in the Third Reich* (Chapel Hill, N.C: University of North Carolina Press, 1996, 1-3 and 27-29)

Keedus (2021)³¹ also points to the influence of the Great War in developing Barth's major post war work on the Paul's Epistle to the Romans which emphasised the wholly 'otherness' of God in contrast to attempts to link him with human endeavours or achievements. She suggests that in Barth's view the modern age marked the start of the 'age of absolutism' in which the determination of law is in the hands of the one with the most power.

She comments: *'A transcendent horizon of justice, no matter how elusive, was replaced by the supremacy of the self-legitimising will of the sovereign, regardless of whether the sovereign was at first a monarch, as at first, or later the nation'.* Political absolutism pointed to unanimity and an order keeping administrative state - the necessary preconditions for the rise of Hitler and indeed other more recent authoritarian rulers. In this way political freedom is gradually aligned with the sovereign will.

For Barth 'the act of God's revelation required humankind to act with the highest moral principles in mind. God the sovereign saves *'only those people who trust not in themselves, but solely in God'*³². Alongside his 'Epistle to the Romans' Barth collaborated with Bultmann in developing a journal *'Zwischen den Zeiten'* which became known for its championing of 'crisis theology', focussing on the increasing distance between God and his people. By 1935, following his expulsion from Germany, Barth was taking a more explicit view – he reminded the Confessing Church of the political context of the Barmen declaration given the increasing deification of Hitler.

The response of Dietrich Bonhoeffer

While Barth was expressing his concerns about the link between theology and the rise of nationalism, the young and dynamic pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer, although mainly absent from Germany in the early 1930's was expressing his concerns about what he saw as the blasphemous and dangerous rise of the 'German Christians'. This movement had grown since its inception in 1932 and developed a dogma of 'German exceptionalism' Combined with the 'völkisch' myth, this dogma saw the German nation as a victim of Jewish influence and of the forces which defeated it in the Great War. This 'Sonderweg' achieved a widespread resonance in Germany in the early 1930s, as Steinmetz (1997)³³ suggests.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer had to conduct his campaign against growing influence of the German Christians from outside Germany for some of the time while he was serving as a Pastor for the Lutheran Church in London. Nevertheless, while he was absent in England, his thoughts were constantly with the deteriorating situation in Germany.

³¹ Keedus, L *'The snake biting its own tail'* Karl Barth on the modern promise of politics, International Journal of Philosophy and Theology, (2021) 82.2, 155-175

³² Busch, *Karl Barth* pp 92 and 117.

³³ Steinmetz, *German exceptionalism and the origins of Nazism – the career of a concept* in Kershaw, I and Lewin, M (eds) *Stalinism and Nazism: Dictatorships in Comparison* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997)

Clements (2007)³⁴ describes his stay in London as being of key importance in the struggle against the developing movement of the 'German Christians'. He had been an early opponent of the 'German Christians' and had opposed the doctrine of racial purity as contrary to Christian beliefs. In his correspondence and sermons he emphasised that the Confessing Church was not a separate branch of the Evangelical Church but the sole national Church.

Bonhoeffer also took a stand against the view expressed by some, for example Niemöller, that it was possible to oppose the German Christians but at the same time remain loyal to the Nazi regime. This became an increasing tense conflict between the 'absolutists' such as Bonhoeffer and those who did not wish to openly criticise the regime. The formation of the 'Pastors Emergency League' in opposition to the Aryan beliefs proclaimed by some Church leaders was another turning point.

Another of his contributions was to assist the Anglican Bishop George Bell in issuing a prescient warning on the dangers of the direction of the Church in Germany, published as a message for Ascension Day in 1934. He urged Bell to use stronger language in his letter intended for the Confessing Church. He was particularly concerned that the letter should mention 'racial distinctions' - a reference to the growing persecution of the Jews which he thought Bell should include.³⁵ 'He reminded Bell in his letter: *'Let us discuss our concerns as long as we like but let us act...*

His other concerns included the increasing autocracy of the newly appointed *Reichsbischof* and the gradual persecution of clergy who refused to follow the increasing marginalisation of those who were not considered to be pure 'Aryan', for example Jewish members of the Church. Bonhoeffer in what was a prelude to the Barmen declaration stressed that the Christological as opposed to the political and social dimension of the Church was non-negotiable.

His stance was based, as pointed out by his biographer Eberhard Bethge (1995)³⁶ on the primacy of the message of the Gospel on the Mount in the Gospel of Matthew. Unlike Barth, Bonhoeffer stressed the need for positive action to put this into action, including the need for non-violent action. In the later formulation of the Barmen declaration this call was to prove too much for those who had to agree its wording. One of his most significant contributions to the gradual development of the political nature of the Church came in his lecture to students in 1932 on the theme 'Christ and Peace'³⁷ in which he developed the theme of the importance of the Sermon on the Mount as well as the dangers of militarization. In another lecture – *'Thy Kingdom Come! The Prayer of the Church-Community for God's Kingdom on Earth'* ,

³⁴ Clements, K (ed) *'Dietrich Bonhoeffer: London 1933-1935* (translated from the German edition) Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Volume 13 Fortress Press, Minneapolis (2007) page 3

³⁵ Bonhoeffer: London, 1933-1935 page 140

³⁶ Bethge, Eberhard: *'The Cross of Christ and remembrance of the Dead'* in *'Testament to Freedom – the essential writings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer'*, revised edition: Kelly G.B and Burton Nelson. F, W-D (San Francisco) Harper Collins, (1995): page 201

³⁷ *'Christ and Peace'* in *'A Testament to Freedom: Essential Writings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer'* Kelly, G and Burton Nelson F (eds) (Harper Collins) (2007) page 93

given in 1932 Bonhoeffer spelt out his early thinking on the relation between Church and State, stressing the responsibilities it has if it is to be described as 'the Kingdom of God':

'The Kingdom of God takes form in the state, insofar as here human desire is restrained with authority and responsibility, is kept within the order, to the extent that each is protected and preserved from the desire of the other. Desire is not destroyed, restrained, so that it may bear fruit in the service of the fallen world.' ³⁸

This was a prescient comment in the light of the arrival of the Nazi regime to power in the following year. It points to the qualities that Bonhoeffer expected the 'Kingdom of God on Earth' to have.

Bonhoeffer was also outspoken in his opposition to the law passed in 1933 that all persons of non-Aryan descent be barred from public service. He was outspoken in speaking up for those he felt to be persecuted. This was in the context of a long standing tradition of anti-Semitism which had begun with Luther. The concept of 'Bildung' or self-improvement as a cultured individual carried with it the assumption that this was only possible if one was of pure German blood.

As Moses (2018) ³⁹ points out, Bonhoeffer's vision of a diaconal Church meant that he and his colleagues had to be prepared to suffer alongside those who were persecuted, the Jews, Jehovah's witnesses, Roma, and many others. He was able to put this commitment into action during his period in London in 1935 when he ministered to German Jewish refugees. In the face of what he saw as a weak and ambivalent response by his colleagues, including a grudging acceptance that Jews could be baptised, he put the question as to whether the Evangelical Church was still the Church of the '*ever present Christ*'. Those few Pastors who questioned the attitude of the Confessing Church towards Jews were in some cases sent to concentration camps.

Even so an area which received a muted response from some Churches was that of the Nazi obsession with eugenics which was manifested in the euthanasia programme of 'life unworthy of life'. Burleigh (1994) ⁴⁰ points to the attitude of the Protestant 'Inner Mission' which advocated for the forced sterilisation of those deemed 'unproductive' and which was carried out in conditions which amounted to torture. The Inner Mission managed several hundred institutions and in 1931 had organised a conference on eugenics which contained echoes of some of the rationale used when the euthanasia programme began in earnest.

Bonhoeffer was an early critic of Hitler - in February 1933 in a radio broadcast he was outspoken in his criticism of the seizure of power by Hitler. This was a precursor

³⁸ Bonhoeffer, D. '*Thy Kingdom Come ! The Prayer of the Church Community for God's Kingdom on Earth*' Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works – I 12 Berlin 1932-1933 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press 2009, pages 285-297

³⁹ Moses, J '*Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Stand on the Jewish question during the Third Reich.*' In 'The Bonhoeffer Legacy - An International Journal - Volume 6, Issue 1 35-50

⁴⁰ Burleigh, M. '*Between Enthusiasm, Compliance and Protest: The Churches, Eugenics and the Nazi 'Euthanasia' Programme.* Contemporary European History Volume 3 no 3 (1994) person pages 253-263

to his later book published in 1937 'The Cost of Discipleship'. As Smith (2004)⁴¹ suggests he went beyond the interpretation of the division of Church and State to assert the need for action to accompany the Christian imperative for action. The Fano conference was more explicit than Barmen...It showed that courage was needed to speak out.

This need to place action alongside faith found its voice in his perhaps most widely read book – '*Discipleship*'. For Bonhoeffer the Christian commitment extended beyond the Church – he writes: '*The community of Jesus ought to examine whether it has given a sign of his love, which preserves, supports, and protects lives, to those whom the world has despised and dishonoured*'⁴² The period spent in 1937 in the 'illegal' seminary in Finkelwalde before it was closed down was also important in reinforcing his conviction on the vital role of pacifism.

By 1944 while still in prison in Tegel he struggled with what he saw as a new formulation of the Christian Gospel: '*Before God and with God we exist without God*' and '*We cannot be honest unless we live in the world as if God does not exist*'⁴³ In 1944 he was writing from his prison cell: '*If the synagogues burn today, the Churches will burn tomorrow*'.⁴⁴

Along with Niemöller, also a critic of the German Christians, perhaps the greatest achievement of Bonhoeffer during this period was his role in the founding of the 'Pastors Emergency League', formed in opposition to the declaration of the German Christian Faith movement in 1932 which was the precursor to the German Christian movement. Perhaps even more importantly he was one of the first to declare that the traditional Lutheran doctrine on the separation of Church and State did not and should not imply political inaction.

During his time spent in prison Bonhoeffer was able to develop what might now be considered his most mature thoughts and set out his position in stark terms:

*The great masquerade of evil has wrought havoc with all our ethical preconceptions. This appearance of evil in the guise of light, beneficence and historical necessity is utterly bewildering to anyone nurtured in our traditional ethical system. But for the Christian who frames his life on the Bible it simply confirms the radical evilness of evil.*⁴⁵

Barth and Bonhoeffer were not of course alone in their denunciation of the German Christians. Martin Niemöller was also outspoken in his views. Even though

⁴¹ Smith, R: 'Reclaiming Bonhoeffer after Auschwitz' in 'Dialog: A Journal of Theology: Volume 43, no 3 Fall 2004 page 214

⁴² Bonhoeffer, D *Discipleship* Minneapolis, Fortress Press (2003) page 123

⁴³ Bonhoeffer, D. *Letters and Papers from Prison* Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works volume 8 (Folio Society, 2000) page 360

⁴⁴ Cited in: Maltusch, Gottfried: 'When the Synagogues burnt' in '*I knew Dietrich Bonhoeffer*' Zimmermann, W-D and Smith, R (eds) (New York, Harper and Row, (1966) page 150

⁴⁵ Bonhoeffer, D. *Prisoner for God: Letters and Papers from Prison*. Bethge, E (ed) Translated by Reginald H. Fuller. New York, Macmillan, (1953) page 14

he was no supporter of the Weimar Republic he became a prominent figure in the Pastors 2 Emergency League. In one particularly fiery Sermon he described his vision of the formation of pastors and he also acted as a place of shelter for Pastors who had been arrested together with their spouses. The seminary marked a departure from the traditional model of formation in universities. At its inception he noted that *'The special character of the Confessing Church derives from the difficult situation in which we have been placed by the Church struggle.'*⁴⁶ Before it was shut down after two years the it became renowned for its focus on scriptural study as an alternative to the prevailing Nazi ideology. Eberhard Bethge, one of the founding students, commented: *'Because I am a preacher of the Word, I cannot expound scripture unless I let it speak to me in particular...'*

Another significant source of reflection over a future Germany based on Christian moral and ethical principles was the Kreisau circle, named after the estate of one of its leading members, Count von Moltke. The circle attracted interest from both Alfred Delp and Bonhoeffer and it was eventually broken up and its members arrested after the July 1944 plot. Nyugen (2014)⁴⁷ describes its powerful influence in drawing a genuinely ecumenical membership in its debates – one of the few places where Catholics and Protestants could work together on equal terms.

The Confession of Altona and the Barmen Declaration

In view of the tensions experienced between the German Christians and mainstream Church leaders, many felt that public statements were needed to clarify the position of the Church. While the Church produced a number of these statements, one of the most significant and earliest of these, and perhaps less well known than the Barmen declaration, was the Confession of Altona, produced in January 1933 in response to the tensions that had been developing within the Evangelical Church.

The Altona Confession marked the influence of Barth's theology with a specific declaration stating that although loyalty is owed to the ruling state, there remains a right to the command of God as opposed to the State which had long been lost in the history of Lutheranism. It followed the 'Bloody Sunday' six months earlier in the Hamburg suburb of Altona when a street battle between the Communists and the Nazis broke out, leaving many people dead or injured.

The Altona Confession which attracted the signatures of 213 pastors, comprised 65 theses and stressed the imperfections of humanity. There were some clear and unambiguous statements, for example *'We condemn every deification of the State. If the State poses as the master over the conscience, it becomes anti-Christian....the State can never determine the command of God for the individual in any particular circumstance'* (Article 3) and *'We condemn the widespread development of the*

⁴⁶ Bonhoeffer, D 'A greeting from the Finkelwalde seminary, October 1935' in 'The way to Freedom' (New York, Harper and Rowe, 1966 page 35

⁴⁷ Nyugen, P 'Ecumenism of Blood: the Martyrdom of Alfred Delp and Helmuth James von Moltke: Canadian Theological Review 2014 Volume 3 Issue 1

political parties into political creeds...' And *'Because we believe that God is the creator of life we must reject as sinful all contempt for life granted by God'* The Altona Confession, if less well known than the Barmen declaration of 1934, was nevertheless a significant stepping stone in the path to German Christian resistance.

A further important landmark for Christian resistance was the Barmen declaration of May 1934. There were present 39 pastors, 53 Church members, and 6 university professors. This came at a critical juncture for the German Evangelical Church. The centrist group in the Church found itself with a dilemma in seeking to reconcile the Barmen statements with the influence of the Nazi regime.

Hence the statement: *'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 becoming an organ of the State.'* (8.24)

While this was a clear statement of the division of Church and State in this and similar statements the declaration failed to make specific mention of the infiltration of Church by organs of the State, nor the persecution of groups such as the Jews and the Roma.

Busch (2010)⁴⁸ describes the dilemma for the 'centrist' members of the Evangelical Church. With their approach the 'centrists' of the Evangelical Church had placed themselves in a position which was not dissimilar from that of the German Christians. There was a firm affirmation that God's grace extended to the will and destiny of the Fatherland. Even so Niemöller considered that it was possible to stay loyal to the regime as well as to the Confessing Church. In 1933 and 1934 the tensions developing in the years from 1932 had also developed also as a result of attempts to rewrite the Bible and remove the Old Testament. Scripture was being altered for political purposes.

At the same time it should be noted that for many Church leaders, loyalty was divided as they attempted to retain their independence in spite of the many ways in which the regime tried to influence the governance of the Church. Within the *'Landeskirchen'* resistance developed under the leadership of Niemöller and Bonhoeffer. As Beech (2010)⁴⁹ points out many Churches functioned on the basis of meeting seemingly contradictory demands. And Barnes (1999)⁵⁰ comments that the struggle with the *regime* was marked by paradox *'with courageous battles fought along more cowardly ones'*

An initiative was needed which, as Barnett (1998)⁵¹ suggests, would clarify the boundary of the Gospel and political ideology. During 1933 the pressures on the

⁴⁸ Busch, E, *The Barmen Theses: then and now*: Lanham, Maryland Lexington Books(2019) page 25

⁴⁹ Beech, D. *'Between defiance and compliance – reconceptualising the 'Kirchenkampf' 1933-1945.* Birmingham Journal for Europe Vol 1, no 1. (2010) Page 2

⁵⁰ Barnes, K. *'Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Hitler's persecution of the Jews'* in Ericksen, R and Heschel, S (eds) *'Betrayal – German Churches and the Holocaust'* Minneapolis, Fortress Press (1999) page 120

⁵¹ Barnett, V, *'For the Soul of the People'* Oxford,

Court system developed as increasing numbers of Confessing Church members were prosecuted. Protests against the regime from the pulpit resulted in a large number of pastors being placed under house arrest. The conflict between loyalty to Church and State could no longer be ignored. Under the leadership of Karl Barth the Confessing Church sought to correct the dilemma faced by the 'centrists' in the German Church.

As Busch comments, many 'centrists' who took part in the Barmen synod saw themselves heading down a road of catastrophe as the Nazi persecution grew tighter. Hence the response of the Evangelical Church was not uniform and it was influenced by the complexities of the position of the Church. While the leaders of the intact '*Landeskirchen*' were in theory independent, they needed to comply with Nazi regime requirements while at the same time voicing their views on the integrity of the Church. Their precarious position could be construed as collaboration with the regime and appeared to some as contradictory behaviour. But overall the Confessing Church was complicit with what could be described as the 'social death' of numerous Jews in the light of increasing restrictions placed on their daily lives.

The essence of the Barmen declaration was that the Church could not stand on the two political pillars of Church and State but one reality, namely the Word of God. Belief in God stood alongside political beliefs and the two could not be mixed. In terms of the strength and weaknesses of the declaration, was that it⁹⁹ clearly delineated the boundaries of Christianity. Hence the third thesis included the words: '*We repudiate the false teaching that the church can turn over the form of her message and ordinances at will or according to some dominant ideological and political convictions*'.

There is an important issue to address in discussing the relevance of the declaration for the struggles and injustices of post war years. Hence the perceived relevance of the declaration as a motivating factor for a variety of Confessions across continents in the post war years. Barnett (1994)⁵², however, injects a cautionary note. In her view Barmen was above all a statement of Church identity rather than a model for future generations. In addition the declaration failed to make mention of key injustices, for example the persecution of the Jews which was gathering pace in 1934.

While it declared that the Church was free from the demands of ideology and while it gave Christians a clear choice between loyalty to God or Hitler, the declaration is open to criticism in that while it set out the boundaries of ideology and active resistance, as Barnett points out that Barmen did not prevent Pastors in Hitler's army undertaking active service. Gustav Heinemann, in resigning his synodal position, put

Oxford University Press, 1998 page 37

⁵² Barnett V '*Transcending Barmen – Confessing in Word and Deed*' Christian Century. May 11, (1994). Page 496

the issue succinctly in 1938 : '*How much have we declared unbearable, and yet we bear it...*'⁵³

Many Lutheran theologians believed that the declaration diluted traditional Lutheran theology of the two kingdoms and it is likely that many of the participants with misgivings voted in favour because of their desire to stem the advance of the German Christians. Nonetheless, in spite of these shortcomings, Barmen was at the time a source of strength for those taking part – contemporary accounts describe the outpouring of emotion for otherwise reserved delegates when the vote to adopt the declaration was taken. Even so some participants, particularly those who were Lutheran, came away with misgivings.

For Bonhoeffer the Barmen declaration, rather than being an unambiguous statement, marked the reluctance of the Church to get involved in a political struggle even if it was clear in its assertion of the separation of Church and State. He noted the 'unwanted political struggle (Bethge, 1974)⁵⁴ In Bonhoeffer's opinion the Barmen declaration was insufficiently radical. Following the declaration he wrote to Reinhold Niebuhr: '*It is high time to bring the focus back to the Sermon on the Mount...the new Church which will come into being will look very different to the opposition Church of today*'.⁵⁵ Nesson (2019)⁵⁶ refers to points on which Bonhoeffer insisted: advocacy of laws which are just, aid to victims of injustice, and perhaps most significant, civil disobedience when all else fails.

Bonhoeffer is also well known for his critique of 'cheap grace'. In his view, expressed in 1937, '*We Lutherans have gathered like eagles round the carcass of cheap grace*'.⁵⁷ True discipleship is costly – '*When Christ calls a man he bids him to come and die*'. As Hockenos (2004)⁵⁸ points out, the implication of 'cheap grace' is that the dualism of the Law and the Gospel for Lutherans could too easily lead to the view that the forgiveness of God for actions such as Germany's involvement in the Great war was all too easily given.

The Catholic Resistance to the Nazi regime and its legacy

Notwithstanding the major contributions of Barth and Bonhoeffer to the resistance movement, an account of Christian resistance to the Nazi regime is incomplete without mention of the role of the Catholic Church. It might have been a major influence in the opposition of the Churches. While Catholics constituted a third of practising Christians in the country, there were 20000 clergy in contrast to the 16000

⁵³ Koch, W '*Ein Christ lebt für Morgen - Heinemann in Dritte Reich*' - Wuppertal, Aussattverlag (1972) page 209

⁵⁴ Bethge, Eberhard '*Troubled self-interpretation and uncertain reception in the Church struggle* in Littell, F and Locke, H. (eds) '*The German Church struggle and the Holocaust*' (Wayne State University Press, 1974) pages 167-184

⁵⁵ '*Letter to Reinhold Niebuhr*' in Dietrich Bonhoeffer, London – 1933-1935 page 184

⁵⁶ Nesson, C. '*Learning from the Barmen Declaration of 1934: Theological-Ethical-PoNew Yorklitical Commentary*' Journal of Lutheran Ethics, December 2019/January 2021 Volume 19, Issue 6

⁵⁷ Bonhoeffer, D. '*The cost of discipleship*' trans R. H. Fuller (New York, Touchstone (1995) page 44

⁵⁸ Hockenos, M '*A Church divided: German Protestants confront the Nazi past*', Indiana University Press – Bloomington and Indianapolis (2004) page 72

clergy of the Protestant Church. It was also based on a much more hierarchical structure and thus in a better position to speak with a united voice. In the early stages of the Nazi regime bishops took a firm stance against membership of organisations such as the Hitler Youth but after 1933 its position became one of acquiescence with the regime, in particular after the signing of the Concordat in 1933.

The Church's attitude to the Nazi regime was confused through several factors. While Hitler had relied on the support of the Catholic Centre Party to bring him to power in 1933, the Church permitted any of its members to join the Nazi party and in some respects contradictory. Demands for loyalty to the regime were coupled with a growing persecution of members of the Catholic Church as well as a confused message from the Church. There was considerable hope placed in the signing of the 'Reichskonkordat' which led to a fear of open resistance to the regime.

For example in March 1933 the German Bishops had refused to protest against the boycott of Jewish and trade and goods called for by the regime or indeed to issue a general condemnation of the regime from the Bishop's Conference. This was in line with the signing of the Concordat in 1933, described in some quarters as a 'fools bargain'. A letter was written to Cardinal Faulhaber by a diocesan priest Alois Worm, in which he stated: *'In this period when the most extreme hatred is being ruthlessly used against the Jewish people, 99% of whom are evidently innocent, not a single Catholic newspaper has had the courage to proclaim the teaching of the Catholic catechism according to which one should not hate or persecute another human being'*.⁵⁹ In a critique of the collaborationist approach of the Austrian bishops Moritz (2002)⁶⁰ points out that they failed to speak out even though they had full knowledge of Nazi atrocities.

Nevertheless the bravery and foresight of individual Catholics was shown in various letters of protest. In addition a number of Bishops and theologians took a firm and principled stand. Bishop von Preysing of Berlin was an outspoken critic of the regime - in a sermon he declared in 1933: *'We have fallen into the hands of fools and idiots'* - although he was never arrested. Von Preysing established a network in Berlin to save Jews at risk of being deported - this was led by a remarkable Catholic laywoman, Margarete Sonner, who worked tirelessly under the direction of Preysing to arrange for emigration wherever possible. She battled with the somewhat equivocal position of clerics such as Cardinal Bertram who refused to believe the reality of the extermination policy. Phayer and Fleishner (1997)⁶¹ describe in detail her efforts and those of other remarkable Catholic women.

⁵⁹ Cited in Scholder, K. *'Die Kirchen und das Dritte Reich. Band 1. Vorgeschichte und Zeit der Illusionen 1918-1934'* Ullstein, Frankfurt am Main, (1977) page 701

⁶⁰ Moritz, S. *Gruess Gott und Heil Hitler: Katholische Kirche und Nationalsozialismus in Oesterreich* (Vienna: Picus Verlag, 2002)

⁶¹ Phayer, M and Fleishner, E *'Cries in the night – Women who challenged the Holocaust'*, Missouri, Sheed and Ward (1997) 20

Bishop von Galen was also outspoken in his criticism, in particular as the euthanasia programme developed from 1940 and his outspoken sermons may have contributed to Hitler ceasing the programme in the summer of 1941. Engelbert Krebs, the well-known and outspoken academic and theologian, spoke out on behalf of Jewish colleagues. He spoke of the need for the Church to preserve its mission of truth, justice and love.

An important figure in the Church, Cardinal Faulhaber of Munich, similar to others, showed a degree of ambivalence in his attitude to Nazism, expressing his sentiments of support to the notion of state racism at the same time as having several lengthy meetings with Hitler. In a sermon in 1933 he suggested: *'From the Churches point of view there is no objection whatsoever to racial research and race culture...Nor is there any objection to the endeavour to keep the national characteristics of a people as far as possible pure and unadulterated'*⁶² Even so in 1938 he supported the 'Anschluss' with Austria.

Faulhaber had already criticised the Weimer Republic in 1921 as 'rooted in treason'. He compared Hitler favourably with Pius XI as being united in their fight against Bolshevism. Nonetheless in later years he became an outspoken critic of the regime in his public speeches and sermons even though, as Macina (1999)⁶³ suggests he did not address specifically the persecution and extermination of the Jews. Indeed much of the Catholic Church, particularly in Bavaria, remained very nationalistic.

Dietrich (2017)⁶⁴ comments that those Catholics who did resist placed themselves in a world of danger. He suggests that *'those who rejected the Nazi Weltanschauung created a new web of relationships and a renewed sense of human identity that resonated through the remainder of the century'* This was in the context of a vacuum at the head of the Church which was still concerned with its anti-modernist and anti-Bolshevist agenda. Even so some courageous German theologians and Bishops attempted to fill the vacuum. It should also be noted that some 2600 Catholic priests were imprisoned in Dachau and 1800 clergy, mainly Polish, were murdered in the concentration camps.

Bishop Preysing of Berlin preached that *'Every person is the image of God and so every person should have the right to be loved'*. He became closely involved in the preparation of the encyclical of 1937 *'Mit brennende Sorge'* which Pius XI published after considerable pressure, perhaps because he was hearing the pleas of the German clergy and bishops. Even if the Catholic Church can be described as having an ambivalent attitude to Hitler, the scale of persecution of Catholic priests in both Germany and Poland was such that nearly 2600 priests lost their lives, including 2000 who perished in the priests barracks in Dachau concentration camp.

⁶² Cited in Lewy, G *'L'église Catholique et l'Allemagne Nazie'* (Stock, Paris, (1964) page 127

⁶³ Macina, M. *'Le Cardinal Faulhaber et l'antisemitisme nazi des années trente'* Bulletin trimestriel de la Fondation Auschwitz, no 64, juillet-septembre (1999), Bruxelles pages 63-74

⁶⁴ Dietrich, D *'Human Rights in the Catholic tradition'* Routledge, London (2017) page 47

Catholic resistance was vocal in opposing the euthanasia programme 'Aktion T4' - which started in 1939 and which resulted in the murder of 70000 innocent victims. These affected directly Church run institutions and were publicly opposed by prominent figures such as Bishop Clemens von Galen who led protests against the policy in 1941. In 1943 there followed an open condemnation by the German bishops who extended their protest to denounce the killing of disarmed prisoners, among many other groups. The Jesuit Alfred Delp also denounced the actions of the regime from his pulpit in Munich where he was a parish priest from 1941.

At a time when up to 6000 Catholics were signing apostasy forms each week a few individuals stood out for their moral courage in resisting the regime, for example the Austrian farmer Franz Jaegerstaetter who was executed following his refusal to join the German Army on moral grounds as well as Fr Franz Reinisch, the Pallottine priest who alone out of 17000 Catholic priests serving in the Army refused to make the oath of loyalty having been drafted into the army even though he was at odds with the official position of the Church. Just before his execution he wrote: *'My life's sacrifice must be a great hymn to the dignity of man, inner freedom, maturing towards the freedom of God's children'*⁶⁵

The Carmelite nun and future saint Edith Stein made an impassioned plea to Pius XI in 1933 which also sent a strong message:⁶⁶ Other clerics took more compromising attitudes. Marianus Vetter, a priest from Berlin tried to reconcile Nazism and Catholicism, describing Pius XI as the 'Führer' of Christianity, also described him as the one person who clearly understood the dynamics of the era. At a Mass in Berlin celebrating the signing of the Concordat, numerous members of the Nazi party were present in their uniforms and the 'Horst Wesel' song was sung. And up to 1945 many Catholic bishops sent telegrams to Hitler on the occasion of his birthday. In neighbouring Austria, after March 1938 a part of Germany, the Bishops had unanimously called for voters to support the *Anschluss* and National Socialism. In Vienna Cardinal Innitzer had already by 1938 arranged for the Nazi flag to be flown on St Stephan's Cathedral.

The attitude and actions of Pius XI and the Vatican officials in the early 1930's as well as the actions of Pius XII and in particular his cautious pronouncements in relation to the Nazi regime have been the subject of considerable controversy. Dietrich (2002)⁶⁷ points to what he describes as the far reaching and institutionalised anti-Semitism which alongside a hatred of Bolshevism, influenced both Pius XI and Pius XII. There is no extant reply to the plea of Edith Stein cited above. This may be due to the view in the Vatican prior to 1939 that it was more important to uphold the Concordat.

Nevertheless pressure on Pius XI was such that an encyclical *'Mit brennender Sorge'* was finally agreed in 1937, smuggled into Germany and read in all Churches.

⁶⁵ <https://schoenstatt.com/heroes-of-schoenstatt/franz-reinisch-a-martyr...>

⁶⁶ Stein, E 'Letter to Pope Pius XI' Centre for Dialogue and Prayer in Oswiecim (www.cdlim.pl)

⁶⁷ Dietrich, D. 'Antisemitism and the Institutional Catholic Church' Holocaust and Genocide Studies Volume 16 no 3, Winter 2002, pages 415-426

The Pope included the words: *'Whoever exalts race, or the people, or the state, and divinises them to an idolatrous level, perverts an order of the world created by God,'* It is noteworthy that even in 1933 when enforced sterilisation of 'life unworthy of life' was implemented there was little protest by the Pope of this initiative – perhaps because efforts were focused on securing agreement to the Concordat by Cardinal Pacelli.

'Writing as Resistance' - the Protest of Women Philosophers

The Protestant and Catholic figures discussed so far were not the only voices of Christian resistance. Brenner (1997)⁶⁸ points to the powerful contribution in the writings of women who were active resisters in the early years of the war – Simone Weil, Etty Hillesum, Anne Frank, as well as Edith Stein, whose appeal to the Pope is discussed above. While all were Jewish they integrated a Jewish humanist perspective with a Christian moral standpoint. For Brenner they represent a *'Weltanschauung that reflects principled determination not to yield to dehumanising terror'*⁶⁹

Brenner points to the cultural zeitgeist of post emancipation of Western Jewry as a common theme of their writings during the war in expressing hope for the moral and spiritual rehabilitation of humanity in the midst of darkness.

Etty Hillesum, the increasingly well-known philosopher who stayed voluntarily at the Westerbork deportation camp until her death in 1943, kept a diary of her thoughts as the deportations continued. In the misery of the Westerbork camp Hillesum took a more realistic view of the limits of divine power when she came to realise that God could not save us and that instead we must save God. *'I shall try to help you, God to stop my strength ebbing away...You cannot help us but we must help you and defend Your dwelling place inside unto the last.'*⁷⁰ Hence we see Hillesum making a commitment to care for a God who is suffering at the fate of humanity. She saw human adaptation to evil as the fundamental problem which needed to be addressed: *'We human beings cause monstrous conditions, but precisely because we cause them we soon learn to adapt ourselves to them. Only if we can no longer adapt ourselves, only if, deep inside, we rebel against every kind of evil, will we be able to put a stop to it...'*⁷¹

Edith Stein, who became a Carmelite nun, while hiding in the convent in Holland where she had been moved for own safety, wrote to her superior shortly before her deportation: *: 'I beg permission to offer myself to the Heart of Jesus as a sacrificial expiration for the sake of true peace, if possible without another world war, so that*

⁶⁸ Brenner, R *'Writing as Resistance- Four Women Confronting the Holocaust'* Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania University Press (1997)

⁶⁹ Brenner, page 20

⁷⁰ Hillesum, Etty *Etty – a diary, 1941 to 1943* Smelik, K, (ed) trans Arnold J Pomerans, Jonathan Cape, London, 1983 Page 152

⁷¹ 'Etty' Page 308

*another world order may be established, because it is already the twelfth hour*⁷² She saw the need for the need for religion to be involved in politics: *'The deeper one is drawn to God, the more he wants to go out of himself – out into the world, that is, to carry the divine life into it'*⁷³

Perhaps the most significant aspect of Stein's witness was her desire to describe a fusion between the Jewish and Christian faiths. She saw no conflict between the Christian faith and the Jewish people, believing that the Cross was now being born by the Jewish people. The fusion by Stein of Jewish destiny with Christian belief is perhaps the most significant legacy of Stein.

Anne Frank, in hiding in Amsterdam, took a more optimistic view: *'I despair over the ideals, dreams and cherished hopes that rise within us, only to meet the horrible truth and be shattered...how lovely to think that no one need to wait a moment, as we can start now...changing the world by treating everyone with kindness'*.

Simone Weil, in exile wrote from a sanatorium in Kent where she had begun a hunger strike in solidarity with the sufferings of the French people, wrote: *'We are living in times that have no precedent...today we must have the saintliness demanded by the present moment, a new saintliness itself without precedent. The world needs saints who have genius, just as plague stricken town needs doctors'*.⁷⁴

Notwithstanding her focus on saintliness Simone Weil had a long record of resistance to an oppressive regime. In 1932 she led various workers protests and was steadfast in her support for the resistance to the Nazi regime. She also visited Spain in the same year. She wrote to denounce totalitarianism, nationalism and racism.

In summary, the freedom of expression which each of the four women found was both spiritual and intellectual even if it ended in the case of three of them in the gas chambers in Auschwitz. In the words of Tillich, the four authors discovered the 'courage to be' *'which is rooted in the God who appears when God has disappeared in the anxiety of doubt'*.⁷⁵ In this scenario the God which represents hope and justice is no longer present. God exists in the human courage to act as if God existed. God can be reaffirmed even if his presence cannot be felt.

The Legacy of the Christian Resistance in a contemporary context

How might we describe the legacy of German Christian resistance to the Nazi regime? And what was its contribution in the context of the overall resistance to the regime? Does the somewhat mixed picture of resistance and compromise invalidate the claim that there are key lessons for modern times from the Christian

⁷² Cited in Herbstrith, W – *'Edith Stein - a biography'* trans Bernard Bonowitz San Francisco, Ignatius Press (1985) page 168

⁷³ Stein, E. *Selbstbildnis in Briefen I* – (1916-1934. Edith Steins Werke, Bd XIII (Druten: Der Maas und Waler/Freiburg-Basel-Vienna: Herder (1976) Letter 43, Page 54

⁷⁴ Weil, S *'Oppression and Liberty'* London, Routledge (2001)

⁷⁵ Tillich, P. *'The Courage to Be'* London, James Nisbet (1961) page 180

resistance in Germany ? The legacy is mixed and somewhat complex. It should be pointed out that Christians by no means had a monopoly on resistance to the regime. Communist resistance was particularly marked from 1933 onwards. Grashoff (2021)⁷⁶ in his analysis of Communist resistance suggests that up to 20000 Communist resisters were executed or interned in concentration camps. The White Rose movement in 1942 was another example of courageous resistance based on Christian principles, if not overtly religious in their motivation.

Nonetheless it can be claimed that both Barth and Bonhoeffer's actions as well as the Barmen declaration continued to influence post war thinking even if in the case of Bonhoeffer his legacy was posthumous. In the years following the end of the war Barth was sceptical about the post war anti Communist narrative. Soon after the end of the war he declared: *'If the human spirit was not controlled in everyday life, then it goes to the devil, despite and amidst all the works of culture, then the Schiller and Goethe homes with all their solemn memories cannot prevent the possibility and reality of a Buchenwald in their immediate vicinity'*⁷⁷

Tietz (2021) comments on Barth's post war frustration that German guilt was insufficiently articulated by many in the Evangelical Church and that this left a mixed legacy in the Church's ability to fight for a new definition of morality in the post war period. He continued to articulate his concerns about the boundaries of Church and State and in a series of lectures: *'Christengemeinde und Burgergemeinde'* in 1946 and emphasised the need for the Christian Community to know more *'in as much as its insight into arrogance and the sinfulness of human beings leads to knowledge about the necessity of an established human order...the Christian community knows how dangerous human beings are and how endangered they are through themselves'*⁷⁸

In Barth's view, therefore, if God and his people are reconciled in the spiritual kingdom, then the implication was that Christians should need to act as disciples of Christ on earth. This view spanned both the earthly and divine kingdoms and as such it was in contradiction to the traditional Lutheran doctrine of divine orders and the two kingdoms. For Barth a Christian state could be developed on the basis of the Christian duty to act to influence the political process. The dilemma of traditional Lutheran teaching was that God ensured that all sinners were forgiven without the need to change their sinful behaviour, so giving rise to a belief that forgiveness was not necessarily based on repentance.

The legacy of Barth's writings can be described as clearly setting out the responsibility of the Christian Community to ensure that the State acts with a sense of moral purpose in the context of many in the Church failing to acknowledge their moral

⁷⁶ Grashoff, U. *'Outwitting the Gestapo ? German Communist Resistance between Loyalty and Betrayal'* Journal of Contemporary History - Volume 57, Issue 2, April 23rd 2021

⁷⁷ Cited in Tietz, C (Barnett, V, trans) *'Karl Barth, a life in conflict'* Oxford University Press, Oxford (2021)page

⁷⁸ Barth, K *Christengemeinde und Burgergemeinde in* Rechtfertigung und Recht. page 51

responsibilities. Keedus⁷⁹ reminds us of the legacy of Barth as a critic of nationalism and capitalism as being responsible for historical catastrophes of the 20th century as well as being a post-modernist and a post war champion of democracy even risking his academic career to speak out in accordance with his principles.

Perhaps a significant aspect of the post war legacy of both Bonhoeffer and Barth is their legacy to the growing post war awareness of the need to develop a commitment to world peace in the wake of so suffering during two bitterly fought world wars. As early as 1934, in his ecumenical role at the Fano conference in 1934 Bonhoeffer laid down a clear marker: *'Peace means giving oneself completely to God's commandment, wanting no security, but in faith and obedience to Christ laying the destiny of the nations in the hands of almighty God'*⁸⁰ Hence the legacy of Bonhoeffer's contribution to the Fano declaration can be seen as significant, for example his call to action: *'Who will call us to peace so that the world will hear – will have to hear'*.⁸¹

This view has been corroborated by Victoria Barnett who suggests that the revisionist views such as those expressed by Eric Metaxas who puts a less 'radical' view of Bonhoeffer forward miss the mark. She suggests: *'Metaxas has a very shaky grasp of the political, theological, and ecumenical history of the period'* (Barnett, 2010)⁸² The question of whether Bonhoeffer was a 'traditional' Evangelical at heart has also been discussed by Richard Weikart in his article *'Scripture and Myth in Dietrich Bonhoeffer'*. Weikart (1997) goes so far as to suggest that *'his theology shares "elements of deception common in the main currents of 20th century philosophy"'*. (Weikart, (1997)⁸³

In *'The Battle for Bonhoeffer'* Stephen Haynes describes the often ill-tempered and bitter disputes to claim and reclaim the legacy of Bonhoeffer with particular reference to his disputed legacy in the United States. (Haynes, 2018)⁸⁴ He points to the call to Bonhoeffer's legacy cited by George Bush in the months preceding the invasion of Iraq in 2003.

It is perhaps the legacy of Bonhoeffer's later writings from prison for which he will be best remembered and in particular his conception of 'Religionless Christianity'. This concept, described in a few letters towards the end of his life, put forward the notion that Christianity, of being concerned with the challenges of everyday life, was all too readily associated with 'religion'. Instead of Christ being present only in the Church, Bonhoeffer's later view suggested that Jesus is present in the daily life and challenges experienced by each individual.

⁷⁹ Keedus, L *'The New World of Karl Barth: Rethinking the Philosophical and Political Legacies of a Theologian'* The European Legacy, Volume 25 (2020) Issue 2 pages 167-185

⁸⁰ Bethge, R *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: a brief life*. 33-35 Fortress Press, Augsburg (2004) pages 33-35

⁸¹ Bethge, R Op cit

⁸² Barnett, V. Review of Eric Metaxas in *Association of Contemporary Church Historians Newsletter* 16,3 (September 2010)

⁸³ Weikart, R *'Myth of Dietrich Bonhoeffer- is his Theology Evangelical ?'* (1997) International Scholars Publications, US (1997) page 139

⁸⁴ Haynes, S. *'The battle for Bonhoeffer'* Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan (2018)

This was a key theme taken up by John T. Robinson's 'Honest to God', which proved to be one of the most popular religious books in the 1960's. Macleod (2007) suggests that this was a key influence in the contemporary religious environment.⁸⁵ Hooton (2020)⁸⁶ suggests that Bonhoeffer challenges us to confront the traditional 'binaries' of religion and non-religion and instead looking to 'the one realm of the Christ reality the *'Christuswirklichkeit'*. In his later thought Bonhoeffer came to the conclusion that life had to be lived as if there was no God – *'the God that is with us is the God that forsakes us (Mark 15, 34)'*⁸⁷

At a time when religion may be seen as a belief system distant from everyday life, the concept of 'Religionless Christianity' can be seen as a timely reminder that the mores of everyday life cannot be separated from the calls of the Christian message. Bonhoeffer's earlier focus on the Sermon of the Mount can be seen as key drivers for the morality of everyday behaviour. It is also important to note that 'Religionless Christianity' does not necessarily imply the 'Death of God', a notion put forward by William Hamilton and others in the mid 1960's.

The notion of 'religionless Christianity' also responds to the argument that a Christian legacy is irrelevant at a time of growing secularisation. Paul Tillich (1988) in a posthumous work, points to the 'triumph of autonomous knowledge' which is at risk of superseding religious knowledge. In this context Christ comes to be seen as a historical person rather than a force for justice and peace in the world. Tillich reminds us that *'Faith becomes one emotion among others, or a lower level of cognitive apprehension'*⁸⁸

To return to Bonhoeffer, his legacy of transnationalism through his numerous ecumenical journeys stands in contrast to the narrow nationalism of Nazi Germany. Clements (2022)⁸⁹ suggests that international ecumenism was seen as 'Un-German'. Nonetheless, in regard to Bonhoeffer, while it ought to be straightforward to regard his legacy as an example to justify a commitment to peace as well as post war liberal democracy, the reality is more complex. The publication of the biography by Eric Metaxas produced a storm of protest from many scholars who argued that Metaxas had tried to fit Bonhoeffer to an agenda of the American New Right by linking Bonhoeffer's theology with American evangelical theology.

The dispute over Bonhoeffer's legacy is significant in that it can be adapted to suit opposite ends of the political spectrum - in particular it can be used to justify authoritarian regimes. For example, in the early 2000's Charles Colson used the 'Cost of Discipleship' as a justification for standing up against a regime perceived as too liberal. In this climate Bonhoeffer can be used to justify movements such as the

⁸⁵ Macleod, H. *'The religious crisis of the 1960's'* Oxford University Press, Oxford (2007) Page 84

⁸⁶ Hooton, P *'Bonhoeffer's Religionless Christianity in its Christological context'* Lexington Books (Fortress Academic (2020)

⁸⁷ Bonhoeffer, D *Letters and Papers from Prison*, Op Cit page 360 (16 July, 1944)

⁸⁸ Tillich, P. *'The Spiritual Situation in our Technical Society'* Mercer University Press (1988) Page 34

⁸⁹ Clements, K *'Appointments with Bonhoeffer – Personal Faith and Public Responsibility in a Fragmenting World'* London TandT Clark (2022) Page 90

anti-abortion campaign in the United States and other movements where⁹⁰ Hence the potentially controversial link between Bonhoeffer's writings and the American evangelical tradition.

Another difficulty in considering the post war legacy of Bonhoeffer is that the immediate post war years in Germany, were marked by controversy rather than reconciliation. Bonhoeffer's radical call to discipleship through his concept of 'cheap grace' and its call for persons marred by the belief of more conservative clergy that justification through faith was sufficient to assure forgiveness. Hockenos⁹¹ points out that the 'law-gospel dualism' provided an easy route to claiming forgiveness of sins committed in the past decade, rather than focusing on repentance as a clear moral guide for the future. Hence the Treysa Conference in Stuttgart in October 1945 was seen by some observers as an example of in-fighting and a failure of the Church to acknowledge its collective guilt at a time when it could and should have provided a moral compass for the post war years in Germany. Did the Catholic Church set any more of a moral example after the war? The proposed statement of the Bishops that the Church should have been less silent was vetoed by the Vatican in 1945.

Together with the legacy of Barth and Bonhoeffer, there remains the question of relevance of the Barmen Declaration for modern times. While it might be seen as outdated or irrelevant in the world of the 2020's, it laid the groundwork for a view of the separation of Church and State in the context of an authoritarian regime. Bonhoeffer had considered that the declaration, while it defined the division between Church and State, was insufficiently radical.

It implied without stating specifically that Hitler was not a revelation from God and that state authority had its limits. In gaining the support of those present through a compromise which was failure to call for action to accompany its tenets and more importantly, it had the result of failing to condemn the 'social death' of the Jewish population, as Karl Barth regretted later. It also did not explicitly commit the Churches to a programme of resistance, which was understandable in the circumstances. There was a mixed reception of the declaration by some Lutheran pastors who did not feel that they merited criticism for their actions - this dampened its effect on the immediate post war period.

The legacy of Christian resistance in Germany during the Nazi period has a particular relevance in the context of the ideology which has provided the backdrop to the conflict in Ukraine, in particular the influence of the theologian and philosopher Ivan Ilyin. Sometimes described as 'Putin's philosopher', Ilyin was a theorist with Fascist leanings. In essence he argued that the world was corrupt and needed redemption from a nation which would be 'unsoiled'.

⁹⁰ Colson, C. *'Should we disobey Our Government ?* Breakpoint, 28 November, 2000

⁹¹ Hockenos (page 73)

Snyder (2020)⁹² points to the '*quasi mystical belief in the destiny of nations and rulers*' which transcend the rule of law and leads to the growth of far right movements. In this way the fascism of the 1920s and 1930's can be reinvented in the context of the 21st century. He further points to the 'fact free reality' of modern right wing politics. In Ilyin's view the divine act of creation was underpinned by a mistake by God which the modern state had to correct through violence if required.

Hence Ilyin built on the concept of 'Holy Rus' in which Ukraine is seen as an integral part, needs to be brought about through violent means if required. Lawlessness can be justified to bring about the fulfilment of this 'sacred' requirement. While Ilyin died a relatively obscure death in 1954, he was reinterred with State honours in Moscow in 2005. In advance of the Ukrainian invasion Putin provided his military commanders with copies of Ilyin's works which have been endorsed by Patriarch Kirill as Head of the Russian Orthodox Church. Ilyin's thoughts find an echo in the philosophies of the American far right. It can be argued that the justification of lawlessness, as witnessed in the assault on Capitol Hill on 6th January 2021, is an example of this trend.

These types of world view can be seen as linked to conspiracy theories which are adapted to particular circumstances, for example the 'depraved West' or the lost Presidential election of 2020. Panin (2022)⁹³ points to the importance of conspiracies in fuelling the ideologies of modern Russian ideology

The influence of a Catholic legacy has been marred by the controversies over the knowledge and actions of Pope Pius XII with particular relevance to his actions over the Holocaust. The machinations and double dealings of prominent clerics such as von Faulhaber did little to advance the cause of Catholic r⁹⁴esistance. While his defenders argue that prudence and discretion was need to prevent further persecution, particularly in the context of the 2000 priests imprisoned in Dachau, this has marred the reputation of the Catholic Church for its failure to provide a provide an unambiguous message. Following the opening of the Vatican Archives it is now certain that Pius XII had full knowledge both of the massacres in the Ukraine and the concentration camps but he refused to issue a public denunciation of the suffering of the Jews. It was not until 1998 under the Papacy of John Paul II that the document '*We remember – a reflection on the Shoah*'⁹⁵ acknowledged the failure of many Catholics to speak out against the Nazi regime.

Moritz (2002) describes the collaborationist approach of the Austrian bishops during the war and their failure to speak out even though they had full knowledge of Nazi atrocities towards the Jews and other groups, for example gypsies. Instead it was left to courageous clerics such as Bishop von Preysing, Franz Reinisch, Alfred Delp, as well as the few lay people such as Jaegerstatter to provide a clear and unambiguous

⁹² Snyder, T: '*The Road to Unfreedom: Russia, Europe, America*' Bodley Head, London

⁹³ Panin, S. '*Conspiracy Theories in Russia: A search for identity, religious world views, and Russian politics* Religion Compass, July 2022 <http://doi.org/10.1111/rec3.12446>

⁹⁵ '*We remember – a reflection on the Shoah*' Apostolic Letter of Pope John Paul II – Vatican 12th March 1998

moral stance against the regime. The reported assistance of highly placed clerics to Nazi war criminals who escaped after the war is the subject of ongoing research after the relevant archives were opened to historians in 2020.

Conclusion

The key question remains – were the Churches too focused on compromise rather than active resistance to the Nazi regime so that they could not provide a moral example for the post war world ? Was the Nazi ideology so ingrained in the life of the Churches that it is not credible to describe a Christian opposition ? Did the Confessing Church provide a response which might serve as a post war legacy ?

Erickson and Heschel (1999)⁹⁶ take the view that the regime's infiltration of the Churches compromised their ability to provide a moral legacy after the war. They cite three well known theologians – Kittel, Althaus and Hirsch, who were complicit with German Christian ideology. They also suggest that the term *Bekennende Kirche* reflects more on the internal divisions of the Protestant Churches rather than a united resistance to the regime.

It was common practice to place the swastika on the altar as well as on the steeples of many Churches, including Catholic Churches and those of the *Bekehrte Kirche*. Both Bonhoeffer and Barth remained critical of the ease with which many pastors were able to adapt to the German Christian ideology. In addition many perpetrators of the Holocaust had no problem in describing themselves as Christian – Protestant, Catholic or Orthodox, even if they knew that these acts of killing were wrong. Many military chaplains were complicit in these acts and the Catholic Church did not sanction those responsible for the murders by mass shootings from 1941 onwards.

For some Catholic priests their actions drew on a long tradition of Christian anti-Semitism. Also the immediate post war period provided an opportunity for pastors who should have known otherwise to claim ignorance of the extent of the killings. For example Boyd and Patel (2022)⁹⁷, in their analysis of a German village, Obersdorf in Bavaria, describe the lengths to which authorities went to ensure that the local Church was filled with Nazi flags with the parish priest being complicit.

Even if the few acts of resistance can be attributed to significant figures such as Bonhoeffer and others in the Confessing Church, as well as the few Catholic clergy and Bishops, it can be argued that notwithstanding the difference in time and circumstances, there are key messages from the Christian resistance in Germany which may serve as a moral compass for modern times at a time when Christian ideology can be twisted to support a one-sided and biased interpretation of the Bible and the Christian message of the Sermon on the Mount .

⁹⁶ Ericksen, R and Heschel, S, *'The German Churches and the Holocaust'*, in Stone, D, ed: The Historiography of the Holocaust. London, Palgrave Press. 2004 296-318

⁹⁷ Boyd, J and Patel, A: *'A village in the Third Reich – how ordinary lives were transformed by the rise of fascism'* London, Elliott and Thompson (2022) 133-246

Recent interest in the legacy of Bonhoeffer, has provided a focus for what Christian resistance to totalitarian regimes might provide. Indeed Bonhoeffer had posed a key question from the solitude of his prison cell when he asked a blunt but pertinent question in a letter to Eberhard Bethge: 'Are we still of any use?' In his later and profound letters from prison he posed the dilemma of 'religionless Christianity' in a question as to how Christ might be seen as Lord in the context of a religionless world. He asked if the '*Bildungsbuergetum*' - the bourgeois 'curators of virtue' of the 19th century who followed the Kantian humanist tradition were at fault for failing to turn their instincts into direct resistance and support for the Jews.

A further question remains - following Bonhoeffer's frank admission - have we become anaesthetised to any form of prophetic message? Or, to put it more bluntly, is anyone listening to the messages from resisters nearly 80 years ago? Are they 'still of any use?' A degree of pessimism about the Christian legacy was voiced by Alfred Delp, the Jesuit who was active in the resistance movement and passionate about his opposition to the regime and who was imprisoned and executed shortly before Bonhoeffer. In his letters from Tegel prison (where he was at the same time as Bonhoeffer) he wrote in a prophetic passage before his execution: '*At some point in the future the honest historian will have some bitter things to say about the contribution made by the Churches to the creation of the mass-mind, of collectivism, dictatorships, and so on.*'⁹⁸ Delp was linked with the Kreisau circle which met to discuss the future of a post war Germany from a Christian perspective. He brought an important perspective in expounding the virtues of Catholic social teaching based on the encyclicals of Leo XIII, much to the surprise of the Socialist members of the circle. He was closely associated with Count von Moltke who had been tried alongside him and sentenced to death for sinister 're-Christianising intentions'.

Thomas Merton, writing in 1962 to introduce Alfred Delp's writings from prison described Delp as providing '*a penetrating diagnosis of a devastated, gutted, faithless society in which man is rapidly losing his humanity because he has become practically incapable of belief...the voice in the wilderness is becoming fainter and soon will not be heard at all*'⁹⁹ In his critique of the Catholic Church Delp also included the pious 'homines religiosi' of the 19th century in his explanation of why the Churches had been so spineless in the Nazi era.

In the context of these concerns, can the Barmen declaration discussed above still be seen as providing a moral and ethical framework within which those Christians as well as others concerned with the fate of our world can use as their example? With its careful language and failure to mention the fate of Jews and other minorities is difficult to see it as a moral beacon in combatting the ideologies current nearly 90 years later - for example the growth of the New Right, as well as 'Trumpism' and the ideology of figures such as Ivan Ilyin. In spite of its limitations

⁹⁸ Delp, Alfred, SJ '*The task in front of us*' Prison Writings (Bloomsbury Publishing Co Ltd, reprint Orbis Books, Maryknoll, NY 2004 page 23

⁹⁹ Merton, Thomas in '*The Prison Meditations of Alfred Delp* (Muriwai Books 2017) page 13

in condemning specific authoritarian policies, the declaration may still serve as a template in defining the limits to the relationship between Church and State and as such it may well yet serve a useful purpose for the future.

Is the 'voice in the wilderness' growing fainter, as Merton asks in such a pertinent way ? Overall, it can be argued that German Christian resistance to the Nazi regime, in spite of its shortcomings and compromises, still provides a model on which resistance to authoritarian regimes can be based. Even so there remain difficulties in seeing it as a beacon for future public policy. In addition it fails to address the modern phenomenon of anti-semitism and other prejudices.

The Christian resistance had few if any answers to the development of an increasingly 'religionless' and 'Godless' society which may not be receptive to a Christian message. As Pope Francis (2019)¹⁰⁰ has pointed out, the most significant challenge to hearing the message is the 'culture of resistance' which he has described as the major challenge to. Nearly a hundred years later, a renewed moral framework of resistance, drawing its inspiration from the Christian example in the Third Reich is needed if trends in the rise of authoritarianism, the 'Christofascism' as well as the 'New Right' are to be addressed for the future. In this way the legacy of Barth, Bonhoeffer, Delp and numerous other individuals can be suitably remembered and honoured.

¹⁰⁰ Pope Francis '*Say no to the culture of indifference*' Meditation in the Chapel of Domus Sanctae Marthae 7 7 January 2019 Dicastero per la Communicatione – Libreria Editrice Vaticana 2019

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¹ Besier, G 'The Churches and National Socialism between Hitler's religious equivocation and Rosenberg's myth: Ambiguities, Fascination and Self-Assertion' in Nykvist, M, Gudmundsson, D and Maurits, A (eds) *Classic in Northern European Church History over 500 years: Essays in honour of Anders Jarlert*. Frankfurt/M: Peter Lang (2017)

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¹ Hillesum, Etty *Etty – a diary, 1941 to 1943* Smelik, K, (ed) trans Arnold J Pomerans, Jonathan Cape, London, 1983

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