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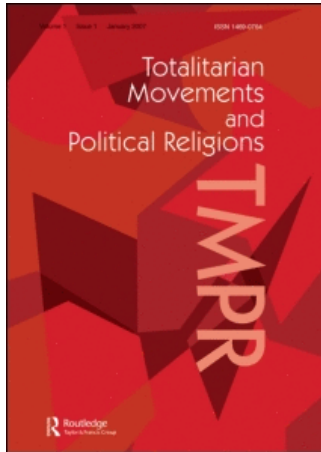
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## The Nazis' 'Positive Christianity': a Variety of 'Clerical Fascism'?

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John Keegan once remarked that Adolf Hitler was an 'anticlerical in the church of war'. Of course, Keegan did not mean by this that Hitler was a pacifist, since that would have made Hitler an atheist in that church. Rather, Keegan's point was that Hitler believed he understood the message and meaning from the religion of war better than the 'high priests' – the generals. Precisely because he felt his loyalty to the faith so keenly, he decried the institution and its representatives who, in his mind, could no longer speak with authority. As I have argued elsewhere, in many ways we can see that, in the church of Christ as well, Hitler was *this* kind of anti-clerical – not a complete anti-Christian, not an apostate (and certainly not an atheist) in the church of Christ, but instead believing he knew and understood, and ultimately fulfilled the religion of Christ better than its hated clergy and institutions. Other Nazis who subscribed to 'positive Christianity' similarly combined a strong anti-clericalism with a vision of Christianity which, while radical, was not simply 'heretical' or beyond the pale of past Christian thinking.

When considering the question of whether the model of 'clerical fascism' applies to German National Socialism, therefore, it is worth remembering that we are talking about easily the most anti-clerical of Europe's fascist movements, and certainly of Europe's fascist regimes. What separates Nazi Germany from Tiso's Slovakia or the Croatian Ustasha is not just the absence of churchmen from the upper echelons of the state, but the state's antagonism to the church. This fact must immediately be qualified, however. First, we must take note of the very strong distinction the Nazis made between the two official religions of Germany, Protestantism – meaning Lutheranism, really – and Catholicism. In most other countries to experience clerical fascism we see a uniting of the movement with a faith to which the vast majority of that nation's population adhered – what the sociologist David Martin referred to as the 'Latin model'.<sup>1</sup> In a society with two main religious milieux, what Martin refers to as the '60–40' model, we see the minority religious group, in this case Catholics, being treated as an out-group in the Third Reich, much as they had been under the *Kaiserreich*. This is all the more significant given the fact that the leadership cadre of the Nazi movement contained a disproportionate number of Catholics. The Nazis' infamous anti-clericalism needs to be understood squarely within this context. For majority Protestants, things were rather different. The Nazis, in ways which again reveal a certain continuity with the older patterns established during the *Kaiserreich* – or at least its first years – displayed a clear confessional preference for Protestantism.

Most surprisingly, even nominally Catholic Nazis like Hitler himself indicated time and again, from the earliest days of the 'Time of Struggle' (*Kampfzeit*) well into the Third Reich, that Protestantism was the 'natural' religion of Germany.

At the same time, the Nazis put forth their own supraconfessional variety of Christianity which they labelled 'positive Christianity'. When Nazis articulated their understanding of what 'positive Christianity' meant – and its meanings varied from one member of the Nazi elite to the next – one of the underlying, shared denominators was that it would not favour one confession over the other. It was never a faith with a liturgy or a canon, with a theology or doctrine which made it practicable; what is revealing about it, rather, is that it shows that Nazis believed that the sectarian divide between Protestant and Catholic needed to be overcome. However, at another level, we can see among the very same Nazis who professed their subscription to this diffuse notion of 'positive Christianity' a clear preference for the content of Protestantism over Catholicism. Whether this is revealed in their attitudes about Martin Luther, their interpretation of the Reformation and the Wars of Religion or the contemporary threats perceived to endanger German nationhood, time and again they upheld the trappings of Protestantism more highly than Catholicism – often much more highly. It could be said that for the nominal Protestants of the Nazi Party this would have been, to some degree, a matter of habitus, but what is truly revealing is that the Party's Catholics and so-called 'pagans' also displayed a clear preference for the culture and ideology of Protestantism – not as habitus, but as world view.

Does this mean that Nazism can be understood as a variety of 'clerical fascism'? Taken as a whole, the answer remains no. There were too many religious views within the Party for this claim to be made. In addition, by the beginning of the war in 1939, Nazi anti-clericalism was increasingly being targeted at the Protestant church establishment, not just the Catholic Church. It must be kept in mind that, for many 'positive Christians', such anti-clericalism could coexist with the idea that their antisemitism or their socialism was still derived from Christian sources. In this way, many Nazis maintained that being anti-clerical did not mean they were anti-Christian, but this variety of anti-clericalism should not be regarded as something that applied equally to both confessions from the beginning of the Third Reich; the sectarian fault line that ran through German society had been evident within the Nazi movement for some time.

This is revealed not just in utterances by the Nazis, whose public professions of Christianity have been regarded with great scepticism. Nor is such a conclusion solely based on private and confidential conversations between Party members. Beyond professing to be Christian, a 'clerical fascist' must be someone who, both as an individual and as a party member, took an active part in church life and sought to bring the church into cooperation with the movement. By this definition, Nazism had its 'clerical fascist' wing – even if it would never have used that expression to describe itself. One could argue, of course, that the so-called *Deutsche Christen* would have been part of this wing. However, as a faction of the Protestant Church rather than a wing of the Nazi Party, the German Christians might better be described as 'fascist clericals' rather than 'clerical fascists'.

Much more revealing than the existence of such fellow-travellers in the churches was the presence of active church-goers in the leadership cadre of the Nazi Party – if not by the end of the war, then certainly at the beginning of the Nazi state and even in some cases up to the beginning of the war. The distinction between Catholicism and Protestantism becomes very sharp indeed when

looking at church involvement among Nazi elites. Party leaders often expressed antagonism toward the Roman Church, even as they insisted their movement was a Christian one. For its part, the Catholic Church opposed the Nazi Party for these attacks, but also for the Nazis' racialist dogma and extreme nationalism. In several parts of Germany, Catholics were explicitly forbidden to become members of the Nazi Party, and Nazi members were forbidden to take part in church ceremonies and funerals. The Bishop of Mainz even refused to admit NSDAP members to take the sacraments.<sup>2</sup> This stance was initially met with concern from other bishops, who were hesitant about turning their backs on a movement that fought Marxism, liberalism and the 'Jewish danger'. Nevertheless, by the end of 1931, the entire German episcopacy had declared itself against the movement.<sup>3</sup> While there were isolated Catholic churchmen who publicly supported Nazism, these were exceptions that proved the rule. The lower ranks of the Nazi Party were known to include church-going Catholics, but whether they were anti-clerical like Goebbels or relatively philoclerical like Bavarian Governor Franz Ritter von Epp, almost none of the Nazis' ideological or political leadership were active *participants* in Catholic church life. Concomitantly, the Catholic church hierarchy refused all formal contact with the Party before the infamous concordat of 1933.

By contrast, the first official contact between the Party leadership and Protestant authorities took place in March 1931, when Franz Stöhr, a member of the executive committee of the NSDAP, met with Gustav Scholz, an official with the federal organisation of Protestant State Churches (*Kirchenbundesamt*). This meeting was requested by the Protestant church authorities in order to determine the exact position of the Party toward religion. Alfred Rosenberg's work, *The Myth of the Twentieth Century*, had been published the year before, and the churches feared it represented an influential segment of Party opinion, if not the official Party line. Stöhr began by assuring Scholz that the NSDAP entered the Reichstag only as a means to an end, to effect 'the creation of the real German Reich of German men'. He maintained that the Party was neither sectarian nor clerical, that the Party was secular and political, but that nevertheless it was 'supported and led by Christian people who seriously intend to implement the ethical principles of Christianity in legislation, and to bring them to bear upon the life of the people'. The existence of at least nominal Catholics in the Party was defended by virtue of the need to create national unity. Nevertheless, the Party leadership was 'shaped by Protestantism'. Those Nazi leaders belonging to the Catholic Church were, in spite of their nominal affiliation, also inclined towards Protestantism. There was no danger that 'the movement will be pulled into the Catholic stream or be caught up in the Catholic Church'. These principles were reflected in Nazi education policy, which Stöhr acknowledged was a single school for both Catholics and Protestants offering common religious instruction. Until such a school was practicable, however, the Party would support denominational schools, while at the same time carefully resisting Catholic prerogatives: 'The German state should be master of the German school'. Stöhr asserted that Nazism was opposed to liberalism's individual man, to Marxism's the collective man and to the hierarchical man of Catholicism; its ideal was the independent German who lived not for himself but for the community. Stöhr concluded by assuring Scholz that what he said could be regarded as 'official party statements'.<sup>4</sup>

The Party would maintain a stance of formal neutrality over the churches, but Stöhr firmly maintained that the substance of Nazism was in accord with

Protestant Christian precepts, that Party members were free to participate in church-related activities, and that, indeed, the Party as a whole was 'shaped' by Protestantism. Scholars like Doris Bergen and Robert Ericksen have demonstrated elsewhere how warmly the Nazis were received by a preponderance of Protestant opinion in Germany. It should also be kept in mind that many strict, confessional Lutherans who would later join the Confessing Church initially welcomed the Nazi movement as well. Otto Dibelius, General Superintendent of the Kurmark, certified the Nazi movement as Christian:

We have learned from Martin Luther that the church cannot get in the way of state power when it does what it is called to do. Not even when [the state] becomes hard and ruthless. ... When the state carries out its office against those who destroy the foundations of state order, above all against those who destroy honor with vituperative and cruel words that scorn faith and vilify death for the Fatherland, then [the state] is ruling in God's name!<sup>5</sup>

Aside from individual Protestant clergy, the main pillar of Protestant associational life also displayed an essentially favourable attitude toward the Nazis. The Protestant League became the first of any Christian organisation to formally support the Party. More than lending outside support, many of the League's leaders took part in the movement: Heinrich Bornkamm, president of the league after Doehring, was a member of the SA, the National Socialist Teachers' League (NSLB) and the National Socialist University Teachers' League (*NS-Dozentenbund*); similarly, league director Fritz von der Heydt belonged to the Working Group of National Socialist Pastors (*Arbeitsgemeinschaft NS-Pfarrer*).<sup>6</sup> In its 1924 Munich assembly, presided over by Doehring, the League endorsed the essential components of Nazi ideology. Doehring proclaimed: 'Neither the cries of the ultramontanist press nor the harsh protests of its Jewish confederates will get in our way'.<sup>7</sup> Whereas such statements conceived the Jewish enemy as a tributary of the Catholic one, they nonetheless indicate the increasingly strong presence of antisemitism within the League, especially when compared to its inception. This, combined with the strident nationalism the League had always espoused, made the Nazi appeal almost immediate. This enthusiasm was felt right through to the end of the Weimar Republic. At the League's 1931 general assembly in Magdeburg, the Rhineland pastor Hermann Kremers spoke on 'National Socialism and Protestantism'. He was careful to suggest that, like the churches, the Protestant League was not making a political endorsement. He made the entirely academic, but nonetheless significant, point that his views related to Nazism as a movement, not a Party.<sup>8</sup> Despite this caveat, Kremers was emphatic about the nationalist and antisemitic goals advanced by Nazism, and was critical only of Hitler's supposed blindness to the ultramontane threat: 'Our Christian duty towards this movement is to protect and preserve it, so that it not be silted up by naturalism, nor, caught by the age old enemy of Germanhood, wither to the roots under the alien sun of Rome'.<sup>9</sup>

As a counterpoint to Nazis within the ecclesiastical sphere there existed many active Christians among the Nazi Party leadership. One of the most important of these was Wilhelm Kube. Beginning his Weimar political life as General Secretary of the DNVP, Kube migrated via the DVFP to the NSDAP in 1928, where he was quickly awarded the job of Gauleiter of Brandenburg (later 'Kurmark'). He was

also the caucus leader of the Nazi Party in the Prussian Landtag. Although Kube was stripped of his power in 1936 after accusing the wife of Walther Buch, the head of the Nazi Party court, of being half-Jewish, he was nonetheless able to retain Hitler's favour.<sup>10</sup> Kube also played a central role in establishing the German Christians, the faction within the Protestant church that originally went by the name 'Protestant National Socialists'. He had been active in a Berlin parish community council after the First World War, and was additionally a member of the synod of the Diocese of Berlin.<sup>11</sup> Quite clearly a committed Protestant and committed Nazi both, Kube was given an early opportunity to express his views on the relationship between church and state over the issue of *Protestant* church concordats in 1929. Sounding a potentially anti-clerical note, he declared the Nazi view in a session of the Prussian Landtag: 'the question of Christian education or the organization of church life is in the final analysis a question of legislation by the state. In accordance with these views, we are unable in any circumstances to accept an equation of the two parties, state and church'. Yet, for Kube, this was in no way antithetical to Christianity, 'precisely because we affirm it, because we are convinced that Christianity and Germanhood have come together in so infinitely many respects that they cannot be separated. ... We have confidence in the German state, that its politics are not opposed to Christian interests and Christian sensibilities, but rather that it will look after these interests in all circumstances'. His attack on the notion of Protestant concordats was not simply a disguised hostility to Protestantism: a section of the Prussian Synod had actually categorically rejected any idea of Protestant church concordats as they were incompatible with the idea of state sovereignty.<sup>12</sup> Kube regarded any deal-making between the Protestant Church and what was then the socialist-controlled Prussian government as treasonous. In Party correspondence to Gregor Strasser, Kube wrote: 'The current leadership of the church want to conclude an unheard-of treaty with the Marxist Prussian state'. According to the letter, 'the position, dignity and self-respect of the Protestant churches' should have prevented them from 'placing themselves under the influence of Marxist-infiltrated governments'.<sup>13</sup> As 'an old fraternity student' he informed the General Superintendent in Lübben that 'with the next church vote we will create a representation in the Protestant Church, which is essential in the interest of the revival of church life on German and Christian foundations'.<sup>14</sup>

Toward this end, Kube suggested the creation of a church Party known as the 'Protestant National Socialists', a group intended to be separate from the NSDAP itself. Such a plan, however, would do well to have Strasser's approval as the Party's chief administrator. Strasser responded by saying that 'in every case we must attempt to take part in the Protestant Church vote in accord with the size and strength of the party'.<sup>15</sup> In addition, Strasser told Kube to inform the rest of the Prussian *Gauleiter* of his plans, adding that *Kirchenfachberater* [consultants for church affairs] should be set up in each *Gau*. Hitler ultimately endorsed Kube's plan, based on the assurance that this group would not be an institutional branch of the NSDAP. Furthermore, true to the *Überkonfessionalismus* of positive Christianity, Hitler suggested 'German Christians' as a more appropriate name.<sup>16</sup>

None of the Prussian *Gauleiter* voiced disapproval with Strasser's and Kube's religious plans for the Party. Indeed, their own religious involvement confirmed that many were actively interested in church life. Perhaps the most notable in this regard was Erich Koch, the *Gauleiter* of East Prussia, who would gain great notoriety during the Second World War as the brutal *Reichskommissar* for Ukraine. In

1933 – and as far as the records reveal to 1934 – he simultaneously served as *Gauleiter* as well as president of his provincial Protestant church synod – a marriage of church and state in one person. Even before 1933, however, he was closely involved with the church: the future *Reichsbischof*, Ludwig Müller, was his pastor, and he was involved in furthering Müller's career.<sup>17</sup> Renowned as one of the most autonomous of *Gauleiter*, Koch fashioned his own regional variation of the *Deutsche Christen*, which struck a more conciliatory tone with their theological and institutional rivals, the Confessing Church: 'We want to serve: through tireless recruitment to our worship; through chivalrous intervention for the poor and needy, through defence of our faith ... through true Evangelical witness in public'.<sup>18</sup> At a 1935 meeting convened by the Reich Church Minister to assess the mood of the various *Gauleiter* on their Catholic and Protestant churches, Koch's representative indicated Koch's personal view that 'through the encouragement of the patriotic (*staatsstreu*) elements of the Protestant Church, Protestantism must be made stronger vis-à-vis Catholicism'. The Catholic Church in East Prussia was, by contrast, deemed 'unreliable from a nationalist standpoint'.<sup>19</sup> Even though he was, by this point, no longer president of the provincial church synod, Koch evidently retained an interest in the fortunes of his church.

Other *Gauleiter*, like Otto Telschow and Bernhard Rust, actively sought and welcomed the participation of pastors in the Nazi movement.<sup>20</sup> The *Gauleiter* of Silesia, Helmut Brückner, sent Strasser an internal 'Special Circular' he had issued to his *Gau* officials on the Party's official church-political stance. Its contents became common knowledge once a copy came into the hands of the *Kirchenrat* and the newspapers *Tägliche Rundschau* and *Christliche Welt*. As a confidential document, however, it provides a glimpse into the Nazis' feelings about the institution of the Protestant church.<sup>21</sup>

We struggle for a union of the small Protestant state churches into a strong Protestant Reich Church. ... We are acting not as a Party, but as Protestant Christians who only follow a call to faith from God, which we hear in our *Volk* movement. As true members of our church we have a legitimate claim to have appropriate consideration given to the greatness and inner strength of National Socialism in church life and the church administration.<sup>22</sup>

Such statements could certainly be construed as a politicisation of the church, and indeed the Nazis freely conceded that it was. However, such a practice was not limited to the Nazis; most other existing church parties had connections with political parties as well. As Jonathan Wright has suggested, 'It is easy to find fault with the anti-German Christian argument that the church must be kept free of politics ... as the German Christians pointed out, politics were already in the church: the church leadership was simply conservative or national liberal not national socialist'.<sup>23</sup> Yet, whereas German Christians were very often Nazi Party members, they remained a separate organisation, with their own leadership and policy-making apparatus.

Nazis could be found in other Protestant church organisations as well. One of the most important was the League for a German Church (*Bund für deutsche Kirche*, BdK), which counted Walter Buch among its leaders. The League was founded in 1921 by Joachim Niedlich – much earlier than the German Christians. Niedlich came from a pastor's home, described by one scholar as 'politically

conservative as it was religiously orthodox',<sup>24</sup> included among its members was no less than Houston Stewart Chamberlain. The BdK remained separate from the DC, but much of its programme was the same, not least the aspiration for a Protestant Reich Church. Like the DC, the BdK was also opposed to paganism.<sup>25</sup> Their agenda was to build 'a church that will fight — not, as up to now, unconsciously pave the way for — both the Jesuit spirit and semitic degeneration through education and instruction, which through the German soul and German Christianity will again provide us a mighty fortress'.<sup>26</sup>

As chairman of the Party's Investigation and Conciliation Committee (*Untersuchungs- und Schlichtungsausschuss*) and president of the Party's supreme court, Buch held one of the most powerful positions in Nazism. He had the power to discipline, expel and punish all Party members, and none of the Committee's judgments could be overturned save for Hitler's direct intervention.<sup>27</sup> Otto Wagener, Hitler's confidant in the *Kampfzeit*, named Buch as one of only three men who 'were prepared and in a position to tell Hitler their own views when they contradicted his'.<sup>28</sup> Both for public consumption and 'behind closed doors', Buch related Nazism as a movement to Christ's own 'struggle', sounding a distinct note of triumphalism. To an assembly of the National Socialist Student League (*Nationalsozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund*, NSDStB) he declared:

When Point 24 of our program says the Party stands for a positive Christianity, here above all is the cornerstone of our thinking. Christ preached struggle as did no other. His life was struggle for his beliefs, for which he went to his death. From everyone he demanded a decision between yes or no. ... That is the necessity: that man find the power to decide between yes and no.<sup>29</sup>

This stark black-or-white vision made clear the dualism of the Nazi world view. In addition, Buch drew direct comparisons not only between Christ's struggle and the Nazis', but between Christ's followers and members of the NSDAP: 'Just as Christianity only prevailed through the fanatical belief of its followers, so too shall it be with the spiritual movement of National Socialism'.<sup>30</sup>

Buch clearly held his childhood Lutheran faith in high esteem and maintained, as a Nazi, that he was still guided by Luther's social thought. This was especially displayed in his concern over the state of German family life: Buch was fond of quoting Luther's adage that the family was 'the source of every people's blessings and misfortunes'.<sup>31</sup> However, he also drew inspiration from Luther in his antisemitism which, according to one authority, 'he had learned as a young boy from his rigid Lutheran parents'.<sup>32</sup> 'The Jew', according to Buch, 'is not a human being: he is a manifestation of decay', and, as he said in a speech from 1932: 'Never more than in the last ten years has the truth behind Luther's words been more evident: "The family is the source of everyone's blessing and misfortune."' For Buch, the Jew caused the breakdown of the German family, since for him marriage was simply a means to an end, a contract concluded for material benefit. The German, on the other hand, entered into marriage to produce children and imbue them with values such as honour, obedience and national feeling. For Buch, the antithesis of the Jew was the Christian as well as the German: 'The idea of eternal life, of which the Jew knows nothing, is just as characteristic of our Germanic forefathers as it was of Christ'.<sup>33</sup> Buch insisted that any mixing of Jews and Germans, whether biological or social, was a

violation of the 'divine world order'.<sup>34</sup> This state of affairs Buch blamed on the liberalism of the previous century:

The heresies and enticements of the French Revolution allowed the pious German to totally forget that the guest in his house comes from the *Volk* who nailed the Saviour to the cross. ... In the nineteenth century the lie of the rabbis' sons, that the Holy Scripture made the Saviour into a Jew, finally bore fruit.

It was under the auspices of Europe's liberal regimes that Jews were allowed their emancipation, to the detriment of Christian Europe. Moreover, the nineteenth century debate over Jesus' Jewishness, exemplified in debates surrounding Biblical criticism, to Buch's mind only facilitated the Jews' hegemony. The truth was that Jesus' 'entire character and learning betrayed Germanic blood'.<sup>35</sup> In his anti-semitic cause, Buch was able to appropriate the legacy of Martin Luther: 'When Luther turned his attention to the Jews, after he completed his translation of the Bible, he left behind "On the Jews and their Lies" for posterity'.<sup>36</sup> Although Buch's language was unmistakably racist, he nonetheless maintained Christian references to the Jews as 'Christ-killers.'

The notion that the liberalism of the nineteenth century had somehow nullified the prior social compact between Christians and Jews, and in addition had given rise to a radicalisation of Christian theological response to the Jews, was not limited to hot-headed Nazis like Buch. The notion that Jesus was not actually Jewish, closely allied as it was with the belief that the Old Testament needed to be removed from the Christian canon, were ideas that found voice within bona fide varieties of Christian thought. Adolf von Harnack, one of the most prestigious Protestant theologians of the twentieth century, advocated removing the Old Testament long before anyone had heard of National Socialism. Just as the First World War was nearing its close, he attempted to resuscitate the second-century Christian Marcion, who had taught that the God of love in the New Testament bore no relation to the imperfect God of the Old Testament, and that Christianity and Judaism had to be totally separated. As 'Jewish carnal law', Harnack maintained that the Old Testament as a unity 'lies below the level of Christianity'.<sup>37</sup> Harnack acknowledged that Luther did not expunge the Old Testament from Protestantism — 'What an unburdening of Christianity and its doctrine it would have been if Luther had taken this step!' — but nonetheless, the latter's emphasis on gospel over law meant that 'Luther's concept of faith actually is the one that stands nearest to the Marcionite concept'.<sup>38</sup> Nowhere in *Marcion* did Harnack engage in a political antisemitism aimed directly against contemporary Jewry. In fact, like many other liberal theologians, he took exception to the Nazis' violent antisemitism. However, significantly, the influence of his work on pro-Nazi religious thinking was openly acknowledged.

Similar instances can be found regarding Jesus' alleged Aryan status. The most prominent advocate of this idea was Houston Stewart Chamberlain, son-in-law of Richard Wagner, part of the *Kulturprotestantismus* milieu, and an early ideological patron to Hitler. Harnack's polemics against Judaism were used by Chamberlain in his own *Foundations of the Nineteenth Century* (1899), a Christian-racist tract widely regarded as one of the most important antecedents of Nazi ideology. According to a review of Chamberlain in *Christliche Welt*, 'this book ... carries in it an apologetic strength for which our "Christian world" will have

much to thank'. While some Protestants firmly rejected Chamberlain's critique of organised religion,<sup>39</sup> others found their own views echoed in Chamberlain's call for a nationalist religion. Another review in *Christliche Welt*, reflecting exasperation with the Jews' refusal to convert, explicitly agreed with the racialist thrust of the book:

We theologians have even now failed to take up a real position but for the present continue to operate calmly with the notion of equality for all men before God, as if this also includes equality with each other. However, the emphasis on race expresses a new important knowledge for our time. Today even the Jews ... no longer hide [this fact] as more and more they give vent in public to the racial consciousness which they have always had.<sup>40</sup>

One of the leaders of the League for a German Church, the Flensburg pastor Friedrich Andersen, elaborated on these theological points in his book *Der deutsche Heiland* [*The German Savior*]. In it, Andersen identified Christianity as the religion of progress, emphasising Christ's loneliness, individuality and ascent to spiritual mastery.<sup>41</sup> Andersen also reduced Christianity to the person of Christ alone, insisting that 'foreign underpinnings' – like the Old Testament – were unnecessary. In his argumentation, Andersen made explicit reference to the theological writings of Houston Stewart Chamberlain and Adolf von Harnack.<sup>42</sup> Andersen's rejection of the Old Testament was based on an insistence that the Christian God of the New Testament was a God of love, not the vengeful, unjust God of the Old Testament. He also posited Christian spirituality and belief in the eternal over against Jewish carnality and crass materialism.<sup>43</sup> These views were established widely in the BdK. Reinhold Krause, whose call for the removal of the Old Testament caused such a controversy at the German Christian Sports Palace assembly of November 1933, had also been a member of the BdK. Significantly, several moderate leaders of the later German Christian movement, while acknowledging their overall indebtedness to the ideas of the BdK, rejected the anti-Old Testament thrust of its doctrine, explicitly blaming this on theological liberalism.<sup>44</sup>

In the Nazi *Kampfzeit*, rivalry soon arose between the German Christians and the League for a German Church, especially regarding the German Christians' status as the only church Party to be endorsed by the NSDAP leadership. BdK officials wrote to the Party leadership, suggesting that this endorsement violated the Party's official neutrality in church affairs, and pointing out that numerous Nazis had been actively involved with their own organisation, both as speakers and members. They also insinuated that the DC was 'Jewish', owing to its ties with a slightly more moderate predecessor, the Christian-German Movement, which did not call for the removal of the Old Testament.<sup>45</sup> They consequently contacted Rudolf Hess' cousin, Gret Georg, presumably a BdK member, to intervene with Hess on their behalf, in the hope that they might salvage their position by forming an alliance with the DC for the upcoming church elections.<sup>46</sup> For his part, Kube violently rejected the BdK's suggestions, and brought himself into potential conflict with Buch, who claimed he had Hitler's ear in Protestant church matters.<sup>47</sup> Kube assured Buch that he was offering his endorsement of the DC to other *Gauleiter*, not as Party functionaries, but as 'private people interested in the church'.<sup>48</sup> Buch, in turn, recommended to other BdK leaders that they try to avoid

any factionalism among Nazi members of the Protestant church, as this would only serve to weaken the Nazi cause.<sup>49</sup>

Links between the Protestant Church and the Nazi Party could be found lower down the Party hierarchy as well. In the Reichstag elections of May 1924, five Protestant theologians ran as NSDAP candidates; six ran in the December 1924 elections.<sup>50</sup> In the Prussian Landtag elections of December 1924, eight Protestant pastors stood as Party candidates.<sup>51</sup> By contrast, no Catholic priests or theologians ran for the Party. One of the most famed heroes of the Nazi rank-and-file, Horst Wessel, who died fighting the communists in 1930 and gained immediate martyr status thereafter, was the son of a Protestant pastor. By one estimate, 120 pastors counted themselves members of the Party in 1930 — a very small portion of the approximately 18,000 Protestant pastors then practising in Germany, granted, but rather more significant when it is remembered that the Protestant churches discouraged their clergy from formally joining any political Party.<sup>52</sup> Relations at the local level could be quite close as well. The local NSDAP branch in Gladbeck was established in the town's Protestant parish hall, which also served as the permanent meeting place for the Nazi Party.<sup>53</sup> In East Prussia, especially in the Catholic enclave of Ermland, Protestant congregation centres were often the primary meeting places for the Nazi Party.<sup>54</sup> Protestant clergymen could be found in the ranks of the district and local Party leadership (*Kreis- und Ortsgruppenleitung*), as in the case of Pastor Michalik of Altmark, Pastor Melhorn of Lauenberg and Pastors Leffler and Leutheuser of the Wiera Valley in Thuringia, who actually founded the local NSDAP in Altenburg.<sup>55</sup>

Further evidence of the nature of relations between the Nazi Party and institutional Protestantism was provided by the National Socialist Teacher's League, whose leader, Hans Schemm, was also the Bavarian Minister of Culture and *Gauleiter* of Beyreuth: Schemm was fond of ending his local Party rallies with the Lutheran hymn, 'A Mighty Fortress is our God'. In the last years of the Weimar Republic, Schemm decided to sponsor the creation of the 'National Socialist Pastors' Working Group' (*Arbeitsgemeinschaft nationalsozialistischer Pfarrer*). Though it counted few members — largely due to the formal 'above parties' stance of the Protestant Churches — its relevance lay in the fact that a major Nazi organisation should have advocated it in the first place. The future Reich Education Minister, Bernhard Rust, endorsed the creation of such a group, as did Gregor Strasser.<sup>56</sup> Whereas some thought was given to creating an actual pastors' league on par with the Teachers' League, this would have abrogated the Party's formal 'above churches' stance; hence, it remained a looser 'working group' affiliated with Schemm's organisation. The first meeting of the group took place in February 1931, at the Berlin home of the mother of the German Ambassador to Moscow. Among the notables present were the Hohenzollern Prince August Wilhelm and his brother Eitel Friedrich (Wilhelm II's sons, and Party members both), as well as Josef Goebbels, who gave a talk on church and state.<sup>57</sup> In May 1931, the first regional branch of the group was founded in Bremen, with *Gauleiter* Telschow of East Hanover in attendance.<sup>58</sup> The Reich Party Leadership Office took an active interest in the group, overseeing appointments of other regional branches in Pomerania and Brandenburg.<sup>59</sup> Others were established throughout the Reich, including Baden where, according to the *Kölnische Volkszeitung*, half of the Protestant pastors belonged to the Nazi Party.<sup>60</sup> Yet this small group had an impact out of proportion to its size. Their meetings served as forums for some of Hans Schemm's many speeches, and Prussian government officials reported that

their speakers were frequent guests at Nazi women's assemblies, where religion was usually strongly emphasised.<sup>61</sup> (Aside from serving as speakers to Nazi women, pastors were also involved in the running of their organisations; one Pastor Lossin was the administrative leader of the German Women's Order [DFO], the main Nazi women's organisation up until the formation of the National Socialist Women's League [NSF] in 1931.<sup>62</sup>)

The Nazi approach to confessionalism displayed a general disregard for doctrine. Positive Christianity was not an attempt to make a complete religious system with a dogma or ritual of its own: it was never formalised into a faith to which anyone could convert. Rather, this was primarily a social and political world view meant to emphasise those qualities in Christianity which, it was said, could end religious sectarianism in Germany. Even while the inner logic of positive Christianity demanded that neither religious confession be officially privileged over the other, there was a clear ideological preference for Protestantism over Catholicism. This was not limited to beliefs: the Nazis explored here went much further, taking an active part in religious activities and church organisations. While they were not large enough to qualify their entire movement as a variety of 'clerical fascism', their numbers and positions of power within the movement were large enough to demonstrate the existence of a 'clerical fascist' variety of Nazism.

## Notes

1. David Martin, *A General Theory of Secularization* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978).
2. John Conway, *The Nazi Persecution of the Churches* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1968), p.6-7; Klaus Scholder, *The Churches and the Third Reich*, 2 Vols. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987-88), Vol. 1, pp.132-3.
3. Scholder (Note 2), Vol. I, pp.133-5. This picture of Weimar Catholicism as anti-Nazi is affirmed in Guenther Lewy's classic, *The Catholic Church and Nazi Germany* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), especially pp.3-25, which is nonetheless critical of the Church's stance after 1933.
4. Kurt Nowak, *Evangelische Kirche und Weimarer Republik: Zum politischen Weg des deutschen Protestantismus zwischen 1918 und 1932* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1981), pp.317-8; and J. R. C. Wright, 'Above Parties': *The Political Attitudes of the German Protestant Church Leadership 1918-1933* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), pp.81-2.
5. Günther van Norden, *Der deutsche Protestantismus im Jahr der nationalsozialistischen Machtergreifung* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Mohn, 1979), p.54.
6. Nazi Party membership in the Protestant League was not limited to these two men. League notables Hermann Beyer and Wilhelm Wehner were respectively in the SA and NS-Volkswohlfahrt, SS and DAF: *Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde* (hereafter BAB) R5101/23126/85a (n.d., n.p.).
7. Scholder (note 2), Vol. I, p.109.
8. Hermann Kremers, *Nationalsozialismus und Protestantismus* (Berlin: Verlag des Evangelischen Bundes, 1931), forward.
9. *Ibid.*, p.52.
10. Kube was actually allowed to keep the title of Gauleiter; see Peter Hüttenberger, *Die Gauleiter: Studie zum Wandel des Machtgefüges in der NSDAP* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1969), p.216. Kube was rehabilitated into the active ranks of the Nazi elite in his appointment as General Commissioner for White Russia in the occupied East.
11. Scholder (note 2), Vol. I, p.197.
12. *Ibid.*, p.198.
13. BAB NS 22/1064 (27 October 1931: Berlin).
14. BAB NS 26/1240 (1 December 1931: Berlin).
15. BAB NS 26/1240 (17 December 1931: Munich).
16. Wright (note 4), p.92.
17. In a monthly report to Strasser, Koch noted that 'Röhm was here and has had several discussions regarding the Reichswehr with my pastor'. Although Koch does not mention his pastor's name, it

- was very likely Müller, since the latter came from Königsberg, counted Koch among his friends and was intimately knowledgeable in military affairs as the *Wehrkreispfarrer* (Military Chaplain) for East Prussia: BAB NS 22/1065 (22 July 1931: Königsberg).
18. As quoted in Scholder (note 2), Vol. I, p.212. On Koch's independence, see Hüttenberger (note 10), pp.52–3, 72–3.
  19. "Protokoll einer Besprechung des Reichkirchenministers mit den Oberpräsidenten und Vertretern der Länder", August 8, 1935; see Carsten Nicolaisen, ed., *Dokumente zur Kirchenpolitik des Dritten Reiches*, 3 Vols (Munich: C. Kaiser, 1994), Vol. III, pp.46–7.
  20. Telschow, Gauleiter of East Hanover, was a good friend of Protestant pastor Ludwig Münchmeyer; BAB NS 22/1063. On Rust, see the correspondence between Strasser and him, in which he endorses the establishment of a "National Socialist Pastors' Working Group" to facilitate the completion of the Nazis' "final struggle" (*Endkampf*): BAB NS 22/1071 (1 June 1932: Hannover). In Rust's Gau alone, 17 pastors belonged to the Nazi Party: Nowak (note 4), p.305.
  21. This was confirmed by Strasser who noted, in a letter to Brückner, that he could find nothing objectionable in the circular: BAB NS 22/1068 (17 November 1932: Munich).
  22. "Richtlinien für Kirchenfragen", BAB NS 22/1068 (10 November 1932: Breslau). Note that the more menacing translation in Scholder (note 2), Vol. I, p.203, 'Purging of the small Protestant Landeskirchen ...', bears no resemblance to the original German ('Vereinigung der kleinen evangelischen Landeskirchen ...').
  23. Jonathan Wright, "The German Protestant Church and the Nazi Party in the Period of the Seizure of Power 1932–3", in Derek Baker, ed., *Renaissance and Renewal in Christian History* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1977), p.413.
  24. Daniel Borg, *The Old-Prussian Church and the Weimar Republic: A Study in Political Adjustment, 1917–1927* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1984), p.183.
  25. *Ibid.*, p.188.
  26. *Allgemeine Rundschau*, 25/10/23: in *Staatsarchiv München, PolDir/6686*.
  27. See Donald McKale, *The Nazi Party Courts: Hitler's Management of Conflict in His Movement, 1921–1945* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1974).
  28. Henry Ashby Turner, ed., *Hitler: Memoirs of a Confidant* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), p.76. The other two men were Gregor Strasser and Franz Pfeffer von Salomon, Supreme Commander of the SA.
  29. "Geist und Kampf" (speech): BAB NS 26/1375 (n.d., n.p.). The speech was probably given between 1930 and 1932.
  30. *Der Aufmarsch, Blätter der deutschen Jugend* 2 (January 1931): in BAB NS 26/1375.
  31. *Ibid.*, p.55–6.
  32. McKale (note 27), p.54.
  33. *Der Aufmarsch* 2 (note 30). Based on this evidence we can argue against McKale's assertion that Buch 'despised Jews not so much for religious or cultural reasons', McKale (note 27), p.55.
  34. *Ibid.*, p.57.
  35. "Niedergang und Aufstieg der deutschen Familie", *Der Schlesische Erzieher*, 18–25 May 1935 (transcript of 1932 speech).
  36. "On the Jews and their Lies" is one of the most notorious antisemitic tracts ever written, especially for someone of Luther's esteem. The rising tide of violence in the work finds its climax in the following passages:

If I had power over the Jews, as our princes and cities have, I would deal severely with their lying mouths. ... For a usurer is an arch-thief and a robber who should rightly be hanged on the gallows seven times higher than other thieves. ... We are at fault in not avenging all this innocent blood of our Lord and of the Christians which they shed for three hundred years after the destruction of Jerusalem, and the blood of the children they have shed since then (which still shines forth from their eyes and their skin). We are at fault in not slaying them (Martin Luther, "On the Jews and their Lies", in *Luther's Works*, trans. Franklin Sherman [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971], pp.47, 289, 267).

At one point, Luther anticipates the medical and scientific metaphors used by racist antisemites later: 'I wish and I ask that our rulers who have Jewish subjects exercise a sharp mercy towards these wretched people. ... They must act like a good physician who, when gangrene has set in, proceeds without mercy to cut, saw, and burn flesh, veins, bone and marrow. Such a procedure must also be followed in this instance', *ibid.*, p.292.

37. Adolf von Harnack, *Marcion: the Gospel of the Alien God* (Durham: Labyrinth, 1990), p.135.
38. *Ibid.*, pp.135, 139.
39. Geoffrey Field, *Evangelist of Race: The Germanic Vision of Houston Stewart Chamberlain* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), p.236.
40. Quoted in *ibid.*, p.240.
41. Friedrich Andersen, *Der deutsche Heiland* (Munich: Deutscher Volksverlag, 1921), pp.10, 15.
42. *Ibid.*, pp.19–20.
43. *Ibid.*, pp.59–62. Andersen joined the NSDAP in 1928 and immediately became active as a party speaker; see Nowak (note 4), p.249.
44. See, for instance, Arnold Dannemann, *Die Geschichte der Glaubensbewegung 'Deutsche Christen'* (Dresden: n.p., 1933), pp.11–2; and Constantin Grossmann, *Deutsche Christen – Ein Volksbuch* (Dresden, 1934), pp.24–5.
45. BAB NS 22/1064 (23 October 1931: Berlin). Although the DC were to get into hot water after one of its leaders, Reinhard Krause, similarly suggested the removal of the Old Testament at the famous *Sportpalast* meeting of November 1933, many German Christians themselves regarded this as excessive. Another DC leader, Friedrich Wieneke, tried to explain this position as a carry-over from Krause's days in the BdK: *Das Evangelium im Dritten Reich*, 2 (3 December 1933), p.514.
46. BAB *Sammlung Schumacher* (hereafter "Schu") 245/1/40 (26 October 1931: Berlin). The letter pointed out that Buch and another prominent Nazi by the name of Löpeltmann could be counted as members of the BdK.
47. See BAB NS 22/1064 (27 October 1931: Berlin), for Kube's attack on the BdK; and BAB Schu 245/1/39 (23 October 1931: Munich), for Buch's position.
48. BAB Schu 245/1/42 (2 November 1931: Berlin).
49. BAB Schu 245/1/44 (14 November 1931: Munich).
50. Herbert Christ, "Der Politische Protestantismus in der Weimarer Republik: Eine Studie über die politische Meinungsbildung durch die Evangelischen Kirchen im Spiegel der Literatur und der Presse", Ph.D. dissertation (Bonn: University of Bonn, 1967), p.278.
51. *Ibid.*, pp.278–9.
52. Albrecht Tyrell, *Führer befiehl ... Selbstzeugnisse aus der 'Kampfzeit' der NSDAP: Dokumentation und Analyse* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1969), pp.379–80. Wright's reference to the 'majority' of this number being Protestant ('Über den Parteien' [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1977], p.140) is not quite correct, since Catholic clergy were prohibited from joining the Party altogether, under pain of expulsion.
53. Frank Bajohr, *Verdrängte Jahre: Gladbeck unterm Hakenkreuz* (Essen: Klartext, 1983), pp.190–91.
54. Gerhard Reifferscheid, "Die NSDAP in Ostpreussen: Besonderheiten ihrer Ausbreitung und Tätigkeit", *Zeitschrift für die Geschichte und Altertumskunde Ermlands*, 39 (1978), p.72.
55. On Michalik: *Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz* (hereafter GStA), I Rep 77/Tit 4043/Nr 423/79 (20 August 1931: Berlin); on Melhorn, see Nowak (note 4), p.305; on Leffler and Leutheuser, see Scholder (note 2), Vol. I, p.194.
56. BAB NS 22/446 (12 January 1931: Munich).
57. GStA I Rep 77/Tit 4043/Nr 392/1 (23 February 1931: Berlin). The report on this meeting, from the Prussian Interior Ministry, provides no detail as to the substance of Goebbels' speech.
58. *Völkischer Beobachter*, 1/6/31: in GStA I Rep 77/Tit 4043/Nr 423/75.
59. GStA I Rep 77/Tit 4043/Nr 423/78 (19 July 1931: Köln).
60. *Kölnische Volkszeitung*, 28/3/31: in GStA I Rep 77/Tit 4043/Nr 423/74. In light of the probable figure of 120 pastors for the entire Reich, the article most likely meant the political preferences of the pastors, as opposed to their actual Party membership.
61. GStA I Rep 77/Tit 4043/Nr 423/76 (n.d.[1931], n.p.). The Nazis themselves acknowledged the important role played by Working Group speakers at women's rallies: *Westfälische Allgemeine Volks-Zeitung*, 8/9/31: in *Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv, Presseauschnittsammlung* p.929.
62. BAB NS 22/1064 (28 May 1931: Berlin). See also Jill Stephenson, *The Nazi Organisation of Women* (London: Croom Helm, 1981), p.45.