Confronting the Past: Post-1945
German Protestant Theology and the Fate of the Jews

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As the audience at the Oberammergau Passion Play of 1934 watched Jesus being hoisted on the cross, many saw a parable of the Third Reich: “There he is. That is our Führer, our Hitler!” The outcry was ambiguous: was Germany being crucified or was Hitler being identified as the savior? To complicate matters, agony and crucifixion were unheroic and thus unsuitable to the Nazi movement. Three years later, at the 1937 Nazi exhibit of Degenerate Art, depictions of Christ’s anguish on the cross were displayed as examples of the unacceptable. Christ was to be presented as an aggressive and manly warrior whose life was the focus of attention, not his death. Accordingly, artistic representations of Jesus increasingly aryanized his appearance and portrayed him in heroic poses, and archeological finds were interpreted as demonstrating his purported “Nordic” appearance. At a minimum, his death had to be understood as the immediate prelude to a grand resurrection.

At the conclusion of the Second World War, ambiguity continued to haunt Germany: had it capitulated to the Allies or had it been liberated from Hitler? For the postwar German Protestant church (Evangelische Kirche Deutschland [EKD]), the dilemma was defined in theological terms: was the church guilty of a horrific collaboration with evil, a crucifixion of Christian morality alongside the murder of six million Jews, or it had now been liberated from a “pagan” Nazi regime that had sought the destruction of the church and Christianity? Following the widespread discourse of German victimhood that developed after 1945, elements within the church sought to present Christians and Christianity as victims of Nazism, just like the Jews, while using as its symbolic configuration the figure of Jesus—who had fallen victim to the Jews.

The failure of the churches, both Protestant and Catholic, to address directly the moral and theological implications for Christianity of National Socialism and the Holocaust parallels the broader reluctance of German society, in the first decades after the war, to confront its past. Indeed, although reparations were paid to the new state of Israel and some trials of Nazis were held, broader questions of complicity were not raised for several decades. The most radical change, of course, was the
immediate shift from a fascist to a democratic state (in the case of West Germany) and a greater involvement of laity in the governance of the Protestant church.

Just as it was only in the 1980s that German society began to engage in a widespread discussion of the Holocaust, so too it was in that decade that the churches began to address issues of Christian anti-Judaism and the need to develop a new kind of Christian theology in response to the Holocaust. At the same time, reactionary voices came to the fore, insisting that the violence of the Holocaust was not German in origin. Ernst Nolte, one of the leading figures in the notorious Historikerstreit of the late 1980s and 1990s, insisted that the crimes of Nazism were “Asiatic,” whereas Christa Mulack, a Christian feminist theologian who became popular around the same time, argued that the Holocaust represented a “Jewish” morality of blind obedience to orders.7

For most German Protestant theologians during the first three decades after the war, the “sin” of Nazism was not primarily its persecution of the Jews or its suppression of democracy, but rather its overheated nationalism that had placed the authority of a secular ruler, Adolf Hitler, above Christ. The complex identification of Christians with Jews, facilitated by the ambiguity of Jesus’ own identity as a Jew who was simultaneously the first Christian, was fostered by the equation of Nazism with paganism and paganism with secularism: Germany would need a rechristianization. According to the ethicist Helmut Thielicke, a member of the Confessing Church (the Protestant group that had arisen in 1934 in opposition to the German Christian movement), the Third Reich was the consequence of lapsed religiosity, Germans’ abandonment of God: “National Socialism is the final and most terrible product of secularization.”8 This rationale overlooked the fact that Christian theological discourse had itself contributed to Germany’s overheated nationalism, racism, and antisemitism both before and even after the Third Reich, providing symbols that shaped the wider cultural understanding of political developments.9 During the last year of the First World War, for example, Matias Grünewald’s famous Isenheim altar, depicting Jesus’ agony on the cross, had been removed temporarily from a church in Colmar and put on display in Munich. The visitors who flocked to the museum interpreted this piece of art as an uncanny representation of contemporary war-era agony, meaningful only to Germans who could understand the Nordic message of the artist.10 The connections between nation, race, and Christianity were configured to express a ressentiment: Germany was Christ on the cross, betrayed by Judas. After the war, such emotions were expressed in more secular terms when theories regarding how Germany had been “stabbed in the back” gained currency. Yet the identification of Germany with Christ persisted, as many pastors interpreted the Versailles Treaty as Germany’s crucifixion at the hands of the victors, and later spoke of the promise of the Nazi party as Germany’s resurrection. In 1931, for instance, a German Christian pastor, Julius Leutheuser (who was also a member of the Nazi party), wrote:

In Adolf Hitler we see the powers again awakening which were once given to the Savior. For the National Socialists there is the experience of joy that finally one can sacrifice his life for something that will remain . . . . Our way is rough, but one thing we know, that we shall as a result maintain a pure soul. Golgotha is followed by the resurrection. We are still standing on the way to Golgotha. Some will remain on it, but the soul, it cannot be stolen. Into your hands we commend our spirit, for Adolf Hitler we will gladly die.11
Following the Second World War, formerly competing Protestant factions became united in their use of biblical imagery of the Israelites in exile in order to describe the “terrible plight” of Germans. Wolf Meyer-Erlach, a notorious Nazi propagandist and leader of the German Christian movement, wrote in 1947: “We are wandering through the wilderness like the Children of Israel. . . . We are like the generation of Israel that was in captivity in Babylon, who had to make bricks in Egypt and were in danger of perishing in the demoralizing service on the front.”

It is noteworthy that, a few years earlier, Meyer-Erlach had expunged the Hebrew Bible (that is, what Protestants at the time called the “Old Testament”) from the Christian Bible; now he was comparing postwar Germans to the children of Israel leaving Egypt. Meanwhile, a Confessing Church pastor, Werner Schmauch, termed the German civilian population “refugees” and compared them to Abram being told by God to leave his fatherland. These former rivals within the church found common cause in identifying themselves as biblical Jews—that is, as politically innocent figures following a divine plan of salvation. Invocations of the Hebrew Bible by Christians remained in place for some decades after the Second World War in East and West Germany and were manipulated so as to exculpate Christians of responsibility for the fate of the Jews by transferring Jewish identity from Jews to Christian Germans.

The Protestant Church during the Third Reich

During the Nazi era, Germany’s Protestants were divided between two main camps. The first, known as the German Christian movement, began to take shape in the late 1920s and became solidified as a movement within the Deutsche Evangelische Kirche (as the German Protestant church was then known) in 1932. This movement advocated the creation of a unified, national German church, to which Catholics, it was hoped, would convert, and which would also exemplify the nazified Christian spirit. During the Third Reich, the movement claimed a membership of 600,000 pastors, bishops, professors of theology, religion teachers, and lay leaders, and it eventually attracted between a quarter and a third of Protestant church members. The movement was highly successful in gaining positions of influence at many of the university theological faculties and regional churches, and its ideology was disseminated through lectures, conferences, and numerous publications that occasionally found common ground even among those in the main opposition, the Confessing Church, as well as those in the Catholic Church and in the much smaller “neo-pagan” groups that rejected Christianity in favor of a revival of Teutonic myths and rituals.

Enthusiastically pro-Nazi, the German Christian movement sought to demonstrate its support for Hitler by incorporating Nazi images into Christianity: placing a swastika on church altars next to the cross, giving the Nazi salute at its rallies, and celebrating Hitler as a leader sent by God. It was ready to alter fundamental Christian doctrine in order to bring the church into compliance with the Reich, and it welcomed the April 1933 order that removed Jews from the civil service, demanding that the Protestant church do likewise by expelling baptized Jews from its ranks. That demand contravened the doctrine of baptism, according to which the sacrament transformed a Jew into a Christian, but German Christian leaders insisted that the Nazi racial laws took precedence and that baptism could not nullify race.
In May 1934, a group of disapproving Protestant theologians in Germany, including Karl Barth, one of the most distinguished theologians of his day, condemned the German Christian movement as heresy, issuing the now-famous Barmen Declaration. This document became the basis of a new movement within the German Protestant church that called itself the Confessing Church. Inspired by the neo-Orthodox theology of Barth, who left Germany for Switzerland in 1935, and who distinguished sharply between the word of God and humanly created religion, the Barmen Declaration insisted on Scripture as God’s word and on Jesus Christ as the sole path to God. While the document was a strong repudiation of the German Christian movement’s efforts to synthesize Christianity with National Socialism, it included no mention of antisemitism, nor did it provide a theological basis to affirm the legitimacy of Judaism or any other non-Christian religion.

As a patriotic confederation of theologically conservative pastors, the Confessing Church eventually attracted the support of about 20 percent of Protestant pastors. Although some of its leaders, including Barth and the pastor and theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, became prominent opponents of Hitler, the Confessing Church did not officially oppose either Hitler or the Nazi regime or the persecution of the Jews. Rather, its efforts were directed against the alterations in church doctrine, liturgy, and scripture that the German Christians had created in their synthesis of Christianity and National Socialism. In the early years of the Reich, enthusiasm for National Socialism and for Hitler prevailed among the public at large. Barth, whose theology inspired many in the Confessing Church, sharply reproached leaders of this church in 1936 for their silence regarding Nazi antisemitism: “This silence can be understood from the fact that in early 1933, when these evils were most flagrantly evident, the people who represent and sustain the cause of the Confessing Church today were deluded by the ideology of National Socialism. In 1933, whoever did not believe in Hitler’s mission was ostracized, even in the ranks of the Confessing Church.” Indeed, when Bonhoeffer and a few others attempted to rally support for the Jews from members of the Confessing Church, they failed. Formal support was forthcoming only for Jews who had been baptized, although some Confessing Church members did organize private assistance to Jews.

Tensions between the two factions within the church continued throughout the Third Reich, as the German Christians gained control of most of the regional Protestant churches in Germany, using the church’s institutional structures and finances to promote their positions. On one issue, however, the two factions were not at swords’ points: most members of the Confessing Church agreed with the German Christians that Germany needed to be rid of its Jews and that Judaism was a degenerate moral and spiritual influence on Christians. However, in sharp contrast to the German Christian movement, the Confessing Church rejected the supremacy of the Nazi racial laws over the sacrament of baptism and spoke out firmly on behalf of Jews who had been baptized as Christians.

The extent of the German Christian movement’s influence, which was initially downplayed by historians, was reevaluated in a major study by Manfred Gailus. Examining 147 Protestant church parishes in Berlin that were served by 565 pastors, he concluded that 40 percent of the pastors were oriented toward the German Christian movement at least at some point during the Third Reich, compared with slightly
more than one-third who were sympathetic to the Confessing Church. One-quarter of
the parishes were dominated by German Christian pastors, whereas half were split
between the Confessing Church and German Christians. While no comparable
detailed social historical studies of the churches in other regions have been carried
out, Gailus’ findings would undoubtedly find parallels elsewhere in Germany, and
would perhaps reveal an even greater proportion of German Christian sympathizers.
The movement infiltrated both university theological faculties and village parishes.
Few Germans withdrew from the Protestant church on account of the new Nazi theol-
ology promoted by the German Christians, and German Christian rallies drew large
crowds. Many pastors were sympathetic to the German Christian movement’s theol-
ogy, and their theological views were disseminated within the institutional structures
of the Protestant church; there was no schismatic withdrawal and creation of alterna-
tive (that is, non-Protestant) churches, nor is there evidence of large-scale objections
to pastors preaching a German Christian message. Efforts made by the Nazi regime
after 1937 to encourage Germans to withdraw from the church while still defining
themselves as Gottgläubige (believers in God) met with only a minimal response. At
the same time, the anti-Christian neo-pagan movements were unsuccessful in attracting
large memberships.

In the spring of 1939, the bishops of Hannover, Württemberg, and Bavaria, all of whom
maintained a non-aligned position vis-à-vis the Confessing Church and the German
Christian movement, refused to sign the German Christians’ Godesberg Declaration,
which proclaimed that “Christianity is the unbridgeable religious opposition to Judaism.” Bishop Hans Meiser of Bavaria asked if “Jewish” referred to the “Jewish-talmudic reli-
gion” or to the apostle Paul’s teachings (which were intended as a sharp refutation of the
“Jewish-Pharisaic spirit”); “or was the declaration directed not against the genuine oppo-
sition between Jewish religion and Jewish spirit but rather against the divine revelation of
the Old and New Testament?” To clarify their position, the bishops formulated an alter-
native declaration that contained even stronger anti-Jewish language:

The National Socialist worldview fights with all relentlessness against the political and
spiritual influence of the Jewish race on our völkisch life. … In the realm of faith there is
a sharp opposition between the message of Jesus Christ and His apostles and [that] of the
Jewish religion of legalism and political messianic hope, which is already being fought
against in the Old Testament. In the realm of völkisch life an earnest and responsible
racial politics is necessary for the preservation of the purity of our Volk.

These two declarations formed the backdrop against which the formal opening in
May 1939 of the Institute for the Study and Eradication of Jewish Influence on Ger-
man Church Life was celebrated at the Wartburg Castle, a famous site of nationalist
gatherings and the place where Martin Luther had translated the New Testament into
German. The Institute published “dejudaized” versions of the New Testament that
were purged of all positive references to the Hebrew Bible and Judaism, a hymnal
purged of all Hebrew words, a revised catechism that proclaimed Jesus the savior of
Aryans, and a vast array of scholarly and popular publications denouncing Judaism.
With bishops, pastors, and numerous professors of theology as members, the Instit-
ute, financed by donations from regional Protestant churches and from church head-
quarters in Berlin, served as a vehicle for antisemitic propaganda.
The Initial Postwar Years

With the defeat of Nazi Germany, the theological “church struggle” between Protestant members of the German Christian movement and those of the Confessing Church was left unresolved. After 1945, the reins of many of the regional churches were transferred to former Confessing Church pastors and bishops as part of the denazification effort—but not all. For example, Christian Kinder, a prominent leader of the German Christian movement, became president of the church of Schleswig-Holstein in 1945, and the “neutral” bishops of the three “intact” churches, Theophil Wurm, Hans Meiser, and August Marahrens, retained their positions, although their stance vis-à-vis the regime and its antisemitism had been ambivalent, at best. Now it became the task of the new church leadership to supervise the denazification of German Christian pastors and to purge the church of their twelve-year reign. Yet “denazification” was largely a farce; hardly any pastors were removed from their positions, even those who had been most publicly and virulently pro-Nazi. One example is the Christian German leader and Nazi propagandist Wolf Meyer-Erlach, who was assisted by Martin Niemöller (a former Confessing Church pastor who was appointed president of the church of Hessen-Nassau in 1947). Presumably as a gesture of “reconciliation,” Niemöller arranged for Meyer-Erlach to receive a pastorate in the Taunus mountains just north of Frankfurt. There he was able to launch a new and very public career as an anti-Soviet Christian propagandist, for which he was awarded, in 1962, the Bundesverdienstkreuz [Order of Merit] First Class by the Federal Republic of Germany, the highest civilian honor bestowed by the government.26

Even though most of the individual regional churches were now in the hands of former Confessing Church members, there was no unity among them, politically or theologically, regarding how to evaluate the immediate past or how to construct the future of the church. Barth, who had long criticized the Confessing Church, now insisted that Germans should not regard themselves as victims. In contrast, Bishop Wurm of Württemberg and church president Martin Niemöller of Hessen-Nassau called for forgiveness, accusing the Allies of vengeful behavior in their punishment of former Nazis. In fact, the ability of former Nazi supporters to retain their positions within the church was facilitated by the unwitting collaboration of Allied officials with church leaders who fabricated a myth of Christian resistance to National Socialism. According to that myth, the spiritual bulwark of faith had kept Christians from submitting to Nazism; at most, some theologians had compromised minor aspects of their religion in order to protect the church from destruction at the hands of the Nazi regime, which was always painted as anti-Christian. The portrayal of themselves as both victims and resisters fell on sympathetic ears; the Allies naively assumed that Germans who could demonstrate their involvement in the church could not have been Nazis. Letters attesting to regular church attendance from pastors—some of whom had themselves been Nazis—proved useful in efforts to achieve a denazified status. Such letters, often deliberate lies, were organized at the highest level of the EKD, as Robert Ericksen has shown.27 Some bishops and pastors, notably Martin Niemöller, claimed that denazification investigations were demoralizing and were being undertaken in a spirit of revenge against Germans who had already repented. Niemöller thus urged Christians not to participate in the denazification tribunals and forbade
clergy from involvement.\textsuperscript{28} Then again, as Steven Remy has argued, the Spruchkammer [denazification courts] were nothing more than “a legal whitewash that facilitated the return of thousands of former Nazis to positions of influence in German public life.”\textsuperscript{29}

In the eyes of most Christians in the two postwar Germanies, the Holocaust was not the salient crime of Nazism, nor was the church implicated in any of the crimes committed against Jews, POWs, the handicapped, Sinti and Roma, members of resistance movements, and slave laborers. Instead, the church presented itself as the conscience of Germany that, together with the universities, could reestablish the moral integrity of the German people. This falsification of the church’s role during the Third Reich was aided by the work of the church historian Wilhelm Niemöller (the brother of Martin), whose numerous publications about the Nazi era distorted the role of the Confessing Church by portraying it as having actively resisted the Third Reich.\textsuperscript{30}

In addition to their claims regarding Christian resistance to Hitler, Protestant pastors and theologians fostered a myth regarding Nazi persecution of the churches.\textsuperscript{31} Proving susceptible to this fiction, the Allies allowed the churches to conduct an independent self-examination rather than imposing on them a rigorous, external denazification procedure. As a result, even those with the most blatant Nazi involvement found that they could leave their past behind. An example is the case of Siegfried Leffler, one of the earliest and most prominent leaders of the German Christian movement, who had held a position in the Thuringian ministry of education during the Third Reich and was active as a Nazi propagandist. He was arrested and imprisoned in Ludwigsburg in July 1947, classified as guilty [\textit{Belasteter}], level two, and given a punishment of one year in a work camp, a 2,000RM fine, and a five-year suspension from his profession. Immediately, he issued a public declaration of repentance and solicited support from a variety of prominent church figures. As the historian Doris Bergen notes, Leffler’s “repentance” was joined to an insistence that he was not responsible for atrocities against the Jews, since he had always believed in “genuine tolerance and reconciliation.”\textsuperscript{32} Leffler’s posturing as an atoning sinner innocent of any of the Reich’s crimes was a perfect combination in the eyes of German Protestants, who presented his case sympathetically in church newspapers.\textsuperscript{33} This stance, in fact, became a Christian staple in postwar Germany, as was reflected in the new image of Jesus that was promoted during that era: suffering and empathic, yet powerless against his enemies.\textsuperscript{34} In less than a year, Leffler was released from the work camp, and by 1949 he had become a pastor for the church of Bavaria; he retired in 1970 and died in 1983.\textsuperscript{35} The church’s emphasis on forgiveness and reconciliation, more than repentance and reparation, promoted a morality that opposed punitive measures against former Nazis.

In the face of church claims regarding Christian resistance to the Nazi regime, it is worthy of note that some of those who had forfeited their lives because of their political resistance were denied church honors after the war. In the most notorious case, Bishop Hans Meiser of Bavaria refused to attend a 1953 memorial service for Bonhoeffer, who had been murdered by the Nazis in April 1945, on the grounds that he was a political martyr, not a Christian martyr.\textsuperscript{36} Bonhoeffer and others, such as Hans and Sophie Scholl and their associates in the White Rose student resistance
group, as well as resistance leaders (including Claus von Stauffenberg) who were responsible for the July 1944 assassination attempt against Hitler, were repudiated by the church for having attacked the state. At the same time, Bonhoeffer served as an excuse for the church, a sign that it had offered resistance.

Postwar Germany, a country that stood universally condemned, attempted to recover its national morality by bringing religious rhetoric into the public sphere. Clemens Vollnhals has demonstrated that the churches were perceived as one of the only German institutions to have survived the National Socialist era intact. Till van Rahden has noted the increased popularity of Christianity in West Germany, among both Protestants and Catholics, after 1945. Pastors and bishops were influential within the government, particularly in establishing social policy; church publications were widely read; and the 1950s and 1960s saw the growth of lay religious organizations. Indeed, van Rahden writes, the “early Federal Republic experienced an epoch of ‘re-Christianization’ among Protestants and especially Catholics.” Strict sexual morality became the template for rechristianizing Germany—premarital sex was forbidden and abortion and homosexuality were to remain outlawed. A new focus on reconfiguring the role of the father and shaping a “democratic family,” van Rahden has pointed out, became a hallmark of the West German quest for democracy. Calls were made for an increased and independent voice for the laity within the church. Not only social conservatives, but democrats, too, proclaimed their allegiance to Christian moral teachings. Yet their moral concerns did not extend to public discussion of the Nazi crimes of eugenics, war, and murder, let alone church complicity in the National Socialist project. No objections were raised, on Christian grounds, to the establishment of the Federal Republic, but when Barth wrote in 1949 that the Jews, not the Germans, were the elect of God, and that the establishment of the state of Israel was a sign of the continued validity of God’s covenant with the Jews, most Christians reacted with discomfort. Classic elements of Christian anti-Judaism, which denied the continued Jewish covenant with God and the national identity of the Jewish people as part of that covenant, had not yet been confronted and overcome by the majority of German Christians.

**Early Postwar Theological Declarations**

In August 1945, following a national meeting of regional churches held in Treysa (Hessen) that established the new confederation of Lutheran, Reformed, and United churches known as the Evangelische Kirche Deutschland, a “Message to the Pastors” was issued. During the debate over this message, Barth insisted that Nazism had to be understood through Germany’s particular history and demanded individual Christian repentance for it, whereas Martin Niemöller insisted that “the real guilt rests with the church.” In the end, the more conservative Lutheran viewpoint prevailed over Barth and the Reformed pastors: namely, that satanic forces had been at work in the Nazi movement and had eliminated reason and insight, and that the churches had attempted to take responsibility during the Third Reich, but had been kept in a “prison” by the Nazis. At worst, German Christians had earned divine approba-

too, had a silver lining: “according to the orthodox Lutheran understanding of the law and gospel, God’s mercy always followed His wrath.”

The theology of the Confessing Church, with its emphasis on the need for greater Christian piety, lay behind the pastors’ Stuttgart Declaration of October 1945, which was formulated for a non-German audience with the aim of gaining postwar acceptance for the German Protestant church. Like the Third Reich-era Barmen Declaration, which in part it echoed, this document made no mention of Nazi antisemitism, the Holocaust, or even the Jews. Rather, the crime of Christians during the Third Reich was claimed to have been theological disloyalty to doctrinal discipline: a crime of the church against the church. The capitulation of the church to the German Christian movement during the Third Reich was explained as resulting from its failure to recognize the supreme authority of Christ due to its near-deification of the Volk and Hitler. As a result, denazification of those who had argued for an Aryan Jesus and who had called for a dejudaization of the church was made contingent upon their acknowledgment that the transcendent Christ held authority over any state leader.

Consistent with his statements in Tresya, Martin Niemöller argued at Stuttgart that the guilt of the church was its turn away from Christian doctrine during the Third Reich, which opened the door to providing political support for many of Hitler’s policies. A different view was taken by Hans Asmussen, who had been active in the Confessing Church: the church was guilty of complacency but not of complicity. The final document spoke of the German churches as having “struggled in the name of Jesus Christ against the spirit” of Nazism, so that the church now stood “in a great community of suffering with our people, but also in a solidarity of guilt. With great anguish, we say: Through us, infinite sorrow has been brought upon many peoples and countries.” The use of the passive voice to speak of crimes committed “through us” was noteworthy: this became common parlance among postwar German theologians. In its concluding sentence, formulated by Asmussen, the declaration criticized Christians “for not witnessing more courageously, for not praying more faithfully, for not believing more joyously, and for not loving more ardently”—hardly a statement of moral or political responsibility. Yet even this pious language, as Matthew Hockenos has demonstrated, was viewed in some quarters as a capitulation by the German Protestant church to foreign interests.

Religious subjectivity remained the dominant concern: confession of guilt, that is, disobedience of doctrine, a turning away from God. Following conservative Lutheran theological traditions, guilt remained a matter of inner religious sin, and religious sin was not linked to concrete political acts. Moreover, sin and guilt were essentially temporary; as Martin Niemöller stated at Stuttgart, God “can forgive all guilt that is confessed to Him.”

In the ongoing debates among theologians, pastors, bishops, and laity, there was little if any mention regarding the fate of the Jews. When the subject did come up, the tone toward Jews was generally disparaging. A fairly typical statement of the time was that of Bishop August Marahrens, who wrote in his weekly pastoral letter of August 1945: “However divided from the Jews we may be in our beliefs and although a number of them may have brought severe harm upon our people, they ought not to have been attacked in an inhuman fashion.” Although occasional comments took the church to task for failing to act on behalf of the Jews, none accused it of taking
an active role in propagating and legitimating antisemitism, deportation, and murder. No recognition was given to the fact that, even if some pastors had supported the Nazi sterilization and euthanasia programs (others had protested against them), no theological justifications for those programs had ever been offered—in contrast to the theological justifications of antisemitism that had received ecclesial backing via the Institute for the Study and Eradication of Jewish Influence on German Church Life. Indeed, rather than identify and condemn the active theological support for antisemitism, the first explicit statement regarding the fate of the Jews issued by postwar German Protestants blamed the Jews for their own suffering: “By crucifying the Messiah, Israel rejected its election and intended purpose.”

This “Message Concerning the Jewish Question” was formulated by a group of Protestants, most of them former members of the Confessing Church, that gathered in Darmstadt in April 1948. In the course of their deliberations, they received a letter from Bishop Theophil Wurm, which read in part:

Can anyone in Germany speak on the Jewish question without mentioning how Jewish literature has sinned against the German Volk through its mockery of everything holy since the days of Heinrich Heine, and the ways farmers in many regions have suffered because of Jewish usurers? And if one wants today to take action about the rising antisemitism, can one remain silent about the misfortune of Jews holding in the palms of their hands the occupying powers, in order to express their understandable feelings of vengeance?52

As noted, the declaration ultimately placed the blame squarely on the victims: “Inasmuch as Israel crucified the messiah, it has lost its chosenness. . . . Christ was crucified and resurrected also for the people of Israel. This is the hope for Israel after Golgotha. That God’s judgment follows Israel even into its rejection, is a sign of God’s patience.” Divine patience would be matched by Christian mission; Jews were welcome targets of conversion to the church.

A little-publicized “Address to the Churches” issued in 1947 in Seelisberg, Switzerland was unique in that it was formulated by a mixed group of Jewish and Christian theologians.53 Unlike other early postwar declarations, the Seelisberg document also directly addressed the issue of antisemitism by specifying a number of Christian doctrines that lent support to anti-Jewish hostility, including Christian supersessionism, teachings about Jewish responsibility for the death of Jesus, and negative comments about Judaism. Despite its sophistication, the Seelisberg document remained little known and produced no immediate impact.

In 1950, as Jewish cemeteries in West Germany were being vandalized during a countrywide wave of antisemitism, representatives of the German Protestant church met in the Berlin suburb of Weissensee and formulated a statement declaring that the church “by omission and silence” was “implicated before God” in the “outrage which has been perpetrated against the Jews by people of our nation” (the terms Holocaust and genocide were not used). Although the statement asked Christians to “dissociate” from antisemitism and to protect Jewish cemeteries, it concluded with a hope for the eventual conversion of Jews to Christianity. The historian Matthew Hockenos notes the passive voice and the declaration’s endorsement of continued proselytizing among Jews even as it recognized God’s ongoing covenant with Jews: “If the Jews were still God’s chosen people then why did the church need to pray that Jews would
recognize Jesus as the Messiah?\textsuperscript{54} The declaration’s affirmation of mission to the Jews hardly brought an end to Christian theological anti-Judaism. Notwithstanding, this statement was perceived as signaling a radical shift in German Protestant theology, and it stimulated further theological reflection in Germany on Christian-Jewish relations. Ultimately, such reflections led to the more important church statements of the 1980s and beyond.

In 1961, the German Protestant Kirchentag, a biannual convention of Protestant laity that had begun in 1949, included the topic of Judaism for the first time on its agenda. The meeting, at which several Jewish theologians were invited to speak, became a catalyst for renewed Christian consideration of Judaism’s religious legitimacy. One topic of debate was whether God’s covenant with the Jews remained in force or whether it had been broken as a consequence of the Jews’ rejection of Jesus. Against those who argued for an ongoing covenant, some insisted that there could be no legitimate path to God or salvation without Jesus.\textsuperscript{55} The supersessionism underlying that assumption became the key theological debate—several theologians could not accept the statement, based on Romans 11:2, that God had not rejected the Jewish people and that “Jews and Christians are linked in an unbreakable bond,” since that would ignore the Jews’ rejection of Jesus as the messiah. Nor could the Christian mission to the Jews be given up without abandoning the obligation to bear witness to Jesus. One theologian present at the Kirchentag, Günther Harder, argued in favor of continued Christian proselytizing among the Jews, although he added that such a mission should be undertaken with humility rather than arrogance.\textsuperscript{56} More liberal theologians, among them Martin Stöhr and Gertrud Lückner, rejected the doctrine of a mission to the Jews quite forcefully. These two individuals later became active in lay organizations within the church that promoted Jewish-Christian dialogue groups (Christlich-Jüdische Gesellschaft)—or, more to the point, Christian groups discussing Judaism, since the few Jews remaining in West Germany had little interest in participating in interfaith dialogue.

The reaffirmation of Christian supersessionism in light of the Holocaust was made easier by identifying German Christians as “Old Testament” Jews and insisting on their victimhood. In 1961, the Jewish theologian Richard Rubenstein met with Heinrich Gruber, who, as a pastor in Berlin during the Third Reich, had provided assistance both to non-Aryan Christians and to Jews; in consequence, he spent three years in the Sachsenhausen and Dachau concentration camps. Gruber told Rubenstein that, in his understanding of Old Testament theology, Germany had simply served as the instrument of God’s wrath toward the Jews; their murder, he told Rubenstein, was “part of God’s plan.”\textsuperscript{57} Moreover, Germans had been punished “far worse than the people of the Lord” by Allied bombings and the division of Berlin into two sectors; according to Gruber, Germans were “now in the same situation as the Jews.”\textsuperscript{58} Rubenstein was horrified by Gruber’s statements and concluded that a radical reconsideration of theology, within both Jewish and Christian contexts, would have to take place: “At the heart of the problem is the fact that it may be impossible for Christians to remain Christians without regarding Jews in mythic, magic, and theological categories.”\textsuperscript{59} Put somewhat differently, by identifying themselves as “theological” Jews, Christians in Germany were able to exonerate themselves from responsibility for the murder of very real European Jews.
Continuities in Academic Theology

In trying to decide what to do about postwar Germany’s nazified universities and churches, the Allies were faced with a dilemma. Alongside the determination to eradicate Nazi influence was a desire to make use of Germany’s spiritual and intellectual elites in the reconstruction of the country.60 One of those urging for the latter was Karl Heinrich Bauer, the postwar rector at Heidelberg University, who argued that the universities and the churches should be placed at the Allies’ disposal for the purpose of building a new spiritual leadership for West Germany.61 This line of thinking, widely adopted in the early postwar years, worked against a thoroughgoing denazification of these institutions and also served as a screen to protect individuals, such as Bauer himself, from investigation of their Nazi involvements.62

Within the universities, those who had joined the Nazi party prior to 1933 were dismissed from their professorships by state authorities, but many others who had been active Nazi supporters retained their positions. According to the denazification rules established by the Allies, it was necessary to produce evidence that a particular faculty member had engaged in Nazi activities in order for that individual to be convicted and penalized. Membership in the Nazi party or affiliated organization was considered to be only limited proof; far more convincing were publications containing articles in which enthusiasm for Hitler was expressed. But the legitimacy of these publications was challenged in denazification hearings on the grounds that Nazi-era documents were tainted and non-objective.63 Attorneys representing the accused argued that postwar reflections and letters of recommendation from friends and colleagues of the accused were far more reliable, since these were produced in a setting shorn of Nazi pressures and threats. In numerous cases, such reflections and recommendations—often self-exculpatory, disingenuous, and dishonest—won exoneration for former Nazis and Nazi sympathizers.

While several university faculties of Protestant theology were closed or consolidated during the Nazi era, those that remained open nazified their curriculum. Professors appointed after 1936 were virtually all members of the German Christian movement, and nearly all of them retained their professorships after the war or else were transferred to influential positions within the church. Scholarship was altered to include racial analyses of the ancient Israelite religion and post-biblical Judaism. Few theologians emerged from the Third Reich untainted by the antisemitism that had been integrated into academic theology. Indeed, the University of Jena’s theological faculty had boasted of its effort to become a “bastion of National Socialism.”64 Such evidence refutes the argument made by the historian Trutz Rendtorff that the Protestant theological faculties were immune to National Socialism, thanks to the rigors of German theological scholarship.65

Moreover, Nazi-era theological traditions continued well after 1945. In the early postwar era, Walter Grundmann, the former academic director of the Institute for the Study and Eradication of Jewish Influence, published three major commentaries on the synoptic Gospels whose negative assessments of Judaism remained essentially unchanged from those of his earlier writings published during the Nazi era.66 Nonetheless, these books were required reading for students preparing for ordination as pastors in East and West Germany until the early 1990s. Ethelbert Stauffer, professor
of New Testament at the University of Bonn and an active member of the German Christian movement, enjoyed an influential postwar career in the field of New Testament. In his work of 1957, *Jesus: Gestalt und Geschichte*, Stauffer reiterated the German Christian view of Jesus as a lonely fighter against the tradition of Jewish legalistic pseudo-piety. The case of Hans F.K. Günther, a notorious racial theorist who had taught at the University of Jena and later the University of Berlin, was somewhat more nuanced. Following the war, he did not return to teach, but he continued writing academic works, some of them under a pseudonym. Writing as “Heinrich Ackerman,” for example, he published two major scholarly studies on the representations of Jesus in modern theology, which essentially reiterated his prewar racial arguments.67

In these and other instances, postwar “Christian theology” was essentially an articulation of anti-Jewish ideas that were ascribed to allegedly objective theological scholarship on Judaism rather than to Nazi propaganda. In the case of theologians with academic training in Jewish texts, it was easy to obtain university appointments after the war: there were relatively few of them, for one thing, and for another, the naive assumption among Allied authorities was that those who had expertise in rabbinic texts must have been sympathetic to Judaism, or at least uninvolved in Nazi activities. In fact, the ranks of these scholars included several formerly active Nazis, such as Karl Georg Kuhn, Paul Fiebig, and Ethelbert Stauffer.

The perpetuation of negative images of Judaism as purveyed by German Protestants after the war was particularly striking in the third edition of a major, multivolume reference work titled *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, which was published between 1957 and 1965. In contrast to the second edition, published between 1927 and 1932, which had included Jewish scholars among its contributors, articles in the third edition were authored exclusively by Christians—many of them either former members or else students of former members of the German Christian movement. As a result, the third edition did not mention the Holocaust, nor did it examine the support of Christian theologians for the Third Reich. According to the historian Ulrich Oelschläger, the third edition also contained more anti-Jewish stereotypes than did the two preceding editions, a fact that indicated the extended influence of Nazi-era theology.68

Until the 1990s, there was very little examination of the German Christian movement on the part of church historians, with the exception of Kurt Meier’s study of 1964 (which paid no significant attention to the movement’s antisemitism).69 Far more attention was given to the Confessing Church, which was presented as a heroic opponent of National Socialism. That myth, as we have seen, was carefully cultivated by Wilhelm Niemöller, among others.70 For several decades, little was written about the antisemitism that had permeated both church factions. Wolfgang Tilgner, writing in the 1960s, articulated the classic Confessing Church position that the German Christians had ascribed near-divine qualities to the Volk because they had failed to maintain a strong incarnational theology—that is, a theology rooted in the belief that Jesus was God incarnate. For him, as for many others, the theological failures of the church during the Nazi era were due to inadequate doctrinal discipline.71 Memoirs by Confessing Church theologians who had been active during the Third Reich usually did not mention Jews, antisemitism, or the Holocaust, whereas German Christian
theologians avoided publishing their memoirs. "Antisemitism" was not a category discussed in the massive historiography on the so-called *Kirchenkampf* (church struggle). Wolfgang Gerlach’s important doctoral dissertation on Confessing Church attitudes toward Jews and responses to antisemitism was completed in 1970, but languished for years before being published in 1987. To be sure, some church historians changed their positions over time. Leonore Siegele-Wenschkewitz, who in 1980 published the first critical examination of a major Nazi theologian, Gerhard Kittel, initially defined the central problem of the *Kirchenkampf* as a conflict over the nature of the church, but in later publications came to acknowledge that the Jewish question was in fact central.

With the establishment of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) in 1949, two separate but intertwined German Protestant churches emerged, forming an important institutional link between the two Germanies. The East German church was financially dependent on its West German counterpart, but it took an independent theological road, presenting itself as a “church within socialism.” Within East Germany, as the historian Irena Ostmeyer has shown, the church was even more reluctant than was its West German counterpart to examine Christian responsibility for Nazi antisemitism and the Holocaust. This reluctance, she argues, served to reinforce the broader refusal of the GDR to discuss its own responsibility for Nazism and the Holocaust. Theologians who were former Nazis were able to attain positions of power within the church of the GDR, in part because their earlier support of Hitler was known to the East German secret police, the Stasi, which then blackmailed them into serving as informants. Among them was Grundmann, who lost his professorship in New Testament at the University of Jena after the war, but who was then appointed rector of a seminary in Thuringia and remained an honored figure in the East German church until his death in 1974.

Within the GDR, attitudes toward Judaism and the Holocaust were ambivalent, at best. Whereas Jews living in East Germany could be included in the category of “victims of fascism” and be accorded the special privileges that accrued to those victims from the state, Jewish cultural distinctiveness and the practice of Judaism as a religion were discouraged on socialist grounds. Zionism and the state of Israel were particularly maligned, especially after the 1967 war. Yet the publication of books on Jewish history during the last years of the GDR aroused some public interest, particularly the 1988 study of antisemitism by Rudolf Hirsch and Rosemary Schuder, two well-known and very popular writers. Moreover, in contrast to most of the theological seminaries in West Germany, the Protestant theological faculty of Humboldt University in East Berlin included sympathetic instruction in Judaism and Jewish theology, as mandated by Heinrich Fink, professor of practical theology.

**Intimations of Change**

Serious discussion of the Holocaust could not begin within Protestant theology until the continuities with the Third Reich, both institutional and ideational, were broken and the Holocaust itself was recognized and articulated as a historical and theological issue. That did not occur until the 1970s and 1980s, when German theologians...
began to speak not only of the genocide of the Jews but of Jewish texts and theological perspectives, including Jewish understandings of the Holocaust, as well as the imbrication of Christian anti-Judaism in the history of antisemitism and the challenge of the Holocaust to the continued theological legitimacy of Christianity.78

In 1975, the West German Protestant church’s “Study Commission on Church and Judaism,” comprising respected scholars with a strong interest in Judaism, published a theological document tracing some of the theological commonalities between Christianity and Judaism (one God, shared scriptures) as well as divergences in historical experience, Christian anti-Judaism and antisemitism, and the problematic nature of the Christian mission to the Jews.79 Prepared for use by lay Christians, the study concluded that the Holocaust was a turning point for Judaism—but not for Christianity.

Recognition that Christianity stood under theological challenge was formulated by the Catholic theologian Johann Baptist Metz in an article published in 1979:

The question as to whether there will be a Reformation, a return to the shared roots in the relationship between Christians and Jews, will always be decided ultimately, at least in this country, based on how we Christians stand on Auschwitz, how we Christians assess it for ourselves. Whether we allow it to be truly the end, the interruption that it was the catastrophe of our history from which one finds his way out only through a radical change, with new standards, or whether for us it is only a monstrous accident in our history that doesn’t affect its course.80

Christian theology could not be pursued in the same way after Auschwitz, Metz argued, and his challenge was soon echoed by a group of sympathetic Protestant and Catholic exegetes and theologians who began dissecting the anti-Judaism within Christian theology, affirming the Jewish contexts of Jesus, Paul, and the Gospel authors, and asserting the continued centrality of the Torah for Judaism.

If, as Metz and others argued, Christians and Jews have shared roots, should Christians continue their centuries-long efforts to convert Jews? Missionary efforts had ceased early in the Third Reich with the rise of racial antisemitism. Complaints against converting Jews were filed with local churches throughout the 1930s, coming both from Nazi officials and lay people: “[J]ust as a pig remains a pig, even if you put it in a horse’s stall, so a Jew still remains a Jew, even if he is baptized,” declared a 1933 article in the journal *Arische Rundschau*.81 Jewish requests for baptism continued, however, and when the Reich did not outlaw the practice,82 those regional churches controlled by the German Christians ultimately took their own action by firing non-Aryan church employees, forbidding non-Aryan Christians from attending church services, and denying pastoral care to baptized Jews.

If the Christian mission to the Jews ceased because of antisemitism, its revival after the war was viewed, at least by some Christians, as philosemitic. The issue of mission to the Jews came to a head in the 1970s when the Rhineland synod prepared what came to be considered a ground-breaking statement on Christian-Jewish relations: published in 1980, this statement included a rejection of missionary efforts aimed at Jews.83 This shift reflected the growing number of Protestant theological voices arguing that the Holocaust was the central theological issue arising out of the Third Reich, and that Christianity—which bore at least shared responsibility for Nazi
antisemitism—would have to revise its attitude toward Judaism and the Jewish people. During the 1970s, the regional churches of the Rhineland, Baden, and Brandenburg began concerted efforts to analyze the anti-Judaism in Christian theological traditions and to forge a new affirmation of Judaism’s continued vitality and legitimacy. It is worth noting that those efforts began among German synods influenced more by Calvinist than by Lutheran traditions. Back in 1960, individual pastors, such as Benjamin Locher of the Rhineland, played crucial roles in formulating a declaration by the EKD that in some ways anticipated the even more influential 1980 declaration by the Rhineland synod. Locher insisted that the Holocaust was not one of many Christian concerns, but rather the central problem of Christian theology: “Something is false in our faith. There must be something false at its heart that we as Christian teachers or practitioners are teaching or representing.” Other important voices in German discussions of the 1970s were those of the Reformed theologians Hans Joachim Iwand and Cornelius Miskotte, who sharply criticized the Lutherans’ traditional distinction between the realms of church and state, arguing that it had resulted in the church’s relinquishing its responsibility for promoting Christian values in the secular sphere.

The Rhineland church’s declaration of 1980 placed political concerns squarely at the heart of Christian theology. Mincing no words, the statement proclaimed the “recognition of Christian co-responsibility and guilt for the Holocaust.” The continued existence of Jews was affirmed by the declaration as intrinsic to Heilsgeschichte (the biblically based belief that history was an unfolding of God’s plan for the salvation of humanity), and Christian proselytizing among Jews was repudiated—a strong and sharp break with Christian tradition and scripture. Indeed, in the wake of the declaration, a lawsuit was filed against the synod by a number of member churches, claiming that renunciation of mission to the Jews was such a profound violation of Christian principles that, if permitted, the church’s tax-exempt status would have to be withdrawn by the state.

Both the statement of the Rhineland synod and the growing popular discussion of the Holocaust in West Germany during the 1980s sparked a reassessment among a group of Protestant (and some Catholic) theologians in Germany with regard to the significance of Jews and Judaism within Christian theology. Renewed attention was paid to Paul’s Epistle to the Romans, particularly chapters 9-11, which describe the relationship between Christianity and Judaism in terms of a tree and its roots: “it is not you that support the root, but the root that supports you” (Romans 11:18). A small but vocal number of professors of Protestant theology began writing on Christian-Jewish relations, dissecting and rejecting negative images of Judaism within Christianity. For instance, Friedrich Wilhelm Marquardt, professor of systematic theology at the Free University in Berlin, began to formulate a christology that would affirm Jesus as the embodiment of the Jewish faith, not as a teacher who sought Judaism’s destruction. Marquardt’s efforts begin with the question, “What meaning does it have for us [Christians] to speak of God after Auschwitz?”

Examination of the theological significance of the Holocaust rested on the highly contested assumption that political events have theological meaning—and that scriptural texts have political consequences. Exegesis and the formulation of theological positions would have to be carried out with an eye to their past and future impact on
Society, as argued forcefully by Berthold Klappert: “The hermeneutical function of the Holocaust regarding new biblical insights signifies … that only from the recognition of the history of interpretation and in giving up our anti-Jewish prejudice will we be able to understand again the real intention of the biblical text itself.”

Klappert’s insistence that exegetes consider the political influence of scriptural verses and their hermeneutical traditions, especially as they have shaped anti-Jewish attitudes in Germany, has had a broad impact.

Critics such as Hannah Holtschneider have argued that placing the Holocaust at the center of a revised Christian theology implies a new version of Christian supersessionism. By making Auschwitz the crucible, the place where Christianity itself lost legitimacy, that most Jewish event—the Holocaust—is transformed into a Christian experience. Klappert, among others, attempts to avoid supersessionism by emphasizing Christianity’s dependence upon Judaism and Jewish history; Holtschneider responds that such dependence is itself a kind of exploitation. Drawing heavily from the work of Elie Wiesel, Klappert writes:

For me, the fundamental dependence of the Christian church and theology upon the Jewish witnesses of the experience of God in Auschwitz is the distressing product of a theology after Auschwitz. Auschwitz is the most Job-like experience after the cross. The experience of the absence and presence of God there, the Jewish tale of the silence of God, from the terror of God up to the hanging and burning of God—which was only witnessed by Jews and can only be told by them, listened to in humiliation by us Christians—renders us dependent upon Judaism. Its storytellers and witnesses in Auschwitz reveal, as a fact, the eternal communion of the crucified with His suffering people.

Like Marquardt, Klappert argues that, through Christian solidarity with Jews, the theology of the cross is radically altered, though not abandoned. Metz writes that because of Auschwitz, “Christians can protect their identity only in front of and together with the history of the beliefs of the Jews.”

Yet the awareness of the political implications of theology was accompanied by a theological reading of history; the line between human and divine responsibility was blurred. The Rhineland declaration, for example, while insisting on the responsibility of Christians and the church for the Holocaust, nonetheless asked why God permitted Jewish suffering: “[W]hy did God no longer guard his chosen people as the apple of his eye?” German responsibility for the Holocaust clashed with theological claims with regard to the divine authorship of history, and it was difficult to wean some theologians from older traditions of salvation history.

Among German liberation theologians, for whom political events are essential to understanding the Christian message, the Holocaust has not played a major role. Such theologians are more attentive to contemporary problems—which they define as American imperialism, nuclear weapons, poverty, environmental degradation, exploitation of women, and other manifestations of economic and social injustice—and have been relatively inattentive to anti-Jewish streams within Christian theology. At the same time, many of them have claimed that Germany’s Nazi heritage of totalitarianism has made them particularly sensitive to issues of justice. A unique voice among German Protestants, Dorothee Soelle, opened her 1982 address to the World Council of Churches with a ringing declaration: “I speak to you as a woman from one
of the wealthiest countries in the world; a country whose history is tainted with bloodshed and the stench of gas that some of us who are Germans have not been able to forget. …"91 Although the address continued without mentioning anything specific about the Holocaust, antisemitism, or the church’s responsibility for Nazism, the opening sentences made her message clear; reflecting on those years in a later talk, she noted that “we drew the consequences of Auschwitz: we rethought our understanding of sin. We called that the 'politicization of conscience.' "92 That she was roundly condemned in Germany for her declaration in 1982 reveals how uncomfortable many remained with the assumption of Christian responsibility for the Holocaust.

Other theologians are more subtle. Jürgen Moltmann, Germany’s most famous contemporary Protestant theologian of liberation, has placed responsibility for political and economic justice at the center of his theology, yet does not speak of Christian responsibility for antisemitism. Instead, he places Christians together with Jews as joint victims of persecution, thus exonerating Christians from responsibility for that persecution:

There is only one people of hope in the world, the one people of God. It is the one people of God, the people of the old and new covenant. Because Jews and Christians have a common hope for “the one who is to come,” the Messiah, they are on the way together to God’s kingdom and future. That is why they are persecuted together and suffer together. When Israel is led to the slaughter, the church goes with her—if things are as they should be.93

Elsewhere, Moltmann writes of “the cries for righteousness of those who are murdered or gassed,” but then asks, “Or do the executioners ultimately triumph over their innocent victims? . . . does inhuman legalism triumph over the crucified Christ?”94 Commenting on this passage, Nicholas de Lange calls it “a major stumbling block to dialogue between Christians and Jews” and asks whether “the only valid choice facing a Jew is to be reconciled to God by becoming a Christian?”95 Moltmann, however, has dismissed the delineation of anti-Jewish motifs within Christian theology as “the signs of a neurotic German mentality.”96 For him, the Hebrew Bible consists of “texts of terror” that can only be read in light of the Gospels, and “in this redemptive light they seem shocking to me.”97

The state of Israel posed a particular challenge to theologians of liberation, particularly after the 1967 war and the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. Older Christian distinctions between a “carnal” Judaism concerned with regulating bodily needs and a “spiritual” Christianity concerned with the individual heart, soul, and conscience began to reappear in the form of questions pertaining to the theological meaning of a territorial dimension to Judaism. Perhaps because the theological meaning of Zionism and the state of Israel were so hotly disputed by some Christian theologians, students of theology were encouraged to study for a year or two at Israeli universities.

In response to the growing interest in analyzing the implicit anti-Judaism of particular biblical passages such as John 8 and Matthew 23, German theologians increasingly began developing new exegetical traditions to mitigate or alter traditional lines of interpretation. The rise of the feminist movement and its calls for altering or reinterpreting the sexism of scripture gave added weight to the quest for
new hermeneutical methods that would make sexism and anti-Judaism both visible and theologically untenable. The recently published Bibel in Gerechter Sprache, a revised German translation of the Hebrew and Christian Testaments, attempts to eliminate the perceived misogyny and anti-Judaism of scripture. In one of the most promising revisions of Christian theology, the Old Testament theologian Frank Crüsemann has developed a new understanding of Torah as an expression of divine unity and as a “fundamental form of the gospel” and the very basis of Pauline theology.98

Conclusion

Within German Protestantism, there was no Stunde Null (zero hour) in 1945. Institutionally, the church continued to be governed by clergy who had, for the most part, supported the ideological underpinnings of the Third Reich. After the war, when overt support for race, nationalism, the cult of the Führer, and war could no longer be articulated, major theological trends were retained. The Hebrew Bible was reintegrated into the Christian Bible, but Judaism’s role as the superseded religion of law remained entrenched. There was no recognition of the fact that Christian theology was deeply imbricated in National Socialism, nor was there any thoroughgoing examination of the church’s history during the Third Reich. Thrilled by its new opportunity to play an influential role in German politics, the church entered the postwar era as a voice of moral authority for a newly established democracy grounded in Christianity. During this time, the German populace experienced a resurgence of interest in Christianity, with a significant number attending church regularly, reading church publications, and taking an active role in church lay organizations. All of this gave added support to a church eager to avoid examining its Nazi past.

With the fall of the Berlin wall and the reunification of the two Germanies in 1990, a new era emerged in the construction of postwar memory and politics. Ironically, the construction of the Jewish Museum and the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin as national monuments of memory has led to an intensified focus on the German experience. Helmut Schmitz has argued that German public discussion of the Holocaust has been followed by a growing discourse of German victimhood. Expulsion of Germans from areas of German settlement in the East in 1945, German suffering during the war, and the destruction and violence after the war have all have come to the fore in films and best-selling books. This, according to Schmitz, is in response to the institutionalization of Holocaust memory. By demanding empathy for all wartime victims and by decontextualizing the horrors of the war, Schmitz argues, this new attention to German suffering avoids dealing with the question of responsibility or the political implications of Nazism.99 Similarly, within Christian theology, trauma and empathy have become increasingly important themes since the mid-1970s, with a growing literature emphasizing God as a suffering deity whose compassion is extended without distinction between sinner and victim, Christian or Jew. Moreover, during the past ten years, many of those who had been at the forefront of shaping a new and positive Christian appreciation of Judaism have either retired or died, among them Friedrich Wilhelm Marquardt and Bernard Schaller, and major new declarations regarding Christian-Jewish relations have not been issued by the Protestant church.
Since 1989, a growing number of voices have urged a turn away from Christian examination of its anti-Judaism and increasingly toward an affirmation of Christian identity; in more recent years, Judaism has taken a back seat to Islam and Christian-Muslim dialogue. Moreover, the ambivalence within the Christian theological imagination regarding the Jewishness of Jesus continues, as do German Christian perceptions with regard to Jews, antisemitism, and the Holocaust. The question of the church’s involvement in Nazism and responsibility for the Holocaust, with all its myriad theological consequences, remains a subject for new generations to debate.

Notes


2. At the entry of the exhibit stood a wooden crucifix by Ludwig Gies, taken from the Lübeck cathedral; also on display was Emil Nolde’s Life of Christ, which showed as well a Christ in physical agony.


5. During the Third Reich, the church had been known as the Deutsche Evangelische Kirche (DEK).


drohten” (letter to Fritz Schmidt-Clausing, 26 May 1947, University of Lund archives, Odeberg materials).

13. Werner Schmauch, “Zur theologischen Frage des Flüchtlingsproblems” (undated, 15-page typed manuscript), BKSH, NEK.

14. While the Catholic Church was officially opposed to the German Christian movement and its theology, individual Catholic theologians and priests expressed similar ideas and some joined the Institute for the Study and Eradication of Jewish Influence; see Heschel, The Aryan Jesus, 133–136. For additional examples of Catholic engagement with German Christian theology, see Kevin Spicer, Hitler’s Priests: Catholic Clergy and National Socialism (DeKalb: 2008).

15. The German Protestant church was divided into regional churches, each of which was headed by a bishop or a president (the positions are equivalent).

16. The neo-pagan movements viewed Christianity as a religion foreign to German sensibilities and rejected the possibility of dejudaizing or nazifying its teachings. Instead, they advocated a return to pagan rituals based on Teutonic myths, with gatherings centered on Wotan or Germanic heroes. (Interestingly, deceased members of the SS were accorded non-Christian, neo-pagan funerals, regard less of their church affiliation, though their families often held additional, private Christian ceremonies.) The neo-pagan groups remained small: the German Faith Movement had about 40,000 members, and others, such as the Ludendorff Tannenberg League, were even smaller. The Roman Catholic Church had about 20 million German members, compared with about 40 million members of the German Protestant church. Tensions between the neo-pagans and Christians have been exaggerated; see Heschel, The Aryan Jesus, 136–139.

17. Karl Barth was a theologian of the Reformed tradition, which emerged from Calvinism and constituted a small but important theological trajectory within the larger, Lutheran-dominated Protestant church of Germany.


19. Ibid., 231.

20. Ibid.

21. Catholics were in a position similar to the Confessing Church: too theologically conservative to alter either their doctrines or their liturgy to bring them in accord with Nazism, yet in basic agreement with their Protestant colleagues that Jews were a degenerate influence on German Christians. Munich’s Cardinal Michael von Faulhaber, for example, delivered a series of Advent sermons in 1933 that attacked the German Christian movement—but his argument, almost identical to what the Confessing Church leaders came to claim, was that the Hebrew Bible need not be eliminated as a Jewish book, as some German Christians advocated. It was, rather, an anti-Jewish book, Faulhaber insisted, since the prophets were constantly condemning Israel for its sinful ways (see Michael von Faulhaber, Cardinal, Judaism, Christianity and Germany, trans. George D. Smith [New York: 1934]). Faulhaber’s objection, then, was not to the German Christians’ antisemitism, but rather their failure to realize that the Hebrew Bible itself was on their side.

22. Manfred Gailus, Protestantismus und Nationalsozialistischen Durchdringung des Protestantischen Sozialmilieus in Berlin (Cologne: 2001). This study was recently expanded; see Manfred Gailus and Wolfgang Krogel (eds.), Von der Babylonischen Gefangenschaft der Kirche im Nationalen: Regionalstudien zu Protestantismus, Nationalsozialismus und Nachkriegsgeschichte 1930 bis 2000 (Berlin: 2006).

23. Zentral Archiv der Kirche (Central Archives of the Protestant Church), Berlin (hereafter: ZAK) 1/A4/170.

24. Letter from Bishop Hans Meiser to the Council of the Protestant Lutheran Church of Germany (Rat der Evangelischen Lutherischen Kirche Deutschlands), 5 May 1939, BKSH, NEK, Signatur 57, Neue Nummer 323.


33. This is documented by Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 223.

34. For example, wives of imprisoned Nazis were urged to follow the example of a Jesus imagined in those terms; see Katharina von Kellenbach, “God’s Love and Women’s Love: Prison Chaplains Counsel the Wives of Nazi Perpetrators,” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 20, no. 2 (2004), 7–24.


38. See the autobiographical reflections by Jörg Zink in *How I Have Changed: Reflections on Thirty Years of Theology*, ed. Jürgen Moltmann (Harrisburg: 1997).


42. Van Rahden, “Paternity, Rechristianization, and the Quest for Democracy in Postwar West Germany.”


44. Gerlach, *And the Witnesses Were Silent*, 224.

45. Ibid., 225.


48. Minutes of the meetings held between Walter Grundmann and members of the church consistory, Landeskirchen Archiv (LKA) Eisenach (Archives of the church of Thuringia, in Eisenach), G 2402.

49. Hockenos, *A Church Divided*. 
51. Ibid., 223.
55. Ibid., 74–75. Harder was one of the founders of the Kirchentag’s division on Christian-Jewish relations, Arbeitsgruppe für Juden und Christen, and he was also the founder and director of the Institute Kirche und Israel at the Kirchliche Hochschule in Berlin (now affiliated with Humboldt University in Berlin).
57. Ibid., 55.
58. Ibid., 56.
59. Ibid., 56.
61. On Heidelberg University after the war, see Remy, *The Heidelberg Myth*.
63. See Remy, *The Heidelberg Myth*.
66. Grundmann’s commentaries on the Gospels were part of a huge oeuvre that comprised both scholarly and popular books. See Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus*.
70. Ericksen, “Wilhelm Niemöller and the Historiography of the Kirchenkampf.”
72. The absence of the Holocaust from the first generation of postwar memoirs by Christian theologians has been traced by Björn Krondorfer, *Mit Blick auf die Täter: Fragen an die deutsche Theologie nach 1945* (Gütersloh: 2006). Two such works are those of Klaus-Peter Hertzsch, *Sag meinen Kindern, dass sie weiterzieh: Erinnerungen* (Stuttgart: 2002)—Hertzsch grew up in Eisenach and taught practical theology at the University of Jena after the war; and Franz Tügel, *Mein Weg, 1888–1946: Erinnerungen eines Hamburger Bischofs*, ed. Carsten Nicolaisen (Hamburg: 1972). Tügel was bishop of Hamburg and active in the German
Christian movement; he was one of the initiators of the Godesberg Declaration. In contrast to these two memoirs, see a discussion of Tügel’s Nazi-era activities: Manuel Ruoff, Landesbischof Franz Tügel (Hamburg: 2000); Kersten Krüger, Beiträge zur deutschen und Europäischen Geschichte (Hamburg: 2000).

75. The two churches formally split in 1969, forming the Bund der Evangelischen Kirchen in der DDR (BEK; East Germany) and the Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland (EKD; West Germany).
78. Among the many important German Protestant theologians who have led the efforts for a positive Christian appreciation of Judaism are Berthold Klappert, Frank Crüsemann, Friedrich-Wilhelm Marquardt, Klaus Wengst, Peter von der Osten-Sacken, Ulrich Lutz, Johann-Michael Schmidt, Martin Leutch, Jürgen Ebach, and LeonoreSiegle-Wenschewitz. Among their prominent Catholic counterparts are Johann-Baptist Metz, Franz Mussner, Hans-Hermann Henrix, and Rainer Kampilng.
82. By 1936, the only remaining official mission to the Jews was in Berlin; it was closed in 1941 by Gestapo action. See ibid., 301–302.
85. On Iwand’s role, see Hockenos, A Church Divided. On Miskotte, see Martin Kessler, Kornelis Miskotte: A Biblical Theology (Selinsgrove: 1997).
88. Holtschneider, German Protestants Remember the Holocaust.


100. For instance, in 2003, shortly before his election as head (Vorsitzender) of the EKD, Bishop Wolfgang Huber of Berlin-Brandenburg argued that the Muslim headscarf symbolizes a cultural divide, whereas the Christian cross has nothing to do with social tensions. See Mark Siemons, “Voilà Integration: Das Kopftuchverbot erzeugt die Bedrohung, der es wehren will,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (13 Nov. 2003), 37. See also Michael Gassmann, “Kreuz und Kopftuch nicht in einen Topf: Unverzichtbarer Distinktionsunterricht: Bischof Wolfgang Hubers politische Theologie,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (5 Feb. 2005), 41.
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In 1933, Jews in Germany numbered around 525,000, or only 1 percent of the total German population. German police soon forced tens of thousands of Polish Jews from their homes and into ghettos, giving their confiscated properties to ethnic Germans (non-Jews outside Germany who identified as German), Germans from the Reich or Polish gentiles. After prominent German religious leaders protested, Hitler put an end to the program in August 1941, though killings of the disabled continued in secrecy, and by 1945 some 275,000 people deemed handicapped from all over Europe had been killed. In hindsight, it seems clear that the Euthanasia Program functioned as a pilot for the Holocaust. Subscribe for fascinating stories connecting the past to the present. Sculptures of Jews and pigs started appearing in architecture in the 1300s, and the printing press carried on the motif in everything from books to playing cards well into the modern period. Today, more than 20 Judensau sculptures are still incorporated into German churches and cathedrals, with a few others in neighboring countries. Children of former Nazis confronted the sins of their parents, becoming peace activists in solidarity with the civil rights and antiwar movements in the United States, France, Czechoslovakia and elsewhere. That distinction is largely artificial, says Thomas Kaufmann, a Protestant theology professor at the University of Göttingen and author of the 2014 book Luther’s Jews. Existential Theology: An Introduction offers a formalized and comprehensive examination of the field of existential theology, in order to distinguish it as a unique field of study and view it as a measured synthesis of the concerns of more. They were both socially committed Protestant existential thinkers with wide-ranging interests, marked by the Great War and the revolutions to which it led, and whose influence, sometimes exerted through the same circles under the Weimar Republic (Patmos, Neue Blätter für den Sozialismus), crucially shaped some key players of the Kreisau Circle of the German Resistance against Hitler (Helmuth James von). The Holocaust, also known as the Shoah, was the genocide of European Jews during World War II. Between 1941 and 1945, Nazi Germany and its collaborators systematically murdered some six million Jews across German-occupied Europe, around two-thirds of Europe's Jewish population. The murders were carried out in pogroms and mass shootings; by a policy of extermination through work in concentration camps; and in gas chambers and gas vans in German extermination camps, chiefly Auschwitz, Bełżec, Chełmno.