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William S. Skiles

Regent University, wsskiles@gmail.com

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Cover Page Footnote

This article is adapted from a chapter in my doctoral dissertation, *Preaching to Nazi Germany: The Confessing Church on National Socialism, the Jews, and the Question of Opposition*. I would like to thank Frank Biess, Deborah Hertz, and the anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments on this article. This research was made possible in part by a research grant from the Leo Baeck Institute and the Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst.

Protests from the Pulpit: The Confessing Church and the Sermons of World War II

William Skiles

Historians of the German churches in the Nazi period have closely examined the conflicts and controversies between the Protestant churches and the Nazi state, as well as within the churches themselves.¹ Yet the approach of most historians has focused on the institutions, their leaders, and their persecution by the Nazi regime, leaving the most elemental task of the pastor—that is, preaching—largely unexamined. In this article, I will offer the novel approach of examining the messages of the Confessing Church through the sermons its pastors preached Sunday after Sunday, to gain a unique perspective of the religious milieu of Nazi Germany from the vantage point of the pulpit. I will provide an in-depth analysis of sermons delivered specifically during World War II to understand how Confessing Church pastors preached the gospel amid the uncertainty, anxiety, and despair of the war years. In short, if a German were to walk into a Protestant church on any given Sunday during World War II, and listen attentively to a Confessing Church pastor deliver a sermon, what kinds of messages would he or she hear about the Nazi regime?

The Confessing Church (*die Bekennende Kirche*) emerged amid the chaos in the Protestant churches after Adolf Hitler and the Nazis came to power in January 1933. The success of National Socialism throughout Germany translated to profound changes in the churches as well. The increasing popularity of the pro-Nazi faction in the Protestant churches, the German Christian movement (*die Deutsche Christen*), encouraged Hitler to unify the German Protestant churches in one Reich Church (*Reichskirche*) with German-Christian leadership. The German Christian movement sought to adapt Christianity to National Socialist principles, to “update” the religion to

William Skiles is Assistant Professor of History in the College of Arts and Sciences at Regent University, Virginia Beach, Virginia.

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¹ See Victoria Barnett, *For the Soul of the People: Protestant Protest against Hitler* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); Arthur Cochrane, *The Church's Confession under Hitler* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962); John Conway, *The Nazi Persecutions of the Churches, 1933-1945* (Vancouver: Regent College, 1968); Wolfgang Gerlach, *And the Witnesses were Silent: The Confessing Church and the Persecution of the Jews*, trans. and ed. Victoria Barnett (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000); Robert Ericksen and Susannah Heschel, *Betrayal: German Churches and the Holocaust* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999); Ernst Christian Helmreich, *The German Churches under Hitler: Background, Struggle, and Epilogue* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1979); Otto Dov Kulka and Paul R. Mendes-Flohr, eds., *Judaism and Christianity under the Impact of National Socialism* (Jerusalem: The Historical Society of Israel and the Zalman Shazar Center for Jewish History, 1987); Günter Lewy, *The Catholic Church and Nazi Germany* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1964); Franklin Littell and Hubert Locke, eds., *The German Church Struggle and the Holocaust* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1974); Kurt Meier, *Kirche und Judentum: die Haltung der evangelischen Kirche zur Judenpolitik des Dritten Reiches* (Halle [Saale]: Veb Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1968); Klaus Scholder, *The Churches and the Third Reich*, vol. 1, *Preliminary History and the Time of Illusions, 1918-1934*, and vol. 2, *The Year of Disillusionment: 1934. Barmen and Rome*, trans. John Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987-88).

suit Nazi ideological and racial precepts, to rid Christianity of Jewish elements, and even to deny church membership and leadership to Christians of Jewish descent.² Many within the Protestant churches would not abide this adulteration of the faith, and in September 1933, Pastor Martin Niemöller of the Berlin suburb of Dahlem organized the Pastors' Emergency League (*Pfarrernotbund*) in response, galvanizing a membership of 7,000 Protestant pastors (of a total 18,000 in Germany).³ Not a year later this movement would become the Confessing Church, an organization committed to halting any National Socialist infringements into Christian theology and practice. The Nazi failure to fully coordinate or align the Protestant churches meant a degree of freedom for Confessing Church pastors to criticize the Nazi regime, albeit, as we will see, often disguised in Christian references or imagery.⁴

To examine the messages of Confessing Church pastors in World War II, I have searched archives, libraries, and rare bookstores throughout Germany for sermons that I could confirm were delivered by Confessing Church pastors. I have found 255 sermons—scattered throughout Europe and the United States—written and delivered by 14 different pastors.⁵ A few of the pastors are easily recognizable by an English-speaking audience, such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Heinrich Grüber, but most are unknown. The majority of sermons were published either during the war or soon thereafter; 79 sermons have remained unpublished to this day. These sermons were not only preached out in the open in German society, but also in concentration camps (22 sermons), in an underground seminary (12 sermons), over the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) to the German people (13 sermons), and to sympathetic congregations living abroad (17 sermons). Though we cannot make a judgment about how representative these sermons are of all Confessing Church sermons in this period, they offer a unique and, up until now, overlooked perspective of Confessing Church criticisms from the pulpit.

² See Doris Bergen, *Twisted Cross: The German Christian Movement in the Third Reich* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina Press, 1996); Kurt Meier, *Die Deutschen Christen: Das Bild einer Bewegung im Kirchenkampf des Dritten Reiches* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1964); and Hans-Joachim Sonne, *Die politische Theologie der Deutschen Christen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1982).

³ Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 5.

⁴ See Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 181-185; Peter Hoffmann, *The History of German Resistance, 1933-1945*, 3rd ed., trans. Richard Barry (Ithaca, NY: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996), 13; and Ian Kershaw, *Hitler, the Germans, and the Final Solution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 166.

⁵ Hans Asmussen, *Gelegen oder Ungelegen: Predigten* (Stuttgart: Schwaben Verlag, 1947); Karl Barth, *Fürchte Dich Nicht! Predigten aus den Jahren 1934 bis 1948* (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1949); Friedrich von Bodelschwingh, *Lebendig und Frei, 2. Folge* (Bethel bei Bielefeld: Verlagshandlung der Anstalt Bethel, 1939); Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Theological Education Underground, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, vol. 15 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), Kindle edition; *Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Conspiracy and Imprisonment, 1940-1945*, vol. 16 of *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006); Adolf Brandmeyer, ed., *Kirchliche Verkündigung unter Frauen und Müttern: Predigten, Ansprachen, Vorträge und Andachten* (Gütersloh: Verlag C. Bertelsmann, 1940); Otto Dibelius, *Predigten* (Berlin-Dahlem: Verlag die Kirche, 1952); Friedrich Forell, Papers of the Newcomers Christian Fellowship, Special Collections, MSC 358, University of Iowa Library; Helmut Gollwitzer, „*Wir dürfen hören...*“ *Predigten* (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1941); Heinrich Grüber, *Leben an der Todeslinie. Dachauer Predigten* (Berlin: Kreuz-Verlag, 1965); Franz Hildebrandt, Papers of Franz Hildebrandt, 9251.53/54, National Library of Scotland; Confessing Church Files, 766/36-38, 50/424, 628/49, 766/10, Evangelisches Zentral Archiv, Berlin, Germany (EZA); Martin Niemöller, *Dachau Sermons*, trans. Robert H. Pfeiffer (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1946); Martin Niemöller, ed., *Das Aufgebrochene Tor: Predigten und Andachten gefangener Pfarrer im Konzentrationslager Dachau* (München: Neu Verlag, 1946); Hermann Sasse, *Zeugnisse: Erlanger Predigten und Vorträge vor Gemeinden 1933-1944* (Erlangen: Martin Luther-Verlag, 1979); Hans von Soden, *Wahrheit in Christus: Zwölf Predigten* (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1947); and Dean Stroud, ed., *Preaching in Hitler's Shadow* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013).

Despite the division of Confessing Church pastors from the Reich Church, we must keep in mind that they had a wide-range of perceptions about the Nazi regime. As Victoria Barnett has argued, “The only thing all Confessing Church Christians had in common was their opposition to the absolute demands of Nazi ideology on their religious faith.”⁶ As she and others have demonstrated, Confessing Church pastors could even be found in the ranks of Nazis or pro-Nazi supporters.⁷ And one would not need to look far to find anti-Jewish comments in their sermons.⁸ In fact, in early 1933, many German Protestants were optimistic about the Nazi rise to power, seeing in it an opportunity for the growth of the German Protestant churches.⁹ For example, just weeks after Easter 1933, Martin Niemöller preached a sermon in Berlin-Dahlem entitled, “We Would See Jesus!” on John 12:20-27, a passage that underscores the necessity of following Christ and the possibility of eternal life.¹⁰ It should be noted that Niemöller voted for the Nazi Party in the elections of January 1933, which brought Hitler and the Nazis to power. In this sermon, he observed that the German people had awakened from the spiritual malaise of the Weimar years (the political and economic instability of Weimar had coincided with a significant decline in church membership).¹¹ Just months after Hitler’s rise to power, Niemöller believed he was witnessing a spiritual awakening in progress. He started his sermon in celebration:

Rejoice! Make a joyful noise, all ye lands!

Yes, that is what we feel like doing, for outside we see the verdant, blossoming spring, and around us we see the people of our nation awakening; and in spite of all its storm and stress, in spite of all its effervescence and fermentation, that awakening tells us that we are still a young nation which does not wish to be drawn into the collapse of Western Civilization: we wish to live! May God speed us on our way!¹²

Niemöller appears genuinely hopeful about the changes occurring in his nation, but his emphasis is not on the political changes brought by the Nazi regime; rather, his excitement is due to a spiritual “awakening” that has rejuvenated the German people.¹³

Yet the optimism among many Christians quickly faded as the regime meddled in church affairs and persecuted its pastors. After the Reich Church failed to achieve organizational unity in

⁶ Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 5.

⁷ See Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 39-40; Richard Steigmann-Gall, *The Holy Reich: Nazi Conceptions of Christianity, 1919-1945* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 223.

⁸ See my doctoral dissertation, “Preaching to Nazi Germany,” 282-370.

⁹ Steigmann-Gall, *The Holy Reich*, 114-116.

¹⁰ James Bentley, *Martin Niemöller, 1892-1984* (New York: The Free Press, 1984), 42-45.

¹¹ The German Protestant churches staunchly opposed the numbers of those leaving to approximately 50,000 in 1933, while nearly 325,000 people joined. Richard Steigmann-Gall argues, “There could have been no clearer sign that national renewal and religious renewal were believed to be deeply connected” (*The Holy Reich*, 114). See also Scholder, *The Churches and the Third Reich*, vol. 1, 520-521. Scholder agrees that “many signs seemed to point to a great future for the church in the Third Reich.” He breaks down the numbers by region: for example, in Saxony, 10,000 people “returned to the church” in 1933, while the numbers of those leaving the church decreased from 28,000 in 1932 to 8,000 in 1933.

¹² Martin Niemöller, *Here Stand I* (Chicago: Willett, Clark, & Co.), 29.

¹³ Bentley, *Martin Niemöller*, 43.

the Protestant churches, Hitler established the Ministry of Church Affairs in 1935 under the leadership of Hanns Kerrl, hoping to lessen tensions and bring the factions together under the Nazi state. And we can add to this Nazi interference in church affairs the harassment and mass arrests of Confessing Church pastors for minor infractions, such as taking “illegal” collections of funds to support pastors and reading from the pulpit *Fürbittenliste* (or intercessory lists), the names of pastors persecuted by the Nazi state.¹⁴ Church leaders had been harassed and arrested in attempts to silence criticism of the state.¹⁵ For example, Martin Niemöller was arrested by the Gestapo in July 1937 for reading the names of persecuted clergymen and for criticizing the regime from the pulpit; this was followed by the arrest of 700 pastors for various infractions against the Nazi state by November of that same year.¹⁶ At the same time, the pro-Nazi German Christian movement continued its relentless attack on the Jewish foundations of Christianity, seeking to adapt the religion for a new modern age. In my examination of Confessing Church sermons in the Nazi era, virtually all positive comments or expressions of hope for the Nazi regime vanish by the mid-1930s. Instead, Confessing pastors criticize various aspects of the Nazi regime, its policies, and ideology.

After examining the 255 sermons, 12% expressed views that publicly opposed the Nazi regime, its ideology, or its policies from the pulpit. These statements either explicitly name Nazi leaders or Nazi ideology, or implicitly refer to them, often using biblical references or imagery to express criticism, perhaps to conceal condemnations from unsympathetic ears. The context of the sermon makes the target of criticism unmistakable. Thus, these sermons offered a competing voice to the Nazi worldview. In this article I wish not simply to note *what* the pastors said, but examine *why* they said it. The pastors’ motivations for publicly criticizing the Nazi regime reveal points of conflict that can illuminate our understanding of the varieties of responses by Confessing pastors to the Nazi regime. In these sermons Confessing Church pastors opposed the Nazi regime on three fronts from the authority of the pulpit: first, they expressed harsh criticism of Nazi persecution of Christians and the German churches; second, they condemned National Socialism as a false ideology that worships false gods; and third, they challenged Nazi anti-Semitic ideology by supporting Jews as the chosen people of God and Judaism as a historic foundation of Christianity.

While 12% of the sermons express criticism of the Nazi regime or National Socialism, it is important to emphasize that the vast majority do not. Most focus on a clear exposition of a biblical text and a reflection on its significance for the Christian life, without any political or social commentary whatsoever. This approach is in keeping with the philosophy of the “new school” of homiletics that emerged after World War I and that sought to limit political and social commentary in sermons.¹⁷ At the outbreak of war, Karl Barth, the Swiss Reformed pastor and later preeminent theologian, was stunned when he realized that pro-war church leaders advanced what he perceived

¹⁴ Helmreich, *German Churches under Hitler*, 162; and Edwin Robertson, *Christians against Hitler* (London: SCM Press, 1962), 35. Robertson also notes that many congregations openly supported their pastors if they were disciplined or lost state sanction, and so they did not need to petition their regional brotherhood council for financial assistance.

¹⁵ See for example, Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 80; and Conway, *The Nazi Persecution of the Churches*, 208-211.

¹⁶ Conway, *The Nazi Persecution of the Churches*, 208-211.

¹⁷ See Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church*, vol. 6, *The Modern Age* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 759. See also Skiles, “Preaching to Nazi Germany,” 86-182.

to be an arrogant and dangerous reading of God's providence in German history.¹⁸ These pro-war advocates included many under whom Barth studied theology. When they, along with other German intellectuals, signed a statement in support of Kaiser Wilhelm II's war policy, Barth began to seriously question the merits of liberal Protestantism.¹⁹ What is more, as the historian S.P. Schilling argues, "he saw a theology which focused attention not on the gospel but on statements concerning Christian self-awareness, depriving men of a reliable norm and inviting uncritical adjustment to passing human opinions and changing social forces."²⁰ In his view, the Protestant churches had lost their way and supported an aggressive and imperialist war, even from the pulpits.

Barth thus encouraged pastors to eliminate from their sermons any personal, political, or social convictions that could only detract from the gospel message of salvation and that served only narrow personal interests. Barth's influence inaugurated this "new school" of homiletics. Elsewhere I have demonstrated that this approach to homiletics gained currency among Confessing Church theologians and pastors, including Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Wolfgang Trillhaas, men who trained seminarians for ministry in Nazi Germany.²¹ As a result of this shift in homiletics, most Confessing Church sermons focused on the biblical text and its relevance for the cultivation of individual spirituality and the life of the faith community. In other words, the focus was on the gospel, not on political or social concerns. This context makes the minority of Confessing Church criticisms of the Nazi regime from the pulpit during wartime all the more conspicuous and significant.

Yet we must consider the impact of Confessing Church pastors' religious statements under the Nazi regime. My analysis of their sermons promises to shed light on the sometimes blurred relationship between the religious and political dimensions of their protests. As Victoria Barnett has demonstrated, Confessing Church pastors only gradually realized the political implications of their religious protests for institutional autonomy.²² Their orientation and language is religious, even when speaking about politics.

Having said this, all the criticisms of the Nazi regime, its leadership, and ideology are framed in short, concise statements within a sermon on a biblical (not political) theme. In other words, the pastors' criticisms are not fully developed into sermons; rather, they are always briefly stated in the larger context of a biblical story or theme. As such, it is easily conceivable that an inattentive congregant sitting in a pew might miss the critical statement in a moment's distraction.

Before we delve into an examination of these sermons we need to ask what constitutes opposition. For example, how might we distinguish the action of an officer involved in the July 20, 1944 conspiracy to assassinate Hitler from that of the middle class woman telling her friends a joke at Hitler's expense in a Berlin café? At what point does simple dissent cross the line to actual resistance against the regime? Ian Kershaw offers useful distinctions that will serve our purposes well. We can distinguish between expressions of resistance, opposition, and dissent.²³

¹⁸ Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1998), 187-8.

¹⁹ The sociologist Peter Berger writes that this event marked the beginning of Barth's theology, which "was, at its very core, a thunderous *no* to all the assumptions and achievements of Protestant theological liberalism." See Peter Berger, *The Heretical Imperative: Contemporary Possibilities of Religious Affirmation* (New York: Anchor Press, 1979), 71.

²⁰ S.P. Schilling, *Contemporary Continental Theologians* (Nashville: Abington Press, 1966), 19.

²¹ Skiles, "Preaching to Nazi Germany," 86-182.

²² Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*.

²³ This discussion is based on Ian Kershaw's work, *The Nazi Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives*, 3rd ed. (New York: Arnold, 1993), 170.

“Resistance” refers to the active participation in an organized attempt to undermine the regime or plan for its termination. This term connotes a fundamental rejection of the Nazi regime, a desire to replace it, and an organized approach to achieve its demise. “Opposition” refers to any action which is at least partially aimed at challenging the dominance of the Nazi state.²⁴ This could include a wide range of actions, such as workplace sabotage of factories, ignoring bans on race relations, refusing to give the Hitler salute, and as I will argue in this article, delivering sermons with implicit or explicit subversive content. Lastly, “dissent” refers to verbal expressions of negative attitudes towards the Nazi regime without intending to undermine its dominance, such as a joke or spontaneous critical comment. The advantage of applying these distinctions is that they rely on judging the significance of a public act, not necessarily the motivations or intentions of the actor.

This methodology necessarily limits the sermons that others might judge significant in understanding preaching in the Third Reich. For example, Dean Stroud’s recently edited and annotated collection of twelve sermons delivered under the Nazi regime, *Preaching in Hitler’s Shadow*, includes some sermons that were indeed oppositional, but others that were simply “daring” in their passionate and eloquent proclamation of the Christian gospel.²⁵ Yet without direct criticism of the Nazi regime, without explicitly applying Christian beliefs to a critique of Nazi ideology and policies, we cannot categorize a “daring” sermon as one that offers dissent, opposition, or resistance.²⁶

The sermons of the Confessing Church reveal limits to the opposition of Confessing pastors. The pastors do not explicitly call for Hitler’s removal from office or the overthrow of the National Socialist government. They do not call for Germans to sabotage or otherwise fight against the German military or police state. Nor do we find explicit calls for Christians to defy Nazi laws to come to the aid of the persecuted Jews. In other words, we may reasonably conclude at the start that the pastors did not go far enough in resisting the Nazi regime—especially as men who preached to a captive audience week after week—by discussing specific and concrete ways to undermine the Nazi regime and seek its eventual destruction. Nevertheless, the comments that we do find indicate that Confessing Church pastors infrequently but publicly sought to undermine Nazi leaders, ideology, and policies through the messages of their sermons.

I. Against the Nazi Persecution of Christians

By the start of World War II, Confessing Church pastors were well aware of the Nazi regime’s attempted coordination of the Protestant churches in the Reich Church, the mass arrests of pastors for criticizing Nazi policy and condemning persecutions of the churches, and the Nazi attacks on Christianity’s Jewish foundations.²⁷ Though Confessing pastors had learned by now to keep a low profile, we still find evidence of criticisms against the Nazis for persecuting Christians and the German churches. In five (2%) of the 255 sermons, Confessing pastors condemned Nazi persecutions of Christians in three significant ways: by remembering the persecuted and affirming

²⁴ Kershaw, *The Nazi Dictatorship*, 170.

²⁵ Dean Stroud, *Preaching in Hitler’s Shadow* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013), 184.

²⁶ For this reason, I did not categorize Wilhelm Busch’s wartime sermon of February 22, 1944, as a sermon of dissent or opposition.

²⁷ See for example, Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 80; and Conway, *Persecution of the German Churches*, 208-211.

the love and justice of God, by pointing to the consequence of a fractured and disunited Christian community, and by condemning the German Christian movement for false belief and, at the same time, clarifying the “true” gospel message.

The most common theme in these five sermons is that though the people of God are persecuted, God is not silent and will deliver them. For example, Bonhoeffer delivered a sermon on Matthew 2:13-23, at an underground seminary service in January 1940. He reflected on the story of Herod’s slaughter of the innocents at the time of Jesus’ birth. Bonhoeffer observes that the people of God—Israel and the Church—have been persecuted throughout history, and will continue to be persecuted. But there is always hope, even in the darkest times. He proclaims:

First misery, persecution, mortal danger for the children of God, for the disciples of Jesus Christ, but then came the hour in which it was said: ‘They are dead.’ Nero is dead, Diocletian is dead, the enemies of Luther and the Reformation are dead, but Jesus lives, and with him live those who are his. The age of persecution suddenly comes to an end, and it becomes clear: Jesus lives.²⁸

This is a sermon of hope and encouragement for the seminarians to stay faithful in a tumultuous time. Though Bonhoeffer does not name Hitler and the Nazis here, it is clear that they belong with Herod, Nero, and Diocletian as persecutors of God’s people. These are after all Christians driven underground to study and worship by a regime that finds their faith dangerous.²⁹ While the sermon does not call for rebellion against the Nazi state, and thus does not qualify as a form of resistance, it certainly condemns the state’s persecutions of Christians and the churches, thus undermining the state’s dominance.

It is difficult to over-emphasize how important context is in determining the meaning and effect of any given sermon. Unfortunately, for most of these sermons not much else is known about the context except location; the audience and their reception of these sermons are largely unknown. Nevertheless, we can make several comments about the information we do have.

Bonhoeffer’s sermon is one of 12 sermons (of the 255 total) delivered in an underground Confessing Church seminary. After the Gestapo closed the Finkenwalde Seminary on September 28, 1937, Bonhoeffer and his Confessing colleagues established underground locations in Köslin and Groß-Schlönwitz (later called Sigurdshof) and continued the theological training of seminarians.³⁰ These sermons did not take place out in the open in German society.³¹ An ordinary German could not walk into a church, sit in a pew, and listen to these sermons. Like sermons

²⁸ Bonhoeffer, *Theological Education Underground*, Kindle edition, location 14,406.

²⁹ See Bonhoeffer, *Theological Education Underground*, Kindle edition, location 809-828. The editor Dirk Schulz writes, “At the end of August 1937, Heinrich Himmler, the head of the secret police, banned Confessing seminaries, as well as related activities such as the taking up of church collections” (location 819).

³⁰ Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 87. See also Victoria Barnett’s introduction in Bonhoeffer, *Theological Education Underground, 1937-1940*, Kindle edition, location 819-825.

³¹ However, one sermon indicates a practice that appears widespread among Confessing pastors: Bonhoeffer wrote a sermon on Matthew 2:13-23 for New Year’s Eve 1940, to be read by a lector filling in for a pastor who had been called to serve in the war. The editor explains, “Once the war began, many clergy were drafted into the military, and the number of Confessing Church clergy and seminarians drafted early was particularly high. As ministers became scarce, trained lectors were often asked to read prepared sermons”; see Bonhoeffer, *Theological Education Underground*, Kindle edition, location 14439. Thus, these sermons written for lectors (perhaps to be read by several at a time) could have reached a far wider audience than any one pastor on any given Sunday.

delivered in exile abroad or in concentration camps, these sermons were unavailable to the German public. They impacted Germans only to the extent that they shaped and informed the seminarians who heard them, and who would go out into German society to preach and minister. Yet the sermons may have hardened the resolve of Confessing seminarians to withstand Nazi persecution and propaganda, and thus helped to preserve their own faith traditions.

Given Nazi laws limiting free speech, it is understandable that pastors very rarely explicitly named Hitler, the Nazis, or National Socialism in their sermons. In fact, the one case in this collection of sermons on the persecution of Christians where a Confessing pastor explicitly named Hitler was Karl Barth's sermon on September 24, 1939, delivered in Horgen, Switzerland, outside the reach of Nazi authorities. He preached on Ephesians 3:14-21, which speaks of God's great love of the Christian family, which also includes the remarkable doxology: "Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine..." Barth considers the great love of God for his people and then says, "What then, can Hitler, Stalin and Mussolini and their ilk ever harm those who believed?"³² This statement places Hitler alongside the leader of the "godless" communist power in Europe, Stalin, who was known in Germany as an infamous persecutor of Christians.³³ The fact that only this one statement explicitly names Hitler as a persecutor of Christians indicates that pastors in Germany may have feared sending any messages from the pulpit likely to land them in serious trouble with the Nazi authorities.

Barth's sermon is one of 17 sermons delivered outside Nazi Germany in lands of exile, refuge, and mission, and they too criticized the Nazi regime and supported Jews. As we will see, Confessing Church leaders in trouble with the Nazi regime and German pastors of Jewish descent preached to friendly (and often German) congregations in England, Switzerland, and the United States. Though a Confessing pastor may give voice to an oppositional statement, the fact that such a statement occurs in a safe and perhaps even friendly environment limits the impact such a statement can have—at least on those who have the power to cause political or social change. In this way, sermons in exile are quite distinct among this collection of sermons of Confessing Church pastors. Unfortunately, we do not know the contexts in which most of these sermons were delivered, nor the identities of the individuals who heard them. Thus, we cannot know if they heard these sermons and contributed in some way towards the effort to undermine the Nazi regime—through the giving of resources or participating in the war effort in some way.³⁴ At the very least these sermons reveal what Confessing pastors believed were the most important messages for Christians to know, giving us unique insights into what Christians abroad knew about what was happening in Nazi Germany.

Another significant theme that recurs is that Christians must be vigilant in repairing the disunity that Nazi persecution has caused. Consider, for example, the unique sermons of Franz Hildebrandt, a German pastor of Jewish descent who in 1937 fled Nazi persecution for Great

³² Barth, *Fürchte Dich Nicht!*, 200.

³³ See for example Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christianity*, vol. 2 (New York: Prince Press, 1997), 1396-1399.

³⁴ In a few cases we know that pastors petitioned for assistance for the German churches, such as Bonhoeffer's work in winning the support of German congregations in Britain for the Confessing Church, and Friedrich Forell's preaching to New Yorkers for assistance to the German churches. See Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 402-404. See also Forell's speech, "Church Life and Church Work in Germany and America," delivered sometime in 1944 (Papers of the Newcomers Christian Fellowship).

Britain, and became a pastor to a German congregation in London during World War II.³⁵ Hildebrandt's sermon collection is distinctive among this group because he preached many of the sermons in London (and later Cambridge) over BBC radio to a Christian audience in Germany. Most remarkable about Hildebrandt's sermons is that he actually hoped and counted on Germans to break the law just to listen to him over the radio. Germans listened to foreign radio programming at great risk to themselves and their families; punishments could include imprisonment or execution.³⁶ In the case of Hildebrandt's work, the content of his broadcasts was not news or updates on the war's progress, but a word of peace and assurance to Germans weary of war. More importantly, it gave Germans a new perspective with which to judge Hitler and the Nazi regime.

In a sermon delivered over the BBC airwaves May 24, 1942, Hildebrandt preached on the tragedy of Christian disunity, reflecting on the Pentecost passage in Acts 2:1-13, in which the Spirit of God, through a rush of wind and tongues of fire, unifies men and women into the Church. This great moment in the story of the early Church represents a reversal of the Tower of Babel, a reunification of humanity after an era of division, misunderstanding, and struggle. Hitler and the Nazis plunged Europe into World War II, pitting Christians against each other on the battlefield. Hildebrandt asks Christians under Nazi domination to consider their unity in faith rather than disunity in war:

We think of our brothers in the persecuted churches in Germany, Holland and Norway that are not silent, but have opened their mouths, and we know how serious it is that they began to preach as the Spirit gave them utterance. It is the exact counterpart to the scene of Babel: what the human spirit has divided in its arrogance, God's Spirit, which descended upon us, has united and reconciled.³⁷

The German listener of this sermon is confronted with a reality contrary to that propagated by the Nazi regime: the bond between a people is not based upon race, ethnicity, class, or geography, but upon God the creator. At Pentecost Christians around the world sing in one voice, united as the Church.

This sermon is one of 13 that Hildebrandt preached over the radio from the BBC in Great Britain to audiences in Nazi Germany. Religious broadcasts were restricted during wartime in Nazi Germany, and thus BBC programs such as Hildebrandt's may have been among the few religious services available on the radio.³⁸ His sermons took courage in that his critical comments of Hitler

³⁵ Herbert Strauss and Werner Röder, eds, *International Biographical Dictionary of Central European Emigrés, 1933-1945*, vol. 2 (New York: K.G. Saur, 1983), 508.

³⁶ Richard Evans writes, "The moment the war broke out, tuning in to foreign stations was made a criminal offence punishable by death. It was all too easy, in apartment blocks poorly insulated for sound, for listeners to face denunciation to the authorities by fanatical or ill-intentioned neighbors who overheard the sonorous tones of BBC newsreaders coming through the walls. Some 4,000 people were arrested and prosecuted for 'radio crime' in the first year of the law's operation, and the first execution of an offender came in 1941" (*The Third Reich at War* [New York: Penguin Press, 2009], 576-77).

³⁷ Franz Hildebrandt, Sermon on Acts 2:1-13, 24 May 1942, Papers of Franz Hildebrandt.

³⁸ Helmreich notes that "In the first years of the regime, religious broadcasts were encouraged and a morning religious hour was a regular part of all network programs. From 1935 on, restrictions were gradually imposed – sometimes speakers were censored, funds were not available, or the program was dropped entirely. Over the protests of church leaders, both Protestant and Catholic hours were ended on April 7, 1939. During the war, even the customary morning orchestral playing of church chorales at the spas was stopped" (*German Churches under Hitler*, 222).

and the Nazi regime could have been construed by his fellow Germans as treasonous and as serving the enemies of the nation (particularly Great Britain). Thus, he risked ostracism at home and among his German colleagues. However, unlike pastors who preached openly in German society, he did not face the possibility of arrest by the Gestapo or imprisonment as an agitator. Simply stated, he preached from the safety of a microphone across the English Channel, far out of the Nazis' reach. Nevertheless, these sermons are immensely significant because they demonstrate the concerns a Confessing pastor would express to his fellow Christians in Germany if given the freedom and the chance.

What is striking about this group of sermons that criticize Nazi persecution of the churches is that none of the five occurred in a congregation out in the open in German society. The exile Hildebrandt, a German pastor of Jewish descent, preached two sermons over the BBC airwaves in London to German citizens. Barth preached one from Basil, Switzerland—this was after he was dismissed from the University of Bonn in 1935 for refusing to swear an oath of loyalty to Hitler, and was even forbidden to speak in public.³⁹ Bonhoeffer preached two from an underground seminary in Finkenwalde. This is in stark contrast to the pre-war record when pastors such as Martin Niemöller occasionally criticized the state for its persecutions.⁴⁰ Many went so far as to read intercessory lists (*Fürbittenliste*) of persecuted pastors from the pulpit during services.⁴¹ Yet the Nazi regime itself viewed the lists as political provocation.⁴² It is possible that Confessing Church pastors did not want to appear as victims of their own state in a time of war, which could be interpreted as unpatriotic or ungrateful for the sacrifices of German soldiers on the battlefield. This indicates Confessing Church pastors did not feel free in their congregations to preach openly about Nazi persecution of Christians during World War II.

It goes without saying that sermons delivered out in the open in German society are the most important in our discussion of Confessing sermons as expressions of opposition to the Nazi regime. As we will see shortly, these sermons were delivered in churches across Germany, where Germans freely sat in their pews to listen to the gospel message. Pastors preached these sermons at regular Sunday services, holidays, confirmation celebrations, and weddings and funerals. This act of preaching in public may have required a degree of courage, depending on how oppositional the content of the sermon was and on whether the pastor believed he had a sympathetic congregation or not. A pastor cognizant that his congregation judged every word he preached might pause before expressing any sentiments of opposition or dissent in fear of punishment. In contrast to sermons delivered in concentration camps, exile, an underground seminary, or over the radio, Confessing pastors freely preached these sermons out in the open in German society and contributed to the on-going discussions of religion and politics in Nazi Germany.

While the *context* of these five sermons about Nazi persecution may vary, the *content* nevertheless challenges the Nazi regime in a unique way. Using the Christian scripture as a source base, the pastors drew on the Christian traditions to oppose unjust persecution, and as we will see subsequently, to criticize National Socialism as a false ideology and to support Jews and Judaism. Thus, the Christian scripture and traditions were the platform from which the pastors formulate

³⁹ Eberhard Busch, *Karl Barth: His Life from Letters and Autobiographical Texts*, trans. John Bowden (London: SCM Press, 1976), 256.

⁴⁰ Skiles, "Preaching to Nazi Germany," 183-281.

⁴¹ See Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 90; Conway, *Nazi Persecutions of the Churches*, 209; and Helmreich, *German Churches under Hitler*, 215.

⁴² Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 90-91.

and launch opposition, in contrast to the acts of opposition and resistance from other groups in German society, such as the conspirators of the July 20, 1944 plot or the White Rose student group in Munich. Rather than use bombs or broadsides, Confessing Church pastors used sermons to undermine the dominance of the Nazi regime.

II. Against False Ideologies and Idols

The most common criticism Confessing Church pastors made against the Nazi regime during World War II was that National Socialism was a false ideology that supported the worship of false idols. Of the 255 sermons in this collection, 17 (6%) offer a clear condemnation of National Socialism as an ideology in direct conflict with Christianity. These sermons advocate one of two major themes: the false ideology of National Socialism has wreaked destruction upon Germany and the German churches; and the necessity to instead choose the gospel as a life-giving and redemptive ideology that is desperately needed amid the destruction of war.

In an extraordinary sermon preached just two days after Nazi Germany's invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939, Helmut Gollwitzer of Dahlem-Berlin condemns the false ideology that had led to war. He reflects on the creedal statement, "I believe in God, the Father Almighty," asserting that Germany shall reap the consequences of turning from God. "Pagans," he contends, will offer up "weak-winged" prayers full of confidence and without repentance, prayers for victory over their enemies.⁴³ Imagining another war as destructive as World War I, Gollwitzer argues that Germans have not earned peace, "but rather [they have earned] this war with all its horrors."⁴⁴ He continues a line of reasoning that turns traitorous in Nazi Germany, "We have each and every one of us brought all this upon ourselves and we richly, richly deserve the consequences."⁴⁵ Remarkably, Gollwitzer asserts that the Germans themselves did not start the war, but that it "has been imposed upon us in an unavoidable way," emphasizing the point that Germans must face the consequences of intractable "hard-hearted[ness]" that brought them to this point—they are reaping what they have long sown.⁴⁶ Their only hope is to pray for God's mercy and forgiveness.

One pastor, Gerhard Ebeling, reflects on the pernicious effects of Nazi ideology in a sermon against the Nazi practice of euthanasia in a sermon on July 17, 1940, in Berlin-Hermsdorf. He was at one time a student of Dietrich Bonhoeffer at the underground seminary at Finkenwalde.⁴⁷ After later graduating with a degree in theology from the University of Basel in 1938, Ebeling first began preaching to a congregation that split during the Church Struggle. In this congregation, there were Confessing Church members and German Christian members together, and yet the head pastor of the congregation was a member of the German Christian movement in Thuringia.⁴⁸ Ebeling preached in the only place he could within the church walls, a small space apart in the sanctuary designated for Confessing Church members. This status essentially made him an

⁴³ Stroud, *Preaching in Hitler's Shadow*, 142.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 144. Stroud notes that the treason lies in Gollwitzer's refusal to acknowledge "the righteousness of Germany's cause, as so many preachers did in 1914," and instead insists on Germans' sin and lack of faith."

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 141.

⁴⁷ This biographical sketch is largely based on the information provided in Dean Stroud's recently published and edited work, *Preaching in Hitler's Shadow*, 147.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

“illegal” Confessing Church pastor. As one writer comments, “he was not the legal pastor of the Confessing group nor had the recognized church ordained him, but rather the ‘illegal’ Confessing Synod of Berlin-Brandenburg.”⁴⁹ However, this situation was short-lived as Ebeling was drafted as a medic upon the outbreak of World War II just one year later.

Yet remarkably, he was still able to preach when opportunities presented themselves; these sermons were published half a century later as *Predigten eines »Illegalen« aus den Jahren 1939-1945*. One of the sermons included was delivered on July 17, 1940, in Berlin-Hermsdorf. A couple came to Ebeling with news that their son had mysteriously died of an unknown illness at an institution for the mentally ill.⁵⁰ The parents believed that their son had been killed as part of a Nazi policy to euthanize men and women with mental illnesses or disabilities. By the summer of 1939, Hitler and the Nazi regime began planning a euthanasia program, known as Action T4, a mundane codename for a chilling program, which was run from the Chancellery in Berlin, on Tiergartenstrasse 4.⁵¹ The euthanasia program targeted men and women in asylums for the mentally ill, who were deemed “unworthy” of life, and thus “burdens” to society.⁵² The program initially employed approximately 50 functionaries, including doctors, nurses, lawyers, and professors to administer the program, and together then murdered approximately 100,000 people throughout the war.⁵³ By the summer of 1940, rumors spread throughout the population about Nazi efforts to murder the mentally ill and disabled, even sparking protests by leading Catholic churchmen such as Cardinal Adolf Bertram of Breslau and, most famously, Bishop Clemens August von Galen of Münster, whose sermons galvanized public opposition to the Nazi policy and forced Hitler to proceed with the program only in utmost secrecy.⁵⁴

Ebeling hears this family’s story, and agrees to conduct the July 17, 1940 memorial service. The sermon focuses on Matthew 18:10, which states, “Take care that you do not despise one of these little ones; for, I tell you, in heaven their angels continually see the face of my Father in heaven.” On the one hand, Ebeling warns not to speculate about what happened to the couple’s son, and yet on the other hand he identifies the “little ones” as those “the world pushes aside, from whom people walk away, about whom no one inquires.”⁵⁵ They are “the ones whom the world despises for the sake of its own belief”; and they are “those with no rights and the sick...”⁵⁶ This sermon is a condemnation of the false belief system in Nazi Germany that has denigrated lives of

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ See Evans, *Third Reich at War*, 82-101; Michael Burleigh and Wolfgang Ippenmann, *The Racial State: Germany 1933-1945* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 101-104, 141-149. The Nazi T4 program of murdering the mentally and chronically ill by gas in vans or killing centers was a precursor to the Nazi mass murder of Jews by lethal gas. See for example, Debórah Dwork and Robert Jan van Pelt, *Holocaust: A History* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2002), 260-265; Christopher Browning, *The Origins of the Final Solution: The Evolution of Nazi Jewish Policy, September 1939 – March 1942* (Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 183-193; Leni Yahil, *The Holocaust: The Fate of European Jewry*, trans. Ina Friedman and Haya Galai (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 308-311.

⁵² Conway, *Nazi Persecutions of the German Churches*, 268-269.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Conway, *Nazi Persecutions of the German Churches*, 271-272; Michael Phayer, *The Catholic Church and the Holocaust, 1930-1965* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 68-69.

⁵⁵ Stroud, *Preaching in Hitler’s Shadow*, 152.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

the “little ones” as, in Nazi parlance, lives “unworthy of life.” Ebeling encourages the mourners at this man’s memorial service to model their behavior after Jesus, who “called ‘injustice’ ‘injustice,’ ‘wrong’ ‘wrong,’ and ‘sin’ ‘sin.’”⁵⁷ And even more, he admonishes, “not [to] abandon those Christ has accepted and for whom he died.”⁵⁸ Christians of Nazi Germany, according to Ebeling, must “stand with the sick and the weak and those without rights to the end...”⁵⁹

This sermon is remarkable because it implicitly acknowledges what they all suspect, that the couple’s son had been murdered because he was ill, and that the reason he was murdered was because he was despised according to worldly belief. Ebeling does not name Hitler, the National Socialist regime, or its ideology, yet the sermon condemns a society, and a mental health system under Nazi control, that denies dignity and life to the “little ones,” those who cannot care for themselves. In this way, it is a criticism of National Socialism. This sermon is not a bold denunciation of the Nazi policy of euthanasia, nor a call to actively resist Nazi policies of death. Instead, it is a reflection on how to care for those whom society has swept aside as worthless.

Confessing Church pastors used not only current events to express criticism of the Nazi regime, but also holy days as occasions to reflect on right and just living. On holidays pastors attempted to reorient their congregants to traditional Christianity and away from Nazism as a false ideology. For example, in a Christmas season sermon in 1941, Heinrich Gollwitzer of Berlin-Dahlem diminishes the importance Nazis give to race, ethnicity, and culture by reference to the nativity story. He reflects on Isaiah 9:1-6, and the phrase, “unto us a child is born.” In celebrating the birth of Jesus, he makes an argument for the equality of all peoples in the light of the gospel message. Gollwitzer proclaims,

There is no kinship joy, no nationalist pride that leads us here to rejoice. And who asks whether this child was Aryan or Jew... It is a child of another people, another culture, another language and another world...and yet we kneel – people [Menschen] of different people [Völker] and races, saints and criminals, pious and godless... ‘Unto us a child is born!’⁶⁰

Gollwitzer’s remarkable statement about the birth of Jesus confronts his congregation with a critical question in the context of Nazi Germany, that is, what is the value of race from a Christian point of view? Gollwitzer responds by revealing the pettiness of focusing on race and nationalism when the Christian scriptures contend that Christ was born the savior of all humanity. His race and nationality are irrelevant to his mission.

But there was no more vocal a critic of National Socialism as a false ideology than Franz Hildebrandt. He sought to expose National Socialism as a false ideology that challenged Christianity and undermined the Church’s mission of preaching. Again, he is preaching to Germans living under the Nazi regime via the BBC radio program from London. In a sermon broadcast on February 23, 1944, Hildebrandt preached a short sermon on Galatians 3:1, in which the Apostle Paul harshly confronts the churches of Galatia for forsaking the gospel and following “strange” doctrines. Paul writes, “You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly exhibited as crucified!” If we read between the lines it

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Gollwitzer, „*Wir dürfen hören...*” 3-4.

becomes apparent that Hildebrandt used scripture as a way to confront the German people about how Nazi ideology has corrupted the faith of the German-Christians, a de-Judaized, militant, and racist brand of Christianity.⁶¹ Hildebrandt draws a parallel between the “false belief” of the early church of the Galatians and that of many Christians in Nazi Germany. He writes,

It is not the first time in history and will not be the last time that Christian communities are exposed to such an assault, and that the Church must pay attention to the warning of the Apostle. How many commentaries on the Epistle to Galatians have been written in these years!⁶²

As a Confessing Church pastor speaking freely over the BBC to Christians in Nazi Germany, Hildebrandt warns that “false belief” is corrupting Christianity in Germany, excluding others, and serving the interests of those in power. Hildebrandt reminds his listeners of Paul’s solution to envision Christ “crucified among us,” bearing the sins of the world.⁶³ Thus, Jesus Christ is not supporting the authorities and excluding others, but siding with the excluded, the persecuted, in the spirit of love and peace.

Hildebrandt picks apart specific Nazi beliefs and counters them with a Christian response. Again, he took to the airwaves on Wednesday July 12, 1944, to preach a sermon on 1 Peter 2:6-10. First Peter is a pastoral letter circulated to the churches of Asia Minor in the late first century, and it discusses how Christians ought to live as a marginalized and persecuted people.⁶⁴ The author writes, “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.” Hildebrandt works from this basis and delivers a sermon that juxtaposes Christian chosenness and Nazi racial exclusion. He directly challenges the National Socialist view of the Germans as the chosen people, contrasting it to the Christian view. He writes,

In fact there is an element in the gospel that to the untrained ear sounds like nothing but just arrogance; and therefore it is necessary to immediately avert the misunderstanding, as if it were here for a new form of the old myth of the master race, a race, caste or sect, the arrogant making themselves the crown of creation.

No – we are the stones in the buildings of God, not master builders.

...

That is, if one may use the word, the specific weight of the Church: to form a people not from the unity of race and blood, history and culture, and not from the opposition against a common enemy, but from the election and grace of God.⁶⁵

This understanding follows the Protestant principle of faith through grace and not works: what matters for salvation is not the activity of the individual, or his ancestry, life’s production, or

⁶¹ Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 228.

⁶² Franz Hildebrandt, Sermon on Galatians 3:1, on 23 February 1944, Papers of Franz Hildebrandt.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ *The New Oxford Annotated Bible, Third Edition* (Oxford University Press, 2001), *New Testament* 395.

⁶⁵ Franz Hildebrandt, Sermon on I Peter 2:6-10, 12 July 1944, Papers of Franz Hildebrandt.

personal characteristics, whether inherent or developed; what matters is God's grace upon the individual. This emphasis precludes any boasting in one's "chosen-ness." Hildebrandt offers a clear and unambiguous challenge the National Socialist ideology of human worth and dignity dependent upon race.

The passage in 1 Peter provides the basis for an understanding of the priesthood of all believers. Hildebrandt underscores that all Christians have a duty to serve as priests before God and the world. All Christians are to "offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ," and this means serving God and others in a spirit of loving self-sacrifice. Again we see that for Hildebrandt, Christianity, like National Socialism, asks for the commitment, the allegiance, of the whole person.⁶⁶ Thus, at least for anti-Nazi pastors there is a necessary contradiction between the two belief systems.⁶⁷ According to Hildebrandt, the individual is compelled to make a choice between two; there cannot be any compromise between the two competing ideologies. Wherever Christians are and whatever they are doing, Hildebrandt argues, Christians "can make it known who is our king. We can call on his name and call out, we can confess him before men."⁶⁸ He continues,

In Germany one knows it better than anywhere else in the world, what that means today. And when free speech is denied, when bans on speaking occur, when the confession with mouth becomes impossible, then it must be that the silence, the exile, the prison bears witness to the virtues of him who had called us out of the darkness into his wonderful light.⁶⁹

Christians have a duty to bear witness before men, even when the Nazis force Christians to be silent, to flee their homeland—as Hildebrandt himself did only years before—or to be imprisoned or worse.⁷⁰ Whatever the circumstance, Hildebrandt encourages his Christian listeners to act as priests in a world that desperately needs acts of mercy and service.

The second major theme in these sermons that condemn Nazism as a false ideology is the necessity for Germans living in Nazi Germany to make a choice between following the gospel or Nazism. The pastors often selected a biblical text that refers in some sense to a decision. The most common biblical story repeated in these sermons is Jesus' birth narrative, compelling listeners to

⁶⁶ Burleigh, *The Third Reich*, 253-255. This idea that Nazism is a political religion that directly conflicts with Christianity goes back to the Nazi period itself with a report by a man named Eric Voegelin, dated 4 April 1937. As Burleigh concludes, "the report likened Nazism to a religion, in a sense demanding of its adherents total submission of their consciences and surrender of their souls" (253). See also Emilio Gentile, "Fascism, Totalitarianism and Political Religion: Definitions and Critical Reflections on Criticism of an Interpretation," trans. Natalia Belozentseva, *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 5.3 (Winter 2004), 362.

⁶⁷ See Franklin H. Littell, *The German Phoenix: Men and Movements in the Church in Germany* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1960), 3; and John S. Conway, "The German Church Struggle: Its Making and Meaning," in *The Church Confronts the Nazis: Barmen Then and Now*, ed. Hubert Locke (New York: The Edwin Mellon Press, 1984), 135; Siegfried Hermle, "Predigt an der Front: Zur Tätigkeit der Kriegspfarren im Zweiten Weltkrieg," in *Blätter für württembergische Kirchengeschichte* (Schleufele, Stuttgart: Verlag Chr. Schleufele, 2002), 145, 155; Robertson, *Christians against Hitler*, 118.

⁶⁸ Hildebrandt, Sermon on I Peter 2:6-10.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ For numerous examples of Nazi persecution of German Pastors of Jewish descent, see Lutherhaus Eisenach, *Wider Das Vergessen* (Eisenach: Das Archiv, 1988).

make the choice to accept the coming of God's messiah as opposed to political leaders that demand allegiance. This narrative appears three times: Matthew's announcement of a new king, the "son of David," in contrast to King Herod (1:18-25)⁷¹; the choice of the shepherds to believe the "good news" of Christ's birth (Luke 2:10-11)⁷²; and a sermon on the meaning of Christmas in a time of war.⁷³ Other choices referred to in these sermons include Jesus' calling of his disciples to "come, follow me" (Mark 1:14-20)⁷⁴; the choice of the Galatians to remain "bewitched," in Paul's famous admonition to follow Christ (Galatians 3:1)⁷⁵; and to remain dead in the faith or to awaken to a true and living faith, as written to the Church in Sardis (Revelation 3:1).⁷⁶ Pastors used the demands of the biblical text to challenge Christians to re-evaluate their priorities in faith. The biblical text often gave the pastors an opportunity to confront their listeners to make a choice.

A remarkable example of this is Hildebrandt's sermon on the parable of the Good Samaritan who, unlike the priest and the Levite, chose to stop and serve a man in dire need.⁷⁷ Midway through the sermon Hildebrandt unequivocally criticizes National Socialist ideology, though he does not name the ideology or condemn Hitler explicitly. We must be suspicious, he says, when some want to restrict the meaning of the term "neighbor" to include only members of one's own community:

We have it now literally in front of our eyes, where it leads if people seek to justify themselves with this question [who is my neighbor?], and if the concept of the neighbor will be restricted further and further so that only the national comrade [*Volksgenosse*], the man of the same race [*Rassengenosse*] and finally the fellow party mate [*Parteigenosse*] is my neighbor.⁷⁸

This is perhaps the clearest example of Hildebrandt using a scriptural basis to argue against National Socialism and its ideology of hate and division. The question then for Hildebrandt is not necessarily who is my neighbor, for all people are neighbors. The question is how are we to treat our neighbors? The answer is surprisingly simple: to show mercy to those in need, to take pity on those who suffer, lying unnoticed by the side of the road. Hildebrandt advocates that his listeners take pity on those who have fallen among murderers. This sermon is oppositional in that it undermines Nazi racial ideology and challenges Nazi concepts of our obligations to one another, thus giving German listeners another perspective of who is a neighbor.

These sermons reveal a deep concern that National Socialism represents a false ideology that Germans have accepted, leading them away from Christianity. Though some of these sermons might have been directed specifically to the pro-Nazi German Christian faction in the Protestant

⁷¹ Franz Hildebrandt, Sermon on Matthew 1:18-25, delivered on 27 December 1944, Papers of Franz Hildebrandt.

⁷² Paul Hinz, Sermon manuscript on Luke 2:10-11, delivered on Christmas Day 1942, Collected Sermons of Paul Hinz, 766/36, EZA.

⁷³ See Friedrich Forell, Sermon manuscript, "What is the Meaning of Christmas for Us Today?" delivered December 1944, Papers of the Newcomers Christian Fellowship.

⁷⁴ Franz Hildebrandt, Sermon on Mark 1:14-20, delivered on 20 December 1944, Papers of Franz Hildebrandt.

⁷⁵ Hildebrandt, Sermon on Galatians 3:1.

⁷⁶ Paul Hinz, Sermon manuscript on Revelation 3:1, delivered on Pentecost 1943, Collected Sermons of Paul Hinz.

⁷⁷ Franz Hildebrandt, Sermon on Luke 10:25-37, delivered on Christmas Eve 1944, Papers of Franz Hildebrandt.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

churches, the Confessing pastors' criticisms also apply to National Socialism's platform supporting a racist, nationalist, apocalyptic, millennialist, messianic ideology in direct conflict with Christianity.⁷⁹ In these sermons, Confessing pastors opposed Nazi racial theory and advanced arguments for the equality of all human beings. This last sermon by Hildebrandt is an excellent example. During World War II and the Holocaust, Confessing pastors like Hildebrandt criticized the racial hierarchy of National Socialism, undermining not only Nazi social policies dividing Germans into Jews and "Aryans," but wartime policies that sought German dominion over the peoples of Europe. At the same time, we also see in these sermons the argument that Christ is the savior over all others, including political rulers, and that Christians must prioritize their allegiances in life. This is in direct opposition to the oaths that many Germans were forced to take as civil servants (and pastors).⁸⁰ The evidence of these sermons indicates Confessing pastors became increasingly worried that Christians' "true and obedient" service was tragically misdirected.

III. Support for Israel and Judaism

Confessing Church pastors also expressed views explicitly supportive of Jews and Judaism, thereby opposing National Socialist ideology and racial policies. Ten (3%) of the 255 sermons address the following themes: the Jews as God's people, concern about their persecution by the Nazi regime, an affirmation of the equality of Jews and Christians, and even condemnations of Nazi massacres of Jews. Regardless of the pastors' motivations or intentions, the pastors' religiously-based pronouncements in support of Jews and Judaism took on political significance as implicit or explicit criticisms of Nazi ideology and racial policy.

Before examining Confessing Church pastors' sermons in support of Jews and Judaism in the war years, it is important to state at the beginning that historians have long argued the pervasiveness of anti-Jewish prejudice in the German churches in the Nazi period, including the Confessing Church.⁸¹ Anti-Jewish expressions were occasionally made from the pulpits of Confessing Church pastors throughout the Nazi period, yet these expressions of prejudice were religious in nature and not racial.⁸² For example, a pastor might make the claim that because the Jews rejected Christ, that God has rejected them, making Christians the new chosen people; or worse, that God has punished the Jews throughout history for the crime of deicide. Yet I have found no evidence of a Confessing Church pastor expressing racial prejudice in the pulpit, such as we see in Nazi propaganda. For example, pastors did not refer to the Jews as *Untermenschen*, nor did they argue that Jews were to blame for all of Germany's ills. Nevertheless, Confessing Church pastors occasionally compared Jews to Nazis in sermons as a way of criticizing both groups as

⁷⁹ See David Redles, *Hitler's Millennial Reich: Apocalyptic Belief and the Search for Salvation*, (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 45.

⁸⁰ The oath is as follows, "I swear: I will be true and obedient to the Führer of the German Reich and nation Adolf Hitler, observe the laws, and conscientiously fulfill my official duties, so help me God." See Helmreich, *The German Churches under Hitler*, 178.

⁸¹ Alon Confino, *A World Without Jews: The Nazi Imagination from Persecution to Genocide* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014); Raul Hillberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1985); Robert Michael, *Holy Hatred: Christianity, Antisemitism, and the Holocaust* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); Christopher Probst, *Demonizing the Jews: Luther and the Protestant Church in Nazi Germany* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012); and Saul Friedländer, who speaks of the "omnipresence of anti-Semitism in most of the Evangelical Lutheran Church," in *Nazi Germany and the Jews*, vol. 2 (New York: HarperPerennial, 2007), 56.

⁸² See Skiles, "Preaching to Nazi Germany," 183-281.

race-conscious, placing unwarranted pride in a sense of divine chosen-ness and racial superiority.⁸³ Any discussion of Confessing Church support of Jews from the pulpit must bear in mind the ambivalent nature of pastors' perceptions of Jews in Nazi Germany.

Let us turn our attention to the kinds of supportive messages Confessing pastors publicly expressed about Jews and Judaism. First, the pastors occasionally affirmed that the Jews too, in addition to Christians, are the people of God. This expression can take the simple form of a prayer at the end of a sermon, like Barth's sermon on 1 Corinthians 3:11, in October 1939, delivered in Switzerland, in which he prayed for "the Gentiles who are waiting for your [God's] word, and *your people Israel*, that they recognize their king [emphasis added]."⁸⁴ This prayer is ambivalent: on the one hand, Barth recognizes the Jews as God's people, which the Nazis and pro-Nazi German Christians deny outright; but on the other hand, he prays not for their safety or freedom, but for their conversion. Barth prayed a similar prayer in a sermon on Lamentations 3:21-23, delivered in Switzerland, near the end of the war on October 29, 1944. He connects persecuted Christians in Nazi-occupied Europe with the persecution of Jews, both as the people of God:

We remember especially our afflicted fellow believers in Holland, in Denmark, in Hungary, that they would wish to find comfort and instruction with you again and again.

We remember again and again your people Israel in its persecution and in the even greater need, that it will not recognize you.⁸⁵

This example is very similar to the previous one as Barth acknowledges that the Jews are the people of God, and yet at the same time he prays for their conversion. However, this time he expresses the view that the Jews' refusal to convert is the greater need (*der noch grösseren Not*) than the persecution they face. Of course, we cannot argue that Barth knew the details of the Holocaust when he made this statement, but it demonstrates the priorities of his concern for the Jewish people at this tumultuous time. These are examples of forms of opposition that not simply undermine Nazi *racial* prejudice, but ironically undermine themselves with *religious* prejudice. One can only imagine the impression let on the audience by the ambivalence: confusion, perhaps, or indifference.

Second, consonant with this theme of the Jews as God's people, but much less ambivalent, are expressions of appreciation for Judaism and the Old Testament as the foundation of Christianity. For example, Pastor Heinrich Grüber, who helped Germans of Jewish descent escape Nazi Germany through his famous Grüber Office in Berlin, preached a sermon on the story of the feeding of the five thousand (John 6:1-5) from the Dachau concentration camp in 1942. He argues that the Jews recognized Jesus as the messiah when he broke bread and banished fear.⁸⁶ Grüber affirms, unlike the pro-Nazi German Christian movement, that God sent Jesus to the Jews, that Jesus was himself Jewish, and that the Jews responded in faith to his message. Thus, to divorce Jesus from his Jewish context would be to dishonor his ministry and work among the Jews.

Grüber's sermon is just one of 22 that were delivered by Confessing pastors in concentration camps or in imprisonment. While these sermons may not be considered to have

⁸³ Ibid., 282-370.

⁸⁴ Barth, *Fürchte Dich Nicht!*, 246.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 284.

⁸⁶ Grüber, *Leben an der Todeslinie*, 64-65.

taken place out in the open in German society or to have had an effect on the general population, we can surmise that they still contributed to the religious milieu of the camps and the morale of the prisoners. Though some may question the degree of courage required to make subversive comments while already in a camp, Christians often had to break camp rules to gather and meet for services.⁸⁷ Furthermore, these sermons help us to better understand the spiritual lives and expressions of Christian concentration camp prisoners.

The third theme in these sermons on Jews and Judaism, and by far the most common criticism, concerned the unjust Nazi persecution of the Jews. An example is a sermon by Paul Hinz delivered sometime between 1941 and 1943, on the famous passage of 1 John 4:16, which states in part, “God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them.” Hinz observes that if we were to “look out into the world” at war, we would see chaos. “Peoples [Völker] are exterminated, races go into the abyss of destruction; a sea of blood and tears, inconsolable sorrow goes over the world.”⁸⁸ Admittedly, he does not tell us which “peoples” are exterminated or which “races” are destroyed, but it seems clear that he is referring in part to the devastation on the battlefields of Europe among the nations at war. At the same time, it also seems clear that he is referring to the Jewish people, the “race” at the center of Nazi hatred and policies of exclusion and extermination. He uses very strong language here: extermination (*ausgerottet*) and “the abyss of destruction” (*den Abgrund des Unterganges*), both of which indicate the decimation of a population most resembling that of Jews in Germany during this time.

To take another example, in a powerful Good Friday sermon delivered on March 30, 1945, to a German-speaking audience in New York City, Friedrich Forell preached on the passion narrative in Matthew 28:46, in which he explicitly connects the suffering of Christ with the suffering of many during World War II and the Holocaust. Forell, himself a German pastor of Jewish descent, draws on the image of the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 53 and affirms that in Christ’s suffering humanity is healed. At this point he connects the present catastrophe in Europe with the passion narrative. He speaks of a woman “whose elderly mother was deported to Poland” where she died, thus indicating he is most likely speaking of the Nazi persecution of the Jews:

There is so much devilish injustice done, there was so much terrible hatred sown:

Only on the cross, on which we find forgiveness, we receive the strength of God to forgive those who have persecuted, expelled, tortured and murdered our loved ones.

On the cross Jesus prayed for his murderers, ‘Father, forgive them.’ On the cross we learn to pray for our enemies, only on the cross, only on the cross.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ The historiography is unclear about how uniform the prohibitions were on Christian worship in the camps. While Niemöller and other clergymen at the Dachau camp were allowed to gather for services, this was not the case in other camps; see Niemöller, *Dachau Sermons*, trans. Robert H. Pfeiffer (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1946), v-vii. However, Corrie ten Boom speaks of smuggling a Bible into the Ravensbrück camp and holding clandestine services, such as they were, in the dormitory where women from a variety of faiths would worship together, translating the Bible into multiple languages as they read; see *The Hiding Place* (Grand Rapids, MI: Chosen Books, 2006), Kindle edition, location 4127.

⁸⁸ Paul Hinz, Sermon manuscript on 1 John 4:16, delivered between 1941 and 1943, Collected Sermons of Paul Hinz.

⁸⁹ Friedrich Forell, Sermon manuscript on Matthew 28:46, delivered on 20 March 1945, Papers of the Newcomers Christian Fellowship.

True peace, he argues, cannot be attained through political parties or peace conferences, but only by the way of Calvary. This passage does not mention Hitler or the Nazis by name, nor does it refer explicitly to the Jews. But Forell's references could hardly be misunderstood by his audience. The sermon is a condemnation of the war and Nazi atrocities. He speaks of a woman deported to Poland, of the "devilish injustice," the "terrible hatred," and the persecutions and murders. Perhaps it is likely that his audience included Christians of Jewish extraction, given that he speaks of the murder of "our loved ones." In any case, his point is that there is a love and a grace capable of dealing with the horrors of what they had experienced.

In these 10 sermons Confessing Church pastors opposed specific Nazi beliefs and policies that sought the exclusion of Jews and Judaism from German public life. While some challenged the Nazi view that the Jews were an evil and pernicious people by affirming their status as the children of God, others opposed the idea that the Old Testament and Judaism ought to have no part of Christianity by affirming their foundational significance. A few even appear to condemn the Nazi extermination of the peoples of Europe, including Jews, in its drive to European dominance. While none of these sermons may be categorized as resistance to overthrow the Nazi regime, they certainly reveal opposition within the ranks of the Confessing Church, as criticisms of the hatred, violence, and inhumanity of the state.

IV. Conclusions

Throughout this article, I have provided evidence that Confessing pastors infrequently, but publicly, expressed opposition through their sermons from a position of religious authority. In our sample of 255 sermons, 31 (or 12%) of the sermons contain oppositional messages against the Nazi regime and its ideology, delivered by 12 different Confessing Church pastors. Though we have no way of knowing if the 255 sermons are representative of all sermons preached by Confessing pastors, the figures suggest that oppositional messages were not uncommon and also part of an on-going debate among Confessing pastors about the relationship between Nazi ideology and Christianity.

To gain a better understanding of the significance of the 31 sermons preached during World War II that contained oppositional content, we must consider their locations. Twelve of the 31 oppositional sermons were delivered outside of Nazi Germany: nine in England and three in Switzerland. Eleven of the sermons were delivered in Nazi Germany (one of which was in a concentration camp). Another nine of the 31 sermons were delivered in undisclosed locations, and thus we cannot make any judgments about the reception of the sermons among the listeners. However, all but two of the nine sermons delivered in undisclosed locations were delivered by pastors known to be ministers in Nazi Germany, so the likelihood that the sermon was preached in Germany is high.⁹⁰ Thus, in all likelihood, 18 of the 31 oppositional sermons were delivered in Nazi Germany during World War II.

At the same time, if we look at the sermons preached by location and subject, we find that of the five sermons preached against the Nazi persecution of the German churches and Christians, we find that all were preached outside Nazi Germany. Of the 10 sermons preached in support of Jews and Judaism, half were preached in Nazi Germany (though one was in a concentration camp), and the other five were either preached outside Nazi Germany (two), or their locations are

⁹⁰ The pastors in Germany at the time of the sermons include Dietrich Bonhoeffer (2 sermons), Hans Iwand, Helmut Gollwitzer, and Paul Hinz (2). Karl Barth delivered one sermon with an undisclosed location, yet he was a professor at the University of Basel at the time. Another sermon was delivered by an anonymous pastor.

unknown (three).⁹¹ And lastly, of the 17 sermons preached against Nazism as a false ideology, six were preached in England (all by Franz Hildebrandt), six from within Nazi Germany, and another five were preached in undisclosed locations, though each of the five were delivered by pastors working within Nazi Germany at the time.⁹²

Given this data, I argue that 18 of the sermons were delivered in Nazi Germany and thus may have had an impact on Germans and their views of Nazi Germany, its leaders, ideology, and policies. The 18 sermons reflect only 7% of the total of 255 World War II sermons gathered in this research sample. This indicates that pastors simply did not feel free in the Nazi totalitarian state to voice their criticisms of the state. However, the sermons preached within Nazi Germany reveal a modicum of freedom, even in wartime, to express criticisms of the state.⁹³ At the same time, the sermons preached outside Nazi Germany demonstrate the actions of a church in exile still trying to improve conditions in its homeland or to prepare for a thriving church after the war. But all of the sermons reveal to us a conversation within the churches about how to address crucial concerns: the persecution of Christians under the Nazi regime, the state's celebration of a false ideology, and the denigration of Judaism and persecution of Jews.

First, the sermons that undermined the Nazi regime and its leaders as unjust persecutors of Christians and the German churches served to destabilize its legitimacy. This criticism asserts not only that the Nazi regime is unjust in its treatment of its citizens, but that the leadership is in some sense anti-Christian and thus at odds with the tradition of the German Reformation. Furthermore, it calls into question Hitler's and many Nazi leaders' claims to be Christians themselves or at least respectful of the Christian tradition.⁹⁴

Second, the sermons that criticized National Socialism as a false ideology served to undermine peoples' adherence to this belief system. The sermons that criticized National Socialism and as a morally corrupt ideology that elevates one people, one race, one nation, as intrinsically superior (thus denigrating all others), became oppositional to the priorities and policies of the Nazi state. These sermons publicly undermined the Nazi philosophy of governance, and provided an alternative vision for governing a society and nation. In effect, these sermons attempted to redirect the allegiance and obedience of the Christian away from the Nazi state and toward God.

And third, the sermons that supported Jews and Judaism, or that condemned Nazi persecution of Jews, undermine Nazi racial ideology and policies. Confessing Church pastors affirmed that the Jews are the people of God and that Judaism is a foundation of Christianity that cannot be denied. Unfortunately, only a very small percentage of the 255 sermons—only 3% (10 sermons)—actually speak out in support of Jews and Judaism. While these messages of support are present in the historical record, the small numbers reveal ambivalence about the Jews and Judaism in Nazi Germany during World War II.

But one should not over-emphasize the oppositional nature of these sermons. The sermons do not offer a sustained attack on the Nazi state, National Socialism, or the regime's policies. We do not find any calls for Germans to sabotage or otherwise fight against the police state. Nor are

⁹¹ Of the three unknown locations, one pastor, Hans Iwand, served at the Marienkirche in Dortmund, and thus the sermon was likely delivered in Nazi Germany.

⁹² The pastors were Helmut Gollwitzer, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Paul Hinz (2 sermons), and Hans Iwand.

⁹³ Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 55; and Klaus Scholder, *The Churches and the Third Reich*, vol. 2, *The Year of Disillusionment 1935, Barmen and Rome* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 169. See also Tim Kirk, *Nazi Germany* (New York: Palgrave, 2007), 108.

⁹⁴ Steigmann-Gall, *The Holy Reich*, 3.

there any sermons that call for organized and united action against the state. The sermons express short critical comments in the context of a sermon's theological reflections. Thus, this research supports the conclusions of historians, such as Wolfgang Gerlach and Victoria Barnett, who assert that the majority of Confessing Church pastors did not speak out effectively in opposition against the Nazi state.⁹⁵

In fact, one may well argue that the true significance of this research is that it reveals the vast majority of sermons (88%) did not criticize or in any way oppose the Nazi state. As emphasized earlier, Confessing Church members were united only on a single point: they wanted the Nazi regime to stay out of the affairs of the German churches. They were all committed to halting any National Socialist infringements into Christian theology and practice—this was a religious struggle.⁹⁶ In other words, they were not interested in a political struggle, but sought to unite to oppose Nazi efforts to undermine church autonomy. Based on this research, and given that only 12% voiced criticism of the regime, one might conclude that the Confessing churches simply provided parishioners with a way to retreat from the political sphere in the Third Reich, and in doing so, that the churches actually discouraged dissent.⁹⁷

This is a valid criticism. Yet it is important to understand the degree and nature of dissent, such as it was, within the only institutions in Nazi Germany that largely withstood the process of *Gleichschaltung* (or coordination).⁹⁸ The Nazi regime coordinated German institutions as varied as the trade unions, the universities, the courts, and the radio industry and the theater. As the German churches remained the only place in Germany society with a modicum of freedom to criticize the Nazi state, it is important to understand the degree and the nature of these criticisms. While the pastors never rallied parishioners to overthrow the regime, nor incited violence against the state or its officials, they publicly criticized the regime on matters pertinent to their own ministries in the Protestant churches. They were concerned about Nazi persecution of Christians, Nazism as a false ideology in competition with Christianity, and the denigration of Judaism and persecution of Jews.

In understanding the low numbers of oppositional sermons, we must also consider the factors that may have prevented Confessing Church pastors from speaking out against the Nazi regime and in defense of Jews and Judaism. First, there were simply fewer pastors to preach than before war broke out.⁹⁹ Of the 17,000 Protestant pastors in Nazi Germany in 1941, 6,800 (40%) were mobilized in the army or navy. Not only pastors, but non-ordained vicars and theological candidates were called up as well. By October 1944, 45% of all pastors and 98% of non-ordained vicars and candidates were mobilized. This left a much smaller contingent of pastors at home to preach.¹⁰⁰ Second, many did not act or speak against the Nazi regime because it was a terroristic, totalitarian regime that threatened harassment, imprisonment, and even death for acts deemed dangerous. The arrests and intimidation of well-known pastors like Martin Niemöller and Dietrich

⁹⁵ Gerlach, *And the Witnesses Were Silent*, vii-viii; and Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 198-199.

⁹⁶ Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 5.

⁹⁷ Special thanks to one of my anonymous reviewers for this critique.

⁹⁸ See Kirk, *Nazi Germany*, 108.

⁹⁹ For a discussion of the mobilization of German pastors, and of the figures presented here, see Helmreich, *German Churches under Hitler*, 306-308.

¹⁰⁰ Incidentally, this led to many women, many times the wives of pastors, to fill in and lead congregations; see Helmreich, *German Churches under Hitler*, 308.

Bonhoeffer, as well as Catholic priests are well documented.¹⁰¹ Intimidation, harassment, and arrests not only disrupted these pastors' services to their communities, but also impacted their social status and ability to provide for their families. And third, we often forget that 117 German pastors of Jewish descent served at this time, and yet at least 43% fled Nazi Germany because it became impossible for them to continue in their ministries.¹⁰² We can only speculate about the number of non-Jewish pastors who emigrated for the same reason.

This study raises several questions about further research into the sermons delivered in Nazi Germany during World War II. First, are there any differences in the frequency of oppositional comments in sermons in the pre-war and war years, and do they reflect the same concerns about ideology and Nazi policies examined in this article? Second, how do these wartime sermons compare to Catholic or neutral Protestant wartime sermons, and do they oppose the Nazi regime, its ideology, and policy with the same degree of fervor and frequency? Third, while we examined Confessing pastors' positive views of the Jews and Judaism, my research indicates that they also occasionally expressed anti-Judaic themes, such as the charge of deicide and the supersession of Christianity over Judaism.¹⁰³ How might anti-Judaic themes in sermons have contributed to a religious milieu that made the Holocaust possible in Nazi Germany? And lastly, how were these sermons received by the German population? We can learn much more of the effects of these sermons if we could understand whether congregants accepted these oppositional comments and, upon leaving church, acted in oppositional ways themselves. I hope with this research that I have cracked open the door to further research on the sermons of World War II so that we might better understand how religion contributed to a German nation at war.

¹⁰¹ See for example, Conway, *The Nazi Persecutions of the Churches*; Lewy, *The Catholic Church and Nazi Germany*; Helmreich, *German Churches under Hitler*; and Kevin P. Spicer, *Resisting the Third Reich: The Catholic Clergy in Hitler's Berlin* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2004).

¹⁰² Skiles, "Preaching to Nazi Germany," 408.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 282-370.