Christianity Encounters Totalitarianism in Germany

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CHRISTIANITY ENCOUNTERS TOTALITARIANISM
IN GERMANY

by

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A thesis presented to the
Faculty of the School of Graduate
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of the
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Preface

The German Church of the twentieth century offers a unique opportunity for study. It has twice faced a totalitarian government and has needed to learn to exist and carry on its witness to the Word of God in the face of almost insurmountable obstacles. The purpose of this paper is to contrast and compare the answer of the Church and the Christian to the National Socialists and to the Communists in East Germany, and to determine if possible if Christianity has learned the way through its desperate struggle in this century to continue its task under a hostile totalitarian government.

In fulfilling this purpose it became necessary to examine: the Evangelical Church as it was after centuries of cultural-Christianity, as it was as it emerged from the struggle to free itself from the state, and as it is in the new all-German Evangelical Church; the form which persecution of the Church and the Christian took under the Nazis and under the present East German government; the answer of Christianity to these attempts to silence its voice; the theological position behind each of the possible answers to the encounter with the National Socialists and the Communists; the practical application to politics of Karl Barth's theology for a third way; the application of this theology by an East German pastor; and the actual encounter of the Christian with the Communist in daily living under a Marxist state.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Radical changes have taken place in the German Church in the twentieth century. The Church has had to struggle for its very existence under two totalitarian regimes, the National Socialists and the Communists. To understand the Church of today it is necessary to survey briefly the Church as it has been in Germany since the Reformation. German Protestantism was shaped from Augsburg (1555) to the " revolution" in 1918 by a harmonism of throne and altar. This came to an abrupt end with the Weimar Republic and the Third Reich. These years brought only struggle to the Church. It took its first clear position at Barmen on May 29, 1934. The men at Barmen understood theology as relating the Christian faith to the issue at hand in a moment of decision. A confession of faith was to them a battle cry. They dealt with the challenge of National Socialism to the Christian faith. They emphasized the discontinuity between the pretensions of society and government and the claims of the lordship of Jesus Christ. "The gospel, when soundly articulated, brought not harmonism but discontinuity, not inclusiveness but separation, not peace but a sword!" ¹ Their story of resistance has never been adequately told.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer may be said to have spoken for many when he said, "If we claim to be Christian then there is no room for expediency. Hitler is the anti-Christ. Therefore we must go on with our work and eliminate him whether he be successful or not."¹

The churches, in spite of the defections of substantial groupings, were the only centers of leadership to survive the Third Reich and the period of denazification in fairly sound condition. The position of the churches had been purchased by quiet resistance over years, of tens of thousands of anonymous Christians, as well as the more dramatic opposition of leaders such as Niemoeller and Bonhoeffer. In contrast with World War I, where churches on both sides preached and fought with pagan abandon, and in spite of terrific pressures, not once did the German churches pray for victory or allow the pulpit to be used in sanctification of the Hitler war effort. They were, at the end of the war, in a position to hold the sympathy of Christians everywhere at a time when Germans were anxious to be accepted back into the family of nations.²

The rise of totalitarianism and the engagement with it of the Christian remnant at Barmen marked the end of centuries of "Christendom," so some churchmen in Europe speak of living in a "post-Christian age." One must understand that totalitarianism is an outgrowth of Western civilization not a foreign import. Totalitarian tendencies are indigenous to Western culture. How often hyphenated Christians in the United States refer to "the American way of life" as if that made everything right. In modern industrial society, the depersonalized mass man is highly susceptible

¹Ibid., p. 4.
²Ibid., p. 7.
to suggestion and insensitive to human relations, a fit tool for any political adventurer. There is a sharp line between the tiny creative minorities and the masses, who lack political and ethical responsibility, or in a deeper distinction, between those who experience and carry history and the formless mass who are content to be what they already are. Totalitarianism is the natural offspring of religion as a well of vague providence and eternal inspirations, of philosophy as a system of absolute values and truths, of sociology and politics shaped by the pressures of the idea of logical perfection.¹

The totalitarian state does not permit its citizens to be bound together in lesser associations, but insists that all citizens confront the state as individuals. In despotisms before the twentieth century, the claim of the state to omnipotence was checked by other institutions. Only in the modern age has Christianity and its institutions lost sufficient authority, government attained enough control over transportation and communication for real totalitarian governments to emerge. Thus, totalitarianism is a "post-Christian" development, of a decaying Christendom. This is possible when the Church ceases to be the Church and settles for the status of a culture-religion. Whether this culture-religion is amiable or demonic is theologically speaking of minor importance. "The difference between going to church as a part of the 'American way of life' and 'positive Christianity' as an expression of 'the religious genius of the German race' is, theologically speaking, a difference in temperature not a difference in climate."²

¹Ibid., p. 57.
²Ibid., p. 60.
The religious issue defines the essential nature of totalitarianism, with its hatred of humanity and opposition to the universalism of biblical faith. Its institutional effects are characterized by: hostility to all sub-political organizations such as churches, unions, and universities which do not orbit around the central government; hostility to independent centers of public opinion where full, free, informed discussion is maintained; hostility to constitutional and representative forms of self-government; a dynamic and organismic theory of state with separation of the elite from fellow travelers, an affirmation of conflict and violence, identification of the interests of the "in-group" with those of the world; politics in terms of ultimates rather than at the problem-solving level; and a blending of political with pseudo-religious concepts and purposes in the interpretation of history. Totalitarianism takes a definite course toward homogenization of all human relations. All relationships are defined by their orientation to the State. Totalitarianism is by nature anti-universal.

The alternative might seem to be for political institutions something such as federalism, and for churches religious liberty such as in America. However, the alternative to totalitarian suppression is not in the contract theory of government, nor in the rigid observance of parliamentary procedures, least of all in "majority rule," even when that majority is honestly obtained. The essence of responsible self-government is not consent, for the frightened man may be taught to consent, and the will of the majority is not reliable at every given moment. In fact it is a purpose of constitutions to prevent the will of the majority, which
is easily manipulated, from determining the issue. Democracy conceived as parliamentarianism and democracy as a way of life are two different things. It is a confusing of the mechanics of popular government with its essence. The heart of the alternative to totalitarianism is continuous and vigorous open discussion, which makes policy decision a more or less adequate expression of the best wisdom available on the issue at hand. "Self-government rests, above all, on the existence of full, free, and informed discussion. It is only through such exchange and airing of issues that the truth can come to the fore. It is this truth which makes the contribution of the Kirchentag and the Evangelical Academies of such major significance in post-war Germany."\(^1\) It is these which have fostered and developed the "talking up" process in public affairs. The very process of debate on a policy creates the will to support of it when it is made. This is necessary in a society when a certain level of literacy has been reached, if public policy is to have behind it the will which makes it effective.\(^2\)

The basic issue between totalitarianism and the society which practices responsible self-government lies between suppression and discussion. In this modern age even the Nazis and Communists have found it necessary to claim they represent the electorate, even going so far as compulsory voting. This is because at the present stage of history, confidence and consensus require involvement of all concerned. The weakness of totalitarianism lies in the suppression of full, free, and informed discussion. They must of necessity do everything to destroy or subvert independent centers of opinion.

\(^1\)Ibid., p. 66.
\(^2\)Ibid., p. 67.
It follows that an open society must encourage their development and their initiative.\(^1\)

True and responsible political decision today requires the commitment to live with the opponent, to rule with the opposition. This is not the same as the style of thinking which deals in absolutes and shows a willingness to compromise. Instead it has its roots in "a final commitment to Him who speaks and acts and authors history, with a resulting attitude to all His creatures."\(^2\) A true discussion can be carried on only when each participant feels that from the most unlikely man he will ever meet he may find out exactly what he needs to know.\(^3\)

At first glance the issue between suppression and discussion may seem sociological and institutional, but at the heart of it lies a major theological question: How does God act and speak and guide in human affairs? The Foundation of the "dialogue" and "encounter" of the newer theology rests on a far deeper and more secure foundation than "the discussion method" usually implies, "a foundation laid when men had learned that in the eyes of the righteous God, hatred and violence toward neighbor are certain signs of rebellion against him."\(^4\)

One of the major contributions of the Church struggle has been the rediscovery of the Church. In theological thinking this is more evident in the negative sense, the defense of the integrity of the Church against alternative systems of salvation. In practical works which have grown out of this rediscovery of the Church

\(^1\)Ibid., p. 69.
\(^2\)Ibid., p. 70.
\(^3\)Ibid.
\(^4\)Ibid.
and the laity, such as the Kirchentag and the Evangelical academies, the constructive elements are plainly visible. The spiritualizing thrust has been halted. It seems that the day of the individual Protestant has ended with these developments.¹

The German Church and the German Christian has in this twentieth century often faced a hostile government and hostile neighbors. There has been little peace within or without the Church. The struggle was intense during the NationalSocialist regime, and must still continue in East Germany under a different totalitarian government, the Communists. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who died a martyr just before Hitler's fall, had these words for his fellow Christians:

It is not simply to be taken for granted that the Christian has the privilege of living among other Christians. Jesus Christ lived in the midst of his enemies. At the and all his disciples deserted him. On the cross he was utterly alone, surrounded by evildoers and mockers. For this cause he had come, to bring peace to the enemies of God. So the Christian, too, belongs not in the seclusion of a cloistered life but in the thick of foes. There is his commission, his work. 'The Kingdom is to be in the midst of your enemies. And he who will not suffer this does not want to be of the Kingdom of Christ; he wants to be among friends, to sit among roses and lilies, not with the bad people but the devout people. O you blasphemers and betrayers of Christ!' If Christ had done what you are doing who would ever have been spared?"²

¹Ibid., p. 75.

CHAPTER II

THE REAL ISSUES

The decision had to be made as to whether the foundation on which the German People stood and lived was to be the racial myth or the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The totality claim of the National Socialist world-view (Weltanschauung) stood in opposition to the Christian foundation of Jesus Christ. The myth of the twentieth century was the basis of the Third Reich. This was recognizable not only in its new political structure but foremost by its aim to establish a new age that would push out the Christian age. A new world-view was striving to reorganize the whole of life. By 1938, already the beginnings of this new life were visible: The main features of a new German Faith already existed; a new political philosophy and a new constitutional law had developed from the racial myth; criminal law had started to change. A complete revolution was taking place. The conflict with Christianity had been taken up all along the line. Christianity's attacks from the Enlightenment, Idealism and Romanticism were harmless compared to the attack made on it from the National Socialist world-view.¹

The Nazi party platform guaranteed the freedom of all religious

¹Dr. Arthur Frey, Cross and Swastika, Trans. J. Strathearn McNab (London: Student Christian Movement Press, 1938), p. 6. Mr. McNab explains that there is no exact translation for the term Weltanschauung but that it means a general view of things that affects every department of life.
denominations with this very significant reservation, "so far as they do not endanger the existence of the State or do not offend the moral and ethical conscience of the Germanic race." Race was thus put above Christianity. Few churchmen at the beginning recognized that anti-Semitic racialism could not possibly be reconciled with Christianity.\(^1\) Hitler's unreasoning and demonic hatred of the Jews could have ultimately only a theological explanation, that as the chosen people of God they are the sign of Jesus Christ who endured the hatred of all men and the wrath of God against all the ungodliness and unrighteousness of men for all men—Jews and Gentiles. Under Hitler the Jews suffered immeasurably more than the Christians and the Church has reason to be ashamed that it was not counted worthy to suffer more, especially since in most cases it failed to identify itself with its Jewish brethren and did not stand forth against anti-Semitism.\(^2\) Professor Hermann Sasse of the University of Erlangen, to his everlasting credit, was the first to declare that because of this one plank in the Nazi program the Church could in no way approve National Socialism.\(^3\)

The resistance of the Church at first had nothing to do with resistance to the new political system, but it finally developed into that against its own will, when this system began to reveal itself as a religious system; when the Nazi State began to force this religion of its own upon the Christian Church. The Church in Germany resisted the government because it could do nothing


\(^2\)Ibid., p. 34.

\(^3\)Ibid., p. 36.
else without ceasing to be a Christian Church. It had only one choice, to be obedient either to the State or to God. Its opposition did take on political significance, but was really nothing else than Evangelical faith asserting and maintaining itself in the face of an attempt to falsify it and ultimately supplant it with an alien faith.¹

How could a highly cultivated people submit to a criminal regime? The germ of evil was planted long ago. A probing for guilt leads beyond the political or juristic guilt into the metaphysical and religious sphere. This is the attitude adopted by important figures of the German Resistance. Long before they realized that Germany faced defeat, they followed their consciences and took responsibility for crimes committed in Germany's name, and tried to atone for them by action or sacrifice. This was a much deeper awareness of "sin" than that of a merely "faulty" historical development.²

In answering the question of how the Nazi regime was possible, the factor of brute force cannot be left out. Hundreds of thousands submitted to this rather than the "attractiveness" or material benefits of the regime. "If one takes the constant threat of the rubber truncheon into account, and then registers the weaknesses which are assumed to be typically German, there may indeed be more grounds for marveling at the limits, than at the extent, of the submissiveness."³ Resistance was much broader than current views of the German character or an understanding of totalitarian dynamics could ever have suggested. By the adversity of the conditions under

¹Frey, op. cit., from Karl Barth's introduction, p. 16.
which the opposition to Hitler operated, and by the response it made in basically human terms, it showed a potential significance transcending any merely national or social movement of liberation.¹

The Confessing Churches and the Catholic bishops raised their voices against the basic features of the Nazi system: "totalitarianism with its complete disregard of the sanctity of individual life and its flaunting of the most elementary notions of justice; the racial reinterpretation of the Christian faith; the deification of Hitler and the glorification of the blood community of the chosen German people."² Once the issue was clear it could not be sidestepped. The charge that "meek submission" was the rule cannot be justified. One has only to read the pastoral letters of the German bishops, or the official pronouncements of the Confessing Church to refute this charge. In 1935, a manifesto against "racial mysticism" was read from Protestant pulpits which resulted in the arrest of 700 pastors. In a pastoral letter of 1942 it was stated, "We wish particularly to stress that we are not only standing up for religious and ecclesiastical rights, but also for the ordinary rights of mankind ... without them the whole of Western culture must collapse."³ Hundreds of pastors were removed from their positions or sent to prisons and concentration camps. About 800 Catholics and between 300 and 400 Protestant ministers perished in Dachau, and the latter were likely to have been German.⁴

"Liberal" Protestantism, permeated with an idealistic philosophy of culture and the "metaphysics of progress" (Tillich),

¹Ibid.
²Ibid., pp. 41f.
³Ibid., p. 42.
⁴Ibid.
believed more in *laisser aller* and thus had less power of resistance to the Nazis. The "radicals" were the "conservatives," those who determinedly held to a doctrinal position and a pessimistic view of the "natural" and "demonic" forces in the world. This movement was led by the orthodox part of the clergy, but theological interest was extensive among the laity. Perhaps this spiritual resistance fatally delayed political opposition. Dr. Niemoeller admitted the justice of this reproach in saying that the Protestant Church awoke to the danger only when attacked in its own innermost concerns.\(^1\)

Could the Churches or should the Churches have resisted earlier? Only through spiritual protest and the defense of the Gospel did they achieve unity, born of suffering for the Christian faith. Only in this way could passive resistance develop into a frontal attack upon the very essence of National Socialism. It might be that by taking a stand within their own confines, they provided the forces of active resistance with a harder core and sharper edge than an external revolt could have done.\(^2\)

The Christian Church everywhere survives, in spite of furious and insidious attacks, such as it has perhaps never had to face since its earliest days. One might almost say that it is the one thing that does survive, as a link with Europe's past and a bridgehead for the establishing of Europe's future.\(^3\)

Practically speaking the Churches were the only institution remaining as a link to the past, and behind the great figures which made headlines were countless obscure clergy and laity who made their witness possible. To the sometimes irritated question,

\(^1\)Ibid., pp. 42f.

\(^2\)Ibid., p. 43.

"What did the Church in Germany do?" one can answer—certainly not all that it should have, but there were thousands who did not bow their knee to Hitler, who witnessed to Christ with fidelity and courage.\(^1\) The members of the two great Christian churches were deeply involved in the resistance to Hitler. Because their opposition was of so fundamental a character, their determination to fight had to struggle against internal doubts. They had to overcome historic tradition, take into account worldly wisdom and considerations of Church policy. But where their opposition arose from profound belief and desperation, they dared to speak boldly and freely, to find the faith for martyrdom, and among them were found those from every part of the community from the most highly cultured to the simplest peasant.\(^2\)

It was in fact only the churches which created a genuine popular movement against National Socialism. Those who like the author took part in the great 'Confessional Synods' of 1934-36 will never forget the deep impression they made, and especially the Barmen synod at the end of May, 1934, the joyous solidarity of the assembly, the open witness against the unspirituality and materialism of the regime, despite the dangers which were so plainly seen, and the last great open air demonstration attended by tens of thousands of Church members who had come from all parts, miners, peasants, townsfolk, industrial workers, educated and uneducated, in omnibuses, farm carts, tram, and on bicycles, all united by the strength of their beliefs and in public prayer for religious freedom.\(^3\)

Church resistance to the National Socialists was primarily spiritual rather than political for various reasons: the theology of some would lead them to acknowledge whatever government was in power; some took refuge in interior pietism, letting the world go to the devil in its own way; some might have enjoyed drawing a

\(^1\)Ibid., pp. 12f.
\(^3\)Ibid., p. 49.
spiritual lesson from the miseries of defeat. The Nazi assault upon spiritual values drove the Churches to resistance. The Churches said and proved by their deeds that they were fighting not only for Ecclesiastical rights, but for the rights of men. Naziism and Christianity were two faiths between which no compromise was possible. Rather than leading to a modification of central Christian truths, Naziism's challenge forced the Church to return to the fundamentals.¹

It was from the Churches that the first serious resistance came, the first check to the onward march of Naziism was given by a small group of resolute Christian men—the Confessional Church. And they had the unenviable position of opposing their own government in the midst of a war of survival, while churches in Holland, Norway, and the other countries conquered by the Nazis were resisting foreign invaders as well as enemies of the Christian way of life.² Hitler learned the truth of what Mussolini once said in Figaro late in 1934:

A fight against religion is a fight against the impalpable, against the intangible; it is open warfare against the spirit in its most profound and most significant force, and it is by this time most fully proved that the weapons at the disposal of the State, no matter how sharp they be, are powerless to inflict any mortal blows on the Church . . . which emerges invariably triumphant after engaging in the most bitter conflicts . . . .³

Most English-speaking historians have looked upon the Church Struggle as a struggle for religious liberty under a totalitarian state, whereas it was primarily a struggle of the Church against itself for itself—a struggle for the Barmen Declaration and for the Church to remain faithful to its Declaration in its actions as well as its sermons.⁴ The Church's resistance to Hitler, viewed politically and sociologically had little apparent effect on the

course of events. Thus secular historians probably would pay little attention to the theological significance of the Church struggle against the revolution of nihilism, perhaps they might not even see it for what it was. The atrocities committed by the Nazis were the symptoms of the evil of a generation without spiritual roots. The extent of the spiritual bankruptcy was revealed in the truths confessed and the errors rejected by the Confessing Church.¹

The Evangelical Church was faced with the question of finally abandoning the Reformation or turning back to the Reformation truths. The question really was whether the Evangelical Church was going to be and remain a Church of Jesus Christ, or whether it was going to become a religious communion based on what comes from man and the world rather than what comes from God. The Christian Church is frequently confronted with this decision, but never since the Reformation so plainly as in 1933. Again it led to a division in the Church—the German Christians wanting to put the Church at the service of national renewal and expecting therefrom a renewal of the Church, the Confessional Church planting itself on the ground of the Reformation, that the Church can only be renewed by the Word of God. It was nothing new to attempt a synthesis between Christianity and National Socialism as the German Christians did. This was the very road the Christian Church had been following for two hundred years in accommodating itself to the Enlightenment, Idealism, and Romanticism. The Church had been content with exercising a Christian influence on modern world-views. The German Christians were aiming to influence the myth of the twentieth century with Christianity.²

¹Ibid., p. 12.
²Frey, op. cit., pp. 114f.
The conflict between the German Christians and the Confessional Church was not a contest between two different Church groups. The Christian Church was at stake. The issue was the surrender or the renewal of the Church.¹

Karl Barth, the influential professor from the theological faculty at the University of Bonn, placed vigorous emphasis on the supremacy and sovereignty of God and the exclusive character of the Christian revelation. He uttered an alien word at the very beginning of the Church Struggle. He maintained that a renewal of the Church could never be the result of political movements and that the Church could render the State and the political renewal no better service than by proclaiming the unadulterated Gospel. The Church's only task is to proclaim the Word of God and nothing else. Karl Barth recalled the Church to its proper task. He declared that under no circumstances must the zeal for something which the Church regards as a good cause, cause it to lose its theological existence. He remarkably came forward, at the moment when national renewal was everything, to say this clear word.² He revealed the theological issue in his famous pamphlet "Theological Existence Today," in which he called for a "theological existence," where in the midst of life as parents, citizens, and Germans the Word of God might be simply what it is.³ He summoned the Church to repentance by,

The mighty temptation of our time is: that in our anxiety in the face of dangers of all kinds we no longer put such complete trust in the power of the Word of God, but think that we have got to come to its help with all sorts of contrivances, thus absolutely abandoning our confidence in its victory.⁴

The real issue, as he saw it, was not the freedom of the Church from

¹Ibid., p. 137.
²Ibid.
³Cochrane, op. cit., p. 102.
⁴Frey, op. cit., p. 140.
political pressure, but the freedom of the Word of God in preaching and theology which had been threatened long before the rise of Hitler. Barth exhorted the Church "to carry on theology, and only theology, now as previously as if nothing had happened."

Karl Barth challenged the false doctrine of the German Christians which was then in vogue by eight points: (1) The Church must do everything not so the German People may "find the way again into the Church" but that they may find in the Church the commandment and the free and pure Word of God; (2) The German people receives its vocation from Christ and to Christ through the Word of God proclaimed according to the Holy Scriptures and the Church does not have the task of helping the German people fulfill a "calling" different from this; (3) The Church does not have to be at the service of man and therefore not to the service of the German People. It serves only the Word of God. It is God's will and work if by means of His Word man and therefore the German people are served; (4) The Church believes in the divine institution of the State as the agent and administrator of public law and order, but not in any definite State. It proclaims the Gospel in all this world's kingdoms, in the Third Reich also, but not under it; (5) If the confession of the Church is to be expanded it must be according to Holy Scripture not according to the standard of any world-view prevailing at a particular time; (6) Not by blood, nor race is Church fellowship determined, but by the Holy Spirit and Baptism, and if Christian Jews are at any time excluded, it would cease to be a Christian Church; (7) If the office of Reichsbischof were permissible at all, it would have to be filled like any other Church office, not according to political ideas and methods; (8) Ministers are to be trained

1Cochrane, op. cit., p. 102.
not to a greater nearness to life and solidarity with the community but toward greater fidelity to their one task, scriptural proclamation of the Word.¹

Barth's words increasingly got a hearing in the Church but it was not until an attempt was made to introduce laws of the State into Church legislation that resistance became a reality. The Pastor's Emergency League was founded in the summer of 1933, in resistance particularly to the Aryan paragraph.² On September 21, 1933, Martin Niemoeller sent a letter to all German pastors inviting them to join the "Emergency League." This was composed of ministers who had given written assurance to one another that in their preaching they would be bound only by Holy Scripture and the Confessions of the Reformation and that to the best of their ability they would help those who suffered from doing so. The response was tremendous with more than 7,000 having joined by January of 1934. The League was never dissolved nor banned, and still rendered service as late as Christmas, 1944. From it the Confessing Church sprang and it remained its conscience all during the long Church Struggle.³ But the idea still prevailed that it was enough just to protest single cases of "encroachment" or "infraction." Even in the Pastor's League it was the general opinion that people must put all their strength behind national renewal and there was even wide agreement with the German Christians that the latest events in German history, for example the National Socialist Revolution, might be claimed as a revelation of God. Karl Barth's warning had not yet been taken seriously.⁴

In the memorandum which Barth presented to the Pastor's

¹Frey, op. cit., pp. 141f.
²Ibid., p. 143.
³Cochrane, op. cit., p. 108.
⁴Frey, op. cit., p. 143.
Emergence League late in 1933, he endeavored to strengthen their resistance. He realized that the German Christians were only a manifestation of a deeper heresy threatening the Church, not only in Germany but perhaps in other lands. In his paper he stated clearly that the German Christian teaching and conduct was a striking consequence of the whole development of modern Protestantism since 1700, and that the Church's protest was directed against an existing and spreading corruption of the whole evangelical church. He insisted that the protest must be directed fundamentally against the source of all single errors, namely, that the German Christians assert German nationality, its history and its political present as a second source of revelation beside Holy Scripture as the only source of revelation, and thus show themselves believers in "another God." Also, in every single action the protest has to have in view the essence and totality of the sickness of the Church. A serious and effective protest can be raised only where there is agreement about this and therefore where there is a will to combat it in its essence and as a whole.1

In spite of the fact that the Church, Protestant and Catholic, was unable to prevent the rise of National Socialism, and even if its major concern during the Nazi reign was for its own existence rather than a just State, and even if it failed to prevent the dreadful crimes of National Socialism, it was only the Church which Hitler failed to conquer. Only the Church offered the resistance of a large section of the population.2

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1 Cochrane, op. cit., p. 123.
2 Ibid., p. 40.
CHAPTER III

THE STRUGGLE WITH THE GERMAN CHRISTIANS

A person who reads Mein Kampf will be impressed by the seeming esteem in which Hitler holds the Churches. He does not want priests engaging in political activity, but statesmen must avoid hostility to established religions. Hitler denounces prostitution, and obscenity in the theater, and favors a healthy family life. He also deplores the strife between Catholics and Protestants. However, it was clear to astute observers from the beginning that under these views lay a dangerous heresy for the orthodox view, in reality a new religion.¹

Hitler's creed rested upon these dogmas: In the beginning God created a race; the antithesis of race is the Jew; Christ, being He whom the Jew rejected and the German acknowledged, is a moral and religious teacher of eminence provided He is thought of as the Teutonic race has thought of Him. The implications of this religion are: (1) the ethics of "race" must be based on self-assertiveness by and for the group; (2) a Manichean distinction between good and evil is introduced into human history—one group can be "saved" through biological and disciplinary measures, the other is irrevocably "lost"; (3) --and this is the only point where the supernatural

enters National Socialism—the God who creates a world in which race is the essential reality cannot be the God of the Jews and Christians, for it is clear that He cannot be approached solely through the Nordic-German race.\(^1\)

On March 23, 1933, Hitler told the Reichstag:

> The national government sees in the two Christian confessions most vital factors in the survival of our nationality. Their rights shall not be touched. . . .
> The national government will accord and secure to the Christian confessions the influence that is due them in schools and education . . . The battle against a nationalistic world concept and the struggle for a real national unity serves the interests of the nation just as much as those of our Christian faith.\(^2\)

Perhaps this statement of Hitler's helps to explain why so many German churchmen committed themselves to National Socialism and why the German Church itself was subjected before its leaders saw the real purpose of the Nazi state. Many of the German Christians had high motives, and for quite a time many churchmen believed that Hitler's henchmen who were oppressing them were acting without Hitler's knowledge.\(^3\) Later, of course, his true feeling toward the Church was revealed. He said to one of his lieutenants, "We are not out after the one hundred and one kinds of Christianity, we are out after Christianity itself." He appointed as Minister for Church Affairs Hans Krell who said, "There is a new authority arisen in Germany which will say what Christ and Christianity means for Germans. That authority is Adolph Hitler." The manual that Hitler caused to be used in the Youth Camps states: "The basis of National Socialism is Race, Blood and Soil. The enemies of this world-view are the Jew, the Masons, and the Churches, Catholic and Protestant."\(^4\)

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\(^{1}\)Ibid., p. 6.


\(^{3}\)Ibid.

\(^{4}\)Ibid., p. 14.
Hitler shrewdly persuaded his associates to proclaim religious neutrality and committed the party to "positive Christianity" though not to any confession. Some important Nazi leaders were known to be Orthodox Protestants and others were practicing Catholics. It seemed unlikely that National Socialism would get involved in a theological brawl. Many Lutheran leaders took a too rosy view of the situation. They expected at last that there would be vigorous action against Bolshevism and godlessness; that public morals would be safeguarded, and that the importance of religion in the common life would once more be recognized. Some also felt that under the Republic, the political organization had favored the Catholics and many Protestants met with satisfaction the news of the dissolution, under Nazi pressure, of the Center Party in 1933. They were not hostile to the Catholic faith but to the energy with which they carried out political action.\(^1\)

Prior to World War I the Lutheran Church was organized as a series of Landeskirchen, that is in many of the German states, the Church was headed by the ruling monarch and was thus assured of a large measure of independence and dignity. Under these arrangements the Church became very conservative, but was freed from any necessity to safeguard its rights through political action and was permitted to do what its governing bodies, synods and university theological faculties felt was wise and expedient. The War removed the monarchs and led to the establishment of a new central administrative agency throughout the Reich. This brought their diverse religious tendencies to the forefront. Twenty-eight Landeskirchen were leagued together in the Deutsches Evangelischer Kirchenbund.

\(^1\) Shuster, op. cit., pp. 94f.
The largest single church was that of the Old-Prussian Union. It was organized according to the parliamentary idea, with an executive committee and two legislative bodies analogous to the Bundesrat and the Reichstag. It was this organization which the German Christians attacked vigorously as being taboo in a National Socialist State.¹

There was an unmistakable dwindling of popular interest in the Church. True, baptisms, marriages, and burials, were still religious events for most Lutheran citizens, but these ceremonies were traditional and many had only desultory day-to-day relations with the Church. For instance in Neu-Kolln, a worker's suburb of Berlin, only one out of 100 members attended Sunday services; pastors in the larger Hessian cities could only muster ten per cent of their congregations; in Baden, where Lutherans predominate, the average adult attendance from 1920 to 1930 was about twenty-five per cent. More striking are the figures concerning the Lord's Supper. In 1862 more than half of Prussian Lutherans took the sacrament, but by 1930 the figure was less than one-fourth. Religious fervor was noticeably declining throughout the country. Protestant leaders were aware of this and many ideas emerged as to how to revitalize religion with the trend toward conservatism rather than modernism. Two main groups have survived. In 1918, Karl Barth published a commentary on the Pauline Epistle to the Romans, and therewith practically established the "dialectical school" of theology. It holds that as a result of a "crisis" the soul feels the complete antithesis which exists between creature and Creator, the first being utterly worthless, the second

¹Ibid., pp. 95f.
incomprehensible holiness. Only through Christ may the redeemed soul reach God. It follows from this reasoning that the Church can only lose from association with temporal institutions. Concerned only with the Word of Christ, it withdraws from the world. The second movement was known as the "Luther Renaissance Movement." Led by Professor Emmanuel Hirsch, it stresses that Protestantism is a continuous historical development. Christianity is not something given once and for all as Barth believes, but a continuous process of discovering, assimilating. The Church must create an awareness of reality, a good part of which is incorporated in civic society. Hirsch emphasizes the continuing struggle between Catholic and Protestant creeds and holds that only the Protestant is wholly compatible with the German soul. Those who followed him were likely to feel that the Church would become more Lutheran in becoming more German.¹

This was the situation when conservatives who thought they could manage him summoned Hitler to lead the government. Of course, he proceeded to establish a dictatorship and take full control of the Reich government. The "revolution" was given the practically unanimous support of Lutheran leaders, many of whom were Nazis.²

At first, after Hitler’s rise to power in March of 1933, and the rout to his side led by Prelate Kaas of the Roman Catholic Zentrum and only the Social Democrats opposing, Protestant church leadership was confused. They issued a statement in October of that year on the occasion of the four-hundred-fiftieth anniversary of Luther’s birth, "We German Protestant Christians accept the saving of our nation by our leader Adolf Hitler as a gift from God’s hand.

¹Ibid., pp. 96ff.  
²Ibid., p. 99.
We agree with a whole heart that the Chancellor defends the Life and Honor of the nation . . . " In January of 1934, after Karl Barth had read his appeal for resistance, the Lutheran bishops announced their unlimited fealty to Hitler and the Third Reich. A large number of pastors who had joined the Emergency League, which had rallied to the call of Barth and Niemoeller, went over to the position of the bishops. From here on Christian resistance was divided and to this day they remain divided as to which policy was the right one. The quiet opposition fitted best the Lutheran state-churches and the traditional Lutheran accommodation to governmental authority.¹

On April 3, 1933, Nazis interested in the conduct of Protestant ecclesiastic affairs met in Berlin to draw up a program. They designated themselves German Christians and demanded of the Church a plainly formulated declaration on the sacredness of race and the limited value of the Old Testament. The principal article of the constitution they adopted read: "Christian faith exacts war against atheistic Marxism and ultramontanism. A religion such as ours conforms to nature in being a message of salvation to all men, though it is given to each folk in an especial way."² Even more sensational were the demands of the demagogue Pastor Hossenfelder, who claimed to be Hitler's "spiritual director." He declared that the Lutheran Churches should become one single national organization and that the existing administrative agency ought to be disbanded immediately. Herr Kube, leader of a Nazi group in the Prussian Lantag, threatened to use force if the will of the German Christians was not obeyed at once. The fight thus started was partly political

since the highest administrative officials of the Church had not been Nazis and had insisted that there be no union between Protestantism and the State. Various groups drew up resolutions warning against attempts to unite "confessions of very different kinds." But many who shared this view felt sure that Hitler would keep his promise to stay out of Ecclesiastical affairs, and that the exuberance of those who wanted union would soon die down.¹

Pastor Ludwig Mueller, appointed Hitler's special adviser in matters affecting Protestantism, soon became an important figure. On May 1, 1933, he appealed for immediate inauguration of the "Imperial Church" and denounced all who opposed it. At the same time Pastor Hossenfelder presented a ten-point memorandum containing almost the whole program which was later realized: a Church which was "not a State Church... but an evangelical Imperial Church, which accords recognition to the majesty of the National-Socialist state as something demanded by the faith"; no separation between Lutheran and Reformed churches; only Aryans could be members; parliamentary procedure to be abandoned in favor of authoritative leadership of a national bishop, under whom no more than ten provincial bishops would hold office; seat of the national bishop to be at Wittenberg, city sacred to Luther's memory. Hossenfelder was obviously the bosom friend of many Nazis, but still the Lutheran authorities failed to take the problem very seriously, not realizing how much conservatism had been undermined in Germany.²

Mueller sharply criticized the "inactivity" of the Protestant clergy, who, he said, had lost contact with the people, and did not preach to men and women of the twentieth century, nor carry on the mission of Luther. This held some truth, for many felt the

¹Ibid. ²Ibid., p. 102.
leadership of the Church to be old and uninspired. The result was a conference at Loccum, attended by Mueller and the members of the official committee. On May 26, 1933, it issued a statement of "basic principles." They had begun to formulate a constitution for German Protestantism as a whole. The creed was to remain unchanged and a national bishop was to be elected. Without, apparently, consulting Mueller the committee nominated a prominent and beloved man, Pastor von Bodelschwingh, to this position and gave the news to the public at the same time as to the government. The German Christians objected to his appointment to the point of a demonstration on June 17. The fight attracted much attention and might have resulted in a defeat for the German Christians had Hitler not intervened. He declared that he could not recognize the Bishop-elect until he knew if the man had popular support. Thereupon the government banished Mueller from office and appointed Dr. August Jaeger, a lawyer descended from churchmen, in his place. A few days later Jaeger was named "commissioner for the domain of all the evangelical churches in Prussia" and given power to take any steps he felt were necessary. He issued a series of statements indicating that the government would not be satisfied until German Christianity was triumphant. One said, "We owe thanks to God and to His instrument, Adolf Hitler, for having averted the chaos of Bolshevism." Church authorities considered appealing to the Supreme Court, but did not do so for Dr. Bodelschwingh resigned.¹

Two weeks later Hitler issued a new constitution for the German Evangelical Church. With the help of Dr. Frick, Minister of the Interior, the so-called "July Constitution" became legally

¹Ibid., pp. 103f.
binding. It was relatively moderate and in principle followed the
resolution adopted at Loccum. The German Evangelical Church was
made a sovereign religious body, but lost some domains of activ-
ity such as the care of youth, foreign missions, and caritative
endeavor. The Reichsbishof was to hold a position for the church
such as Hitler held for political affairs. Dr. Jaeger was
enthusiastic in his support. The people were to vote on July 23,
if they would accept the German Christian idea or if they favored
the opposition, now called "Gospel and Church." The election was
a farce, with Storm Troopers lined up at Church doors on election
day, and the German Christians registered a great victory.¹

A synod was convened in Prussia on September 5, 1933. It
gave Mueller and Hossenfelder a great deal of authority, stated
that Church officials must give three cheers for Hitler, and de-
clared that non-Aryans could hold no office in the Church (at which
point the "Gospel and Church" rose and left the room). German
Protestants were gripped by deep depression. Life seemed gone from
the Church. Some even considered rejoining the Catholic faith.
Others felt that the substructure of Lutheranism and the free
authority of the University theological faculties had collapsed.
But some orthodox Lutheran leaders now began to stand firm—
notably Dr. Bodenschwingh, Dr. Kapler, Dr. Koch (president of
the "Gospel and Church" group), and Dr. Dibelius, who said in a
speech in Potsdam that to limit the Gospel to one nation was to
falsify it and that although the Church was being oppressed, it
would arise because it would continue to struggle against the users
of violence. Except in the cities of Prussia, the German Christians
were at a disadvantage because many provincial conservatives were

¹Ibid., p. 105.
devout Lutherans, and local Nazis hesitated to tangle with them. Many small congregations in rural districts could not understand what all the disturbance was about. Meanwhile the pastors themselves began to take action. The *Pfarrer Notbund* was established in the summer of 1933, and soon numbered its members in the thousands, some of whom were counted as non-Aryans. One result, then, of Hoffenfelder's insistence on the "Aryan clause" was the growth of solidarity among pastors and theologians.¹

The opposition forces were very obvious when delegates from all the Churches of Germany met in Wittenberg in September of 1933, to elect a *Reichsbischof*. Dissidents had to rely on word of mouth because of censorship, so Mueller was elected, but the tenseness of this meeting spread real alarm among the German Christians. Mueller thereupon proclaimed that there were "absurd rumors" about changes in personnel and penalties to all who were not German Christians. Instead, he said, the fighting was over and all that remained was "winning the people for the Church." He failed to see the real source of conflict. He thought the pastors were worried about ecclesiastical appointments while the struggle had already shifted to the realm of religious conviction. This was the point at which Karl Barth began to issue his series of brochures, *Theologische Existenz heute* (The Existence of Theology Today), in which he challenged the doctrines of the new "German Evangelical Church." Lutherans, too, agreed now that the fundamental issue was not one of organization but of doctrine.²

A series of "creeds" were issued which made it very clear that German Protestantism was faced with doctrine which could not be reconciled with Christianity in any form. The German Christians

¹Ibid., pp. 106ff.  
²Ibid., pp. 109f.
watched their organization disintegrate. At first many had rallied to the movement for they thought it would put new life into the Church, but now all but rabid Nazis retreated in haste when it was clear that only political allegiance held the German Christians together. Dr. Krause, president of the Berlin German Christian group, in a speech in commemoration of the four-hundred-fiftieth anniversary of Luther's death declared that the National Socialist revolution was going to reform the Church. There would be no more "foreign elements" in the "German religion." The Old Testament would be repudiated, the New cleansed, and he closed by shouting, "We reject the crucifix!" He was removed from office, but his successor held exactly the same views. Pastors belonging to the Notbund read from their pulpits a declaration charging that the German Christians had brought paganism into the Church. The Reichs bischof himself flayed Dr. Krause. The "radicals" of Thuringia withdrew in a body from the German Christian movement.

The Reichs bischof was being attacked from both sides. At Mecklenburg, Westphalia, a district synod passed resolutions extremely critical of the German Christians as early as August of 1933. Karl Barth published his "Antitheses to the Rengsdorfer Theses," in which he stated that anyone who preaches Christianity rooted in the German people, as the German Christians had done at their October meeting in Rengsdorf, puts himself outside the pale of the Evangelical Church. In November Professor Gogarten and his friends signed a declaration condemning the rejection of the Old Testament, the interpretation of Christ as an heroic figure, and the exclusion from the Church of all but Germans. In December of 1933,

1Ibid., pp. 111ff.  
2Ibid., p. 113.
von Bodelschwingh and his associates in a confession repudiated the "non-Aryan" tests applied to the Christian faith and also the new theories of Church and State: "We denounce the heresy that the rulers of the state are entitled to hold sway over the Church; in particular that they have the right to appoint and dismiss incumbents of ecclesiastical office, and to make laws which directly or indirectly affect the teachings of the Church."¹ The "Gospel and Church" group had attacked the German Christians, just previously, as something "which in its teachings and acts contradicts the spirit of the Gospel in vital matters, and which disregards the creed of the Church."²

The Notbund, now greatly strengthened, felt strong enough to make some suggestions: that the Reichsbischof disassociate himself from the German Christians who had torn the Church apart; that all responsible for the Sportspalast demonstration which had culminated in Dr. Krause's speech, or who had trespassed against the liberty of others be removed from office; and that the preaching of the Gospel remain inviolable. Practically all the Protestant theologians rallied to the support of the Gospel. Mueller appealed in vain for support and obedience. He called the bishops together to discuss how the Church would be governed. The main result was an order from the Ministry of the Interior for all ecclesiastical authorities to quit expressing their views in the press. A few days later came the law stating that no officer of "the central government of the Church" could belong to any ecclesiastical group. Mueller resigned as protector of the German Christians. It looked as if National Socialist efforts to make Protestantism an instrument of the government had failed.³

¹Ibid., p. 114. ²Ibid., p. 115. ³Ibid.
But Müller was not silenced. On December 8, 1933, he arbitrarily declared that Evangelical youth groups would from now on be incorporated into the Hitlerjugend. Baldur von Schirach, leader of this group, was an outspoken pagan who declared that belief in Germany should come before allegiance to any Church. Müller, with no constitutional right to do so, ruled that the Church could exercise no control over the 800,000 members of the youth organizations except in the matter of religious instruction. He ignored completely the constitution under which he held episcopal office in order to do the will of the Nazi high command, which was all that had any real meaning for him. On his own authority he also appointed a "commission" to pass a series of laws regulating the conduct of churchmen, and their tenure of office was left to a "tribunal."

Against these new threats, a strong opposition was organized. Between Pastor Niemoeller, now heading the Notbund which had by this time 6,000 members, and several provincial bishops—Maharens of Hannover, Wurm of Stuttgart, and Meiser of Bavaria, among others—a pact of alliance was signed. They presented an ultimatum to Reichsbischof Mueller; either his tactics would be changed and the Church constitution respected or they would refuse to obey his orders. On January 4, 1934, Mueller declared that the Church was under a state of siege. Every kind of criticism of the Mueller government was forbidden. Those refusing to conform would be dismissed from office and then disciplined more severely. The "Aryan paragraph" was to be in force. To show government backing, secret police attended all services and recorded what was said.

1Ibid., p. 116.
A great many of all ranks were suspended, deprived of salaries, or dismissed without a hearing by their peers.\(^1\)

The situation was grave and all were worried. It was apparent to the young Lutherans who were determined to hold their ground that this could not continue indefinitely. Everyone was concerned with the effect of racial propaganda on the youth of the nation. All that can be said is that nearly all the pastors as well as their loyal congregations did their duty and people all over felt that civilization did still survive in the German people. Catholics, who had felt that Protestants were too weak to offer effective resistance, were immensely pleased by the willingness to accept martyrdom which characterized followers as well as their pastors.\(^2\)

Soon 10,000 active ministers belonged to the Notbund, and there was no question that the whole influence of Germany's conservatives, even in military life, was behind the attack on the Reichsbischof. Hitler, who undoubtedly was behind the whole plan, retreated and ordered Dr. Frick, Minister of the Interior, to effect a compromise. He convoked a sort of Council in Berlin. Mueller was there and seven delegates from the opposition, seven German Christians, and Hitler and his crew. At the beginning of the meeting Goering read a purported telephone conversation said to have been obtained by tapping Pastor Niemoeller's line, in which von Hindenburg was about to administer "extreme unction" to Hitler. Hitler marched out very angrily, and the bishops were so frightened that they signed a declaration asserting that they were in complete agreement with the Reichsbischof. Disciplinary actions were everywhere apparent, but this time the laity saved the situation. They refused to accept changes in pastors.\(^3\)

\(^1\)Ibid., p. 117.  \(^2\)Ibid., p. 119.  \(^3\)Ibid., p. 121.
Mueller decided now to make a general advance on the churches. On March 2, he decided to ignore the constitution of the previous year, and declared that from now on the government would recognize only the Reichsbischof and a Prussian synod comprised of German Christians. The ultimate aim was to organize the Church as a state-controlled "union."\(^1\) A reign of terror burst upon the Church. Orthodox pastors and their congregations were harassed by secret police, and violence took place even in the churches. Pastors and bishops were replaced with Nazis. The laity again stood firm. They sent the Reichsbischof messages of disapproval and greeted Niemoeller with rousing cheers as he entered his church. The clergy resorted to organizing "free synods." The initiative probably came from the Reformed Churches of the Rhenish-Westphalian district, who had objected to the installing of bishops all along. The "synodal movement" spread rapidly and gained power. The Reichsbischof was tired and distressed. He issued a conciliatory statement on March 22. He said that a number of pastors could be reinstated, if they promised to abstain henceforth from "political activity." Very few took advantage of this invitation.\(^2\)

Early in May, 1934, the "free synods" of the Rhenish-Westphalia district celebrated their amalgamation into a "Confessional Union" by issuing a document declaring that the Reichsbischof governed by violence and by his whims. They further stated that until the rule forbidding the state to interfere in the business of the Church was obeyed, there could be no peace. Bishop Eckert of Berlin, at his own synod meeting concluded that since Hitler was the chosen instrument of God, any cleric or layman who joined a free synod was

\(^{1}\)Ibid.

\(^{2}\)Ibid., p. 124.
an enemy of the State and a dangerous rebel. There were certainly a lot of rebels, for the "free synod" movement spread throughout Germany. Protestantism was not going to die without a struggle. In almost every case the leader was an eminent and courageous pastor. Even in the small cities, where religious fervor had been noticeably lacking prior to the National Socialists, crowds now braved insult and danger to show that they were solidly behind the Notbund. Some of this might have been their way of showing political opposition, but the vast majority were sincerely concerned over the Church.¹

By the end of the first year of National Socialism it was clear that the Confessionals had won a major victory over the German Christians. But unfortunately the Confessionals were to make mistakes which would alienate many cautious neutrals who sympathized with Niemoeller's aims but could not reconcile themselves to his methods. Thus three factions developed, rather than the two there should have been. Only one thing was certain, the new regime was interested in the Church only as a tool to strengthen its power over the nation.² Karl Barth was not happy, even when many Church leaders were rejoicing over the demise of the German Christians. In the foreword to a pamphlet entitled "Lutherfahrer 1933" he wrote:

A hundred per cent victory by the opposition in the field of church politics would also be of no help if the opposition did not know how to get at the root of the virulent disease of our Church which has finally broken out in the 'German Christians' though not first or only in them. Even the creation of a Free Church without a clarification of the basic issues could be of no help to us ... The resistance has to go farther and be directed against the

¹Ibid., pp. 127f.

²Stewart W. Herman, Jr., It's Your Souls We Want (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1943), p. 135.
ecclesiastical theological system of modern Protestantism which in no way is embodied in the 'German Christians' alone if everything is not to have been in vain.¹

Everyone now knew the issues at stake. The government and the German Christians had revealed their hands, and the synods had spoken resolutely and plainly. They exhibited at their conferences a spirit of profound loyalty to the historic Church. All of the manifestations of this loyalty—the conferences of the free synods, the statements of theological professors, the baskets of telegrams received by Dr. Frick at the Ministry of the Interior—reached a climax in the "council" which convened in two sections, at Wuppertal and Barmen, on May 29, 1934.²

¹Cochrane, op. cit., pp. 119f.
²Shuster, op. cit., p. 133.
CHAPTER IV

THE RENEWAL OF THE CHURCH

The Synod of Barmen, the First Confessional Synod of the German Evangelical Church, was composed of 139 delegates drawn from eighteen provincial churches and from extremely varied geographical, denominational, and theological backgrounds. Members of Lutheran, Reformed, and United Churches, and of various free synods found themselves united in common devotion to Jesus Christ. Foremost among the personalities there was Karl Barth. It might not be too much to say there would have been no Barmen except for Karl Barth, not only because he was the author of the original draft of the Theological Declaration, but because of the way he had shaped and molded theological thought in Germany during the years 1917 to 1934. Barth kept silent at the Synod's meeting and Hans Asmussen had the task of guiding the Declaration through the synod. ¹

The actual Declaration as passed by the Synod is composed of six articles. The first confesses Jesus Christ as the one Word of God, whom Christians have to hear and obey in His life and in His death. It was this article which led to the Christian resistance against culture-religion and also against the persecution of the Jews, for Christ's command was to love one's neighbor.

¹Cochrane, op. cit., pp. 149f.
The second article frees Christians from bondage to the godless associations of this world and calls them to serve his creatures. Thus the gospel has to do with all areas of life—political, economic, and social, as well as the spiritual. There is no area of life beyond the reach of Christ. The third article establishes that neither the gospel nor the order of the Church may be left to shifting governments and ideologies. This was more the Calvinist position, as the Lutheran one had been that the outward form was unimportant as long as the inner life of the Christian remained untouched. This latter position often led to their accommodation to any political situation. The fourth article establishes that authority in the Church, based on Matthew 20: 25-26, is not one of rule, but rather one of service. The pastor had traditionally filled the role of authority in the state-church parish. Now at Barmen the Church's position was restated—that in the Church he is first who is servant of all. In the fifth article the purpose of government is stated. Just government has to do with the maintenance of order. It is the Church which derives authority in reference to the kingdom of God. This position as against one of the chief claims of a totalitarian state of being above every other organization, including the Church, and in the end as being the individual's savior. Article six condemns the Nazi church machine as contrary to law and faith. If one obeys this machine, he disobeys Jesus Christ. This was not a well-rounded confession of faith but was a clear call to the faithful to avoid apostasy. They were fighting for the integrity of the Christian faith.¹

¹Littell, op. cit., pp. 14ff.
From the Barmen Declaration it is possible to learn: (1) That a Confession of Faith is a written document drawn up by the Church which confesses Jesus Christ. A confession is not the publication of opinions, convictions, ideals, and value judgments of men. It does not set forth a program or system of theology or ethics. "It confesses Jesus Christ as the one Lord, the one justification and sanctification of men, the one revelation, and the one Word of God which we have to hear, trust, and obey in life and in death."

(2) A Confession of Faith confesses Jesus Christ as He is attested for us in Holy Scripture. (3) It is a confession of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. (4) It is an act in which the Church is born or reborn. (5) A Confession of Faith, as the voice of the one, holy, catholic Church, reflects its unity and continuity with the Church of the fathers, and it does not seek to replace older confessions but to clarify them in the face of new questions. (6) In and with its Confession of Faith the Church claims to be the one, true Church. (7) A genuine Confession of Faith occurs when the Church is convinced that its faith and unity are endangered by a heresy. The heresy was not the acts of violence, injustice, and maladministration, but the false doctrines of the German Christian which struck at the heart of the Church's faith. The synod saw in this heresy the culmination of the theology of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. A confession is a militant action of the Church by which it purges itself of error. (8) A Confession of Faith is not only relevant for the Church's own doctrine and life but bears implications for concrete social and political issues. This is the ethical character of a confession. It is relevant for

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1 Cochrane, op. cit., p. 182. 2 Ibid., pp. 182ff.
social and political justice, freedom and peace. This is necessary
to a true confession, for without it the confession would be deny­
ing that the Church has been called to serve the world. The
Confessing Church has been condemned for just this fault--of being
primarily concerned for just its own spiritual and physical exist­
ence. Its accusors have said that in the "Stuttgart Confession"
immediately following the war, the Church admitted to this failing
by confessing its share in the guilt for the miseries National
Socialism brought to the world. However, this is not the whole
truth. It is true that the Church failed to present a united front
against the State, and to remain faithful to Barmen. It failed
in the degree to which it refrained from spelling out that justice
and peace which the State has been appointed to provide, and in
the degree to which it failed to make God's commandment very clear
with regard to the responsibility of rulers and ruled. But it was
by no means silent. On June 4, 1936, the Provisional Board and
Council of the Confessing Church sent a lengthy memorandum to Hitler.
Ten leaders of the Church here opposed a totalitarian State without
any personal security. It called attention to the anti-Christian
and pagan character of the Nazi State, openly condemned anti-
Semitism, racialism, concentration camps, secret police methods,
oaths of allegiance contrary to God's word, the destruction of
justice, and corruption of the second, fifth and sixth articles
of the Barmen Declaration.¹

¹Ibid., pp. 205ff.

(9) A Confession of Faith always
provokes opposition from the false church and the world because
in its witness to God's free grace for all peoples it is a
radical attack upon them. This resistance might not always take
the form of violence, but might be much more subtle and dangerous, such as accepting it as "an interesting point of view." (10) A confession is not the only commentary Christians have to read, but as a decision of the Church it deserves the highest honor and respect. A confession will be a stimulus and guide to a better understanding of Scripture.1 "A Confession is Christological not only in the fact that its articles are related to Christ but in the sense that He is the confessor. The Church confesses only in Him! The Confession occurs not when we think we have discovered the truth, but when the truth has found us."2 True confession never takes place for the sake of preserving the Christian's Christianity. It occurs when men without any ulterior motive or any regard for consequences say "yes" to Christ. This is a joyous freedom from questions of expediency. It also creates freedom in those who hear it, freedom to choose, to decide, to act, to obey. It emancipates men.3

In the Church's real distress it was natural for it to turn first to the Confessions of the Reformation. But these were not sufficient, for the German Christians too were claiming that these were binding on them. The question arose: With what seriousness is the new Confession to the contents of the old Confessions made? The confession which the Church demanded meant opposing a "god" who aimed at ousting the Lord of the Church, or at least taking his place beside Him. It meant resisting the National Socialist heresy, the myth of blood and race. This was no mere theological quarrel. At issue was the taking of a stand for Christ and against the world with all its material forces. Only from Barmen can a renewal of the Church be spoken of.4

1Ibid., pp. 210ff.  
2Ibid., p. 212.  
3Ibid.  
4Frey, op. cit., pp. 147f.
From the Barmen Declaration, it can be clearly seen that a Church's Confession is always an action of the Church; to the Confession must always be added a Confessional attitude, conduct. Confession consists partly in confessing before the world. It is evident that it was not easy to achieve a real Confessional conduct, especially when it meant confessing Jesus Christ in opposition to the State. Especially the Lutherans, who had for centuries recognized absolute obedience to the State, found it difficult to say a word against the State. A struggle went on over the purity of the Lutheran confession. The danger was that dogma would be looked after carefully within the Church, with no confession before men. The acceptance of the Barmen Declaration was far from clearing away all difficulties. But it did give the assurance that in all the struggles to come, the right path would be found.¹ A Church without a Confession is defenseless in the face of the world. In a concrete situation doctrines are no help. The Church's concern over and against the world is the living Lord. A doctrine cannot give protection against the totalitarian State. Only a confessing congregation can offer resistance.²

Was it possible to live in Nazi Germany on the basis of God's Word? The Christian there could not live on the basis of reason, or of culture, but she could live on the Word of God. One thing after another by which the Church thought it was able to live was taken from it. There only remained to the Church the Bible. It became for thousands their only support. The resistance of the German Confessional Church to the National Socialist world-view arose solely from obedience to God's Word. Political motives are

¹Ibid., pp. 157ff. ²Ibid., p. 220.
not the Church's affair, but decisive political importance attached to the conflict because the Church's resistance to the State's totality claim was the only resistance against which the omnipotence of the world and State would break. It had great cultural significance for only in the Church could be found freedom of conscience, freedom of thought, and freedom of speech. During the age of individual and subjective freedom the Church was the sanctuary of the idea of authority and obedience, but the Church showed in Germany during the National Socialist regime that when an epoch of force approaches, it knows how to become the sanctuary of freedom.

A Confession of Faith involves a conflict not only between theological schools within the Church, but a conflict between the true and the false Church. It is a conflict which divides the Churches, and deep wounds are inflicted. The true story of the Church in Germany is not entirely one of faith and courage, rather it is mainly a tale of betrayal, timidity, and unbelief. Not one was entirely righteous. Throughout the Church Struggle the Confessing Church took its stand upon the Barmen Declaration as the only legitimate interpretation of the Reformation symbols and thus claimed to be the one true evangelical Church in Germany. It kept asserting that a person could not be faithful to the Lutheran and Reformed Confessions without being faithful to Barmen. Both the German Christians and the Lutheran confessionalists professed their loyalty to the old standards. It was demonstrated by the history of the Confessing Church that when a Christian tried to be true to the Reformation without Barmen, resistance to the Reich Church government and the Hitler state was weakened. The Lutherans,

1Ibid., pp. 222f. 2Cochrane, op. cit., p. 16.
led by men like Sasse, Elert, Atthaus, and Bishop Mahrenkhold to the position that Barmen had no "authority in matters of doctrine for Lutherans . . . since the Lutheran Confessions do not recognize an Evangelical Church that is above the Confessions or the teaching office of such a Church." Sasse referred to the Confessing Church as a sect. On the other side Bonhoeffer took the position that anyone who knowingly separated himself from the Confessing Church separated himself from salvation. He stated that either the Barmen Declaration was a true confession to the Lord Jesus, wrought by the Holy Spirit, with the power to build or split the Church, or it contained the opinions of certain theologians and was binding on no one. The Lutherans continued to be divided with respect to Barmen.

In August of 1934, a new law was passed--clergymen must take an oath of allegiance to Hitler:

I, being a rightfully appointed servant of the Church, take this oath before God that I pledge loyalty and obedience to Adolf Hitler, leader of the German people and their State; and I solemnly declare that I will make every sacrifice, and render any service, which a German Evangelical man owes to the German people. I also declare that, in accordance with my duties and my office, I will conduct myself in consonance with the laws of the Evangelical Church and will observe scrupulously instructions given me under those laws.

It was clear that the members of the clergy were being asked to embrace Hitler and also to promise to obey the Reichbischof. The opposition issued a manifesto, read from their pulpits, that this oath was a flagrant violation of Christian ethics, "Obedience to this church government means disobedience to God." They refused to take the oath.

1 Ibid., p. 183.  
2 Ibid.  
3 Shuster, op. cit., p. 136.  
4 Ibid.
With no general unity, how could Müller be installed as Reichsbischof? Jaeger realized that the principal offenders were the Bishops Wurm and Meiser of Stuttgart and Bavaria, so he concentrated his attacks there, and attempted to have them removed from office, but the laity rallied behind them. Not one pastor in Munich complied with the deadline for signing the oath and crowds marched through the streets of the city acclaiming Bishop Meiser. Bavaria became again a center of opposition.¹

Nowhere else had the National Socialists conducted themselves with such insensate brutality as they had in Bavaria in 1933. Once the storm had spent itself, even many Nazis were utterly disillusioned, but they could do nothing. In Prussia, National Socialism gradually became indistinguishable from the old Bismarckian tradition. The aim of von Papen, Dr. Schacht, and the Reichsheer officers was being realized but by methods which often shocked them. Bavaria in particular must be Prussianized, and not even the Nazis of Bavaria wanted this. Many were alarmed by the effort to nationalize Protestantism. They did not want a religion dictated by the Prussians.

On September 19, the Bavarian Ministry issued a statement approving a central ecclesiastical organization but only if regard for differences of faith were upheld. General von Epp, the Bavarian Staatsrat, and even the Brown House, seat of the Nazi general staff, sent telegrams to Hitler urging him to curb Mueller and Jaeger, but Hitler made public his support for the policy of Jaeger and two days later, Mueller was finally installed as Reichsbischof. At this moment 6,000 of Germany's 16,000 Evangelical ministers were proclaiming from their pulpits their allegiance to the "Confessional

¹Ibid., p. 138.
Union." Bishop Wurm was deposed the next week. The press was
forbidden to print anything about the situation except Jaeger's
statements. His statements assured the people that Germany would
soon have only one Church, inside which differences between Catholics
and Protestants would soon disappear. Orders were issued forbidding
opposition pastors to speak in public, their churches were locked,
and Bishop Wurm and many of his supporters were arrested, but the
congregations assembled before barred doors to sing their tradition­

nal hymns. Bavaria next felt Jaeger's wrath. On October 10,
he went to Munich and seized the diocesan executive offices. He
declared that Bavaria was to be divided into two dioceses. Bishop
Meiser was placed under house arrest, but he had provided for this
emergency by appointing a council to govern the Church in his
absence. They decreed a day of fasting and prayer to be observed
by church attendance. The crowds were large and enthusiastic.
Bishop Meiser was that evening deposed and put under strict arrest.¹

The persecution of the Churches of Wurttemberg and Bavaria
and their bishops, Wurm and Meiser, led to the Second Confessional
Synod of the Evangelical Church in Germany in Dahlem, on October 24,
1934. Where Barmen had worked out the principles for the Church's
witness, the 143 delegates assembled at Dahlem laid down the
principles for Church policy. The Reich Church was declared
shattered and the Council of Brethren was summoned to assume the
leadership of the Church, and congregations, pastors, and elders
were called upon to refuse instructions from the Reich Church govern­
ment and to stand by the synod and its organs.² A document from
Dahlem demanding that the "Confessional Union" alone be allowed to

¹Ibid., pp. 140ff.
²Cochrane, op. cit., pp. 198f.
speak for the Church and setting forth reasons for their rejection of Jaeger and Mueller, was placed in Hitler's hands. On October 26, Jaeger resigned in a letter to the Reichbischof, suggesting that a council of bishops whom Jaeger chose would aid Mueller. All this meant was that since the opposition would not be browbeaten and the world at large had taken an interest in the Church situation in Germany, Hitler must alter his program, at least temporarily.1

The Dahlem Declaration affirmed that the creation of the Church organization is the Church's concern, to be carried out exclusively according to Church points of view. This was a clear defiance of the State which had aimed at co-ordination of the Church. Dahlem was the dam erected by the Church against which the State's totalitarian or absolutist claim was shattered.2

At a meeting of the Council of Brethren in Dahlem on November 9, the split in the unity of Barmen and Dahlem came to a head. Bishop Meiser, who had strongly stressed the sole authority of the Council now disputed it on the ground that Churches with legal constitutions had arisen since Barmen. The first Provisional Board of Administration was set up under Bishop August Maharenz. Immer, Hesse and Martin Niemoeller resigned from the Council of Brethren in protest because they believed that Barmen and Dahlem had been forsaken and they feared that a compromising course would be followed under Maharenz's leadership.3

Pastor Niemoeller insisted that the Confessional Union must declare that it was the only real German Evangelical Church and that it would not compromise. Mueller must go the way of Jaeger, if peace was to prevail. Mueller dared not break with the German

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1Shuster, op. cit., p. 145.  
2Frey, op. cit., p. 184.  
3Cochrane, op. cit., p. 199.
Christians or the whole Church would be against him, so he stalled for time. Hitler called three leaders of the opposition—Maharens, Wurm and Meiser—to a conference. Dr. Frick annulled all measures which had been taken against these three. When they arrived in his presence, Hitler told them that the State would not attempt a solution by force. The government was now to be neutral. On November 5, Dr. Frick opened a conference to settle the major difficulties, but the Confessional Union refused to alter its position: the central government of the Church must admit that it had violated the constitution and that all Jaeger's decrees were illegal. Frick proposed compromises, and then threatened that the government would withdraw all subsidies from the dissenting churches. The Confessional Church replied that it could not be bought. The attacks on Mueller became stronger. Nearly all of the most illustrious professors of theology urged him to resign and soon the theological faculty of the University of Leipzig asked the same thing.¹

There was virtual war on a number of fronts, such as when the German Christians refused to evacuate the chancery office to Bishop Wurm who had been officially reinstated, and went so far as to fortify it against possible seige. Dr. Frick issued an order forbidding the German press to make any mention of what was taking place among the Churches. On November 9, Mueller publicly refused to capitulate. Dr. Kinder, decidedly an improvement over Jaeger, accepted the position he had held. He was a sincere churchman and a lover of peace, but he was a politician and wanted order regardless of the cost, so he was repudiated as firmly as Jaeger had been.²

¹Shuster, op. cit., pp. 158ff. ²Ibid., p. 162.
Various members of the opposition were worried about the withdrawal of government subsidies, and as the year ended it seemed possible that some sort of compromise might be hammered out. But dissension had gone too far. Pastor Niemoeller was now advocating complete separation of Church and State, with the Church depending on voluntary contributions for its financial support. The South German churchmen refused to assent to this view. The Church was obviously anything but united as to what course of action to pursue. The situation inside the universities had worsened. Karl Barth had refused to take the oath of loyalty to Hitler. He insisted upon adding the words, "in so far as in conformity with my responsibility as an Evangelical Christian." The Reformed Church held that this was the only way the oath could be reconciled to the conscience; the Lutherans taught that this reservation was implicit in the oath itself. Barth was suspended and theology students at Bonn refused to attend the lectures of the German Christian appointed to take his place. Barth was later dismissed.1

The renewal of the Church which started with Barmen and continued with Dahlem was endangered by the period of quiet which came for the Church after the collapse of the Mueller-Jaeger experiment. All danger was regarded as past so it was thought possible to depart from the decisions of Barmen and Dahlem. Besides, by many the Barmen Confession was not regarded with anything like the importance attached to the Reformation Confessions. But the so-called "radical" wing of the Confessional Church never strayed from Barmen and thus the position once won was not surrendered.2

Neutrality of the government was pretty well observed at the

1Ibid., pp. 163f.  
beginning of 1935, but in April Dr. Frick announced that the Evangelical Churches were as far from harmony as ever, and that the government might soon have to abandon its neutral position and use force to achieve the desired results. In June, Hitler put Dr. Bernard Rust in charge of relations between the Churches and the State. His contention had long been that the "new order" called for endorsement of Hitlerism by Christians of both confessions in exchange for which the government would assure everyone the right to pray as much as they desired. So much had happened in the Church-State struggle that nobody paid any attention to Rust.¹

Soon the Church underwent severe persecution, with hundreds of pastors being put in jail, professors being relieved of their chairs and financial support being curtailed. The effect on the Churches was a unifying one and this harmony found expression in the Third Confessional Synod held at Augsburg on June 4. Immer, Hesse and Niemoeller resumed their positions on the Council of the Brethren.

Peace was short-lived, for on June 26, a new law was published putting legal questions regarding the Evangelical Church in the hands of a special bureau set up by the Ministry of the Interior, rather than in the courts. This virtually placed ministers under police control. This was followed by the "dictatorship" of Hans Kerrl, who was appointed by Hitler on July 16, as Reich Minister for Church Affairs with absolute power to restore "peace" in the Church.² The significance of the appointment of this rabid Nazi was that Hitler was frankly admitting after two and a half years of Nazi rule that there was still open warfare between National Socialism and Christianity. The outlook for Protestant Christianity in Germany at

this point was extremely bleak.1

The State intervened anew with the Reich Church Committee which was given the task of building the Reich Church. The members were appointed by the government. Their declaration contained two confessions, one to the Gospel, the other to the National Socialist world-view. In large part they took the view of the German Christians. Could the Confessional Church cooperate in the Church Committee's honest attempt to restore peace to the Church? Two things had to be considered. Was the peace aimed at peace at the expense of truth? Could an attempt to bring the Confessional Church and the German Christians together on a line halfway between, which meant putting doctrine and heresy on the same plane, be permitted? To cooperate would have meant departure from Barmen and Dahlem. The answer brought a split in the Confessional Church.2 Many of the Lutheran churches tried cooperation.

At this time appeared a secretly and widely circulated pamphlet, by Otto Dibelius, "The State Church Is Here!" It cut to the heart of the whole debate. It showed how the State had taken over the administration of the Church and how it worked closely with the Gestapo to subject the Church to its own Weltanschauung. This pamphlet strengthened the resolve of many and clarified the situation. The Council of the Brethren came to see that in the face of totalitarianism the Confessing Church must end compromise or expediency. On January 3, 1936, the Council passed a resolution repudiating the authority of the Reich Church Committees, and in effect putting outside the Confessing Church all those churches which did not stand behind Barmen and Dahlem. Then at the

1Shuster, op. cit., p. 167.  2Frey, op. cit., p. 163.
Fourth Confessional Synod in Bad-Oeynhausen in February of 1936, the Confessing Church held together and the Synod declared itself to be the legitimate synodical organ of the German Evangelical Church. The synod expressly rejected the right of the Reich Church Committee to decide in matters of faith and doctrine. The result was that the intact churches of Württemberg, Bavaria, and Hannover became more closely associated in the "Lutheran Council" than before and were spared any further interference while those who held true to Barmen and Dahlem were subjected to grievous assaults. This was a difficult time for the Confessional Church, for only a few realized that on account of the Church Committees there was the greatest danger of the Church losing its freedom and succumbing to the State's move to co-ordinate it. But there had to be a brave and consistent "no" since this was a matter of doctrine against heresy.

A far-reaching step taken at this Synod was the reorganization of the Council of Brethren with powers to elect a new Provisional Board of Administration. This new Provisional Board was fearless and in all its pronouncements reflected the spirit and letter of Barmen.

On July 16, the new Board addressed itself directly to the problem of confessionalism within the German Evangelical Church. It declared that Barmen was binding upon the Church. It expressed its belief that the "Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Germany" established at the same time as the present Provisional Board was formed not on the basis of the Lutheran Confession but because of a political attitude to the Church Committees. It was their contention that the Lutheran Church of Germany was too concerned with preserving the outward existence of the Lutheran Church.

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Churches in Germany. In this way did the Confessing Church reiterate its claim to be the one, true Church. The Lutheran Council thus, although still pursuing its divisive policy, was forced to do so outside the administration of the Confessing Church. Finally in 1937, the Reich Church Committee had to tender its resignation because Kerrl had made it impossible for it to carry on its work, thus proving that the Council of Brethren had been right from the start in opposing the Reichbischof and the Church Committees.\(^1\)

With the resignation of Dr. Zoellner and his Church Committee came the speech of Dr. Kerrl before the Landeskirchen blaming the Committee for its failure to bring the Church to recognize the supremacy of the State over the Church. The Lutherans had tried for over a year and a half to work with this man. He now made arrangements to favor the German Christians even more and promised rules and regulations which would take from the Church its last vestiges of independence. Thus did the State admit that its second major attempt to co-ordinate the German Church had failed. None of Kerrl's orders were carried out, except the one forbidding pastors to read the names of those resigning from the Church from the pulpit, for Hitler felt it necessary to intervene by announcing the calling of a General Synod where he said, "... the Church shall now, in complete liberty and along the lines determined by the Congregations themselves, give itself a new Constitution and therewith a new organization." Nothing could have better restored the confidence of many good Christians in Hitler's good intentions, nor put such a brilliant propaganda weapon in the hands of the anti-Christian Nazis who were bent on showing foreigners how free the Church was. A free election in Germany was impossible and it

\(^1\)Ibid., p. 204.
never did materialize. It was postponed several times, and then finally forgotten.¹

By 1937, Karl Barth could write that the Evangelical Church was proving that modern secularism does not have the last word even in the twentieth century, but that it was showing something of the faith which is the victory that overcometh the world. It was his advice that all the churches from every country should pray for repentance for their apostasy from the faith of the Bible and their fathers, for their weak theology by which they had all contributed to the affliction which had befallen especially the German Church.²

We have but to think of the remarkable passivity with which the political world has accepted the suppression of the Church in Russia, and with which it now appears to be willing to accept that of the Church in Germany, without the Churches having so far done anything worth mentioning in opposition to this indifference.³

In June of 1939, the most serious encroachments of the State on its last "enemy" began. The struggle was no longer between factions, but between the pagan State and the Christian faith. The confusion cleared away and never again obscured the true opponent from the eyes of the Church. At last all the Lutheran Churches, too, saw that their real enemy was the State, and they joined with the Confessing Church in whatever opposition was still possible in Nazi Germany. It was very late, by 1939, when all Christians finally realized that the only course was total opposition, for any effective political action to be taken by the Churches. There was only room for spiritual resistance and individual Christian heroism as the government tightened the reins at the outbreak of war. Radio broadcasting of religious services was banned. Only bookstores exclusively selling religious literature could display

¹Herman, op. cit., pp. 158f. ²Frey, op. cit., p. 24. ³Ibid., p. 25. From Karl Barth's introduction
religious books or pamphlets. In 1941, religious publications were almost completely suppressed with the excuse of a paper shortage.¹

Two major conclusions may be drawn from the long Church struggle which preceded the outbreak of war. First, there was no doubt left in the minds of the most objective observer that the Nazi government had no real sympathy for Christianity, which it had at first pretended to support. The best that could be said of Hitler by the outbreak of the war was that he did not understand the genius of the Christian faith nor the hold that it still had in the hearts of the same people who welcomed him as a national hero. The Church never meant much to him, so he could not understand how it could mean much to others. National Socialism meant everything to Hitler, so he thought it should mean everything to all Germans. Second, the Nazi State had either started from or arrived at the viewpoint by 1939, that a new religion must be sponsored by the New Germany. Whether Hitler himself felt this to be necessary, his radical followers who had now superseded those who had hoped to reconcile Church and State did think it necessary and they had gradually imposed their will upon the nation.²

The Nazi victory was only over the visible Church. Instead of counting on the spiritual support of a nation in time of war, they had only the Gestapo. The Church from 1939 on was like a conquered country ruled by the police. It had been forced into a position where it could no longer minister effectively to the people, particularly the soldiers, in a time of tragedy. The State used this opportunity to try to complete the strangulation of the Christian faith. In spite of mistakes and dark days the Church and the Christian in Nazi Germany struggled on, doing their best.³

¹Herman, op. cit., pp. 182f. ²Ibid., p. 184. ³Ibid., pp.186f.
CHAPTER V

THE NEW RELIGION

The Nazi method of subjugation was torment and torture in an effort to suppress Christianity by attrition. Money collected from Church members as Church taxes was withheld from the Confessional Churches and they were forbidden by law from taking up collections for their support. When a pastor must be acquitted for some trumped up charge, he was met at the door and taken to a concentration camp. There were police and spies placed in the congregations. Drastic punishment was meted out to pastors who dared pray for peace during the crisis of September, 1938. There was incitement to dissension within local churches. The State Church Council decreed that if a minority complained about a pastor he was to be removed for not being able to keep order. Ridicule was used as a potent weapon. The whole range of Christian teaching was treated with contempt. The status of Christians who were non-Aryan was the subject of perpetual dispute. Pastors were forsaken by the school teachers who were forced to exclude religious teaching, and substitute Rosenberg's religion of Race, Blood and Soil. In his January, 1939, Reichstag speech Hitler referred to the "Confessional Church" in contempt and assured the world that it was declining. Small wonder, in view of the fact that of the 18,000
pastors in Germany, 1,300 were at one time or another placed under civil arrest or in concentration camps prior to this time. While many of the congregations remained loyal, they were silenced by threats, and yielded because of fear of even heavier punishment on the pastor.\(^1\) Appeals were in vain. In 1936, these pastors bravely appealed for freedom directly to Hitler, "Nazi policies are like those of Russia, except that in Russia there is far more honesty in the effort to extirpate Christianity." The German Church was sifted during this period. Some yielded up the heart of the Gospel while a smaller number were made strong in weakness. The latter refused to compromise. "The 'Crisis' theology of the Continent has one great truth revealed in history. It is in times of crisis that the Christian Church has always been at its best."\(^2\)

The National Socialists against their will became the instrument for waking the Church, and leading it back to the sources of its being. Many in Germany were grateful to the Nazis for this reason. They would not have wanted to be back in a peaceful Church which had forgotten that it was a Church and why it was a Church.\(^3\)

In January, 1939, in a speech before the Reichstag Hitler made what he called a solemn declaration that "no one in Germany has hitherto been persecuted for his religious views." He went on to say, "the National Socialist State will ruthlessly make clear to those clergy who . . . regard it as their mission to speak insultingly of National Socialism that they will be called to account. He declared, "There are tens of thousands of clergy of all Christian denominations who fulfill their ecclesiastical duties . . . without ever coming into conflict with the laws of the State," and then

\(^1\)Macfarland, op. cit., pp. 26ff. \(^2\)Ibid., pp. \(^3\)Frey, op. cit., p. 20. From introduction by Karl Barth.
added, "We shall destroy clergy who are the enemies of the German Reich."  

The appeal by the chaplains of the armed forces of Germany, in November 1937, goes far to refute Hitler's allegation. The title is, "A Memoir Regarding the Effects of the Church Struggle on the Moral Preparedness of the German People." These were its important points: The split in Germany is between National Socialism and Christianity. The real source of disunity is not religious or ideological differences as such, but the State's interference in these differences. The State and the Party today combat not only the Churches, but Christianity. The Church is being undermined from within, by being placed under the direction of the German Christians who have surrendered the substance of the Christian faith. At the same time the Church is attacked from without, public acceptance of Christianity is regarded as unfitting a candidate for service to the State or Party. Everyone now knows how things stand, therefore the breach. In the country villages, the populace is divided into two camps, one supporting the National Socialist leader, the other the pastor or priest, and sometimes the two groups come to blows. Where these differences find no public expression, it is because of the universal fear that men and women feel. This combat is carried on by the use of State power. The State itself is an object of the new ideology that combats the Christian faith. This racial ethic hurls itself against materially helpless Christianity armed with all the force of the totalitarian State. Regional leaders of the National Socialist party and other political leaders spoke of pastors in general or certain groups of pastors as rabble, priestly

1Macfarland, op. cit., p. 11.
crooks and the like. The result is the destruction of confidence. Official statements have been issued repeatedly in regard to the Church struggle which are demonstrably false. Not a word of the true situation is allowed in the press. The lack of confidence is so great that facts, which have been fully demonstrated, are not believed. One sees clearly the split when one half believes enthusiastically everything that is officially announced, and the other half holds that it is all a lie. The Church has not forgotten Hitler's promises of 1933. The sense of injustice suffered is constantly growing. This chaos is destroying respect for authority. "It is cautiously estimated that 12 to 15 per cent of the population has been forced into bitter opposition to the State and the party by the campaign against Christianity." This might seem a small figure, but it includes portions of the population who should be pillars of the State. The assumption should not be made that these are only old people, who will soon die off. There are also many youth. Protestant Christians will do their duty in time of war in spite of this, but not with enthusiasm. War propaganda will not be believed, because of Christian experiences with State untruths in the Church struggle. The Document concludes with remedies for the situation. They amount to a demand that attacks on Christianity cease, and that the State cease its interference in Church affairs.¹

By 1939, practically all the dynamic leaders of the Confessional Church were confined in prisons or concentration camps. Some people said they were there because of political rebellion rather than religious views. The falseness of this is revealed by the fact that Niemoeller voted the National Socialist ticket up to 1933, and

¹Ibid., pp. 91-100. Summary of the full text of the appeal of the chaplains of the armed forces in November, 1937.
in 1934 went to Hitler to express his fear for the future of the Third Reich. Pastors of the Confessional Synod signed the oath of allegiance to Hitler, with the reservation that it could not contain anything "contrary to the Word of God and the pure teachings of the Christian faith." It is true that a large section of the German Evangelical pastors and Churches kept silent, but they feared that overt acts might bring about final destruction of the Church and more cruelty to the pastors who were in prisons and camps. Thus those who did not yield were beaten into seeming submission. There was appreciation even among the National Socialists of the courage of those who did not take it lying down, but a purge was started just prior to the war to remove Nazis who could be fair, honest, and appreciative of moral courage. Many were removed from office. There is reason to believe that some of the army officers who were punished, were back of the chaplains' appeal.

By this time the German Christians were being superseded by the so-called "German Faith" movement, led by Alfred Rosenberg, a chief lieutenant of Hitler. National Socialism had now become a religion itself. The contention was that Christianity had been a disaster for the German people, that it had destroyed their virtues, and made them anemic. Their social, political and religious woes had been the result of Christianity. The literature of the "German Faith" movement was printed and allowed to circulate widely. Against this the Christian leaders were not allowed to defend themselves or Christianity in public places nor in the public press. To this movement Hitler gave no direct support, but it is of genuine political and religious importance. Count Ernst von Reventlow, publisher of

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1Ibid., pp. 14f.  
2Ibid., p. 20.
the weekly Reichswart, which became the most widely read of the new "religious" journals, had a two-sided program: he directed a steady stream of criticism against Reichsbischof Ludwig Mueller's endeavors to force all Lutherans into German Christian uniformity and did much to sap the Nazi's confidence in this enforced liaison between Protestantism and National Socialism; he kept up a persistent demand, long before it had a large following, for government recognition of the German Faith movement as a Church equal to the Catholic and the Lutheran, and thus entitled to tax money.¹

The theology of the German Faith Movement was arranged in three tiers. The lowest stratum was actuated by hatred of the foreigner. The second was represented chiefly by Professor Ernst Bergman, whose most important pronouncement was probably, "I believe in the God of the German Religion, who is operative in nature, in the supreme human spirit, and in the power of His people. And in Germany, which is creating a new humanity." He felt that the time had come to get rid of the Christian God. He proposed a German National Church to which every German, Catholic as well as Protestant would belong. He demanded a break with the Papacy for the Catholics and thought that the Protestants would offer little effective resistance to a National Church officially proclaimed. The third tier was occupied by Professor Jakob Hauer, professor of comparative religion, who played an active role in some phases of the Youth Movement. His doctrine was basically an effort to salvage the liberal theology of the late nineteenth century. This was the "religion of humanity" which appeared as the "religion of German humanity."² Congregations were organized; public demonstrations with a Nazi flavor were staged; pagan liturgies were arranged.

for Easter and Christmas; the sacraments of baptism, confirmation, and matrimony were given appropriate German Faith ceremonies.\(^1\)

Some of the moral effects of the Nazi religion were being noticed. A book for study among little children taught hate and brutality from cover to cover, and the pictures and language reached the very verge of obscenity. The state had assumed the right to break marriages at will, if one partner was considered socially undesirable. Marriage was considered an affair of the State and had no sacramental meaning. It was solely to perpetuate the life of the nation. The children and youth of the nation had been taken over. The fundamental teaching of the youth leader was that Germany was the only god whom youth were called to serve. The effect of this was seen in the fact that theological students decreased to an extent that imperiled the German Evangelical Church. By this time there was a law which forced all boys and girls to join the Hitler Jugend.\(^2\)

Alfred Rosenberg did more than any other man to establish the two fundamental doctrines of Hitler's creed.\(^2\) His chief doctrines are set forth in Der Mythus des 20 Jahrhunderts, published in 1930 and made required reading for Nazis in 1934. In it he tries to give National Socialism a religious and philosophic content. Essentially it is an elaboration of "become what you are," the are meaning fellowship in the dominant German race. Since a culture requires an absolute, German civilization will become great if it incorporates the god whom it is capable of waking. The Teutonic soul has found expression in two series of documents: first, the sagas and myths which enshrine love of heroism and addiction to martial values—Siegfried is the true German saint here and in

\(^1\)Ibid., p. 221.  
\(^2\)Macfarland, op. cit., p. 21.
comparing this with the "cattle trader" morality of the Jews it becomes apparent that the Old Testament is unworthy of the German's attention; second, the writings of various medieval mystics, such as Eckhart. He concludes that both "myth" and "mystic" shows that the German has his own way of discovering and manifesting God. It follows that Christianity has deflected this Teutonic soul from its natural and predestined course. If one studies Christian tradition carefully, one can find some things which can be reconciled with the Nordic spirit and others which are incompatible. The ethical teachings of Jesus are good and so is his dissatisfaction with Jewish cruelty and literalness. The evil of Christianity has two main sources--its acceptance of the Old Testament, and the assimilation by the Catholic Church of "Asiatic" and "African" traditions and customs. He would suppress the Old Testament altogether and take from the New whatever is not compatible with the outlook of a "modern European." He is trying to stamp out every trace of Semitic tradition, everything it has contributed to Western Civilization.2

In opposition to Rosenberg's attacks on the Christian Church, the Provisional Church Government, the Lutheran Council and the Conference of the Leaders of the German Evangelical Regional Churches issued a common Manifesto on Reformation Day in 1937. In his Protestant Pilgrims to Rome Alfred Rosenberg had demanded the separation of the German people from Christianity:

The historical Christian tradition does not help towards a political moulding of our life; it has rather become a hindrance... The National Socialist world-view is based uncompromisingly on the self-regard of the German man, on the natural values which we feel to be noble. We are firmly of the conviction that the German people has no original sin, but original nobility.3

1Shuster, op. cit., p. 23.
2Ibid.
3Frey, op. cit., p. 173.
The answer of the Manifesto was couched in these terms:

The words of Rosenberg which have been quoted show that the attack is directed against the Christian faith itself. In view of such utterances no one can maintain that the fight is waged against political interference on the part of the Church or its ministers. No, Christianity is demolished. Its place is to be taken by the worldview of the Rosenbergian myth and 'the political Church' of National Socialism. He who aims at that can no longer speak of a confession of positive Christianity.

Then the question was put to all Germans, "Are you willing to join us in testifying that Rosenberg's statement is not Christian, but anti-Christian and that belief in the myth is rebellion against the Gospel of Jesus Christ?" This Manifesto attests to the seriousness of the situation as early as 1937.

On October 27, 1941, President Roosevelt, in a speech, brought to the world's attention an allegedly secret Nazi plan to abolish all religions in Germany and to found a Nationale Reichskirche whose mission was to be the furthering of the Hitlerian gospel. By coincidence, the next month Mr. Douglas Miller, formerly the United States Commercial Attache in Berlin, published in Life the text of the thirty-point church program. In all probability as an official document of the Nazi regime this is bogus, but its spirit is unquestionably authentic. In support of this statement, the German press repudiated authorship of the document, but gave no assurance that its contents were untrue to what might happen, or had already happened to religion under Hitler. Also, various versions of the program had already received a fairly extensive circulation in Germany many months before the President's speech. One copy of the document was found dated 1941. The document did exist. Whether it was the work of someone trying to embarrass the

1Ibid.  
2Ibid.
regime, or a Nazi fanatic hardly matters, since it was in fact a
good summary of the attitude of the Nazis. The churchmen seemed
not to see anything in this program to get excited about since the
nation was already faced with the reality of Christian oppression
and the growth of paganism.¹

The whole program can be covered by four general points:
(1) Establishment of a German National Church, including reversion
of all Church property to the State as a token of the final fusion
of the new Church and the State; (2) Abolition of Christianity, with
suppression of all religious literature, including the Bible which
was not to be published nor imported; (3) New Doctrine with the
establishment of Mein Kampf as a complete guide to Germans in their
"life-struggle," and although the new religion "worships god and his
imperishable works," the chief teaching was to be of one's own people
and race and there was to be no forgiveness of sins; (4) Priesthood,
services, and sacraments—a replacement of clergymen with National
Socialist orators whose task was to be expounding Mein Kampf to the
best of their ability, and services were to be held only in the
evenings, preferably on Saturday, with Christian celebrations to be
replaced by Nazi festivals and with baptism and marriage to be
celebrated only according to Nazi rules.² There was no doubt that
many phases of this program were being hurried toward completion,
regardless of whether there really existed a master plan. They
did not wait for the proclamation of any plan to start to eradicate
Christianity, but they did maintain the fiction that they were
advancing "positive Christianity" and as proof the Propaganda
Ministry pointed out that no churches in Germany were closed.³

¹Herman, op cit., pp. 45ff.  ²Ibid., p. 48.  ³Ibid., p. 49.
Naziism was a new religion which tried to usurp Christianity's place. By the time Christianity was aware of the true nature of National Socialism, the regime had a firm grip on the country and on the Churches. The actions of the Churches, as such, were so restricted that there was no hope of any concerted action against the State. It was merely a matter of individual heroism, which could offer no real threat to the might of National Socialism.

After nearly ten years of Nazi rule, confusion still existed in the minds of Hitler's followers, many of whom had been or still considered themselves Christians, on the subject of religion. Half of the party members, when asked, could not see any reason why Christianity could not carry on as usual. The other half stated, either defiantly or very reluctantly, that the two faiths were incompatible, therefore Christianity was the one that must go.¹

The word "Gott" under National Socialism was an empty word. Dr. Goebbels, for instance, on the occasion of Hitler's birthday said:

The Eternal Power which rules over us is called the Almighty or God or Destiny or the Good Father who—as the final chorus of the Ninth Symphony puts it—must dwell above the tent of stars: we pray this Almighty One to preserve to us our Leader, to give him power and blessing, to increase and multiply his work, to fortify us in faith, to bestow upon us constancy of heart and strength of soul, and to grant to our people after struggle and sacrifice the victory in order to fulfill the day which we brought to its dawning.²

This speech indicates clearly the relative positions occupied by God and Hitler in the Third Reich. No one was sure who or what was meant when God was mentioned, except that he worked for the Third Reich.³

In a German textbook on religion, Gott and Volk, published and delivered free to 250,000 soldiers, the anonymous author confesses faith in the God of power, not the God of love. He is

¹Ibid., p. 80. ²Ibid., p. 62. ³Ibid., p. 63.
to be worshipped, not in churches but in "ancestral halls" and "courts of honor." "We won't tear down the cathedrals. We will fill them with a new spirit and in them a new faith will be proclaimed. The suffering, sorrow-torn face of the crucified one will disappear. Our heroes must once more carry swords in their fists instead of crosses on their backs."¹

Religious conditions in the Third Reich were critical during the war. Hitler had only been patient with the Church, after the hope of voluntary cooperation faded away, because he had not felt fundamentally strong enough to risk forcing the issue. If Germany had won the war, certainly the Christians would have been confronted with the Nazi claim that the Jewish God had not won it, but rather German strength. Dualism in any form is abhorrent to the Teutonic mind, so it is inconceivable that National Socialism and Christianity could have continued to live together. Germans have a blinding passion for perfectionism, which is their most precious asset but at the same time their most besetting sin. Their other huge virtue is "order." They derive a great deal of pleasure from putting things in "order." National Socialism, as followed by its most fanatical supporters, was a religion best described as a "perfectionist cult." It set up arbitrary, oversimplified absolutes, and claimed the unquestioning loyalty and obedience of all members, and promised salvation to all true believers. This may be an exaggeration of the German mentality but it is the basis for understanding what was bound to happen when the Nazis set about constructing their ideal State. If religious organizations refused to go along, they would become extinct.²

¹Ibid., pp. 64ff. ²Ibid., pp. 88ff.
CHAPTER VI

AGAINST A FALSE RELIGION

Under the German Christians political and secular ideas crept into Evangelical theology and preaching, particularly the conception of the Third Reich as a divine dispensation. Here orthodox theologians, under the leadership of Karl Barth, recognized the danger in time and faced up to it. Liberal theologians also strove against Hitler's regime, but generally the danger of being enticed by the National Socialist propaganda became greater as belief moved away from the old Biblical foundations. Real resistance could form around the hard core of orthodox theology. Even there some thought it was a resistance by the Church against State encroachment on its sphere, while in reality it was resistance against State control of every human activity, and thus a struggle to preserve the basis of Western Culture. Now the Evangelical theologians found out how poorly they were equipped intellectually to make the struggle demanded of them.¹

The old Lutheran teaching of the 'Two Kingdoms,' the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of this world and of the 'Christian supremacy' needed developing, renewing and reinforcing. Through deep spiritual effort new bases were found for practical resistance to the totalitarian state and a doctrine worked out on Lutheran principle of the right, aye, the duty of the Christian to resist godless tyranny. Only then was it possible for Evangelical

¹Ritter, op. cit., p. 51.
Christians, including several notable professional theologians, Dietrich Bonhoeffer among them, to stand with a good conscience in the van of the political opposition and work directly with it for the reconstruction of the state after Hitler's fall; the opposition movement was thereby spiritually reinforced to an extent which should not be underestimated.¹

In a book written in 1939, just before the storm of war broke, Karl Barth laid down the position that he felt the Church must take, and the reasons why it must take this stand against the National Socialists. His theology was followed quite closely by the Confessing Church, and it had a great deal of influence particularly on Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

The Church is a people held together by a condition common to all her members. It is this condition which also unites the Church with the pre-Christian people of Israel and in a certain sense with post-Christian Israel. This condition consists in the person and work of Jesus Christ. He is the comfort and hope, the beginning and the end of the Church's path. He is also seen by the Church as the Lord of all men, for she is certain that to Him is given all power in Heaven and upon earth. Because of this, the Church in all her members is called to service. She is not creative but must repeat what Jesus Christ was, is and will be. This is her service of witness. The Church herself is not this Prophet, Priest and King but must bear witness to Him who is all that. This Church may and does exist wherever the call to the Church, coming through the Word of God is issued and heard. Where this happens it is a matter of decision, both divine and human, a decision of revelation and faith.²

¹Ibid., pp. 51f.
²Karl Barth, The Church and the Political Problem of Our Day (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1939), pp. 5-11.
Real witnessing to Jesus Christ is the unity of two things—a repetition of the confession of Jesus Christ, and the actualization of that confession here and now. This is the point at which it touches contemporary world problems. It does this only for the sake of witnessing to Jesus Christ. This witnessing can only become audible in its relationship to those questions which agitate both the Church and the world here and now. It does not do this with every question but only those into whose province it sees itself summoned by its own inner necessity. This actualization will be definite affirmations or negations. There is only one decision which matters—the affirmation of the Prophecy, Priesthood and Kingdom of Jesus Christ and the denial of every denial and restriction on this His office and work, the denial of every perversion and falsification of His truth.

The Church can and even must remain silent on some contemporary questions. Sometimes this silence is only temporary and sometimes after speaking her "yes" or "no" she must again be silent. The Church cannot speak in a merely meditative and discursive manner in the actualization of her confession. The Church has to speak decisively her "yes" or "no" when the occasion is here to do this in witnessing to Jesus Christ. Woe to the Church if she sleeps when Christ is in sore trial. There are questions the Church must answer. The Church must not be disconcerted by approval any more than opposition. She must not be fastidious about what other groups may be saying "yes" or "no" with her. She must take care that her own voice rings out distinctly as hers through all apparent or real alliances. She must not fail to speak clearly because she might be

\[1\text{Ibid., p. 12.}\]
compromised through the presence of some perhaps not entirely trustworthy neighbors who happen to be saying the same thing.¹

The Church who never dares to be a party must be careful she is not compromising herself with the devil, so absorbed in keeping her good reputation and clean garments,

That she keeps eternal silence, is eternally neutral, a Church so troubled about the transcendence of the Kingdom of God—a thing which isn't really so easy to menace!—that she has become a dumb dog. This is just the thing which must not take place—must not take place to-day.²

National Socialism is not only the political problem of the day, involving not only Germany but all of Europe, but in addition to being a political experiment it is a religious institution of salvation. Does the Church have anything to say to National Socialism? Those who say she does not, say it is a question of a political experiment. No reason can be determined just from the existence of a particular state-form which would have to cause the Church to take up its position with a "yes" or a "no."

The Church can exist under a monarchy, an aristocratic or democratic republic or even under a dictatorship. The apostles under the Roman Empire had nothing either positive or negative to say.³

In its first stage National Socialism did have the character of a political experiment and "The Church in Germany at that time—this is still my conviction to-day—had the right and the duty to confine herself to giving it, as a political experiment, first of all time and a chance, and therefore to adopting to herself first of all a strictly neutral position."⁴ The problem directed at the Church in those early days of National Socialism was the German

¹Ibid., pp. 18ff.
²Ibid., p. 20.
³Ibid., pp. 29ff.
⁴Ibid., p. 31.
Christians. No one can know who did not live through the heretical intoxication of those days how difficult it was to hold the Church, or part of it,

With entreaty, supplication and persuasion first simply to neutrality, i.e., to the protection of her own substance, to Theological Existence today, to the warding off of the threatening invasion of natural theology; and how difficult it was to hold her back from staining her hands by taking over the alien mission of the falsification and inversion of the testimony to Jesus Christ.¹

This was the first place to oppose National Socialism—the consolidation of the Church confession in its purity and individuality. People still upbraid the Church for not seeing through National Socialism at that time and unmasking it. They were not political visionaries and at that time there was nothing to make them at once disavow this political experiment. The thing perfectly plain at the time was the threatened destruction of the substance of the Church's confession by a false doctrine arising in connection with the political experiment. The political experiment of National Socialism had to be given a chance.²

In the face of National Socialism as it is today in 1939, there is no longer neutrality for the Church. The Church can no longer delay her "yes" or "no." The majority of the Confessional Church in Germany still think they can defer their answer, but they are back at the starting position of 1933.

Today it is senseless to continue to close one's eyes and deny that the import and character of National Socialism as a political experiment, is a dictatorship which is totalitarian and radical, which not only surrounds and determines mankind and men in utter totality, in body and soul, but abolishes their human nature and does not merely limit human freedom, but annihilates it.³

¹Ibid. ²Ibid., p. 32. ³Ibid., p. 37.
This dictatorship can no longer be understood as carrying out a divine commission so can no longer be conceived as a "higher power" in the sense of Romans XIII. It claims to be in itself and unmediated, a divine power—the divine power. Even to the political experiment itself the Church cannot any longer maintain neutrality. But in addition, according to its own self-revelation—it is a religious institution of salvation. One cannot separate these two aspects. The justification and the power of National Socialism, "lies in the presupposition that it itself is able to be and to give to man and to all men everything necessary for body and soul, for life and death, for time and eternity."1

National Socialism dares to act as a radical and totalitarian dictatorship because it has exalted itself and its fundamental principles to be a myth—Germany, nationality, Aryan race, the idea of "leadership," and dependence on leaders, and the ability to defend oneself. The secret of this myth is not wholly in Rosenberg's book. The myth is the life of the National Socialist "man" with its absolute claims expressing themselves in this or that theory, but being lived as the life of the German people, its race, its blood, and soil, sufficient unto itself, an everlasting life boldly anticipated here with every technical assistance of modern times. Participation in this, according to the National Socialists the only worthy and blessed life, is what National Socialism promises to those who share in the experiment. Thus it must crush and kill all resistance with the might and right which belongs only to Divinity.2 Islam proceeded in this way.

It is impossible to understand National Socialism unless we see it in fact as a new Islam, its myth a new Allah,

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1Ibid., p. 41.
2Ibid., p. 42.
and Hitler as this new Allah's prophet. National Socialism is a proper Church, a very secular one, but one which from its whole inventory should be recognized as such; a church of which the real and ardent affirmation is only possible (with or without the Rosenbergian Doctrine) in the form of faith, of mysticism, and of fanaticism.¹

These three theses must be the answer of the Church in 1939 to National Socialism. (1) No peace is possible between Christianity and National Socialism. Does National Socialism exhibit as a religious institution all the characteristics of an "anti-Church" hostile to Christianity and as a political experiment all those of a fundamental dissolution of a just State? In the deity of National Socialism, the God of the Christian Church and the Christian life are absolutely unrecognizable. The Christian in Germany should be able to recognize that this is not just another God, but an evil God. The really decisive, Biblical, theological reason for the Church's own observation of the nature of National Socialism lies not in the anti-Christian acts of the National Socialists but in their anti-Semitism. This alone identifies it as the anti-Church fundamentally hostile to Christianity. This is a mortal blow into the roots of the Church. A radical enemy of the Jew is a radical enemy of Christ. Anti-Semitism is sin against the Holy Ghost for it means rejection of the grace of God. Why talk of dissolution of the just State? According to the Scriptures the office of the state is that of the servant of God who carries the sword for rewarding the good and punishing the evil, for the rescue of the poor and oppressed, and to make room externally for the free proclamation of the Gospel. National Socialism in its deed has absolutely denied and disowned this office.²

¹Ibid., p. 43. ²Ibid., pp. 46ff.
destruction of all order, all justice and all freedom, and of all authority as well.¹ There must be a choice between faith in Jesus Christ and the affirmation of the internal and external sovereignty of National Socialism, because they are mutually exclusive, and between them there can be no peace. They stand against each other with an unbridgeable gulf between them, so the choice of faith is today also a political choice.²

(2) If no peace is possible between witnessing to Christ and the sovereignty of National Socialism then the Church may and should pray for the suppression of National Socialism.³ Today the Church is once again in danger of the Turks. The Church then prayed that the menace would pass—"They prayed that it would pass and be driven away to the honour of God and to the preservation of Church and State and to the obviating of incalculable affliction for multitudes. We may and have to pray to-day, in this same thre­fold sense, for rescue from the danger."⁴ This will be the practical proof of the Church's rejection of National Socialism.

(3) If the Church has to pray for her own restoration and preservation and therefore also for the restoration and preservation of the just State, then her witnessing to Jesus Christ implies, as summons to repentance, the summons to cooperation in that which serves this double restoration and preservation. In the face of National Socialism exists the occasion to pray before anything else, for the restoration of the Church and the State. This, not only in Germany but in all of Europe. First the Church must be restored before praying for its preservation. The actions of Christendom at the time of Versailles and during the Weimar Republic

¹Ibid., p. 52.
²Ibid., p. 57.
³Ibid., p. 59.
⁴Ibid., p. 65.
makes "Christian Europe" richly deserve to be threatened with ruin. Are they sure they will meet National Socialism with a solid resistance if it rises even higher? Christians must also bear in mind that the matter cannot rest only with the prayer of the Church as such. When Christians pray they are summoned to do what is humanly possible towards that for which they pray. Where prayer is made for lawful authority every single praying Christian openly assumes his own share of responsibility for the existence of a lawful authority.

With these three theses as the theological basis for an active attempt by the Churches and the Christians in Germany to do away with the unjust State, much was actually done during the war years.

One outstanding figure of resistance was Bishop Wurm. His attitude underwent various phases of development. At first, in the days of the Church's fight to stay independent of the Nazi government, he was one of the leaders of the resistance. Later, however, along with Bishop Meiser of Munich, he seemed content to make terms with the State as long as some autonomy was allowed. But when the war began, even though seriously ill, Bishop Wurm showed exceptional courage in his public condemnations of Nazi interference with the Church. He became more and more the spokesman of the Evangelical Church as the war went on. His letters to parishes and memoranda to the government brought to public notice the straits of the Church. He courageously protested to Frick on July 19, 1940, against extermination of lunatics and mental defectives in one of the noblest documents of the German Resistance. On September 2, 1941, in
addressing his Provincial Church Conference he made a speech which was a classic in spiritual resistance. In it he complained that all of his efforts to get a hearing from the authorities on the decay of religious education, the high numbers of the clergy called to the army, the closure of four pastoral training schools by arbitrary takeover of the army for war purposes, had been to no avail. "Where is courage," he asked, "if the only argument that counts is the Gestapo? Are we not also men of Germany who have the right, as members of the community, to be heard within a State which calls itself the People's State?" The Bishop then mentioned the many recent measures since the beginning of the war which had as their goal the preventing of the Church from performing its proper work among the people. Among the measures he mentioned were the abolition of religious education in the upper classes of high schools, the prohibition of Christian literature at the front, the abolition of almost all Christian publication, and pastoral care in hospitals made more difficult. It took a good deal of courage to make such public utterances. Bishop Wurm also attacked the flagrant propaganda on behalf of the new racial ideology which was coupled with attacks on Christianity. His address ended with a profession of loyalty to Christ and the Gospel.¹

Wurm and the other bishops only in extreme cases and reluctantly protested against abuses that strictly speaking were not directly concerned with the Christian religion. They were not as forthright as Niemoller, whom Hitler recognized as the regime's most determined political opponent, and thus he never let him out of prison. They never abandoned the belief that a Church which let itself be forced out of peaceful religious edification would

¹Martin, op. cit., p. 38.
be untrue to the mission of Christ to be "the salt of the earth," but at the same time some of the Lutheran leaders realized that it could not escape responsibility for the actual political and social conditions. When at last aroused, they spoke out with courage.

Perhaps one of the major ways the Confessional Church still resisted anti-Christian Naziism, even during the war, was by its quiet perseverance in Christian pastoral work. This had an effect. The Christian way of life was presented as an alternative to Nazi world power and was taken seriously in strange places. Sometimes the youths in S. A. and S. S. uniforms attended religious meetings and asked questions. Small groups of youth caught the spirit of their devoted pastors and were inflamed with loyalty and Christianity. A group of boys, ages sixteen to twenty, met once a month in an air-raid cellar in Berlin to worship and strengthen themselves against the Nazis. It was not an indifferent gathering. They were fervent in their faith and very intense in their convictions. There were more groups like them who would not give up the Christian faith of their fathers. It was from groups like this that the new Christian Church was to come. Both the Party and the Church knew that the future belonged to the next generation. The State succeeded in getting most of the youth by coercion and propaganda, but the Church never gave up. Some clear-sighted Nazis saw in the resurrection of a dead Church the end to their own movement. This work, of the pastors, of direct Christian evangelism and education wherever possible, quite unpolitical in itself, was really a direct "no" to the official philosophy of the Nazi Party.

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1Ritter, op. cit., p. 53.  2Martin, op. cit., p. 42.
3Herman, op. cit., pp. 11ff.  4Martin, op. cit., p. 42.
Then, one might ask how it was that not more was accomplished toward shaping German policy by this proved resistance. In the first place it must be remembered that the Confessional Church was not the Protestant Church in its entirety. There was still a wing of German Christians, and the silent moderates who perhaps did not want to cause their nation difficulty in time of war. Some Christians were afraid of Communism and some did not know of Nazi misdeeds in occupied countries, or indeed of events in other parts of Germany. During the war, where these deeds were known there was genuine shame and remorse that such things were done in the name of Germany.¹

The Protestant Church was not as an institution involved in the plot against Hitler, but many churchmen were. Outstanding among them was Pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer who made a trip to Sweden to inform the Bishop of Chichester of the plans of the conspiracy. He was the son of a famous psychiatrist and one of the leading contemporary Protestant theologians. His attitude revealed at a Church meeting in Geneva in 1941 was: "I pray for the defeat of my nation. Only in defeat can we atone for the terrible crime we have committed against Europe and the world." He was arrested after the attempt of July 20 against Hitler.²

Dr. Eugen Gerstenmaier, a member of the Kreisau Circle, was a prominent layman of the Evangelical Church. He was, like Bonhoeffer, convinced that spiritual opposition to Naziism was not enough. Naziism must be destroyed if Christianity was to survive in Germany. Before the war he tried to move Protestant ministers to action. He too was in on the conspiracy of July 20, and was arrested in the War Office. He never understood why he was not

¹Ibid.
executed on the spot as so many others were. After a trial he was sentenced to only seven years, while many others were condemned to death.¹

Goerdeler and Moltke attached great importance to collaboration of churchmen. They often consulted Church leaders. They wanted not only Church support for the government they hoped would succeed Hitler, but also practical cooperation between the great Christian faiths. They were aware that division in Christianity worked to Hitler's advantage. Progress was made as the Lutheran and Reformed Churches realized that their common plight was more important than theological differences. Catholics and Protestants met secretly in the monastery of Ettal and found common ground for resistance to the paganism of the Nazis. It was at Kreisau that the most was done to build this spirit of collaboration on a non-sectarian basis. Protestants, Catholics and Social Democrats worked closely together.²

The atmosphere in which a conspiracy against Hitler could grow was partially created by the courageous example of Niemoeller, Bonhoeffer, Bodenschwingh, Wurm, Galen, Preysing, and many other priests and pastors and laymen united in their faith. Thus did the Churches play a part in the opposition to Hitler.³

Hitler shrank from a "Kulturkampf" until after the war when he expected to be all-powerful. He felt it necessary not to push his "National Church" during the war but to resort to indirect methods such as conscripting troublesome pastors, forbidding or curtailing Church work among the young, refusing permission to print religious literature, and attempting to destroy theological teaching in the

¹Ibid. ²Ibid., pp. 117f. ³Ibid., p. 119.
universities by refusing teaching permits to the younger people.¹

How can the comparative success of the Evangelical Church opposition be explained? They had a forum where the police were not inclined to enter and which they did not want to risk closing entirely. They had a Church "underground" with secret meetings in unlikely places, not readily accessible to the police, and a cleverly organized information service. The pastor's "emergency league" which was formed under Niemoeller's leadership in 1933, had as its purpose the helping of those driven from their pulpits or in need of money. There were educational centers for young theological students, a Church assistance scheme for Christians of Jewish origins, and an elaborate system of getting news to co-religionists abroad. It is astonishing how the law courts risked decisions in favor of the Evangelical Church. The same was true in concentration camps. Many pastors there had evidence that their jailers were on their side and did not want to do their official duty. Probably this was possible because originally the Evangelical Church confined its defense to religious interests. Certainly, German Lutheranism had not before stood up to secular authority. It was a long step from the obedience of a subject to active resistance, from blind confidence in Hitler's recognition of Christianity as the foundation of the moral and ethical life of the nation to extreme mistrust and illegal action. However, this step was taken by various leaders over a relatively long period of time and led to a split in the Church, but the Church opposition was not really destroyed because the satanic nature of Hitler's power was revealed fully during the war.²

¹Ritter, op. cit., p. 50. ²Ibid., p. 51.
Karl Barth did finally try to show the German Church and the German Christian the way to resistance, but by the time enough people recognized their extreme danger, not much could be done with a political "no." As has been fully demonstrated there was much resistance, some on the political scene, but far more strength was exhibited in the spiritual "no" to National Socialism. There were several times when the government was forced to recoil from extreme measures. However, in the total picture, it must be admitted that the political importance of the Church resistance was limited to perhaps delaying or modifying effects.

More important was the effect of the Church resistance on the Churches themselves. They gained in prestige and vitality. In spite of the fact that doctrine came to be taken more seriously, the boundaries between confessions decreased in importance. Christian solidarity became an important feature of the German Resistance. For the first time since the middle of the nineteenth century, religion reconquered lost ground. Some Marxists were won by the courage of the ministers and churchmen. It is true that some of the masses who packed the churches in spite of the spies there did it as the only means available to express opposition, rather than from strictly religious motives. But they could not fail to be caught by the intense spirit displayed in the Church. After some manifesto was read, or the Gestapo went into action, the people would often spontaneously sing, "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God," Luther's hymn, which thus became a song of political defiance and religious confession at the same time.¹

¹Rothfels, op. cit., pp. 44f.
regime. Genuine Church opposition was possible only on a basis of principles kept free from any sort of opportunism. The Church maintained the same anti-totalitarian front after the Nazi fall. Only on this ground could the Church preach an uncompromising attitude, and have their protest grow into underground work and active political resistance.¹

With the Barmen Declaration of May, 1934, and the Stuttgart Confession of Guilt of 1945, the Church brushed away much of the deadwood of centuries and reached back to the Reformation. It was hard for the Confessing Church and the twentieth century Confessing Christian to abandon the practices of centuries to go back to what Calvin had taught, which put responsibility on the pious to overthrow and dispose of "Godless" authorities. But, their successful struggle with this profound moral issue could not fail to strengthen the Church, and at the same time lead to their future concern and involvement with whatever State they existed within.

By 1945, Karl Barth speaking from the safety and comfort of his Swiss refuge felt that the German nation would not have had to consist of heroes in order to have avoided National Socialism. It would have merely had to have consisted of politically responsible citizens ready to act, or of citizens each quietly remaining in this place. Each could have refused to carry out unconstitutional regulations. Resistance would have come: from each professor and teacher who would have stood by the scientific truth, as it was known to him; from each minister who would have continued to preach the uncorrupted teaching of the Gospel; from each officer

¹Ibid., p. 46.
who would have clung to his honor; from each common man who would have insisted on his constitutional rights. They just needed a healthy conception of citizenship and maturity instead of hopeless submission. The totalitarian state did not strike them over night. It came upon them gradually with almost all giving up their legal ground inch by inch. Ordinary people then became heroes who could easily be liquidated one by one. 1 This criticism seems unfair, particularly from the man who maintained even in 1939 that the Christian's answer to National Socialism could not even be said in 1933, but that the new regime had to be given a chance. This seems a very impractical look at things as they were in Germany during the crucial years. It is as if in looking back over an eleven year period, one can easily see what should have been done, but it is ignoring the genuine confusion which existed in the minds of many Germans. To them, it must have seemed as if the totalitarian State did arrive over night, for it was an accomplished fact before they realized what was taking place. Only gradually did the people come to realize the kind of inhuman government they were supporting. Could all of the German people have been made to realize, at the outset and at the same time, what Karl Barth (at a later date for him, too) realized, "... the Germany of today--and this distinguishes it also from revolutionary Russia--has raised inhumanity to a principle, a system and a method. National-Socialism is not only bound up but also identical with inhumanity, "2 then, perhaps the disaster of National Socialism could have been avoided.

1Karl Barth, The Only Way (New York: Philosophical Library, Inc., 1947), pp. 38ff. This is from a series of lectures given in Switzerland in January of 1945.
CHAPTER VII

THE NEW GERMAN CHURCH EMERGES

The strength of the Christian Church in Germany in the years immediately after the war was greater than at any time since the early seventeenth century. This was largely due to two factors: it survived the organized onslaught of the Nazis, and was for a brief time the only organ of social continuity in a pulverized society; and there was a religious revival which accompanied the collapse of Nazism. A Christian revival in the middle class was particularly noticeable. It gave history and tradition to men whose traditions had been swept away by the Third Reich. Above all Christianity offered a principle compatible with democracy, and antithetical to Communism, the fear of which was a strong emotion for most Germans. An often repeated phrase sums up the Christian revival: westlich--christlicher--Kulturgut: western orientation, recognition of human dignity, respect for private property and hostility to materialistic Communism.¹

In 1945, a conference of Protestant leaders carried through a reorganization of ecclesiastical structures to bring together the established churches and the Confessional Church. The principal

organ of Protestantism, the Evangelical Church Council in Germany, a "roof" organization, was established.¹

If the strength of a church is measured solely in terms of church attendance, which in Germany runs from two to thirteen percent, it comes off badly when compared to the United States. Since people in the United States are from a voluntary church pattern, they have a tendency to measure influence and prestige. There is another strength measured by the prestige and influence of church leaders and movements in the public life of the people. Here German churches enjoy phenomenal influence. It is hard for Americans to see this because in America there is such a small amount of carry-over from the churches into public life. So many Christians in America attend church on Sunday and forget about the Church as they go to their various places of work on Monday morning.²

One cannot comprehend the post-war German Church without understanding the terrific spiritual struggle they underwent from Barmen to Stuttgart, the struggle which led them to direct opposition to the entire racial myth of a proud people. The two great movements of the German Church, the Kirchentag and the Evangelical Academies, are products of this spiritual struggle which at the end meant a rediscovery of the Bible, of the Church, and of the laity as the whole Christian people.³

The most dangerous group as far as the Confessing Church was concerned were those who were steeped in Pietism. Pietism had led men away from loyalty to existing religious beliefs and their disciplines. They had turned to a simpler and more heartfelt form of

¹Ibid., p. 120.
²Littell, op. cit., p. 8.
³Ibid., pp. 9ff.
religion, the expression of immediate feeling rather than the outcome of study and discussion. These men, genuinely devout, had divorced personal religious experience from the claims of history. The time came when well-meaning people were unable to distinguish between the emotions aroused by a religious meeting and those aroused by a Nazi party rally. Against these "spiritualizers" and those who compromised the intellectual and organizational integrity of the Church in the name of a "non-sectarian" Christianity, the Confessing Church maintained the position that no section of life was free from the claims of the lordship of Jesus Christ. They were carrying on a battle for the integrity of the intellectual discipline of the Church. This was in the classic style, for always the subverters and spiritualizers have been more dangerous than the persecutors.1

As Karl Barth was the rallying figure of intellectual resistance to Hitler, so Pastor Martin Niemoeller became the symbol of church resistance. He proclaimed fearlessly from his pulpit that the Christian's choice was between faith and neoheathenism. He was aware of the sharp discontinuity between the culture-religion of the nineteenth century and faith in Christ. He had come to realize the utter impossibility of a moral universe. After the war this assertion of the lordship of Christ over all aspects of life, both individual and social, became the foundation for the new life in the European churches. The discontinuity between the life lived in expectation of the kingdom, and life buried in the spirit of the age were again preached and practiced. They discovered that the basic choice lies between "the Christian hope" and "the spirit of the times." This is so hard for Americans, with their life imbedded in their society, to

1Ibid., p. 18.
understand. Sensitive Christians in Europe are no longer interested in improvement of life. "The only word which speaks to their condition is His who makes all things new (Rev. 21:5)!" Christians in America who are still lodged in the climate from which the Confessing Church has emerged fail to understand the Stuttgart Declaration of 1945, in which the EKID (Evangelical Church in Germany) confessed their guilt along with that of the German Nation. It is a striking fact that while these Christians were confessing their guilt, the Nazi war criminals were pleading not guilty at Nurnberg. When Americans understand this, perhaps they will have begun to fathom the depths of the soul-searching and re-appraisal which went before the rebirth of Christian initiative in the newer movements (and new men) of the Church in Germany.

The Stuttgart Declaration was taken by the vulgar as a simple statement of political truth, of course they were guilty and should be punished. By the naive, it was taken incredulously, of what were they guilty? Had not many died as martyrs? But the men of Stuttgart knew they were guilty, and they asked God's forgiveness for not witnessing more courageously, praying more faithfully, believing more joyfully, and loving more intensely. Now something wonderful had happened, the Church had been brought to the baptism of repentance, which goes before the infusion of the Holy Spirit. The way was now prepared for the laymen's movements in Germany.

It is necessary to discuss briefly the style of religious adjustment to cultural norms which extended across four generations, against which these men of Barmen and Stuttgart revolted. During this time the official churches officially abandoned biblical truth.

1Ibid., p. 20. 2Ibid., p. 23. 3Ibid., pp. 23f.
The idea and even the name of a Kirchentag, a rally of the Church, extends back as far as 1848, but never did it reach the level of the post-World War II rally, for it could not break the pattern of obedient loyalty to Christian princes and town councils and it lost contact with both intellectuals and the proletariat of the great cities. In its early stages it did give impulse to the Christian missionary movement and charitable missions at home (Inner Mission), but these never became the responsibility of the whole church. "The church remained fixed in the image of the rural village, in which the parson led the church, the church was the center of a stable community, and the community was based on the neighborly virtues desirable when generations lived in fixed geographical propinquity."\(^1\)

The Church was a religious association recognized and privileged by law. The churches in effect maintained the fences which separate the churches through national and historical differences.\(^2\)

While the established churches of Europe were content to function as the religious expression of a culture, a new movement was emerging, which was to be the greatest challenge to Christendom. Among the disinherited masses of the cities, where frequently parishes numbered from 20,000 to 50,000, people were organizing to seek social and economic justice. Protestant preachers advanced the claims of "inward religion" and neglected biblical warnings to the rich, and favor for the poor and disinherited. The state churches lost the proletariat and the intellectual, both the driving power and those intelligent enough to sense where the Church was heading. Three of the four greatest thinkers of the nineteenth century—Friedrich Nietzsche, Karl Marx, and Sigmund Freud—were enemies of

\(^1\)Ibid., p. 26.  \(^2\)Ibid.
official religion, and are still regarded with horror by pious people, but each in his own way represented a biblical truth which Christendom was neglecting.\(^1\)

The crisis between Communism and Christianity is regarded by Mr. Littell as far more than a geographical one. Communism is called a "post-Christian" manifestation, which cannot be understood apart from the desperate sickness of Christianity, and all of the inadequacies of culture-religion in West as well as East. He feels that if it is only a struggle between an Eastern hard materialism and a Western soft materialism, the decision is already made, for hard materialism always wins. If the disasters which Christians experienced, particularly under the Nazis, lead them, on the other hand, to self-criticism, then they may learn that even Communism can be a rod of the Lord's anger and perhaps that not all that bleat are sheep nor all that snarl are wolves.\(^2\) They may also find that Christian experience in the encounter with the Nazi secular religion may show the way for a struggle with a Communist secular religion.

Both Marx and Engels had a sense of involvement, of moral responsibility. They were outraged by the exploitation of the poor and the abuse of public trust. Marx was influenced by Hegel's Idealism, but for him things came before ideas, action was more important than thought, and practice took precedence over theory. The dominant Idealism of the nineteenth century failed to come close to real human beings. Ideas were not translated into action. The ideas of the scientific materialists reflected the economic interests of groups and classes. The churchmen failed to understand to what degree they were the paid retainers of the privileged, or more important that their persistent "Idealism" alienated the masses.

\(^1\)Ibid., pp. 35f.  
\(^2\)Ibid., p. 38.
They depreciated the importance of intellectual discipline (theology) and spiritual discipline (the liturgy). They persisted in verbalizing ideals which were not really commitments, in resolving high intentions which were not made matters of witness. They ceased to take seriously the power struggle in human society, and their own relationship to it. They neglected the truth in the doctrines of sin and original sin, and therefore failed in their prophetic and pastoral functions. They internalized religion, exaggerated the importance of subjective sensation and sentiment and neglected the doctrine of election. They ceased to believe, in short, in the Word which was made flesh and which was raised bodily from the dead.

If it had not been for this failure of nineteenth century churches, Marxism would never have lain upon the "post-Christian" world. It was their neglect of basic dimensions of biblical truth that opened the way to Communism and its appeals.

The influence of Barth's theology has contributed everywhere in Europe to down ideological politics in favor of a more practical approach to the problems of state. This is seen clearly in Germany, where since the Church struggle, the Confessing Church has prevented the regrowth of a political party of Evangelical-Conservative background, and has at the same time contributed to the unideological realism of the Christian Democratic Union, preventing it from becoming again a Catholic party, and to a reconciliation with the Social Democrats. Even Heinemann's unfortunate "Gesamtdeutsche Volkspartei" was based not on a new ideology but on an attempt to give popular expression to a particular policy, which he felt was being ignored by the major parties.

Barth's thought has permeated the Church circles to which many of the German churchmen belong. His political and theological leadership during the struggle with Naziism and before means that certain

1Ibid., p. 46.
2Ibid., pp. 40ff.
of their basic attitudes, such as that toward natural theology and revelation, toward Christology and toward ideology, are shared by all of them, over against the more strictly "confessional" Lutheran theology of the Erlangen school.\(^1\) This group believes that only the Reformation Confessions have validity for Christ's Church.

The emphasis of contemporary theological thought is on the role of the "lay theologian" and the "teaching elder" in the life of the Church. In this struggle with National Socialism the whole congregation was called upon to confess its faith. The layman came into his own. From the rediscovery of the Bible, to the rediscovery of the Church, to the rediscovery of the laity, this was the course of ecumenical thinking. It might be better said— to the rediscovery of the Church as the whole people of God. The layman, after being led so long by professional theologians again became the carrier of the faith. The encounter with totalitarianism brought theology and the social sciences together and the silent majority through their efforts began to speak up. The clerical monopoly was broken, and this is one of the great debts which the world church owes to the Church Struggle. The contribution of the informed layman assumed a central position in shaping the thought and action of the congregations.

The struggle for the integrity of the Church reached its high-point on October 19, 1945, with the Stuttgart Declaration of Guilt. This contributed very fundamentally to the good health of postwar relations between Germany and the rest of the world. "It left Christians in Germany defenseless, dependent alone on the mercies of a just—and merciful—God."\(^3\) To understand what is meant theologically by this statement, one can contrast this with the attitude

\(^1\)Ibid., footnote p. 249.  
\(^2\)Littell, op. cit., p. 51.  
\(^3\)Ibid., p. 76.
of the churches after the Civil War in America. The situations were comparable; brother had fought brother and the churches were deeply involved. The identification of religion with popular interests on both sides of the Mason-Dixon line was almost complete—in the North the churches cried out for vengeance on these traitors; in the South for many decades the churches have lived in the bitterness of a "lost cause"—and instead of issuing a call to repentance the churches clung to the self-righteousness of man. The men of Barmen and Stuttgart knew they were sinners. At Stuttgart it was a hard word to say, but theologically it was a true word. It spoke largely of the guilt that comes from identification and that which comes from original sin. The whole ecumenical fellowship owes them a great debt, who after the good fight of resistance had enough strength and faith to lay a strong foundation for reconciliation and forgiveness.

The Berlin Synod, headed by Dr. Dibelius, officially recognized the guilt of the Nazi years and summoned the Church and people to repentance. It declared that the tragedy and deep humiliation of Germany were that the events between 1933-1945 could have taken place in a country where ninety per cent of the people were baptized Christians. The active sin of Naziism must be acknowledged as well as the passive sin of all Christendom in Germany, that more active resistance had not been carried out against the Nazis' violations of God's law. But the Synod also recognized that God had brought to the Church, through the past misuse of God's Word, a greater understanding of its real depth. A new group of young pastors had arisen out of the Confessing Church and congregations had felt the fellowship

\[\text{Ibid., pp. 76ff.}\]
of suffering. The repentant Church was ready to see in the midst of overwhelming physical and spiritual privation opportunities for service and witness which it had often failed to recognize in better times.¹

Three main tasks lay before the Berlin Synod: First, to proclaim the Word to a people finding itself defeated and despised by the whole world, and to save the people from bitterness, hatred, and despair; second, to guide the youth, who had been taught pride and arrogance by the Nazis, to an understanding of freedom and self-respect in the light of the Gospel; finally, it must carry on a ministry of love and mercy among a people whose families had been decimated and whose houses and homes were gone.²

One of the greatest blessings brought to the German Church through the "illegal" resistance movement of the Confessing Church was the realization that it was possible to find a self-conscious unity on the level of the congregation. A common bond was found not only in their place of residence, by the people, but also in loyalty to the lordship of Christ and to the authority of the Gospel as against the claims of a totalitarian state. This unity found expression, too, in a willingness to undertake direct financial support of a Church organization which resisted the State. One thousand pastors had been trained in a secret seminary supported by an annual contribution by Church members. If the earlier Church administration had been in closer touch with the congregations and had been more truly representative of the lay Christians, the Nazi State would never have been able to manipulate them as it did. The Synod declared that

²Ibid., p. 22.
the entire pretension of the secularized Volkskirche, which demanded all kinds of vows and pledges of the Church members but failed to be concerned about their fulfillment, depending only on general custom, was laid open by the Church Struggle. In spite of this forward-looking program there is, particularly in West Germany, a striking similarity between the Churches of today and pre-Nazi days. The changes such as in finance and education in the East German churches have come about because of pressure from Communism, from outside the churches rather than from forward-looking decisions of the Churches eager to face a new age. There have been some notable advances made, particularly in the spiritual content of the Church, and the meaning of Christianity to the layman, which might not be apparent to the casual observer, but which are nonetheless basic changes, and worthy of a penetrating examination by Christians the world over.

In studying the lessons of the Church struggle one is discussing several dimensions: its interdisciplinary character, paralleling both the best developments in religion in higher education in its thinking ministry to the whole campus rather than just the pious, and the determination of the new laymen's movements to relate theology to vocational commitments rather than just to leisure time activity; the dialogue with the recent past; the ecumenical area, where one becomes acutely aware of common responsibility to the catholic and universal church during the complete blackout of the war between believers in Germany and those outside with only the bond of ecumenical fellowship in existence.

The answer which has come out of the Church Struggle is the method of "dialogue," the renewed confession of faith in the God

1. Ibid. p. 23.
2. Littell, op. cit., p. 51.
who acts, the God who speaks, the God whose sovereign will is made known to specific men at specific places."¹ Out of this renewal of faith has come courage to face the human predicament in its reality, a new sense of history, and a recovery of the human dimension.²

The founder of the *Kirchentag* was Reinhold von Thadden-Trieglaff, a layman, a "tough Christian." He conceived the idea in a little fellowship group in a Russian slave-labor camp. Members were drawn from several churches, Baptist, Lutheran, Mennonite, and Roman Catholic. He pictured all Christians together regardless of denomination, with no professional churchmen there, and he saw them discovering in a new way the saving power of the Gospel. Dr. von Thadden went to work for the ecumenical agencies in Geneva, and in visiting many prisoner-of-war camps where hundreds of thousands of German soldiers awaited decisions on their future, he found that the Christian message was now everything, or nothing at all. No longer was Christianity a leisure-time activity or an expression of cultural values.³ On the final day of a church rally of the old Student Christian Movement, August 1, 1949, the *Deutsches Evangelischer Kirchentag* was founded. Reinhold von Thadden was given the official responsibility of leading the movement, and has since then been president. The purpose of the rally was to be "the trouble in the Church," the enlivening of the laity, with the center of attention on Christian life at the level of the local church. The traditional role of the layman of docility and listening attention in the state-church was no longer enough. When the Nazis had closed down one church publication after another and the people had been forced to rely on their Bibles, they had found there that the laity of the

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¹Ibid., p. 58. ²Ibid. ³Ibid., p. 79.
Church were the people of God, members not spectators in the movement which carries history. This "revolt of the laity" took the course of new forms of Christian witness, within the community of faith. They were neither docile nor disloyal.

The men who had rediscovered the church in the Kirchenkampf were taking the lead to bring people back into relationship with the community of the word and the sacraments, and at the same time they were pointing the church toward the world.

Dr. von Thadden declared in a paper "What is the Objective of the Kirchentag?" that the purpose of the laymen's rally is to take seriously five dimensions of life: the time in which one is born; the world in which one lives; the human being (encounter between persons) to whom one belongs; the living God who is calling one; and the Christian community, the lay apostolate. These in contrast to the religion of nineteenth century continuum. The first point stands out against Christianity misinterpreted as a system of timeless truths; point two stands against a "spirituality" which relieves the Christian of responsibility; point three stands against philosophies of humanity which deny or brutalize the person; point four stands against vague views of divine power used to justify racial or cultural pride, and asserts the distance between God and His creatures; point five shows the new view of the Church and points to new forms of the apostolate of the laity. The whole approach rests on the discontinuity between Christian commitment and the natural human preference for a religion which blesses preferred values in the name of doing God a service.

In speaking of the "parapolitical significance" of the

1Ibid., p. 86.  
2Ibid., p. 87.  
3Ibid., p. 88.
Kirchentag, Dr. von Thadden spoke as follows:

The fight for the fate of Europe cannot be solely a matter of military strength. The spiritual resistance of the Christian nations is more important for the defense of the Western world than material supply. This spiritual resistance must not be a passive but an active attitude. It must find expression in the readiness to obedience and sacrifice, to witness to the Christian heritage, and to apostolic action in an un-Christian world. At present, Germany appears a spiritual battlefield where our nation—in the same way as twenty years ago—is the object of a fanatic anti-Christian propaganda.

Since the Kirchentag brings hundreds of thousands from both East and West, it could hardly avoid a political role. Many consider it the most important bracket holding Germany together. However, the basic commitment still is the awakening of the Church to her mission in the world. At Hannover, in the year it was founded, the Final Word, a closing statement issued at the last session, stressed the need for a just peace and for laymen to participate actively in public life. German Christians, used to the exclusive tradition of private piety, had in the past stayed away from the "dirty business" of politics, with the resulting triumph of the indecent and demonic.

In post-war years the Kirchentag, the Evangelical Academies, and the Studentengemeinde (Student Christian Movement in its post-war form) developed, often cooperatively, the new approach to Christian social action, taking it out of the realm of ideology and putting it into concrete expression in terms of vocational situations, where in industrial societies, community is experienced and decisions are made. Thus the Christian message was to penetrate the community of persons in a particular vocation, earning their living in the same work.

1Ibid.
2Since the building of the Berlin Wall in the summer of 1961, the East Germans have been unable to participate in the Kirchentag.
3Littell, op. cit., p. 90.
4Ibid.
Meetings of the Kirchentag have been held at Essen in 1950, Berlin in 1951, Stuttgart in 1952, Hamburg in 1953, Leipzig in East Germany in 1954, Frankfurt in 1956, and in Munich in 1959. In 1957, it was impossible to hold a great rally due to Communist interference, and in consultation with the Katholikentag it was determined to go on a schedule of every other year, with the Catholic rally on even-numbered years and the Protestant rally on odd-numbered years.¹

In Berlin in 1951, over 300,000 participated in the mass rally at the end, and over 250 ecumenical delegates joined with their German Protestant brethren. On this occasion there was much concern with the resignation from the office of Minister of the Interior in the Bonn government of Gustav Heinemann, presiding officer of the Synod of the Evangelical Church in Germany. He had been one of the pillars of the Church in the fight against the Nazis, but now with the public encouragement of Karl Barth and the aid of Martin Niemoeller, President of the Church of Hessen-Nassau, he took up the stance of conscientious resistance to the government in power. This was on the occasion of the promise of the Bonn government to train West German contingents within NATO.² Karl Barth's views had been represented for several years by the Bruederschaften, or Brotherhods of the Confessing Church. These groups claimed to represent the pure spirit of Barmen as differentiated from the tendency of the Church in West Germany since the war to revert to old ecclesiastical and social patterns and to become the supporter and advocate of certain government policies. They felt that this had been fatal to the Church in its encounter with National Socialism. The Brotherhods, led by Niemoeller and Gustav Heinemann, worked unceasingly to mobilize

¹Ibid., p. 91. ²Ibid., pp. 92f.
Church opinion against German rearmament, NATO, and the entire Western defense policy. They actually became advocates of a political party themselves and were often criticized for sympathy with the East. Martin Niemoeller boycotted the Stuttgart meeting of 1952, because he felt it was too "Western" in orientation, and he considered that this was the reason he could not get permission for East German members to attend.

The 1953 Kirchentag, in a period of relaxation of the East German government, brought 16,000 from the East. Nearly 800 delegates appeared from abroad, and it was evident that the Kirchentag had entered upon a new level of work and significance; it was an ecumenical event of great importance.

Christian vitality in East Germany was clearly demonstrated by the 1954 Protestant all-German Rally in Leipzig. This was a calculated risk by the DDR (German Democratic Republic). It was attended by nearly a half million Germans, some 10,000 from the West. Those from the West had to overcome great technical difficulties in order to attend. At the closing sessions all these Christians joined in prayer and song. It was obvious at this meeting that the Kirchentag had become the single voice of the whole people in a way no other institution could even approach. Many of those who came probably came to protest against Communism rather than to witness to their firm conviction as Christians. Regardless of this, the leadership went ahead with consideration of basic questions in the study and discussion groups and relating the Christian faith

1Scilberg, op. cit., p. 281. 2Littell, op. cit., p. 95.
3Ibid., p. 97.
to every aspect of life.¹

There were about 1,000 or so East Germans who attended the Kirchentag in Munich in 1959. Those who attended were impressed with the spiritual contact between East and West German Protestants, this in spite of the political barriers and misunderstandings.²

East Berlin Christians were supposed to play host to some of the meetings during the 1961 Kirchentag, which was held the week of July 19, but the East German government refused to permit any of these meetings to be held in East Berlin. Instead, they wanted to move the entire celebration to Leipzig. This was turned down by Kirchentag authorities because a number of prominent West German churchmen were to be refused permits to attend. The East Germans could attend the events in Berlin, but no public rallies of Christians from both zones were permitted in East Berlin.³ There was increased tension at this exact time because of the construction of the Berlin Wall and it was to be doubted that the Kirchentag could meet as planned in Berlin. However, it was held and a large number of refugees slipped across the border to attend and then perhaps to stay in West Germany in anticipation of the final closing of this escape route. The Communists had outlawed this meeting at the last minute on the grounds that it supported "militarism."⁴

The strength of the Church rally came in part from the desperate needs of the German people at the end of the war. It rallied the Christian forces in the midst of great discouragement. It had a freshness of approach and a mobility which brought many who were

¹Littell, op. cit., p. 99.
alienated from the established churches. It also came to represent the longing of all Germans for reunification. It served as a great symbol of continuing unity. This metapolitical function continues, but it has become more and more a rallying center for Christians, especially laymen, throughout all Christendom.¹

In terms of its permanent effect on the everyday life of the laity, both Kirchentag and the Evangelical Academies are still working experimentally. Dr. von Thadden has been hesitant to pursue any program which might be considered as competition to any regular groups of the parish. At the local level old ways of doing things persist and the leadership of pastors and superintendents is quite resistant to new ideas. At the national level in Germany, largely as a result of Kirchentag, the bishops and church presidents have greeted the laymen's movement as a welcome instrument of evangelization; but the pastors and superintendents prefer to keep their monopoly of initiative and decision.²

The leaders of the academy movement had learned how much social status affects the thought patterns and teachings of their practitioners. Idealism had made it difficult for churchmen to see how much their "principles" reflected the prejudices of the middle class rather than "eternal truth." The newer laymen's movements were brought to a vivid view of their own function. The Christian man is brought, in the struggle for faith, to ruthless self-examination. He will never yield to Christ unless he realizes that even his expressed ideals and values reflect in fact his own sinfulness and aggressive drives. The student at the lay academies is schooled to accept the truth that his own insights and interpretations are at

best just partial truths.¹

Dr. Eberhard Muller, founder of the mother academy at Bad Boll, compares the Evangelical Academy to the Platonic academy, rather than just the classical academy. In the classical academy students were trained in the skill of debate where all opinions are true, and they were trained in the skills which overwhelm the opposition regardless of the merits of these opinions. In this method rhetoric assumed undue significance. In the Platonic academy truth was something to be gone after and the trend was toward discussion rather than debate. Each person brought his insights and in the fitting together of these partial views, a whole truth, probably imperfect, began to emerge. This truth, finally formulated after a full, free, and informed discussion, was often superior to the insight of any single individual before the exchange began. Before this can take place each individual must examine himself in order to understand the limits of his own views. The Evangelical Academy presumes no Platonic structure of universal truth, nor protectionist philosophy of "Christian education," rather any persons who follow the rules of a full, free discussion--Communists, agnostics, avowed Christians, and avowed anti-clerical--are welcomed. In contrast to totalitarianism which demands the process of homogenization in which all are taught to think alike, the academy has erected many centers of study and discussion and opinion-forming. There is a theological question involved here: Can men expect the guidance of the Holy Spirit in a mixed assembly of believers and unbelievers? The purpose of discussion is discipline arrived at through talking up rather than dictation. Discussion is the means of discovery of the Order which

¹Ibid., pp. 118ff.
the Supreme Lawgiver has given. The final decision is no more important than the process which also creates the will to maintain the order.¹

The style of group work as spread by the academies rests not upon the determination of even a majority to have its way, but upon a view of interpersonal relations derived from fresh insight into fellowship in the Christian Church. The academies began with the assumption that the pulpit should not tell the laymen what to do. Their function is to make clear biblical imperatives (the Word of God), emphasize the responsibility of Christians for each other and their joint witness (the nature of the Church), and prepare the way for understanding of decision-making (the work of the Holy Spirit).² They have abandoned the layman’s traditional role of docile receptivity, rather he is to witness. Thus the academies have provided the laity centers in which to study and discuss their own vocations within which they witness. They have also moved into discussion of relationships between Christian faith and public policy. Conferences, lasting from three to ten days, deal usually with one of these two main categories—problems of specific vocational or professional groups, or problem-centered conferences where Christian faith is related to public policy.³

The academy movement has spread rapidly to other countries and two aspects of the work have special ecumenical significance. One consists of the training of laymen for overseas service, where the layman learns to see himself as a representative of the faith and to appreciate his professional competence as a vocation in the full Christian sense, thus enabling each to play an increasingly

¹Ibid., p. 120. ²Ibid., pp. 123f. ³Ibid., p. 126.
significant role in the spread of Christianity. The other is a trainee program for the younger churches in the newer nations of Asia and Africa in the academy style of work, when the initial impulse comes from men in these countries who are already involved in the thinking and planning of the World's Student Christian Federation and the World Council of Churches, and where these trainees will help fill staff needs for new institutes and increase the laymen giving on-the-job witness to their faith.¹

These academies continue to carry out their programs even in the face of great difficulty. For example, most of the Church of the Berlin-Brandenburg district is in Communist controlled areas, and support is difficult to raise, but the Berlin academy continues to operate and to serve as an educational center for Germans from both East and West.²

This "new" teaching about the layman's vocation is familiar, even though it is a forgotten dimension of the Church in culture-religions. In I Peter 2:9-10, we read:

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful needs of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. Once you were no people but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy but now you have received mercy.

In Martin Luther, we read:

Clergy and laity are distinguished from each other, apparently, only by the fact that the former have the commission to administer the Sacraments and the Word of God. Otherwise they are utterly alike. And Peter and John say it right out: all are priests. I am astonished that ordination was ever able to become a sacrament.³

These things only become clear when the alternatives are also clear. Dr. Reinhold von Thadden-Trieglaff put it this way in his

¹Ibid., p. 136. ²Ibid., p. 150. ³Ibid., p. 153.
address in 1952 before the Buffalo Laymen's Conference:

In the Confessing Church we made the discovery that its fight could not be effective without the community, and that the church could only act when supported by the ninety-nine per cent of lay men and women who represent the majority of its members. It was then that I came to realize the necessity for summoning the lay members of the Church to personal witness, to regular responsibility for all matters within and outside the Church, and to active service in the worldly sphere.  

The new German Church, as it emerged from the struggle for its integrity, is trying to take its place as a vital force in the lives of the laymen, the royal priesthood. It is trying, against the forces of provincial reaction formed by centuries of culture-religion, to extend its witness to all groups where community takes place, and thus to make Christianity a true way of life, by its permeation of each action of the Christian in his social, political, and economic day-by-day living, as well as his spiritual living, to which it was long exclusively confined. The Church, through Kirchentag and the Evangelical Academies, is trying to develop the free, full, informed discussion which is the only answer to totalitarianism, and which is at the same time the method whereby the Christian gives the Holy Spirit the opportunity of working through him to witness to all men.

\[1\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 154.}\]
CHAPTER VIII

THE CHURCH IN EAST GERMANY

The first city government established for Berlin on May 17, 1945, included a special office for Church affairs. Responsible for the Protestant Churches in this office was Dr. Heinrich Grueber, who had spent several years in Nazi concentration camps because of his persistence in aiding Jews. In these early days there was in the Soviet Military Administration a very friendly attitude toward the Church. The reason was clear. The Russians were aware that many churchmen had carried on a lively resistance against the Nazis. They had paid for this in the concentration camps, beside many leading German communists. Most men in the Berlin city government had spent time together in concentration camps. They were bound together by their common experiences and eager to cooperate. This so-called "concentration camp effect" between the Russian occupation forces and the Church lasted from at least 1945 to 1948. In fact no real Church struggle in East Germany can be spoken of until about 1950. There were, of course, during this period, fundamental differences, but they did not come into open conflict. Most leaders of the Confessing Church, however, had emerged from the Nazi struggle with a deep distrust of all government, as Grueber himself did. They were not unaware of Lenin's writings nor the history of the
Russian Church during the 1920's and 1930's. However, the Churches could and did take advantage of this period of reprieve before the new totalitarianism was clamped down by reorganizing their Church structure, electing new synods, establishing spiritual ties with West Germany and the ecumenical world, and by ministering to the physical needs of their own members as well as millions of refugees.¹

The poverty-stricken period of the East German Churches immediately following the war, with buildings and parish houses in ruins was probably the least likely period for them to willingly choose to establish a complete program of religious instruction, including materials, teaching staff and schoolrooms, but they had no alternative. The action of the Soviet Military Administration which completely separated Church and State forced the action upon the East German Churches.² A State monopoly was established in education. No private schools whatsoever were permitted. Here is where the danger lay for later on when the time was ripe, the ideological content of Socialism and Communism could be poured into the schools and with the principle of the State monopoly on education well established, there would be no escaping materialistic atheism's impact on every child. This was the eventuality that the Churches sought to prevent by their bitter opposition to a State monopoly on education.³ The Church faced its task of providing separate religious instruction and raised up a staff of 12,000 lay teachers, and provided them with special training in about forty catechetical seminaries, hurriedly erected and staffed. Under the supervision of Dr. Walter Zimmermann, who became Chairman of the Department of Education for the Eastern churches, teaching materials were prepared and a long-range program

¹Solberg, op. cit., pp. 29ff. ²Ibid., p. 41. ³Ibid., p. 46.
undertaken to help each of the seven thousand congregations build or furnish rooms for the instruction of its children. The launching of this program against seemingly insurmountable odds is one of the most exciting episodes in post-war European Protestantism. It showed that the Church can use hardship creatively, even at the close of a long period of discouragement and suppression. It demonstrated that the Church was flexible enough to make changes in its long-standing practices when confronted by a hostile governmental regime.\(^1\)

Just at the time when politically and economically the two Germanys were approaching an open division, on July 10, 1948, with delegates present from all Churches, the assembly constituting the Evangelical Church in Germany convened in Eisenach in the Soviet Zone. The twenty-eight separate churches embracing 40,000,000 members achieved a unity denied to Germany in the political and economic spheres. The establishment of these two all-German Church structures, the Evangelical Church in Germany and the United Evangelical Lutheran Church was one of the most significant steps taken by post-war German Protestantism and had it been delayed even so much as one or two years, it probably never would have been achieved, for by that time the Soviets had realized that they could not bring all Germany within their orbit.\(^2\)

Morally in the post-war years East Germany was prostrate. The Church faced a tremendous task in combating the hardness, disillusionment and despair which stalked among the congregations. In view of the monumental moral defection of the German people, the Church felt a deep obligation to restate and re-emphasize the Ten Commandments and to summon the people to a new obedience. Most of what the Church did to strengthen the physical and moral standards among the people

\(^{1}\)Ibid., pp. 41.

\(^{2}\)Ibid., pp. 51.
in East Germany was cordially welcomed by the Soviets. The earnestness with which the Church restated the Ten Commandments was based on a humble awareness that much of the moral decay that was apparent could have been prevented if the Church had spoken out more clearly when the Nazis debased the commandments of God. The Church underscored the sincerity of its repentance by its determination never again to remain silent when faced by a moral obligation.¹

The first formal statement to the Soviet authorities in which the official position of the East German Church was made clear—which came on May 11, 1948—was written by all the bishops of the East Zone Churches to Marshal Sokolowski, Chairman of the Russian Military Administration for East Germany. Up to this point there had been no occasion for such a statement since there had been no real attempt to mobilize the Church for political purposes, but now with attempts being made to censor sermons, and with pastors being called upon to give public support to political programs, the fundamental question of the independence of the Church from political agencies was raised. The letter stated that every Christian is obligated under God to obey the laws of the State, as long as these laws do not contradict the laws of God. The task of the Church is to proclaim the Gospel, and the Church in performing this task cannot accept the direction of any human authority. There may be political questions, upon which the Church must speak. If some proposal or action of the State or a political party deeply affects the moral life of the community, the Church may support or criticize such action, always basing such statement solely upon the duty of the Church to summon men to obedience to God. The freedom of the Church to express

¹Ibid., pp. 52ff.
itself is absolutely essential to the religious freedom guaranteed under the State constitution of the East Zone. The Iron Curtain was beginning to descend and by 1949 the Soviets launched into their program for complete integration of East Germany into the Soviet bloc. This letter served notice that the Evangelical Church would resist such integration.¹

The Communists for a period of several months in 1951 tried to put an end to the continuing conflict of Church and State by a policy of "the outstretched hand" toward the Church. Perhaps the most significant aspect of this new policy was its commissioning the Christian Democratic Union as its spokesman to the Church. This had been founded in 1945 as one of the organizations approved by the Soviets, and had at first attempted to carry on the traditions of the old Catholic Center Party. However, the leaders found it so difficult to maintain their independence that its members resigned, leaving it to a more pliable man, Otto Naschke, to take over. All vocal resistance within the party had been eliminated in 1950 with a purge of leading party members, and it placed its full support behind the National Front. CDU party officials were instructed early in 1951 to take up contact with leading pastors, and to quiet their fears with assurances that the government had no intention of continuing the conflict with the Church.²

In October of 1951, appeared the Meissen Theses on Christian Realism, twenty-two proposals by the CDU as the theoretical basis of the party's program. This was an attempt to justify its participation in a political front with a party which had officially declared itself committed to dialectic materialism. These Theses declared

¹Ibid., pp. 58ff.
²Ibid., pp. 113f.
that such cooperation did not involve a denial of Christian principles. The central doctrines of man's sinfulness were reaffirmed, and the historical authority of the Bible was declared to be beyond question. Errors of both idealism and materialism were rejected. The Theses laid special stress upon the Christian's responsibility in society, which the Church had too often ignored. They had failed to follow in Christ's footsteps by a deep concern over social righteousness. According to the tenth thesis, Jesus had warned of the danger of riches and opposed the exploitation of the helpless by the ruling class. The Church had failed miserably, particularly during the nineteenth century by "passing on the other side" hand in hand with the rich and powerful while the mass of mankind became cogs in the machine of the industrial revolution. Karl Marx had been the only one to see the way to get rid of the evils of capitalism and the "progressive" Christian of East Germany was urged to commit himself to this as exemplified in the Soviet Union. There were other commitments made by the CDU in the remaining theses, all for the luxury of professing allegiance to a few basic theological fundamentals. Ignoring the long-range ideological goals of the Communists, the CDU supported the immediate objectives of the Soviets for East Germany. The final appeal called for Christians to join the World Peace Front.1

The most significant thing about these theses was their attempt, analogous to that of the German-Christians in relation to National Socialism, to provide a theological foundation for the political-economic system of Communism in East Germany. The theology of the Meissen Theses on Christian Realism found only a few supporters among the clergy in East Germany, but they remain as the best example

1Ibid., pp. 114f.
of the creed of a so-called "progressive pastor" in East Germany.¹
There has always been a group of these men in post-war East Germany,
whose leftist political leanings made them sympathetic toward
Soviet economic and social policies. These are the collaborationists,
whose group is extremely small. In fact Albert Norden told his
colleagues of the SED Central Committee that, "one must look for
them with lanterns."² Not until July 1, 1958, was there a formal
organization for these "progressives." At that time a group of
sixty pastors from all of East Germany organized the League of
Evangelical Pastors. They claimed that the atheistic character of
Communism could be blamed on the Church's failure to speak on the
questions of injustice raised by Karl Marx. Now the Church was
called upon to make amends by confessing its past sins and joining
the State in building a society where the laboring man would no
longer be hungry and poor. This group joined the National Front
and sent its chairman, Pastor Coffier, as a delegate to the Third
National Congress.³

Both the beginning and the end of this period of temporary
tactical non-interference were caused by factors unrelated to the
Church and even to some extent beyond the control of the East German
government. The respite had been a result of the Soviet's desire
to prevent incorporation of West Germany into NATO. When Adenauer
in May of 1952, signed the agreement which would eventually make
West Germany a member, all restraints were thrown aside. The
division of Germany was recognized as permanent and full sovietization
of all aspects of life was undertaken openly. This opened for the

¹Ibid., p. 116.  
²Ibid., p. 277.  
³Ibid., p. 278.
Church a year of the most savage persecution experienced in Germany since the Nazi measures of the 1930's.¹

During the worst year of the Church persecution, 1953, Professor Karl Barth himself wrote to the Minister for State Security, Wilhelm Zaisser, pleading especially for the release of Pastor Hamel, but also mentioning several others by name. He described himself as one who stood consistently "for an understanding attitude toward the East," and as one who had often been attacked as a secret Communist. He urged Zaisser not to spoil the record so far maintained by the East German government of letting the Church have the freedom to live its own life and to preach the Word of God. Barth observed that an attack such as the present one could only serve to strengthen anti-Eastern propaganda in the West. Zaisser seemed utterly unimpressed by this appeal.²

June 10, 1953, was a memorable day for the Churches of East Germany. The Kirchenkampf had been carried on for a bitter twelve months. Suddenly on this date Otto Grotewohl agreed to receive a Church delegation for a conference. This, after months of silence on the part of the government and refusal to discuss any grievances of the Church. Church strategy was planned hurriedly by the bishops. Each was to present one phase of the Church's complaints, youth and education, the arrest and imprisonment of pastors, the seizures of institutions, and the hindering of Church life. To the amazement of the bishops, the representatives of the government, with Prime Minister Grotewohl as leader, read prepared statements admitting government mistakes and promising rectification of the injustices which had been imposed. This applied to all the areas covered by

¹Ibid., p. 126. ²Ibid., p. 148.
the Church protest. No further measures would be taken against youth organizations or any other Church organizations; limitations placed upon religious instruction in public schools would be lifted; all but one of the welfare institutions seized would be returned to the churches; unjust sentences against pastors and church workers would be withdrawn; and the State was prepared to resume its financial obligations to the churches on a regular basis. At the conclusion of the three-hour conference a nine-point communique summarizing these concessions by the State was released to the public. This was the beginning of the so-called "new course" in Church-State relations.1

The reaction of Church leaders was one of overwhelming gratitude that God had given the Church a new beginning. However, by 1953 the leaders of the Church in East Germany had learned not to expect basic changes in the attitude of State to Church, but to live from one reprieve to the next. These sweeping changes held no suggestion of a fundamental ideological shift. The churchmen recognized that this new course was closely tied to political and economic policies of the Soviet Union. Joseph Stalin had died three months previously and the political turmoil in the Soviet Union demanded an immediate lessening of international tensions. Soviet leaders would soon formalize their objectives in a policy of "peaceful coexistence" and a lessening of strict Stalinist controls within international Communism. On June 9, 1953, the Politburo also announced a sweeping modification of its program of "the build-up of Socialism." They admitted publicly to serious mistakes. The real cause was the fear that the government had pressed its program beyond the point of

1Ibid., pp. 158f.
safety. The alarming rise in the number of refugees and the general unrest among farmers and laborers had caused this letup in sovietization.¹

The June 19 uprisings of this same year, with the government so weak that Soviet troops and tanks had to restore order, had no effect on the new treatment spelled out on June 10 for the churches. The Church as such took no part in the demonstrations; however, it made clear its support for the laboring classes. Bishop Dibelius himself got into direct contact with the Soviets, urging conciliatory action and advising against harsh reprisals.²

The Soviets followed through on their promises to the Church. Many of the pastors, including Pastor Johannes Hamel³ were released. Welfare institutions were actually returned to the churches and young people who had been expelled from school for their profession of Christianity were allowed to return to school.⁴

In July of 1954, the "new course" had ended. External interferences were beginning to recur, but more significant was an organization which now appeared, the Society for the Promotion of Scientific Knowledge. Its Soviet counterpart was the direct successor of the League of Militant Atheists. The new assault was much more subtle, the use of dialectical materialism as the weapon for a campaign extended into every phase of life, educational, economic, cultural, and social. The Central Committee declared that its aim was to educate the Soviet people to a scientific outlook, and to wean them away from the superstitions of religion.⁵

¹Ibid., pp. 160f.
²Ibid., p. 163.
³Pastor Johannes Hamel is the East German pastor to whom Karl Barth wrote his famous letter and the one who tried a third way as an answer to Communism, with which later chapters of this paper deal.
⁴Solbencz. pp. op. cit., p.163.
⁵Ibid., pp. 182f.
Immediately following the approval in March of 1957, of chaplain service for the armed forces of West Germany by the EKD Synod, there was a serious attempt by the East German State to split the Church. The Office of Church Relations which had been under Naschke's supervision was eliminated and a new office, a State Secretariat for Church Affairs in the East German government, was created. As a first step the government announced it would have no more dealings with any representative of the Church who was not a resident of East Germany. The scheduled Kirchentag meeting in Erfurt for April had to be cancelled. Direct frontal attacks were made on Bishop Dibelius, but the Synod refused to separate itself from him. Less spectacular but potentially more dangerous was the singling out of individual pastors or groups of pastors either for favorable treatment or attack. Parish members, pastors, and superintendents were urged to separate themselves from "reactionary Church leadership."

By the end of 1957, the East German government was following two lines in its efforts to split the Evangelical Church. On the negative side they were attempting to link the Church with the policies of NATO and West German militarism, while the new ideological emphasis, sparked by Sputnik represented the positive phase of the program. The State declared its open sponsorship of the Youth Dedication to wean away the loyalty of the people from the Church to the State.

The forthcoming Synod of the EKD in April, 1958, was to be devoted to a discussion of the problems facing parents and children in an educational system in which educational benefits and advantages

1Ibid., pp. 227ff.  
2Ibid., pp. 244ff.
were made dependent upon the pupil’s acceptance of Atheism. The Church noted with alarm the Lange Decree of February, 1958, which placed new restrictions on the giving of religious instruction. No classes in religion were to be held for the two hours preceding or following regular school, and any person instructing pupils outside of school must demonstrate a positive attitude toward the Workers’ and Farmers’ State. The director of the public school would have the final decision as to the qualifications of such a person. This licensing by secular school officials of both catechists and pastors was in direct contradiction to the East German Constitution. As soon as the agenda was announced an organized campaign was begun by members of the SED in East Germany to force a change. More than 5,000 petitions were directed to the synod, demanding an alteration in the agenda. Immediately preceding the opening of the synod, the East German press launched massive attacks against it and its pastors.¹

In his official report as chairman of the Council of the EKD, Bishop Dibelius, although he made it clear that the Evangelical Church in Germany wanted all atomic weapons outlawed by all nations, strongly opposed using a Church synod for political debate. He declared that the crying spiritual problem of the Church in East Germany was the issue of a government-sponsored atheistic ideology in education. He raised the question, "Is it possible for those who reject the atheistic world concept to live any longer as citizens of the German Democratic Republic without forfeiting the essential rights of citizenship?" He then gave several suggestions to the churches in East Germany growing out of the current relations between

¹Ibid., pp. 250ff.
Church and State. It would be necessary to make a fresh start in Christian education, with more stress on Christian guidance of children; confirmation would have to be re-examined since it could no longer be regarded as the traditional family ceremony marking the end of a formal course of religious instruction. Its confessional significance must be rediscovered and re-emphasized, even though the number of confirmands drastically declined. The confessional character of Church membership itself would eventually result in a smaller nucleus of those who were Christian by confession rather than tradition, and who were willing to pay the high cost of discipleship in a Marxist land.1

The Synod ended dramatically as the controversial Dr. Heinrich Grueber, asked for the floor and declared that he must in the interest of truth answer the attacks made upon Bishop Dibelius. He declared that most of those who accused the Bishop of giving his blessing to the regime of Hitler had not been on hand to witness his resistance to the Nazis. Through his participation in the Confessing Church movement in Berlin during the war he had done far more than those of the so-called Remigranten, who had fled Berlin and then returned with the Russians to take over positions of leadership at the expense of the real leaders of the resistance movement. The most prominent of these, although Grueber did not mention him by name, was Walter Ulbricht who had spent the war years in safety in the Soviet Union. This was Grueber's parting shot at the government for he knew his usefulness as an official Church representative to the Communist government was over. It had been based upon his record of anti-Nazism and his many personal contacts

1Ibid., pp. 253ff.
with Communists in Hitler's concentration camps, and these men had by now mostly disappeared from government positions in East Germany.\(^1\)

The EKD prepared to issue a statement of its own since the request of the all-German Synod for conversations with the government had been ignored. Just before their statement was released they received a letter from Grotewohl declaring that the government was ready to receive a Church delegation providing that only representatives of Churches in the German Democratic Republic were included. The Committee on Education was sent since this was the main issue. The crucial meeting was held on July 21, 1958. Each side read its statements, with Mitzenheim taking the leadership of the committee. Since the statements represented opposite views, Grotewohl suggested using his for a basis of negotiation. During a one-hour pause the Church committee prepared their modifications. The document, still essentially Grotewohl's, was brought back, accepted, and issued as a joint communique by the government and the Church. It stated that the Church:

> serves the cause of peace among the nations with the particular means at its disposal, and therefore agrees fundamentally with the peace efforts of the German Democratic Republic and its government. Christians faithfully fulfill their responsibilities as citizens in obedience to the law. They respect the development toward Socialism, and make their contributions to the peaceful upbuilding of the life of the people.\(^2\)

When the committee returned to West Berlin it was already very clear that the Church had maneuvered itself into a very embarrassing spot, since the SED had stated categorically only a week earlier that the only acceptable world-view was atheism, and with Walter Ulbricht having just made public his ten commandments as the bases of the new

\(^{1}\)Ibid., pp. 255f.  \(^{2}\)Ibid., p. 263.
socialist ethic, it was difficult to see how a Church committee could pledge respect toward the development of Socialism in East Germany. Mitzenheim believed optimistically that even holding the conversations had been a triumph for the Church. He was willing to risk institutional coexistence in the hope of keeping alive the historic form of the Church. He was warned by fellow bishops that this was the fatal formula tried in Nazi Germany, but Bishop Mitzenheim felt that the loyalty of the laity to the Church would outlast the power of a totalitarian State. Everyone else felt that the communique had been a tragic defeat for the Church.

How then could the Church leaders in Berlin answer it? If they approved it would be regarded as capitulation; if they gave an outright rejection, they would be playing into the hands of the Communists for they had long tried to split the Church. They finally decided to issue a statement reserving their judgment until some concrete solutions had come from the series of conferences to be held to solve educational problems. Neither the Church nor the State was committed to a clear position, and neither could fulfill its conditions without betraying its basic commitments. However, the stage was now set for a long overdue process in the Church of East Germany.

Up to this point, the Church had looked upon Communism as a temporary tribulation soon to pass away. They had expected to recoup their losses in a reunited Fatherland, when the Churches would resume their honored and respected position in society. By 1958, it was clear that this was not to be in the foreseeable future, and that the Church would have to consider new ways of life and new counsel for men and women called to bear witness in a Marxist land.¹

¹Ibid., pp. 263ff.
Two factors emerged clearly after the communiqué of July 21. The first was the crystallization of the ideological position of the East German government with no intentions of concessions to the Church. The second was the wide divergence of opinion within the Church as to how best to meet the almost universally recognized openly antagonistic position of the Communists toward the Church. So far there had been little theological or practical study given to how a Church should perform in a Marxist land.1

As evidence of the hardening of the ideological position of the government, Norden, Secretary for Agitation in the Central Committee of the SED, in a confidential statement to the inner circle of the Party on the proper attitude of the Party toward Church people in an impending election, judged that most pastors must be written off as hopeless cases. Apparently they had no hope of destroying the Church by a frontal attack. Rather they must wage a war of attrition, capitalizing upon the inherent weaknesses of the traditional and form-ridden folk Church. To meet such an attack the Church would have to find some way to confront its large nominal leadership with living and eternal truths rather than forms and ceremonies which could be traded for more practical things such as jobs, housing, and education.2

The Communist state openly declared its totalitarian intent in a speech by Grotewohl late in 1958. He claimed for the schools the responsibility of moral education of children in harmony with Socialist principles. He stated:

At the same time that the pattern of the social order changes, the customs and usages of the people, and their understanding of the meaning of Right and Good and Evil, also change. All things are moral which serve the cause

1Ibid., p. 266.  
2Ibid., pp. 267f.
of Socialism. This is the foundation of the moral education and training of the youth.\(^1\)

Now even the inner realm of moral education was claimed by the State.

The Church has a unique position in East Germany. It is the only non-Communist organization in East Germany. Also, although Germany is divided, the Christian Church is not. This is the only Russian satellite country whose Church has its leadership in the West; consequently, the Communists have been unable to put puppet leaders in control and thus isolate the East German Church.\(^2\) It is true that since the erection of the Berlin Wall the threads connecting the East German Church with the all German Churches have become finer and finer and perhaps they will snap at some future date, but thus far they have managed to keep this connection at least in name even if actual contact between the churches of East and West has become less and less frequent. By this time the issue is clear: Communism against the Church. Atheistic Communism is determined to subjugate the Church and destroy its effectiveness among the East German people. The Church is equally determined that it shall continue its mission to witness to the Word of God in a Marxist land.

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\(^1\)Ibid., pp. 270f. 
\(^2\)Grothe, op. cit., pp. 213f.
CHAPTER IX

THE STRUGGLE AGAINST COMMUNISM

Communism is much more than an economic system. It is in a sense a religion, which claims to have the answers to man's problems, his personal and social life and his future. It commands, in short, the total allegiance of its subjects. It has such a strong hold on its adherents that many are willing to die for the cause. There are many parallels between Communism and Christianity. The Communist Manifesto is their Apostle's Creed. Communism claims to be a scientific philosophy for a scientific age, creating a new moral man undefiled by temptations of lower societies. It offers deliverance to the poor and downtrodden and alleges that it will give forgiveness and a New Way to those who confess their sins. One sees other parallels: God, as revealed through Christ—and dynamic economic forces; sin—and the evil of private capital; the New Testament—and the writings of Marx, Engel and Lenin; the coming of God's Kingdom—and the coming of a classless society. All of this makes Communism a religious opponent of Christianity.¹

The message of the Christian Church—love, humility, and otherworldliness is bound to be diametrically opposed to a philosophy which teaches hatred, deceit, and materialism. The Communists are bound to try to uproot Christian beliefs in East Germany. They

¹Ibid., pp. 212f.
cannot win the minds of these people for Communism, unless they can first be separated from Christianity.¹

Bishop Otto Dibelius, chairman of the all-German Evangelical Church Council, the leader of 41,000,000 Evangelical church members in both Germanys, 14,000,000 of whom are in East Germany, spoke of the innate hostility between the two, "Every real Christian sermon is an anti-Communist propaganda lesson. Whenever people learn the teachings of the Church, they are automatically learning the opposite of Communism." The traditional position of the Lutheran Church has been obedience to civil authority because it is God-given. But in this situation, Bishop Dibelius says:

That would only hold true if we were such a small minority that we couldn't have an effect on German life. Our church is interested in the nation as a whole. We can never say to a materialistic state, 'Make your materialistic policy, and we will hold our services in an ivory tower.' A Christian can never be a loyal member of a Communist state.²

Bishop Dibelius comes very close to being indispensable in the anti-Communist propaganda war in East Germany. It is largely due to his efforts that the Church remains one in East and West Germany. Eighty-five per cent of the East German population is Protestant, overwhelmingly Lutheran. To understand the Protestant Church, it is necessary to know something of eighty-year-old Bishop Otto Dibelius, outside of the Pope, the most important religious figure in post-war Europe. He is singularly outspoken, as he was under the Nazis. He said from the pulpit in the first year of Hitler's rule,

The dictatorship of a totalitarian state is irreconcilable with God's will . . . We do not resist authority . . . but as soon as the state demands to be the Church, and strives to assume power to rule the souls of men . . . then we are asked by Luther's words to exercise resistance in the name of God.³

¹Ibid., p. 213. ²Ibid., p. 214. ³Ibid., p. 214.
When asked by a Nazi official why he continued to agitate even though removed from office and pensioned; he made an answer which has become famous, "A Christian is never off duty." He ended the war in a Nazi prison.¹

The East German regime has given him all kinds of trouble, sometimes not giving him entry visas to visit parishes in his own diocese. He has not been timid with the Communists. They know where he stands. He wrote in a pastoral letter to be read in all his parishes:

The cries of our church people daily rise. . . . We are being forced to say things which for truth's sake we cannot say, to do things against which our consciences rebel, to approve decisions with which we cannot agree. Yet by our refusal to co-operate, we are in constant danger of losing our freedom (i.e., of being imprisoned), our livelihood, and the means of supporting our children. Most pitiful of all are the cries of parents whose children, under pressure from schools and youth organizations, are starting to write and say things which they do not believe. They are made to despise the Christian faith and are taught that there is no God. . . . Do not let your consciences be dulled, do not in your daily life reject the truth as of no importance, nor accept deceit as inevitable. Finally we proclaim to those who even now have shut their hearts to the call of Christ that His truth can make them free . . . . He alone enables us to be brothers or one another.²

On the same day he wrote to Grotewohl, the Prime Minister of East Germany:

This (the pastoral letter) is no political offensive, nor does it indicate a change in the firm policy of the Church to leave political matters to the individual, or to refrain from interfering in political decisions taken by the state. But when the faith of baptized Christian children . . . is in danger, then the Church must take action in defense of these things.

The Church does not fear the state, but wants no quarrel with it.

No one with impunity can set himself above God's commandments. No state can flourish unless it possesses valid authority, and this it can never have as long as the mass of the people

¹Ibid. ²Ibid., p. 215.
feel that what they cannot really approve will nevertheless be forced upon them.¹

These two letters brought immediate results: an investigation of the causes for this complaint, and a placing of the blame on local authorities.²

Many people in the West consider Bishop Dibelius a "tough Christian," as contrasted to the "soft Christians" in the West, privately devout, personally religious, amiable and neighborly, such as American Christians, safely imbedded in an intact society whose Old Testament is the "American way of life," and gospel too often a moralistic code called the "teachings of Jesus." The "tough Christian" is he who, in the midst of the insecurity of his life, has committed honor, goods, family, and fortune to the cause of Christ.³ Bishop Dibelius seems to be the most-heard spokesman for those Christians who advocate all-out anti-Communism to be preached from the pulpit, regardless of the forces of hatred and the enmity created in the Christian heart. He seems to have forgotten that the Christian is to meet his fellowman with love.

Bishop Dibelius has held to a strictly anti-Communist position. There is anything but agreement with this policy among the Evangelical Church leaders in West as well as East Germany. Many Germans had eagerly awaited the March, 1960, session of the all-German Synod to be held in Berlin, expecting it to ease growing tensions within the Church on the question of the proper Christian attitude toward the State. Prior to this meeting Bishop Dibelius's essay, in which he said the East German government does not fit the qualifications of a government "instituted of God" (Rom. 13:1) and

¹Ibid. ²Ibid. ³Littell, op. cit., Preface p. 13.
does not require Christian obedience, added heat to the question. But, the meeting was anti-climactic, the controversies all took place behind closed doors, and the synod gave a clear testimony of the essential, inalienable unity of Protestant Christianity in Germany. Nonetheless, the synod could not avoid dealing with Dibelius's essay, but they implied their opinion only, by reaffirming a 1556 resolution on state authority, in which it stated that both German governments were "instituted by God" and entitled to obedience. The resolution makes clear that this is no blank-check approval of either government. In this reaffirmation they sought consciously to restate in broad terms the basic Protestant attitude toward the State. Near the end of the session it was announced that the East Berlin public prosecutor had started official investigations against Bishop Dibelius because of his essay. The churchmen rallied to his defense. President Martin Niemoller, who does not share Dibelius's view of the State, said theological questions could not be solved by government action. The synod agreed and passed a resolution which read in part, "The synod does not forget that throughout his lifetime he has taken a stand for the gospel and has done great service to our church as well as to the ecumenical community of churches."

Bishop Dibelius retired early in 1961. It might be said of his stormy career that he has been a rallying point for German Protestantism. Year after year the Communists have chipped away at church prerogatives, persecuted pastors, and driven thousands to flight, but through it all Bishop Dibelius and the Evangelische Kirche

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in Deutschland have struggled to maintain a sense of unity among its forty million members in both East and West Germany. Bishop Dibelius has been outspoken against Communist oppression from the pulpit of famed Marienkirche in East Berlin. He often embarrassed his colleagues by his very outspokenness. In his farewell speech he said, "The most important thing is that we regard ourselves as one."  

The question before the Church synod was whether to slap the Communists by electing Bishop Hanns Lilje, his deputy, to take Bishop Dibelius's place, or to play it safe, and perhaps not raise the Communist's ire, by electing someone more moderate. They elected the first East German resident to hold this, the highest post in German Protestantism, Dr. Kurt Scharf of East Berlin. In his acceptance speech, he trod softly hoping for "peace with everyone." In view of the many crises confronting the Church he would aim "not to find dramatic solutions, but to progress bit by bit." His motto is Romans 12:12, "Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer."  

The Communists were rebuffed at this meeting by a refusal to seat Bishop Mitzenheim of Thuringia, who is the nearest thing to a fellow traveler among the top men of the Church. He is suspect for many reasons, among them the fact that in 1959 he led a delegation of East German churchmen on a visit to Orthodox Churches in Russia. They also made contact with the Baptists of Moscow and with Lutheran Bishops of Latvia and Estonia. The purpose was to strengthen relations between the German churches and those of other Communist countries. To a Church engaged in a struggle to keep itself one,
this sort of action would present a definite threat, aside from
the fact that Bishop Mitzenheim seems to be too closely allied with
the Communist state.

No report of the April, 1963 Bethel-Bielefeld national Synod
of the EKD appeared in East German daily papers. The Synod tried
hard to preserve the national unity which was endangered by the
denial of passports to East German delegates.¹ This was the first
time in two decades that no representatives of East German member
churches were present. The authorities in East Germany contend
that there are two German states, so they now bar participation
by East Germans in meetings of any institutions that embrace both
states. Chairman Kurt Scharf pointed out that the East German
Churches still regard the Synod as the legitimate representative
of the whole Church. A telegram from Bishop Friedrich W. Krummacher
of East Germany read: "Outwardly separated though we are, God's
grace keeps us together. In the face of every obstruction to our
common service we must not cease searching together in his word
so as to realize his will."²

This Synod concentrated on its most urgent task. How to keep
the EKD unified. Some feared that if the Synod was divided, as
others favored, into East and West with each having power to deal
with Churches in its own area, this might lead to a de facto exis-
tence of two synods; also that it might signify to some, Church
approval of the Ulbricht two-state theory. Finally, two new laws
were adopted almost unanimously. One authorized separate sessions
of "the one, undivided EKD Synod" and permitted adoption of measures

by simple majority rather than the previously required two-thirds majority, but these laws must be approved by the Council of the EKD. (This action legalizes rump sessions such as this one where so many were absent.) The other law makes possible "working sessions" at which members of the Synod may deal with regional affairs and submit draft suggestions to the whole Synod. Those at the Synod are aware that this will not solve all the problems, but they are determined to maintain their unity and to keep political forces from telling the Church what to do.¹

The Conference of Protestant Governing Church Bodies in East Germany, made up of leading officials of all the regional Evangelical Churches in the Soviet zone, unanimously approved a document entitled "Ten Articles on the Church's Freedom and Service."² These Lutheran and Calvinist Churches, to which nearly all East Germans belong, have in this document staked out a claim to freedom with a ten-point declaration of independence. It was approved at a recent closed-door synod meeting in Weissensee, a district of East Berlin.³ This is probably the most significant document produced within German Protestantism in recent years. Some even rank it beside the Barmen Declaration. These articles are based on theological discussion of the past several years and are for the purpose of helping East German Protestants decide what their duty is in regard to problems of our times. In summary form this is the document: (1) We must preach the gospel without fearing men or striving to please them. (2) We must "examine

¹Ibid., p. 473.
existing social situations to find out God's will for us"; we must not permit ourselves to be bound by moral principles based on atheistic concepts. (3) We must be careful not to idolize science. (4) We condemn the abuse of justice for political or economic advantage; "We would be disobedient if we failed to take a stand for and suffer with our neighbors who are denied their right and whose humanity is threatened." (5) We urge efforts for world peace in a time when mass destruction has made it so war can no longer be a solution to conflicts. (6) We point out that while work is necessary to live and to serve, it is not Christ's will that we become slaves to our job. (7) We acknowledge the need to recognize authority of the state and pray for those in power but "Those representing state authority are still in God's hands and under his orders even when they disregard them, proclaim themselves lords of conscience and interfere with the office of the Church. We would be disobedient if we kept silent about the abuse of power and if we were not ready to obey God more than human beings." (8-10) We speak for the life of the Church, its order and its hope, for "the Church is authorized by the Lord to define her own order and form."1

Walter Ulbricht's government reacted to this declaration with growing distress. One of the government officials charged that it was prepared in West Berlin for "cold war purposes." The leaders of the Church clearly intend to live by this declaration. At a recent administrative session they elected as their chairman and deputy chairman bishops known to favor non-cooperation with the

state. In retaliation, the government formally barred any leader of the West German Church from entering East Germany. This was a further blow to the very frail ties still binding the Churches of the East to those of the West.  

There is no all out war on religion, rather the attacks are insidious such as the "Youth Consecrations" (Jugendweihe), by which the Reds try to create a religion, in blasphemous imitation of confirmation. The major church leaders seem to have a certain degree of immunity, but lesser churchmen are continually harassed, seemingly with the single purpose of keeping Christians always on the defensive. Often leaders are arrested and put in prison for some time, usually accused of various political crimes. 

One of the best ways to judge Christianity as a weapon against Communism is by the strength of the attacks made upon it by the regime. The SED (Sozialistische Einheits Partei Deutschlands), Socialist Unity Party, after a policy meeting, issued this statement:

Since the church in our German Democratic Republic is beginning to allow itself to be exploited as a trumpet by the Western imperialists, we must see to it that these comedians of heaven lose all interest in such activities. Enough room is still available in our camps for additional labor companies composed of these black brethren. Physical work will dissuade them once and for all to quit inciting against the people who are still gullible enough to listen to them.

In May, 1946, Robert Bioleck, former FDJ (Frei Deutsche Jugend—youth organization, really communistic, although purporting to be non-party) chief of Saxony said, at a time when the Communists were

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1"Conscience in East Germany," Time (July 19, 1963), p. 60.
3Grothe, op. cit., p. 216.
trying to enlist the support of the Church:

We know that the ecclesiastical work among the youth has created many valuable human beings; we appreciate the heroic battle fought against fascism by the Protestant and Catholic anti-fascist youth. We know that during the underground fight against the terror of fascism, a solidarity developed between socialist youth, religious youth groups, Communist youth and democratic youth. We ask that all German youth belonging to whatever political party or church take the hand that we offer them.¹

By January of 1948, the FDJ was no longer courting the Church and Bieleck made this statement:

We shall strike the Church ten times a day behind its back until it is completely down; then we will strike it just a little bit until its wounds are healed. Then it will send out a general letter that will bring in members, and then we will strike it down again. That is the way we operate in Saxony.²

It has not seemed necessary to dramatize the conflict between church and state in East Germany since the war, as persecution was apparent in its milder forms, monetary grants cut, church missions shut down as "spy-centers," religious instruction interfered with, and church windows smashed. The churches decided to go about their business and wait for a turn of the tide. Matters were brought to a head, perhaps by an action of Dr. Otto Dibelius, in the fall of 1957. He signed an agreement with the Bonn government, under which pastors could be attached to West German armed forces. The East German government reacted violently. Dr. Dibelius was attacked as a supporter of "fascist reaction." His repeated offers to attach pastors to the East German army were ignored. A tougher attitude was immediately forthcoming both to individual church members and to ministers. The real issue is certainly not the use of nuclear weapons. Clearly the East German government wanted the support of

¹Ibid., pp. 216f.  
²Ibid., p. 217.
the Evangelical Church for their campaign against nuclear weapons, as this would embarrass the Adenauer government, but it is much more likely to have in mind some long-term consideration in its attacks on the churches. East German leaders have never faltered in a determination to impose a "pure" Communist system on East Germany. The churches belong to the "old orders." The Evangelical Churches are regarded as, essentially, enemies of the order, since they are the only surviving all-German institution.¹

The principal weapon of the regime has been the attraction of young people out of the churches in the sure belief that the Christian faith can be purged in a couple of generations. Much more damaging than any public pronouncements against the Church is what is taught in school about religion. One of the first anti-religious acts of the Communists was, as has been mentioned, the closure of all denominational schools. All religious symbols were removed from public schools and replaced by pictures of Communist leaders. In the classroom they emphasize three points: religion is not scientific since the Bible is a collection of myths; a person is to be ridiculed if he believes in religion, because only old people expecting to die are religious; students must abandon religious thinking, since it is not what the educated, democratic worker believes in. The little they are taught about religion comes in history class and directly from the Communist line: Christian and Communist morals are opposites. Communism is the banner of the fight for liberation of workers from slavery, religion an ideology to justify and perpetuate slavery.²

¹Terence Prittie, "The Protestant Church in East Germany," The New Republic (May 12, 1958), pp. 7f.
²Grothe, op. cit., pp. 217f.
In April of 1958, all school teachers were ordered by Herr Neugeheuser, head of the educational section of the Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party, to instruct their classes in dialectical materialism. This applied, too, to the six thousand of twenty thousand teachers who are practicing members of the churches. The Minister of Education, Herr Lange, forbade religious instruction at all higher schools. At this time, Bishop Pibeltius told the members of the synod that militant atheism was on the march in East Germany.\(^1\) Since there is no longer any real connection between churches and schools in East Germany, it should not be surprising that the churches were not consulted early in 1960, when a new school law was passed which adds greatly to church difficulties. It makes clear that children are to receive socialist instruction, and all are to receive technical training and work experience in industry and agriculture. This is in addition to the regular curriculum and in effect cuts down the hours available for church-school instruction. Furthermore, the schools are going to schedule events for Sundays, so the children cannot attend services then, either.\(^2\) School authorities have been promoting the "all day" school for elementary students, with the afternoon spent studying and participating in sports or dramatics. Prime Minister Xrotewohl recently affirmed that this is voluntary. Christian parents are insisting that their children be excused in the afternoon to go to week-day classes in religion.\(^3\) How long they will be able to hold out against this added pressure remains to be seen.

\(^1\)Prittie, op. cit., p. 8.
\(^3\)Ibid., (August 31, 1960), p. 1006.
Communism tries to appeal to the emotions of the German populace by assuming the formal garb of religion. It has the Red Corner, which is the counterpart of the altar. These are usually found in factories, clubhouses, and schools. They consist of partitions of rooms, furnished with red flags, red lamps, candles, and Communist books. They have rituals here, where a FDJ youth, for instance, takes a vow to work harder for the organization, and then kisses the flag. Confession is paralleled by the rite of "self-criticism." A party member who has erred is asked to "confess" his "sins" before a council of the SED, which may then absolve him.1

The Christians hold in greatest contempt the Jugendweihe, or Youth Consecration, which is the Communist version of confirmation. This requires preparatory lessons which stress materialism. The rites last for about three hours and include a speech by a Communist official, folk-dancing, singing, and a solemn "consecration" of the youth. Each receives a certificate and a book on materialistic philosophy, and perhaps a gift.2 A trade union in one of Germany's big copper mines issued a paper urging all parents to spurn church confirmation rites to take advantage of the Communist-sponsored youth dedication ceremony. It also contained propaganda for the Communist "name-giving" ceremony as a substitute for Christian baptism. A prize of fifty marks was offered to all who chose the Communist ceremony.3 The SED has waged a vigorous campaign in the homes and in the schools to enlist youth in the Jugendweihe, but at first, largely due to the stands of the Protestant and Catholic Churches, only

1Grothe, op. cit., p. 223.  
2Ibid.  
about eight per cent joined. In a move which rocked the regime, Bishop Dibelius of the Lutheran Church and the late Bishop Weskamna of the Catholic Church announced that all youths who undergo the Jugendweihe, and their parents, would be denied the sacraments (including marriage) until they repented. Bishop Dibelius said, "The other side knows how stubborn I am on this question." The churches at once recognized the dangers of the "youth initiation" ceremony, crowned by Prime Minister Grotewohl's slogan, "Grow beyond the limits of your own being by growing into the Fabric of society." The parents were to be threatened with political reprisals if they influenced their children in favor of the churches. Bishop Dibelius was mainly responsible for the decision not to confirm children who were initiated by this pagan rite.

In 1954, very few attended the youth initiation ceremonies, but by 1958, the churches themselves believed that about 95,000, or nearly forty per cent of those of confirmation age attended. In an even later report, in April of 1960, it is reported that the largest decrease in any of the religious services has been in confirmations, because of Jugendweihe. Now some churches confirm no children at all; others have had drops of from sixty to eighty per cent. The Protestant Churches continue to suffer tremendous losses in almost all services. In one city congregation, for example, in 1957, eighty-one children were baptized; in 1958, the number was forty-two; in 1959, it was only twenty-three. The major reason for this decrease is the secular name-giving ceremony which the government has set up, and which many people who were

1Grothe, op. cit., p. 234.
2Prittie, op. cit., p. 7.
3Ibid.
once nominal Christians prefer. A substitute wedding ceremony is replacing the Christian one, but there has been no decrease in the number of Christian burial services.¹

The clergy faces many hardships, among them the one of imprisonment. In 1958, there were, at one time, thirty-one Protestant ministers behind bars. A Lutheran minister told something of how he was treated during five months behind bars. He was imprisoned because of a few speeches saying the Communist regime had infringed on the fundamental rights of man. He was taken from his home, blindfolded, and driven about for two hours. When he refused to undress, he was beaten with metal rings. He was kept in a cell for three days, fed mostly on bread and water, and then interrogated for hours, beaten, and was refused an answer when he asked the charges. On a religious feast day he was beaten for asking for Communion, and told that each time he asked for Holy Communion he would be beaten. After two weeks he was told he was being taken to the "death cell" (an enclosure so small that one can only stoop, with so little air that one usually dies in two days). He screamed so loudly that they took him back to his cell. After five months, through the intervention of a Church of England bishop, he was released. During all that time he was never given a trial.²

Among other harassments is the fact that no child of a minister may receive higher education. Also, entry permits are so hard to obtain that in 1950, nine hundred Lutheran churches needed pastors. By 1958, this condition had not improved much. Ministers

²Grothe, op. cit., pp. 218f.
are underpaid, with salaries equal to about $61.00 a month. Every sermon preached in East Germany is heard by a member of the S&L (secret police). The SED has applied the whip, but lately has tried the sweet treatment. They have invited the clergy to dinners at which they promised favors for "co-operation." Up to 1958, 150 out of 7,500 Protestant pastors succumbed because they believed something must be worked out for Communism and Christianity to exist together.

The Church has had to face the problem of pastors leaving their posts in East Germany and fleeing to the West. There are strict rules governing the movement of East German pastors to West German pastorates. These rules were worked out in an agreement between Evangelical churches in East and West Germany. In some cases where pastors are in danger, they may be given permission to work in one of the regional churches in West Germany. Usually such permission is withheld as the East German congregations need pastoral care so desperately. Most churchmen feel that pastors should stay at their posts if at all possible, no matter how difficult the conditions. In most districts of East Germany, one pastor now serves approximately 3,000 parishioners, so the need is extreme. The problem still continues, as evidenced by the fact that a synod meeting, early in 1961, of the Evangelical Church of the Union (congregations in both East and West) felt it necessary to send a letter to all East German churchmen urging them to stay in their present positions even if at great personal sacrifice. At the same time West Germans were admonished not to try to get

2Grother, op. cit., p. 219.
their East German brethren to leave for the West.¹ Karl Barth in his controversial "Letter to an East German Pastor," in answering a specific question asked him, "Should pastors who leave their pastorates be dismissed from their offices and is this legitimate discipline?" supports the Church's position. His reasoning is that in leaving his pastorate, the pastor has already resigned. He has left his place and task. Official action against him only confirms this, and the Church can do nothing else.²

They have the problem of training new pastors in East Germany. During the one-hundred-fiftieth anniversary of East Berlin's Humboldt University, the dean of the theological faculty reported that since the end of World War II, the number of the theological faculty has increased from six to thirty-one. By 1957, the number of students had risen from thirty to 230, but has since declined to 135. In West Berlin the churches themselves for twenty-five years after the war maintained a high school which was the only West German theological institution which East German students were permitted to attend before the building of the Berlin Wall.³

A report in Pastoralblätter summarizes the present situation. About 100 candidates for the ministry enter the six theological faculties in East German universities each year, and an additional 100 enter theological schools, but 300 are needed each year to fill the vacancies. About two-fifths of these students are women.⁴

Women are increasingly taking over the pastoral work in East Germany and have come to be called "pastoresses."

The Communists harass the Church in another way. They consistently schedule events during services. Many of these events are compulsory. Many factories and collective farms require their personnel to work on Sunday morning. Many youth activities and compulsory demonstrations are on Sunday morning. The Church sidesteps this by holding services at other times. The West German bishops have said that no farmer who joins a collective farm could be a church member. Walter Ulbricht, deputy prime minister of East Germany, criticized this position in the lower house of parliament, saying the peasant must join, and that he would be allowed to attend church in the village. There is a doubt, however, as to whether they will have to keep their children home to work in the fields on Sunday, or whether they will be allowed to send them to services.

The SED dared not abolish Christmas, but instead tried to bend it to its own purposes. On December 24, 1955, the Neues Deutschland commented that Christmas had religious meaning for very few, and that the deepest meaning of Christmas was as a hopeful presentation of the Communist future. This same year saw the Marx-Engels Platz turned into a "Peace Christmas Market," with many hate posters displayed and a sign saying, "Christmas is a holiday of peace, and so, therefore, down with the warmongers." There was nowhere a reference to Christ. Christmas vacation

2Grothe, op. cit., p. 219.
became "winter vacation" for school children. No carols could be sung by the children. Replicas of Communist youths with banners replaced figurines of the Christ Child. The extreme was the publishing of a Red version of "Silent Night" in the Frankfurt Sozialistische Zeitung:

Silent Night, holy night,
Worker's son, be on guard,
As your duty is to fight
Until mankind's sacred night begins,
And freedom comes to all of us.  

German families are traditionally very close. The Church considers them spiritual cells, and, therefore, they become cells of deviation from Communism. The party does its best to break this closeness by deliberately arranging working hours so man and wife see little of each other, and more important, by making divorce very easy. One may be obtained if a marriage has "lost its sense for the couple, the children, and society." A Communist judge decides if it has "lost its sense." Differences in politics have led to divorce. Sometimes children are taken away if parents do not rear them in a "progressive spirit."  

There is a growing problem of providing adequate church music. Choir directors and organists are scarce, and many churches find it difficult to find funds to pay those who are available. Most congregations have no music at all, or employ part-time musicians, who probably teach the catechism or give private music lessons on the side.  

Church taxes (usually about one per cent of income) are no longer compulsory in East Germany, so many simply refuse to pay.

1Grothe, op. cit., p. 221.  
2Ibid.  
Many church people have moved to the West, and of those remaining, much property upon which merchants, farmers, and industrialists previously paid taxes, is now nationalized. The East German churches are forced to rely on voluntary giving, where most of the Christians are poorly paid because of discrimination against them in job assignments, and operate at enormous annual deficits, much of which is made up by West German churches.¹

Many East German churches are in a state of disrepair and decay. Money is insufficient, but even where it is available, no workmen can be hired, as they are needed elsewhere, and no materials can be purchased, for they are allocated by the government. There are many reports of churches about to be torn down because they are in the way of Communist planners. The Church of St. George in East Berlin faced demolition in 1960, for the extension of Stalin Allee. The government did not say whether they would permit the congregation to worship elsewhere or to buy a new church.² The Berlin Cathedral, partially repaired, was torn down to make way for Communist city-planners. The church in Magdeburg was sacrificed to the same cause, but the Communists offered to compensate by rebuilding another church in the downtown area.³ Protestants and Catholics cooperate in a manner unthinkable in the West. When denied building materials, they share their limited space. In the province of Magdeburg, 700 Catholic services a week are held in Protestant churches.⁴

East German authorities continue to confiscate many theolog-

²Ibid., p. 757.
⁴Grothe, op. cit., p. 224.
ical works coming in from the West. They even refused admittance to Christianity Under Marxist Rule, by Johannes Hamel, and his position is not really anti-Communist.1 East Germany has a rule that all manuscripts must be submitted to the government before publication. There are three publishers in East Germany who publish books in the field of religion. Increasingly, as in Nazi times, it is becoming clear that only comments on theology are permissible. All discussion of political, social, or cultural matters must be avoided. One may, then, it seems, write about God, but stay strictly away from what kind of order God wants in today's world, for in East Germany only the Communist party is competent! It is no wonder that Christian writers feel extremely handicapped.2

A few of the governmental moves which have affected the Lutheran Church in East Germany are: in January of 1956, 110 of the 121 Evangelical Church railway missions were closed for espionage activity, and many mission workers, including women, were arrested; Christian organizations are forbidden any religious, social, or charitable activities outside the parish buildings; a limited number of censored church publications are allowed to circulate in the DDR, with only one out of sixty receiving them as compared to one out of four in West Germany; members of the Young Community, Lutheran youth group, were asked in 1952 and 1953 to sign pledges to quit the group, and when most refused, 2,000 were dismissed from school.3

The situation of the East German church improved slightly during the spring of 1961. A number of churchmen were released

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3Grothe, op. cit., p. 222.
from prison before their terms had expired. In the Magdeburg area, congregations which lack facilities for general meetings were given permission to hold their meetings in private homes or school buildings, and the women and youth groups find it easier to secure the special police permits needed for district and regional conferences. Communist dailies are again printing names of pastors who officiate at funerals. Church leaders of a number of places were invited by city officials and chapters of peace organizations to participate in conferences and discussion meetings, and there they were allowed to speak more freely than had been the case for a long time. Ulbricht has asserted more than once that Christians and Marxists have much in common, since both are working for the same "human ideals." On a recent occasion he spent several hours discussing the East German social and political situation with a group of theological professors, pastors, and others. Youth camps of the Church are permitted. For several years the police had closed these camps entirely, or sent participants home after a few days. After a long correspondence with Werner Eggeratti, state Secretary for Church Affairs, Bishop Mitzenheim secured an agreement whereby they may operate, provided nothing except religious subjects be discussed.

It seems clear that the government of East Germany intends to eliminate the Church, or reduce it to a simple ineffective liturgy of the people, as rapidly as it can. They have found that they cannot wipe out the habits of thought established through

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1Ibid., p. 750.
generations of a culture-church all at once. Their pressures on the Church have varied greatly from time to time, but the direction and implacability of that pressure can hardly be denied. Certainly there may come a time in the not-too-distant future when the Church will find no room left in which to operate in its traditional form. When and if that time comes, it may be that only the invisible church and the Christian will remain to witness to Christ in a godless totalitarian state.
CHAPTER X

THEOLOGY PRESENTS ANSWERS FOR THE COMMUNIST ENCOUNTER

This is a changing world, and theology too has changed. In a short generation theology has become more conscious of itself. It has discarded the popular theory of twenty-five years ago which placed the encounter between Marxism and Christianity almost on the same level as a life and death struggle, and the one which regarded them as elements to be synthesized to the advantage of both. These are not two humanist philosophies at war, or in conversation about the best ideal for human society. This time is past because Communism in practice has erased this false picture of what it is and intends. It is past because Christian theology has found that its object is not human experience, nor religious experience and practice, but God and his acts toward men. The Christian has lost his good conscience about his culture and class position, about his confidence that his doctrine is truth and not ideology, about his attempts to withdraw from testing his faith in practice in social and historical action. Christians have made the great discovery that they have complete solidarity with a world which has lost its self-confidence in a revolutionary age, and that they are free to be open to what God is doing and to bear witness to it.¹

Three theological questions will be put to each of five theologies in the following pages: (a) How far does Christian

¹West, op. cit., p. 12.
thought meet the challenge of Marxist ideology in general, and Marxist criticism of religion in particular? The heart of Marxist ideology is more than materialism; it is the prophetic rebellion against the bourgeois world's idealizing of itself. He set out from Hegelian idealism to find his neighbor. He only found another ideology, but his searching questions still confront Christians everywhere. Does Christian theology and witness express only God's work in Christ, or does it express the interests of some social group or other ideology against the Communist one? Does the Christian's faith explain the world to him, justify it, and separate him from the needs of his neighbor who is out to change it? (b) Does Christian thought meet the challenge of the Marxist doctrine of history, with its straining of every nerve of society toward revolution and the classless society? Does it understand the revolutionary ferment of our time and is it free of reflections of the theologian's cultural background and interest? Is it effective in facing problems of social and cultural construction in this changing world? (c) Is it effective in meeting the humanism which marks Marxism? Does it meet the material aspect of man's existence? Is man seen in his real, not his ideal social bonds and relations? How effective is it in reaching men who have been captivated with the Communist vision of what man can be, with a gospel of more real humanity, and a more realistic means of expressing it?¹

The first response to Communism to be considered is that of absolute conflict, which is perhaps the most natural response for the Christian world. Christians have met the Marxist attack on

¹Ibid., pp. 19ff.
religion by condemning Communism as atheistic in theory and immoral in practice, and by defending their "Christian civilization." This is blind rear-guard action against the rapidly changing realities of today, ignoring it for it has nothing to teach them. However, the spirit of anti-Communism today is new to the post-war world, because it is based on actual encounter, of rejection out of bitter experience and the struggle to save precious things from Communist power. From this comes the theology for this first encounter.¹

Emil Brunner, the foremost of the theological writers advocating anti-Communism, says an absolute "No" to Communism, for he feels it to be the worst form of totalitarianism there can be, for the total state becomes the logical means toward an illusory end which is individualist humanism, and in the process man is de-personalized and the human is destroyed. In his earlier works there was a dialectical tension between the Divine Command and the orders of creation as a basis for ethics. He does say that Christian ethics is decision in obedience to God. The immediacy of Divine Command, this openness to concrete decision in faith beyond all principles, is lost in his later thought. In The Divine Imperative, it was balanced by the orders of creation, which is the basis of his rejection of revolution, and his conservatism. God commands us to revere the form of creation in which we find ourselves. It is God's will to conserve creation by his orders and to redeem them from within. The Christian will try to change these orders from within by his love of the neighbor, if human sin has taken them over. A civilization does not require a "Christian" element in

¹Ibid., p. 27.
order to exist, for it is one of the orders of God's creation. But, there are Christian criteria for civilization, and a Christian idea of it. A civilization, such as the West, which has been strongly influenced by this idea can, with caution, be called a "Christian civilization." This last principle seems to dominate Brunner's recent writings. From this he evolves three more specific principles for the guidance of society: the principle of federalism, a pluralism of communities prior to the state; the principle of personal freedom in community (his Christian antithesis to both individualism and collectivism); the principle that justice does not imply equality, but a properly ordered functional hierarchy based on the orders of creation in which a man has only such rights as come from God's grace to him in his due place in the community. This is the Christian civilization which Brunner would oppose to the totalitarian Communism which he condemns. He does not claim that such a society exists, but that these ideas have gone into the forming of the West.¹

Brunner fails to meet the challenge of Marxist ideology to his own thought. His answer to the question of the roots of ethical and social knowledge is the concrete command and gift of God's grace, but balanced by the orders of creation elaborated not only by analogy to Biblical example, subject to the activity of God in Christ, but also by natural reason. This lays him open to the charge that his own social experience and position enter into his thinking. He does not seem to have felt the fundamental doubt about human capacity to express social truth free of social interest, which a real encounter with Marx's doctrine of ideology arouses.² His doctrine

¹Ibid., pp. 31-37. ²Ibid., p. 38.
of history in general emphasizes its fulfillment in the decision of man according to his dual relation to the Church and the world; faith in Christ as the single concrete event who confirms history's linear character and meaning as history. He gives a heightened seriousness to atheism; it cannot be merely a-theistic but must be anti-Christian. The paradox in his thinking is that Christ's lordship over history only heightens the crisis in history. The other possibility which is developed by all other theologians in this study, that modern paganism might be a reaction which God permits against "western" identification with God's will, never becomes part of the structure of his thinking. He disclaims revolution because it is the assertion of human power from without rather than from the truly "revolutionary" influence of the Spirit from within. He thus becomes a conservative, who seeks to protect and restore what he imagines to have been active in the Christian tradition, pluralist personalism. He ends up with idealism which lacks clear reference to a future hope. When it comes to man in society, he is concerned with the Christian conception of a civilization. The social action he calls for is: mild reform of the capitalist system, return to the spiritual foundations of this civilization, and vigorous defense of this civilization against the totalitarian menace of Communism. We have here in Brunner a typical example of conservative idealism, open to all Marxist charges that it fails to understand and change reality in a largely socially determined world, and helpless before the vigor of Communist power to build new societies on the strength of a future hope.¹

He is for total opposition to Communism, but leaves open the

¹Ibid., pp. 38ff.
form it should take. There are two lines of strategy which develop from his theology. The first is that which would not declare total war, cold or hot, on Communism. Rather, the foreign policy of the West must aim at building up a world situation in which peaceful change can take place in an ordered way. This is the object of Communist containment, not the crushing of Communism itself. On the second level Christianity is in a life and death struggle with Communism, with the moral conscience of the world on the side of the West. The West must prove that peaceful change is possible in the framework of western international order, giving hope to the poor and weak of the world, and that that change does not need to be effected by violence. In this strategy again, faith is linked to an idealized civilization of the West. The second line of strategy which flows from Brunner's thought is that of irreconcilable conflict whether in cold or hot war, resistance whether active or passive, until the day the Communists are overthrown. There is a spirit of implacable enmity in every negotiation, every act of bargaining, every assertion of truth and justice, of advocates of this strategy. This is in reverse exactly the Communist attitude toward the non-Communist world. "The Hungarian revolt of October, 1956, with its costs in life, in shattered hopes, and in lost opportunities for slow progress towards a more humane society, is a tragic footnote to it."¹ Brunner's theology leads to the conviction that the struggle with Communism is absolute, and must end in victory, or in destruction of Christian civilization.

The value of this conservative reaction to Communism, for the

¹Ibid., p. 44.
Christian encounter as a whole, lies first in the fact that it is impossible any longer to take lightly the challenge offered by Communism to western institutions and values. They have reminded the West that it is necessary to meet power with power. Secondly, it reminds the Christian in the West of the real human values in western civilization. The Christian who has experienced life on the other side of the Iron Curtain learns to thank God for things which never before occurred to him.  

This "no" is based on two crumbling cornerstones. The first of these is hate and bitterness and a total rejection of Communists because of their Communism. These men forget, in their conservative opposition, that Communists are also creatures of God whom he seeks in Christ. They fail to serve the real person behind the Communist. More seriously, this absolute opposition fails to understand the life problems of the people who live under Communism, and to help them. There are millions, many of them Christians, to whom the horrors of total war weigh nothing against their hope of liberation. They are an embarrassment to the Church because their motives are anything but Christian. The real need of the people behind the Iron Curtain is aggravated by crusaders such as this. False hopes are raised, hatred fanned to futile self-destructive acts of rebellion, which lead to reprisals. The second of their crumbling cornerstones is culture-Christianity, the confusion of Christian faith and ethics with the values and traditions of western culture, so one is never sure which is primary. This is a faith which limits love so it cannot encounter human beings conditioned by needs and traditions outside this western society. No set of laws and ideals

1Ibid., p. 46.
is so purely conceived as to be an objective standard of the Good. It is always partly the justification of the culture and social power out of which it arose. This leads every such Christian to rigidity in world politics and self-righteousness which aggravates conflicts.¹

Next, we must consider the theology of those who say "yes" to Communism, those who have sought some way of life for the Christian conscience acceptable both to the Communist state and the Christian faith. The chief theological spokesman for this group is Josef Hromadka of Prague. He rejects the pre-war attempts to reconcile Christian and Communist world views on the basis of a liberal theology. He approaches Communist reality from the perspective of a theology of crisis which distinguishes Christian faith, hope, and obedience from political structures found good in their time. His theology is an encounter between Christian revelation and the reality of Communism, not an attempt to accommodate one to the other.²

To Hromadka, western civilization is in total crisis. This is a judgment of God for the failure of the Church to proclaim and live the Word of God. His followers, such as Berecsky in Hungary, feel that the role of the Church's word must be repentance for the blindness, the fruitlessness of the Church of the old society and gratitude that the Church may be allowed to exist and serve God in the new. Against his indictment of the past bourgeois society he places his understanding of Communism. Basically, he comes out with a two-story universe, which leaves ultimate truth, final goodness, and eschatological hope to Christianity, while granting to the movement and ideology the right to interpret and control

¹Ibid., pp. 47ff.  ²Ibid., p. 52.
the immediate movements of history. He finds grounds for basic optimism in Communist practice by ignoring the basic problem of power in a totalitarian state. The question of power realities is overridden by his sense of the historic rightness of the Communist revolution, and in this process real human beings and their problems fail to come into focus.¹

Central to this theology is the doctrine of history. The Church must stand with the oppressed masses to bring the Gospel to them. She must recognize and rejoice in the judgments of history from her sovereign freedom, for the Church cannot be at home in any earthly city, and must act in the light of them. God is the Lord of history, which forces Christians to take seriously its revolutions and social changes. His view, then, of man in society is full involvement of the Christian in the world with complete confidence that Christ is ruler and asks of the Church a joyful affirmation of the creative possibilities inherent in the new Communist society. The Church must take her stand within the socialist society, as Bereovsky puts it, "Our Church is not between East and West; our Church is in the East. She must serve here, and she must accept from God's gracious hand all struggles, travails, positive achievements, of the great transition in which we live, as opportunities to serve."² (This was stated in "On the Prophetic Service of the Church," Hungarian Church Press, Feb. 1, 1952). In order to bear witness in a Communist society, the Church must preach the Gospel in a positive way. The leaders are still learning, and need education as much as criticism. The Church must assist with her prayers and the activity of her members the building of a socialist

¹Ibid., p. 63. ²Ibid., p. 70.
society where exploitation, injustice, and violence will be abolished and a classless society created. In doing this the Church must criticize, and sometimes say "no", but her primary work is her "yes" to Christ. Their "yes" is not only to the state as God would have it be, but to the state as the Communists rule it; not only to God's purposes for the Communists, but to the Communists' purposes for themselves. There is no real attempt made to help the Christian who must live in both these worlds at once. This theology remains curiously abstract and challenges the East with nothing concrete. In theory their theology is valid, but how much is it given false meaning by their silence in the face of violations of other men's freedom and welfare, by their lack of a searching critique toward their society, and by their acquiescence in governmental control of the Church? Behind the crisis theology of these pro-Communist churchmen lurks a longing for the unity of religion with social power, such as was found in the anti-Communism of Brunner. They are thinking in terms of faith in culture, society, and politics informed by religion, rather than the Christian faith. In both, the Christian remains bound not to Christ in the world, but to the world, either as friend or enemy, of Communist power and pretension, itself.

When considering religious socialism, Paul Tillich is the theologian whose thought must be studied. The Origin or sense of Being controlled man until the Unconditional Demand, the I-Thou confrontation when I recognizes the same value in Thou, takes over in the beginning of Creation by Prophecy. Christian history depends on Christ as the centre of history, the kairos of time in which

1Ibid., p. 76.
unconditioned meaning is fulfilled in history determining both the beginning and end of all history. History is divided into periods of preparation, characterized by demand and expectation, and periods of fulfillment in which meaning which has appeared in the kairos is actualized in culture. Christ is the fulfillment of the true Origin in whose light all history becomes the history of salvation since his appearance. Within this history the struggle between the divine and the demonic continues.¹

Tillich's distinctive contribution is the doctrine of the secondary kairos, with its movement since Christ between the poles of theonomy and autonomy. This is a period of expectation informed by the prophetic demand, passing judgment on the failures of a fading structure of social existence, and met by the power of a new creation for which the time is ripe, and which surrenders itself to become a vehicle for the Unconditional Demand (God). The period which follows is a new theonomy. The coming of this kairos is not the coming of the Kingdom of God, for the realization of the meaning is partial. It is one which is conscious of the Origin and the Unconditional Demand, the divine is not a problem but a presupposition and the spirit of the whole carries the individual, for such an age is directed toward the divine. Over against this is autonomy, with its humanism, which seeks to realize the unconditional meaning in existence. It is basically critical and does not have creative power. It clears the ruins of an old theonomy away, when it has lost its inner power to hold allegiance. It prepares the way for a new theonomy, when the old has become heteronomous, the truly demonic condition of society in history. Heteronomy is the conscious attempt to suppress autonomy, to limit

¹Ibid., p. 78.
creativity and subject human life to a law alien to its internal consciousness.¹

Tillich finds the world today in an extreme autonomous condition, where both Protestantism and socialism are en kairos. In the Protestant principle alone are the resources to lead the world over into a new period of reception and creation. The Christian's task is threefold: to proclaim God's grace; since the message is broadly social and not limited to the visible Church and society as a whole is justified by God's grace, the Church is called to make this known; to proclaim the New Being of Christ, and to live out of its power alone. It tries to realize the theonomous meaning in culture. It unites protest and form within itself, trying to be transparent for a meaning beyond itself rather than absolute in meaning itself. In this sense Paul Tillich calls Christians to religious socialism.²

Tillich sees the bourgeois capitalist world as demonic and driving itself to destruction by its inner laws. This crisis produced Marxist socialism. The basic historic impulse is not the demonic one represented by Soviet Communism, but the kairos in which the proletariat stands, on the verge of a new theonomy. The power of Being expressed in the proletarian situation is expressed in socialism and if socialism can grasp this Being and realize it in society, a new theonomy may break on the world, and if not a new barbarism may be turned loose. The task of religious socialism is to bring this awareness and direction to socialism as a whole. It means taking Marxism beyond itself, for not even Marx recognized the prophetic depths of his own insight. It must look beyond history

¹Ibid., pp. 78ff.
²Ibid., pp. 81-86.
for its fulfillment. It must not become ideological. It must seek in the churches the religious depths of its own principle. This was Tillich's religious socialist encounter with Marxist socialism in the nineteen-thirties.1

Two lines move forward from this to the present encounter with Communism. One is a lasting encounter, the other has proved itself inadequate and been lost. The first of these is Tillich's exposition of the prophetic-religious character of the early Marx, and his conviction that Christian faith belongs in a relationship with it of fruitful give-and-take. In the view of Walter Dirks, the Roman Catholic editor of Die Frankfurter Hefte, we see reflected the whole post-war German Christian thinking on this subject. The Christian is called to see the world from both the Christian and proletarian points of view at once and to contribute to the reconstruction of society according to this. He finds two similarities between Christian and early Marxian insight. First, Marx led the way in opposing the materialist view of history to Hegel's idealism. This Marx's "material" was human relations in production, more spiritual than material. Second, the younger Marx calls the Christian to sober obedient realism about his responsibility in the world of power-conflicts and economic forces. Not just any social ideal, but the strategic next step in the light of the forces at work in society, lays its moral claim on the Christian. But Marx forgot about a whole dimension of human nature, that of freedom, sin, salvation, and life in God's grace. These points Tillich also made, but Dirk's thought breaks with Tillich's, as does most post-war thinking on this question, by understanding Karl Marx, not as a prophet of a socialist movement whose inner conflicts

1Ibid., pp. 87f.
must be resolved by deepening its religious understanding, but as the apostle of another faith which confronts Christianity with humbling examples of love and devotion, and with distorting and limiting perspectives and actions. He recognizes that direct encounter of minds is not possible at first. The Christian must start to live his faith, as honestly as does the Communist, from the proletarian situation, until he can solve problems better and think better than the Communist does. Only in this way will the Christian become credible over against Marxism. This implies an open and flexible approach to social reality with only the Word of God as guide.¹

The other line moving from the early Tillich to the present has been proven ineffective. This is carried on by Tillich himself. His advice to the Church is unrealistic and has never come spiritually to grips with the kind of revolution Communism is. His hopes of a new conversation between Russia and the West after the war, in which each would learn creatively from the other, and a new opportunity for socialism, deepened into religious socialism, to grasp the kairos of our time, proved fruitless in the overriding importance of the American-Russian conflict. In 1948, he confessed that there remained no possibility of a religious socialist spirit penetrating East and West with a new outlook. He still regards socialism as Europe's only answer. Therefore, the Christian must not act but must wait in the "sacred void" which replaces the hoped for kairos.²

Tillich's greatest contribution is to the understanding of the religious qualities and roots of Marxism. He fails because his

¹Ibid., pp. 87-107.  
²Ibid., pp. 109f.
faith that the world is basically a system of being in motion, closes his mind to the human realities of Communism when they fall outside this system.¹

Nicholas Berdyaev, who is loosely connected with the socialist way of thinking, must be mentioned. He is not strictly a theologian, but he blazed several theological trails in the encounter with Communism. He was the first Christian thinker to take entirely seriously the revolutionary aspect of Marx. He is more revolutionary than Marx, placing the value of the free creative life of concrete human beings above all the philosophies, movements, and powers of history. It is a revolt against every violation of man by man. He was the first to understand Communism as a religious movement. Communism is right in seeking a new and better life, but its big lie is its denial of both God and man, in its inhuman collectivity which is its God. Its relationship with Christianity is twofold: inevitable conflict because it is another religion, professing to be totalitarian where only God can be totalitarian; its dependency on the religious energies of the people enlisted in the service of an idol. He contributed, also, a realism about the Christian encounter with Communism. He views Communism as a judgment of God, inevitable though not in itself creative nor "good." This means, for Christianity, seizing the opportunity given, for Communism cannot carry through the spiritual promise of its own faith. It means seeking out the creative forces among those who have been through the revolution and working with them in hope. He was the first to express the insights which are the most effective witness today behind the Iron Curtain.²

¹Ibid., p. 111. ²Ibid., p. 116.
Primary reality for Reinhold Niebuhr lies in the immediate struggle of men in their sin with the social powers and responsibilities before them. This differentiates him from the others mentioned here who start with a theological conviction about grace, or a vision of what society might be. To him, the law of love for one's neighbor is a challenging standard which can never be captured in any idealistic structure. The ethic of Christ in the Sermon on the Mount is the ultimate ideal of this world, which inspires, judges, and transforms every achievement of relative justice. Humanity has the double task of reducing the anarchy of the world and bringing some semblance of order and unity, and of setting these unities and achievements under the criticism of the ideal.¹

The object of his social ethic is to preserve the genius of a democratic tradition in a mixed economy, and its inner improvement. Communism, then, becomes a religious utopian threat with which no real encounter is possible, although he realizes it has the characteristics of a Christian heresy and is fed by self-righteousness of Christians. He leads a large group of thinkers on the left in Britain and America, who have taken Marxism seriously without becoming fellow-travelers.²

Niebuhr sought to change the socialist movement from within by Christian insights. These Christians sought to oppose Marxism's false religion with Christian truth. The truth to Niebuhr is:

We are called as Christians to embody our faith in thoughts and actions which make use of reason to work out faith's implications. Yet faith tells us that in doing this we are corrupting truth again with our interests. Prayer and consecrated thought help to make us aware of these corruptions, but only if humility and contrition operate alongside of faith's conviction, so that we forgive and learn

¹Ibid., p. 119. ²Ibid., p. 124.
from those who hold what we believe to be untrue convictions. This is the perpetual dialectic of Christian knowledge.¹

He believes the same to be true of grace. The Christian tends to misuse this gift and must continually ask forgiveness for so doing. He places reason as faith's handmaiden. This is Niebuhr's answer to ideology.² Is it adequate to answer Marxist charges? In Niebuhr's thought is exposed more mercilessly than anywhere else the devices which Christians use to justify their own social power and privilege, and to deny their responsibility for their neighbors. All the other theologians in this study make an attempt, in one way or another, to escape the burdens, tensions, anxieties, and relative decisions of this world in some theological or churchly way, leaving less pious people to bear them. He writes to Karl Barth:

... Cannot mean emancipation from the tortuous and difficult task of achieving a tolerable justice. It is certainly not right for Christians to leave it to the 'pagans of our day' to walk the tightrope of our age which is strung over the abyss of war and tyranny, seeking by patience and courage to prevent war on the one hand and the spread of tyranny on the other, while Christians rejoice in a 'revolutionary hope' in which all these anxieties of human existence ... are overcome proleptically. (From "We are Men and not God," The Christian Century, Oct. 27, 1948, p. 1139.)³

Niebuhr declares his solidarity with the pagans of this world wherever they are honestly engaged in dealing with the problems of our time. His finest ethics are found where he brings the insight of the Bible to these problems. In all this Niebuhr fulfills the basic requirement of an effective Christian encounter with Communism and an answer to its doctrine of ideology. Barth says he lacks a third dimension: the Word of God, the Holy Spirit, God's free

¹Ibid., p. 143. ²Ibid., p. 144. ³Ibid., p. 145.
choice, God's grace and judgment, the Creation, the Reconciliation, the Kingdom, the Sanctification, and the Congregation as indications of events, concrete, unique divine actions. Niebuhr fails here by implicitly taking his commandments from somewhere in history itself, rather than from Christ's relation to the redeemed man.\(^1\)

Niebuhr's pattern of history is one of continuous dialectic between God's agape and the pattern of man's search for self-fulfillment. Christ illuminates all its ambiguities. The cross shows its true meaning. It shows the judgment over all history to be one of grace. It lifts no burden from man but clarifies his responsible action toward the powers of this world.\(^2\)

Ruling classes and nations have their time, but they continue only by "dying to self" in response to demands of new, previously subject, groups with new demands for justice. These new forces too are always involved in the same idolatries which they contend against. The Christian must act as a balancer of order and freedom against their tendencies to turn into tyranny and anarchy. Government is involved in the same dialectic as other social forces with on the one hand a divine authority as an organizer of order and justice among competing groups, and on the other the dangerous possibility of injustice when it makes order into an absolute tyrannical power coercing society. Thus Niebuhr considers democracy, with its framework for endless experiments, necessary to achieve a just balance between changing power groups, as the Good in politics.\(^3\) America's greatest

\(^1\)Ibid., p. 146. \(^2\)Ibid., p. 151. \(^3\)Ibid., p. 155.
danger today stems not from her failures, but from her achievements in which she takes pride. Because of these illusions of a perfect innocence and virtue she cannot deal with the ambiguities of power politics. Since both Communists and Americans feel that they are masters of their destiny, Niebuhr is afraid that they may bring catastrophe upon the world. The Providence of Niebuhr, is that which upholds an open society where power is free to balance power, and men are humble enough to know that no cause is absolute. In this he fails to recognize the extent to which the world has lost its sense even of a residual justice. He does not see the inner threat, the temptation which Communism is in the midst of social and personal chaos.¹

For Christians confronted with Communists as neighbors Niebuhr is of very little help. He rarely brings to the fore the personal God who calls and redeems in Christ, and leads the Christian to concrete personal relations with Him and their neighbor in faith.² Niebuhr's criticisms of the pretensions of the Church far outweigh his constructive statements about what it should do.

The Church as a free community in an unfree society, as a source of truth and love where these are officially distorted, as a point of contact between the power of God and the powerless Christian giving him direction and strength in his witness--these are themes which Niebuhr has not developed, for he remains too much the Christian-in-society to appreciate their full value.³

The most significant encounters with Communism in Europe today are rooted in Karl Barth's theology. It is necessary to keep in mind in considering his theology that his political opinions are only one, and not necessarily the most valid, application of his theology. Barth is fundamentally a rebel and has gone far

beyond revolutionary socialism. It is no longer a question of the oppression of one class against another, but of organized rebellion against God which man expresses in his political structures, particularly those which man endows with moral and spiritual authority. Christ demands of us, precisely in the name of His revolution that we should not break through the regulation of secular authority. His basis for this is Romans 12:21: "Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good." Subjection, then, is the real act of revolution, because it is obedience to God and not to those powers. It deprives the existing order of all its ultimate worth and validity. Barth is prepared to recognize a certain value in the orders of this world as shadows of the outline of God. The whole area of social questions per se, including Marxism, lies on the periphery of Barth's interest.\(^1\) Both Barth and Tillich started with the fundamental problem of finding an answer to the existential despair of Europe, raised by the fall of reason before the onslaught of the nihilist (Nietzsche) reaction to idealistic philosophy and theology.\(^2\)

It is the person of Christ who gives to Barth's way of thinking the dimension usually applied in natural theology by the encounter between man and God. Christ expresses God's will to hold man in a covenant of Grace in the I-Thou relation. Jesus is the particular object through whom we know what God's gracious action means, through whom and in whom God makes all men into his covenant partners. This man is the man, whom God has elected, who is the only-begotten Son of God, who is completely open and ready for God, who is completely and without remainder the man for other men.

\(^1\)Ibid., p. 189.  
\(^2\)Ibid., p. 190.
This is the relation, the activity of God in its essential form, complete in itself. This is the concrete being and knowledge from which all other human and historical knowledge and being come. It is the nature of God to include and fulfill all that is human as he has created it, stones and redeems it. This is the basis for Barth's concern for man and his society.¹

The primary question for one who thinks as Barth does, is how man as a creature is related to Christ, and so to God. Barth himself says that the answer already has been given in the atonement, but the question is primary to those seeking an answer to how effective his theology is in meeting Communism, because the manner in which he establishes this relation between Christ and the many acts and structures of life determines its effectiveness. The relationship between God and man can be simply stated as the I-Thou as expressed: in Christ as the Father and man; in man as man and wife, as the imago dei in man, the patterns of mutual dependence, fellowship, and simple togetherness of man and wife which happen day by day and rooted in their created differences but realized in its fullness in Christ in relation to the Church. Thus the threefold analogy of relation: God in relation to himself as Father and Son; man as created in relation to his wife, and Christ with his Church. The central I-Thou relation impelled by His love moves outward like waves over the water when a stone is dropped. As Christ's humanity is complete co-humanity, so man's humanity depends on his fellow man. "I am, in that you are."² The encounter with other human beings is always on a man-to-man basis, two people who look each other in the eye and therefore can see and be seen by another. Society is the

¹Ibid., p. 197
²Ibid., p. 204.
participation of one in another in understanding, help, giving of
the self and receiving from another self. "There is no place in
all this for the individual whose end is the development of his
inner creative capacities and powers (the Nietzschean ideal) or
for the endowment of groups with personal characteristics. 1
Both
are subordinate to the I-Thou relationship, and are not divine orders
and convey no commandment. This leads to an attitude of free responsi-

Bility toward social structures in which a man finds that God has
placed him. These are God's gifts, and man is not responsible to
the gift but to God in Christ. As an object of God's gracious elec-
tion man is free against these conditions of his existence—a pil-
grim on the earth. Barth is here giving a caution and a charter to
free, responsible, and empirical ethical thinking guided only by a
determination of the social conditions at hand and a Biblical Christ-
centered understanding of the needs of the fellow man. 2

Barth values and honors human culture precisely because it
is not itself continuous with God, but because it is the response
in human personal relations to the action of God's grace. The
Christian is able to be a more sensitive and complete advocate of
relative human values because he does not depend on these for the
meaning of his life; be they freedom, democracy, justice, or
peace. This Christian is freest to see the realities of the world
unveiled by radical or conservative illusions, and act accordingly
in serving his neighbor. 3 This is the basic attitude toward
society which informs many Christians who face a day-by-day en-
counter with Communists. It claims to be the New Testament atti-
tude toward society. It might briefly be described as "positive

1Ibid., p. 205. 2Ibid., p. 207. 3Ibid., p. 211.
and responsible in the light of Christ's victory over the powers of evil, free and defiant, in the hope of Christ's coming again.\textsuperscript{1}

Several charges have been brought against this theology: that it is a crisis theology only, not helpful in daily life because it does not affirm life's values strongly enough; that it does not take seriously enough the problems of man in society in his daily responsibility, nor help the creators of culture, economic, and political policy with their ethical problems; that its emphasis on redemption fails to take sin and the necessity for opposing social evil seriously enough. Is Barth's position an adequate answer to the encounter of the Christian with Communism?

One could wish him no finer development than the unfolding of these two insights in interacting parallel: that no formulation of man, not even the finest theological statement, can capture the truth which comes to us by God's grace alone, and that the Christian must prove his dependence on that gracious God (and therefore bear witness to his reality) by the way in which his ethical life, his behaviour in the I-Thou relation, shows another basis than that given by his culture or class.\textsuperscript{2}

The seeds of an adequate encounter are here, but Barth's primary concern is the first; the second has fallen by the way, for he does not apply this adequately to the problem of the Christian's political responsibility in the face of Communism. Of all the theologians Barth gives the most adequate Christian answer to the intellectual problem raised by the Marxist doctrine of ideology. He goes as far as theological words and thoughts can go in searching for the answer which comes in truth from beyond the distortion of human sin, and in protecting it from distortion when it encounters human realities. His deepest contribution has been the attempt

\textsuperscript{1}\textit{Ibid.} \hfill \textsuperscript{2}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 217.
to build a Christo-centric way of thinking which contains its own corrective against ideological distortion because it is a true reflection of Christ, and not a system itself.

The problems in Barth's point of view have not lain in God's aloofness from the affairs and problems of man, but rather in the thoroughness with which everything takes its meaning from the point where God became man for our redemption. They do not lie in his over-consciousness of sin (where everything man touches is tainted, for man is sinner) but rather in his banishment of sin to a position of such little weight before the power of God's gracious election, so utterly nothing, that one wonders about Barth's realism about human limitations. His statement of what God has revealed in Christ, for the fullness of human life is so comprehensive and powerful that every other world view must ask itself what truth about God and His act it could contribute, which would not show up as darkness in this light.

Whether Barth's theology can lead Christians truly out of the ideological self-doubt and bourgeois ineffectiveness where the rise of Marxist socialism and the fact of proletarian living has placed them, into a response to truth itself in their social living, or whether his thought is, as Tillich says, a new heteronomy, the worse for being so 'orthodox' must be decided by the power of positive truth in his doctrine of Christ.

The great central theme of Barth's theology could be stated in a simple sentence. He once answered an inquirer who asked him to give a few of the fundamental principles of his thinking, that he had no principles: "But one thing I know. Christ lives. All the rest comes from there." However, even though so simple, its implications are so various that only a vague idea can be given

\[1\text{Ibid.}\] \[2\text{Ibid., p. 223.}\] \[3\text{Ibid., from footnote.}\]
her. This centrality of Christ bears on the question of truth and ideology at two points. First, Christ is the centre of his doctrine of predestination and election. There is no law of universal atonement. This process is a personal one between God and the creature whom he has chosen. Christians cannot draw inferences from it for themselves; neither that evil is no more, nor that all men are elected because God does not will that any be lost. Christ defines the content of election; the judgment of God who bears man's condemnation for him and stays with him whether as enemy or friend; the life of thankful response whose content is bearing others' burdens and bringing them the Gospel.¹ Second is Barth's emphasis on the priority of concrete action over being. He seeks to liberate the concrete human being from every generalization and abstraction which would limit his human nature and destiny by human ideas. In Christ we have the union of the order of being and the order of knowing. Existence is for the sake of, and in the history of, the covenant of God's grace. This dependence of both being and knowing on God's gracious act in Christ has two consequences: faith, and only faith, is the way man receives and responds to this creation and this revelation and here alone is a point of contact with Truth; God has created a human nature, about which a relative truth can be known by man even apart from Christ, and there is no way upward to God's truth from this relative truth so it must be content to remain relative and incomplete. Christians and non-Christians share a common humanity and a common ability to know this humanity. Christians possess no special knowledge here, save understanding that the root of humanity lies in no theory but in the

¹Ibid., p. 226.
freedom of the human heart for the fellow man.\textsuperscript{1}

The Christian's task in the realm of nature and humanity in general is threefold: he is the guardian of the objectivity and validity of this truth against all ideologies, because he knows more than others of its reliability to man; he knows that creation is friendly and that it reflects the goodness of the Creator, and he is called to be simply and truly human in a relative and practical way, objective, relative, realistic in his thinking and helpful in his actions toward other men, whom he can see, because of Christ, as real human beings, not obscured by an ideal; the Christian does not turn even his theology into another philosophy for he knows it is dependent on Christ, not on any imparted wisdom, and must be fundamentally a report of what God has done for him, not a system of knowledge, and in no sense is it an explanation of God, but the thought side of the act of response and obedience, whose source and completion is in God alone.\textsuperscript{2}

Barth has given Christians here, by his most original presentations of the themes of Christian faith, sometimes for the first time in history, a clear understanding of the way in which Christ himself can be the reality which breaks through all human ideology.\textsuperscript{3}

Some questions still remain to be asked of Barth's theology. Is it possible to say with Barth, that man's very knowledge of God begins with the victory of redemption? Are men worthy of this freedom? Or is it necessary to have the experience of moral struggle and suffering under the law to make men sensitive to their fellow man and responsible moral agents? Dietrich Bonhoeffer in criticizing Barth on this point says:

\textsuperscript{1}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 230. \hspace{1cm} \textsuperscript{2}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 234. \hspace{1cm} \textsuperscript{3}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 235.
It is only when one knows the ineffability of the Name of God that one can utter the name of Jesus Christ. It is only when one loves life and the world so much that without them everything would be gone, that one can believe in the resurrection and a new world. It is only when one submits to the law that one can speak of grace, and only when one sees the anger and wrath of God hanging like grim realities over the head of one's enemies that one can know something of what it means to love and forgive them. I don't think it is Christian to want to get to the New Testament too soon and too directly. (From Letters and Papers from Prison, p. 79.)

No theology is justified in itself, but only in the quality of an ethical decision and in personal contact with an unbeliever. In this situation must a theology be tested for its power to liberate the believer from ideology. Helmut Gollwitzer, one of Barth's followers, has applied his theology to political ideology in practice. His development of Christian witness in freedom from ideology bears a different tone from that of Barth because of his appreciation of what it means to call Communism another faith and because of his sense of continuing responsibility for the culture and structure of the West even after they have been stripped of every ideological pretension, simply because its culture is serviceable to human beings compared to that of Communism. He develops it thus: the Christian is free from both of the great world powers, serving only Christ; the Christian cannot see any conflict as absolute, even though it remains real, rather he sees it without illusions and not through a cloud of moralism; the Christian's task is one of reconciliation, a struggle for peace through conversion of the enemy rather than his defeat; the Christian seeks the welfare of the city, whether in East or West, even perhaps to the extent of responsible resistance to tyranny in certain cases.

1Ibid., p. 245.
This development of Barth's theology brings one closer to the experience of Christians in East Germany, for the ideological conflict is central for the Christians there, where Communism presents itself in unmistakable terms as a religion of salvation, claiming the whole allegiance of man. There is a total onslaught on his mind, against which he must fight to maintain any sort of independent thought or decision. It is hopeless in a situation like this to attempt to reject in principle every attack on Christianity, to make it a body of knowledge to be defended whole at every point. It is a lack of faith to think that one concession of power and privilege by the Church could shatter the power of God. It is equally impossible to adopt Marxist standards of criticism and to prove that Christianity is harmonious with a Communist society by a process of adaptation. There is only one possibility left open. The Christian must recognize that Christ alone is the real accuser in all these questions of the Communists. So the dialogue must go on between Christians and Communists, but in Christ who seeks out both in His grace. The Christian is then open to the fellow human being who is a Communist for he does not fear his ideological attack. The Christian is the custodian of direct, factual, un-ideologized truth and human relations. It may be easier for the Christian in East Germany to recognize what is ideologized truth than for those in the West, for in East Germany they are so obviously idols.¹

In teaching and learning his subject free of the Marx-Leninist framework, in bearing witness to the duty of justice even in courts where justice has disappeared, in advocating, at risk, the cause of reasonable production and human relations on the farm and in industry against the almighty Plan—in such acts as these the

¹Ibid., p. 255.
Christian is called to pursue his unideological calling and witness, and thus to commend his faith in such a Communist society as Eastern Germany. It is a witness, which owes much to the background of Barth's theology.¹

This is an extension and a correction of Barth's theology. It is a correction for the center of its emphasis is on the problem of encounter, of apologetics and ethics, rather than on theology itself. The thinking of these East German churchmen is even more critical of ideological thinking than is Barth, for they see them misused by both Communist and anti-Communist. Their thinking lacks the joyful abandon with which Barth calls the Christian to co-operate with other men in discovering the truth about humanity, and tells him he is free and needs nothing but Christ to guide his service in the world. Of course these ideas are good and right, but in practice many problems arise. In each concrete decision the problem becomes acute, how far is he witnessing to the Gospel, and how far to something ideological; how far does he point in his actions to the victory of Christ's love, and how far does he perpetuate human divisions?²

The next thing to be concerned with is how well Barth's theology meets the challenge of Marxism in society, by its interpretation of history and the question of politics. The challenge which Marx presented was the challenge of a radical dynamic which changes society. Tillich finds Barth indifferent to the heights and depths of the historical process because he will grant to it no divine meaning of its own save in the light of God's act toward man in Christ. He finds in Barth an indifference to culture and history which cannot be meaningful or creative. Hromadka, on the

¹Ibid. ²Ibid., pp. 255f.
other side, although claiming to follow Barth, has the picture of a line of God's history and of world history which cross and occasionally run together for a while, thus justifying him in saying "yes" to Communism. Niebuhr accuses Barth of being so concerned with redemption that relative responsibility no longer weighs on him, allowing him to accept flagrant injustice as a witness to the grace of God as long as that injustice does not present itself in terms of the Christian faith itself.¹

God is time for man, and this is sharply distinguished from "our time," of alien lost time. Created time is the form in which man has fellowship with God, the form of history. History is "the continuum of events in which God makes, carries through, and brings to its goal this, his Covenant with man; and so makes true in the realm of the creature what He has decided for himself from all eternity."² However, there is such a thing as "our time"—time from the view of human beings thinking in their sin, without reference to God. This is a history of the world grounded in and determined by its ignoring and rejecting the will of God. It is determined by human pride, but God's creation continues in it, so it always has an aspect to it which is immediately set by God. The believer, who seeks the work of God revealed in Christ through these creaturely events, acts in the reality of the world objectively in that he knows he is dealing with God in all its developments. Human activity is a tool which God has made useful in history and chooses to use. With the death and resurrection of Christ has come an end to "our time" and Christ has become its limit. This brings to world events their meaning. The whole world exists between the Cross and

¹Ibid., p. 258. ²Ibid., p. 260.
His coming again in glory. Political events are significant because they take place in this framework. The beginning and goal of world history is the history of God's salvation of man. It is the time of the Church, of preaching and sacrament, whereby the knowledge of God's grace and Christ's lordship is proclaimed to the world and lived by those bound together in the Holy Spirit. It is also the time of political orders which have the purpose of keeping order; the time is short of relative justice under God's providence.

The Church would not be the Church if it did not depend wholly and completely on the calling act of Christ and not on any worldly definition. It would not be the Church if it were not wholly in the world and for the world in its confession of faith, political guardianship, and service of the neighbor, bearing witness not to itself, but to Christ. There is definitely a paradox in Barth's thinking in regard to the Christian's response to political power. First, he maintains that Christ is Lord in our time, even though the world may not know it. Thus no devil in political form can arise. The Christian may not, therefore, think in terms of absolute enmity, of a Christian crusade against the powers of evil. The Christian must not be distracted by changes in political order, or by the struggles for power in history, from his task of proclaiming the reconciliation of man and God in Christ. His political decisions will be objective, aiming in the direction of freeing men from fear of their enemies, reconciliation of worldly powers, and peace. He will seek in all this for what God has in mind. He will always witness but not in condemnation, as the possessor of a superior

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1Ibid., p. 266.  
2Ibid.
truth and morality. The other side of the paradox is that nothing prevents Barth from declaring crises in political history when they are determined by the pretension of earthly political structures to claim authority over men which belongs only to God, and by the temptation they offer to Christians to identify with an earthly ideology. These crises do not seem to lose their absolute quality from Christ's redemption. In these circumstances Barth says that a Christian must say "no" to an earthly enemy and fight him. He is called to challenge the validity of their faith by their political decision. He did this specifically in fighting Naziism, and in general terms in his most recent writings:

In the midst of problems of reason and evaluation, the Christian faces the problem of obedience. Since (and the salvation of his soul is at stake!) he can only do justice to the problem in one absolutely definite direction and can answer it in one way only and in no other, he finds himself called and constrained to make a concrete political decision and to stand by his decision, to defend it publicly and to summon other Christians (and non-Christians) at all costs to make the same decision (since God, known or unknown, is the God of them all).

This does not happen in relation to every question, but only where he finds a spirit at work which is basically at odds with the Holy Spirit. Barth saw Naziism as a destruction of all order, all justice, all freedom, and of all authority--no state at all. This demands the Christian's basic opposition as an act of his Christian confession. Christian prayers and actions should aim at its destruction. Barth sees Christ as the future, which does not exclude temporary hopes, but rather includes them. This hope sheds light on each event in history.

One of Barth's profoundest contributions to the whole

1Ibid., p. 271. 2Ibid., p. 275.
Christian-Communist encounter is to have given Christians a new (or perhaps the old Biblical one) theological perspective on time and eternity, which circumvents the Marxist-Idealist antithesis, the idea of a linear time, history with a beginning and an end moving in some way forward. He meets the Marxist rebellion against "our time" in three stages. First, he takes it seriously, more than any of the other theologians. Barth's view of history does not lead man to depend on his ability to interpret a revolutionary system. It leads him to action out of his freedom of response to the Lord of history. Second, both Marx and Barth have a concrete Lord of history. Both are prophets of redemption, but Marx's trinity for redemption—the dialectical movements of economic history, self-redeemed man in the proletarian class, and the strategy of revolution-cum-socialist construction—only achieves a shadow of its purpose of the discovery and fulfillment of concrete historical man, for it subordinates the human being to an abstract system where the few dominate the many. Barth's opposition to Marxism is that of the discoverer of true grace in history toward those who have simulated this grace because of the lack of it. "He catches up the revolution into his concept of God's time and ours, but finds, in the personal concrete human relations which express God's historical activity, an endlessly radical and creative source of reconstruction."¹ Third, Barth meets Marxist eschatology with a genuine eschatology of his own, the centre of which is Christ himself. H. D. Wendland in West Germany writes in 1954, that it is not sufficient to reject the Communist hope.

¹Ibid., p. 279.
Rather, Christendom must ask itself what it hopes, or if it hopes anything, or whether it has degraded Christ to a man of the past and given itself up to hopelessness. Only by an ethic which expresses this hope in Christ will the Communist hope be countered. The test of this eschatology in practice is in East Germany, for there, all humans have is hope in a time of trial. The Communists themselves live on hope. The anti-Communist lives on the hope that the old order will be restored. Against these stand the Christian hope as Barth defined it. It is a hope which releases the Christian from responsibility for the total political and social strategy with relation to the Communist power, for actually Christian responsibility only extends to the area where his choice is significant. He can love the neighbor whom he can see and trust God for the movements of history. Second, it is a hope which gives a positive place to suffering and judgment. The way of hope may lead through suffering, for the suffering Christ is Lord of the world. To hope in a coming kingdom is to recognize what God is doing and to act creatively in it. Third, this hope gives the Christian freedom against hopes which arise out of non-theological calculations, either to accept them thankfully, or to live without them.

To Barth the just state safeguards the freedom to preach justification. He sees it as a sign of the heavenly kingdom which is the hope of the whole world under God's redemption, reflecting indirectly the truth and reality which constitute the Christian community. It cannot become the Kingdom of God, but is an order which God uses in a world not yet redeemed, where Christ's rule is hidden and with its goodness recognized only by the Church.

1Ibid., 281. 2Ibid., 284.
Christian carries, jointly with the rest of the world, responsibility for the civil order. The Church's first duty toward the state is to pray for it, and remind it of its responsibility to God thereby, by whose gracious act justice is defined, and to seek in everything with which the civil community is confronted that which comes closest to reflecting the active grace of God in the political community. The Church can accompany every political system, but must not ally itself with any. The "subjection" required of Christians cannot mean that they accept responsibility for the undertakings of the state which are aimed against the freedom of the Christian message. Their "subjection" in such cases consists in becoming its victims. All this is done not against the state but for it. Christians would be enemies of the state if they did not resist when that state threatens their Christian freedom.\(^1\)

A Christian encounter with Communism is the act of meeting of two living movements, which theology attempts to illuminate, thus helping the Christian in the concrete business of obedience and witness.

The world meets Communism as a revolutionary power of a revolutionary age. It is seen on two levels, among the men of practice, particularly farmers and laborers, who see in it the only power which seems to be representing their interests, and among men of theory, the uprooted intellectuals of changing societies, and the nihilists who cannot live forever sceptical of all meaning and value. For these people Communism did not have to measure up to a previously held ideal or standard, enough that it was revolutionary toward all the pretensions of the bourgeois world, exposing all its hypocrisies.

\(^{1}\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 295.}\)
and selfishness, and that it presented itself well organized and whose triumph seemed inevitable.  

Christianity meets Communism on a much broader revolutionary scene:

The Christian Gospel yields nothing to Communism in its realism about the relation of ruling social power, philosophy and culture, to group interest; in its self-identification with the proletarian situation, in the fullness of its love and hope for man, both body and soul; or in its thorough identification of truth with response to the neighbour, its unity of theory with practice.

The insights of the Communists are but borrowed from older themes in the Bible itself, in spite of their "scientific" cloak. Both these movements are movable forces, then, not debris in the way of this revolutionary change.

Christian study of the younger Marx, which Tillich started but which needs to go deeper, where one finds the prophetic impulse in the whole Marxian movement, is vital, for the Christian must search Communism for its moments of judgment and prophecy to learn about Christian witness in the revolutionary upheaval of today. Beyond the revolution lies a reality, about which the two doctrines can never agree. "But it will break down into a fruitful encounter when Christians begin to live and think before God, as those who have learned, from Marxism and elsewhere, not least from their Bibles, what it means to be in a proletarian situation as His children."

This implies the other side of the picture, Communism is a betrayal of the world revolution and in time is revealed in its true colors, because its hope is in an earthly utopia, rather than in Christ who judges and redeems all time. The vices against which

1Ibid., pp. 326ff.  2Ibid., p. 330.  3Ibid.  4Ibid., p. 333.
Marx rebelled have returned in new clothing, because it was not revolutionary enough to subject its own ideals and power to the proletariat it claimed to lead. There is today a growing "post-Communist" mood among the proletariat, the dispossessed and homeless--both in body and mind--for whom Communism has had its greatest appeal. In this mood is a new opportunity for the Christian, for in the disillusion and despair of fallen hopes the Christian can speak again of the real needs of real people.¹

The world meets Communism as a tyrannical power. The quality of its tyranny and the depth of its power claim comes from its pretension to be the expression of the world revolution, and its fulfillment. There is a reality to the resistance to their claim to total allegiance of body and soul. This is human resistance, not just resistance for the sake of an ideal. The Christian theologian stands before the victim and fugitive of Communism as one who must deny him what he probably wants most of all, another human authority, or another ideology, for this desire is the sickness of his resistance to Communism, not that resistance itself. The Christian resists Communist ideology because in Gollwitzer's words, "He is a slave, who belongs to another." He resists as a witness to Christ, who is really in command. He resists for the tyrant's sake as well as the victim's and as one never possessed by a state of resistance. He resists as one for whom the friend-foe antithesis is not the important factor, and as one to whom ideologies are no longer necessary even to ward off others. This is the freedom in resistance so clearly defined by numerous Christians from East Germany, particularly Gollwitzer.²

¹Ibid., p. 334. ²Ibid., p. 337.
The world has matured. It is a secular world which has largely dispensed with metaphysics. Men are too busy with the complexities of modern life to worry about supposedly ultimate problems. The world goes on its merry way as if God did not exist, not falling into a counter religion, but remaining relative, realistic, and problem solving. Most of the theologians admit this in one way or another. Only Hromadka feels the revolution in our time to be entirely a religious phenomenon, thus seeing the issue as one of spiritual disintegration in the West and the rise of a new spirit in the East. Brunner sees the growth of the secular world with horror. The loss of the religious dimension leads to the false antithesis of individual and society, which destroys the true picture of person in community and is the source of inhumanity in both modern capitalism and Communist totalitarianism. Tillich, Niebuhr and Barth acknowledge this secular maturity, and try to come to grips with it alongside the fact of revolution. Niebuhr and Barth are especially important for they, more than all the others turned the attention of Christians to the relative problems of humans living apart from every total ideology. But Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a student of both, gave Christianity the insight that the maturity of this technical world is a fact of God's providence before which revolutionaries and Christians must show the respect which reality demands. His thought will help synthesize an adequate theological approach to Communism.1

The mature world is neither ideal nor stable. Its eternal absolute bonds have been replaced with relative human ones with a gradual shift from dependence on divine activity to independent human

1Ibid., pp. 339f.
effort. It resists all attempts to push it back into dependence on any ideology as a violation of its encounters with immediate realities before it. The impact of Marxism has forced the world to realize that it has absolutized many principles which are really only working hypotheses, and that it is more enamoured than it knew of false religions which give security to some against the onslaught of others. Marx launched his revolution from the midst of this world of human problem-solving, against which Christianity has been able to avail little in calling men back to religious ideology.¹

Where is Christ in such a world as this? Bonhoeffer's answer combines Niebuhr and Barth. Christ reveals to us God's love, in the middle of this mature secular world and reconciles it to himself out of its sin and rebellion. It is not some explanation of the relations between a divine and a human realm; but the reality of God in Christ, and the reality of this world so loved by God. Bonhoeffer talks of the non-religious nature of the Christian faith in his Ethics, "The reality of God discloses itself only by setting me entirely in the reality of the world; but there I find the reality of the world, already always sustained, accepted, and reconciled in the reality of God."² In a few notes just before his death he compresses his ideas of the essence of what the encounter with the world involves (Letters and Papers from Prison):

Encounter with Jesus Christ. Experience that here a reversal of all human existence is found, in that Jesus exists only as 'the Man for others.' This 'being for others' of Jesus, is the experience of transcendence! Out of the freedom from himself, out of his 'being for others' unto death, springs his omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence. Faith is participation in this being of Jesus (incarnation, cross, resurrection).³

¹Ibid., p. 342.
²Ibid., p. 344.
³Ibid.
The encounter with the secular mature world to which the Christian is called is simply—to be a man, to share the being of Christ in the world, which means in the fullest sense to love the world, to be a part of it, to share its problems, its joys, its decisions, its successes, its failures—all of this to accompany his love, as one with Christ, who shares his being with others unto death.¹

It will be an encounter first of participation in common life, with the Christian trying to find at each point by prayer and action the reality, the service which is truth. He will express the Word of God in such human words that his colleagues will accept it.

This then is the encounter. How does theology meet the three questions asked of it: How far does Christian thought meet the challenge of Marxist ideology and criticism of religion? Does Christian thought meet the challenge of the Marxist doctrine of history? Is it effective in meeting the humanism of Marxism?

The Church cannot say, "Organize your understanding to such and such a world-view." It must say to the world,

Trust your experience and insight in the business of living with your neighbor and adjusting your life to his, precisely because you know how relative your life is and how little it has to do with absolute truth. Guard this relative, problem-solving understanding against every attempt to enslave it in any ideology, and against any passions such as hatred and fear.

The answer to this problem of ideology lies in the fact that God has become, in Christ, our neighbor. Niebuhr faces the world from an Old Testament position, with his emphasis on God's blessing and judgment over the life of men in all its variety and fullness.

¹Ibid.
particularly its social fullness. Barth stresses the New Testament with the reconciliation of the world in Christ, and this leads him in practice to a curious indifference to much that is truly human. He seems to forget the Christ who could weep over the city of Jerusalem. Each emphasis tends to be ideological without the counteraction of the other.¹

Bonhoeffer combines the Old Testament and the New Testament views of history in his theology. Christ is the goal and source of all history, but the concept of God's blessing on every aspect of its life fills out the picture for one who shares the tradition of a great society. The Christian will commend the Lord's coming as the goal of history by the free courage of his service to the welfare of the state or of its victims when no other hope moves men to do what they know to be right and necessary. He will commend it by the sensitivity of his insight and love for all that is human when all other hopes favour one group against another. He will commend it by the way in which he uses both the freedom under grace which Barth taught him, and the disciplined loving use of the heritage which is part of himself, which he learned from Bonhoeffer.²

In answer to the last question, the Church must be asked, "How can the Christian confront the political and economic world, not with any Christian ideal or program, but with Christ, so those engaged in the world may understand and serve the concrete needs of men in all their complexity and variety?" The Church is not a place of refuge; it is in the world and of the world. Christ reconciled the world unto himself. The Church is the community which knows this and lives from it in faith, in love, and hope. It

¹Ibid., p. 350. ²Ibid., p. 354.
receives the Word of God and is called to pass it on to the world. The Church exists for the world. It must create a community which follows the pattern of the Gospel and repents continually for its conformity to patterns of human sin. The dilemmas will have to be solved in Christian living rather than theory. It must attempt to combine in its practice politics and compassion. Only with prayer will this be possible. Bonhoeffer calls first for a hidden discipline, a renewal of the community of believers in prayer, study, and the discipline of Christian life in the world so it may become a living witness before it tries too much to speak to the world. If the Church fails, there still remains the Christian. He meets the Communist in politics with the same response as elsewhere: he will not be afraid to confess his faith by seeking new forms more adequate to human need for security and freedom; but, he will uphold that relative, realist, problem-solving approach of men so far as it serves the concrete needs of human beings for order, justice, impartial law, well-distributed economy and a balance of powers which minimizes exploitation, tyranny, and inequality.¹

This then is theology's answer to the Christian Encounter with Communism. This is the thinker's answer. It is a third way. The test of any theology comes in its practice, so it remains yet to examine the way it is working as practiced in East Germany where the Encounter is ever-present, and very real.

¹Ibid., p. 359.
Karl Barth downgrades the idea that in Communism Christians are confronted with a totalitarian force which demands constant vigilance. He is more concerned with the danger of anxiety, fear, and hate in the face of Communist pressure. This parallels his neutralist attitude to problems of Western defense against Communism. His central positive point is that Christians in the West owe the godless East, not a crusade, not a vaunting of their superior religion, justice, and wisdom, but the Word of the Cross, through which they also allow themselves to be renewed. The primary task of the Church is self-renewal, so Communist atheism will be deprived of the substance which their culture-Christianity gave it. The Church belongs between the East and the West seeking to preach the Gospel of reconciliation in Christ to both, seeking in all practical ways toward reconciliation and peace. He calls the present world situation a pure power struggle and calls the Church to seek a third way, which will also offer a third way to Europe. In this attempt to apply his theology to politics are reflected, on the most practical level, both the strengths and the weaknesses of this thought in the encounter with Communism.¹

¹Ibid., p. 304.
There are no easy rules in trying to serve God in a Marxist land, therefore discussion becomes more important, for it is in this interchange conducted in the light of Scripture that God can help His children to see His will more clearly. How to serve God in a Marxist land should concern all Christians, West as well as East, for at least two reasons: Christians in the West need to sympathetically become aware of what is happening to their Christian brethren all over the world, for when one suffers, all suffer (I Cor. 12:26); they have much to learn from the East German Christians' dilemmas, and they need to discover that not all the acute dilemmas are on one side of the Iron Curtain.  

Excerpts from Karl Barth's letter to an East German pastor on this problem of serving God in a Marxist land brought it sharply into focus for the West. This dispatch only reported a few extreme statements from the letter, which practically made Karl Barth a Communist informer. When seen in its entirety it creates quite a different impression. Karl Barth has never inspired any lukewarm reactions, and part of the value of something like this letter is that it invites vigorous answers. A great body of opinion has grown up around this letter of August, 1958. The Barmen Declaration, which Karl Barth authored, provided the rallying point for all those who fought for the integrity of Church and Gospel during the Nazi regime and even after its collapse when the German Churches invoked the Barmen Declaration as their "declaration of spiritual independence." In this letter to an East German pastor, Barth seemingly

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1Barth, Karl and Hamel, Johannes, op. cit., p. 12. From the introductory essay by Robert McAfee Brown.

2Ibid.
read into the East German situation his own understanding of constitutional freedom. It would seem that he could not give such advice if he knew conditions in East Germany. Yet, he does know the situation well. His advice reflects one important point: It is a well-founded fear that the Christian Gospel may be identified with the "western way of life," and that the political-economic contest between East and West may become a "holy war" in which all the demons are on one side and the angels on the other. This point is in line with Barmen, for the task of the Church is to proclaim injustice wherever it is found and to proclaim fearlessly the Word of God, and to summon all men to repentance and obedience to His eternal law. Karl Barth deserves thanks for this timely reminder, but in seeking to convey this warning he greatly minimized the demonic forces working within the Communist structure. Their professed aim is to destroy Christianity and the Church and they are backed by the power of a totalitarian government. Even if the German people are reaping the benefits of earlier sins, the facts of the present situation are not changed. Because this may be a scourge of God visited upon the German people because of their early blindness to the demons in National Socialism is no reason for the German people to commit the same mistake again. Barth seems as blind to Communist demons as the Germans were in 1934 to Nazi demons.¹

To understand Barth one must understand a little of the history of his theology. One must remember that his was a most courageous opposition to Nazism, and that his opposition to Nazism was a political decision prescribed by the decision of faith. It was

¹Solberg, op. cit., pp. 278ff.
necessary that the church pray for its destruction and the mainten-
ance of a just state. It must also act, even bearing arms against
injustice. Barth's theology leads to anything but ethical quietism,
as the West, particularly the United States, has it stereotyped.
Rather, dogmatics and ethics are very closely tied and in his Church
Dogmatics he deals explicitly with such matters as marriage, war,
suicide, and many others. His theology is precisely an attempt to
show how at all points a gracious God relates himself to man's
situation and how man is to live in the light of this. Because of
his reaction to Naziism and his theology toward it, many people
expected him to attack the Communists at the end of World War II.
He did not. In fact he began again to turn out writings, which took
a different line on Communism. In an article "The Church between
East and West" first appearing in Unterwegs in 1949, Barth gave some
of his reasons for not engaging in an all-out offensive against
Communism. He feels that the struggle since World War II is basic-
ally a struggle between the United States and Russia, each wanting
to master the other, with Europe caught between. The Christian
must not take fright, nor take part in the conflict. It is not a
real conflict but merely a power-struggle. Neither side is con-
vincing in their charges and counter-charges. The only possible
way is a third way. Barth tries to explain why he does not consider
the Communists in the same light as the Nazis. He tries to discrim-
inate between Communism in practice and the Communist ideology. He
attacks the West, increasingly since 1949. He does not think
Western democracy much better than Eastern communism. Another
difference he sees is that Communism makes no pretense at being
Christian while Nazism attempted to present itself as a new form of salvation for German people, with a new messiah, a new gospel, and all the rest. Many Christian pastors preached this from the pulpit. Communism is not anti-Christian, just coldly non-Christian. It is godless. Thus it is not the same kind of threat to the message of the Church. The Church's real task is to call men back to humanity.¹

In 1948, a pastor in East Germany, writing on behalf of a group of his colleagues wrote to Barth and asked his advice about proclaiming the Gospel behind the Iron Curtain. The famous "Letter to a Pastor in the German Democratic Republic" was his answer. Most of his letter is a compelling setting-forth of a biblical basis for living in the midst of a time of trouble. This will have relevance long after one set of specific problems has been replaced by another. This is still God's world despite all signs to the contrary. It is impossible not to feel Barth's positive faith in the gospel of God's sovereign grace. There is joyousness in God's service no matter where one may be. The Christian should have no regrets that he must rely simply upon the Word and the Spirit. These are his true weapons and only in using them does the Church resist or remain firm in the faith.²

In his letter Barth uses many biblical references to put across his theology. In I Peter, 5:9, the congregations are challenged to "resist, ... firm in faith." The passage immediately preceding identifies the adversary as "the devil who prowls around like a lion, seeking someone to devour." To many in East Germany

¹Ibid., pp. 27ff. ²Ibid., pp. 30ff.
this "adversary" is Communism, but to identify this "lion" with Communism itself is to fall into an error arising from a dangerous optical illusion. Those who make this error, immediately conclude that the "resistance" required is openly or subtly active "anti-Communism." Really it is more complicated. Communism has a good deal to do with that "adversary," but only in so far as it takes on the role of a tempter, capable of seducing and misleading people (particularly Christians) into wrong attitudes and reactions toward themselves, into godlessness of action which is truly atheism. Only so far is it to be identified with the lion which prowls the East, and this communism must be resisted.¹

But the communist adversary is not the only one. The West, too, would like to dissuade the Christian community from doing what makes it a Christian community,

Its proclamation to the world—and in no uncertain terms—of the strange witness that disconcerts the world: that God's kingdom is near at hand, that its ultimate revelation is on the way; that God's all-conquering reign even now is over all the kingdoms of man—economic, political, cultural and religious as well.²

There is "hostility to Christ" in the West as well as in the East, although in a different form. It goes against the grain of the world to hear the Church's message that Christ is the sum and substance of a coming reign. It is embarrassing to both East and West. It is opposed and all but overcome by both Eastern and Western inanity and nonsense.

Among you an open totalitarianism; among us a creeping totalitarianism; there an omnipotent party, propaganda and police; here, an equally omnipotent press and system of private enterprise, pretentiousness and

¹Ibid., "Letter to an East German Pastor," pp. 49ff.
²Ibid., p. 52.
public opinion. But for our witness' sake we are to 'resist ... firm in faith.' Christians need to resist in the West, too. Perhaps in both East and West they just fail to see what form that resistance should take. On both sides it is difficult for the Christian to find and follow the narrow path which is his one and only path. How to stand up against the unending pressures toward voluntary conformity without its being obstinancy or fruitless opposition? How to hold to the gospel of free grace, as unpopular as it is in both East and West? This burden is common to both the East and the West.  

The only thing any Christian can do in the East or the West, is to get back to the ABC's of the Christian faith--to believe in God, and therefore Christ, above all things; to acknowledge Him in all things as the eternal One; to risk his life, and the life of his society in the belief that all good things come from Him, and that all things that come from Him are good. God above all things! This is the one key the Christian has.

Even the power under which man lives is a tool of God, perhaps one of punishment for past sins. Only God sits in the judgment seat. This gracious and merciful God wills that the whole of mankind be saved and come to the knowledge of truth. His judgment is always and everywhere beneficient and its effect an expression of His love. Will this socialism improve? Perhaps, but if not, the one who hopes in the God who is above this socialism and uses it for His purposes will not be disappointed. The Christian can depend on

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1Rose Marie Oswald Barth translator, "Karl Barth's Own Words," Christian Century, Vol. 76 (March 25, 1959), p. 352. The words are different in this article than in the book.
2Barth and Hamel, op. cit., p. 53.
3Ibid.
His showing him new ways. Maybe both those in the East and those in the West are to do justice to the Soli Deo Gloria in a new spirit of humility, openness, and willingness. Perhaps those in the East are especially called to show the rest of Christianity how a church lives that locks for and finds a new way, one that is a church for (not of) the people.¹

God above atheism and materialism! The propaganda of neither can hurt God or actually a single human being. The bubble of materialism will burst when the time comes, as the bubble of idealism has already burst. Atheism cannot be taken seriously except in so far as it rests on misconceptions, for which Christianity is largely responsible. People cannot escape God just by reading themselves out, by saying they are a-theistic. They cannot deny the living God for they do not know Him, nor can they wrest other humans from His hands. However "a-theistically" any human behaves, a Christian does not think of him as strong, but rather, just refuses to believe in his undertaking. The Christian must remember that all humans belong to God. Certainly God is not against them. The Christian is to witness to them of Christ, who died and arose for them, too. The Christian does not fear totalitarianism (which is legalistic and therefore totalitarian in a godless and inhuman fashion) for one day it will reach its limits, where its office holders will stop or be destroyed. Grace is totalitarian. It is all embracing. In a sense the opposite of the totalitarianism which sets up a cunning snare of theses and antitheses and uses every device to have them recognized and crushes any opposition.²

¹Ibid., pp. 54f.
²Ibid., p. 56.
Free grace wins its victories and establishes its reign in the heart of men. "It does not retaliate; it forgives. It does not subjugate; it raises up. It does not provoke bitterness, does not kill; it heals, binds up the wounds, is merciful like the good Samaritan." Where law is supreme the good turns into evil in both the East and the West. Where grace reigns, evil is invariably transformed into good. If one believes in grace, one can see the crucial weakness of the system in power—it only knows law. This means the powers-that-be cannot be opposed on their own grounds. They cannot be opposed with even a delicate inhumanity and atheism. In attempting to follow the rule of an eye for an eye, the Christian community would cease to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. She cannot develop an ecclesiastical as against a governmental legalism. She cannot match a materialistic with a Christian view, match socialist mores and politics with a Christian counter-project, counter party or police power with the claim to synodal authority, or parallel a Marxist litany, with a magic of her own. She can only "start out from and fall back upon the fact that love is the fulfillment of the law, that love is the doer of the good which necessarily eludes those who put their trust in the law." This is the only "firm . . . faith" basis of church resistance. She can never resist on a basis of forcing anyone to accept any kind of principles or dogmas. "She will plead, admonish, comfort. Sometimes she will declare her faith boldly, ready to do battle; again she will maintain a significant silence and stand aside. But always she will be serving God and man. Never will she act as if she would or could dispose of God and man." The Church cannot

1Ibid., pp. 58f. 2Ibid., p. 60. 3Ibid.
cease to resist in this sense. She will resist in both East and West in this way effectually. The Christian everywhere must fear and love God's free grace above all things.¹

God and His free grace are really above all the usual practices by which Christians are used to living, seemingly serving both God and the salvation of man. Christians have taken for granted so much: a church with a comfortable social position, tolerated by the state; Sunday a recognized holiday; the chief church festivals having left an impact on the people as a whole, baptism, confirmation, marriage, burials, "the Christian landmarks of the milieu and the existence of Mr. Everyman--means whereby the church has liked to reassure herself again and again of her indispensability!"²; influence of the church in education; the prestige of her position among other social and cultural institutions; the formal recognition of the church's freedom to discuss general human concerns. It seems very natural that the proclamation of Christ's gospel continue in this same channel, and that the Christian must do his utmost to preserve it for God's sake and the gospel. Christians were motivated by the idea that each and every citizen must understand and appreciate the Christian cause and confession, or at the very least that they must have free practice of "religion." Is the world obligated to grant to Christianity the right to that form of existence in its midst? What is happening in East Germany seems to cancel this whole bill of rights.

The time seems near when the church in this form of existence will no longer have any place at all. The church will be foreign, despised and greatly suspect in the eyes of state and society. Membership in the church and confession

¹Ibid., p. 61.
²Ibid.
of Christian faith will greatly jeopardize life's opportunities for individuals from school age onward. Your freedom of movement will be restricted to a minimum, and all that you are commissioned to do as a church will be done only in corners, in the shadow, with constant interference, harassment and sabotage from without.¹

Can Christianity fulfill its task only in the light of at least public tolerance, with the help of a national church, as a strong pillar among others in the social structure, only when it has a legal claim on every citizen? Were the early churches permitted this, or were they promised this for any time? It is certain that something resembling an end to the Christian Era is beginning to show dimly everywhere, sharply in the East. The church does not have to possess the same form. Perhaps God, to the Christian's discomfort, but to His glory and for man's salvation will put an end to this mode of existence because it lacks integrity and has lost its usefulness.²

If the Christian but listens, God will show him new ways which he cannot anticipate. Barth closes this part of his letter:

Might it not be, dear brothers and sisters in the imperiled East Zone, that you there and we here are now to do justice to the old Soli Dei Gloria in an entirely new spirit of humility, openness, and readiness? Might it not be your special calling to be a living example for the rest of us of how a church lives that seeks for and perhaps has already entered upon a new way, of a church for, not of, the people—the church in 'God's beloved (deeply beloved!) East Zone'?³

In the remainder of his letter he deals with specific questions put to him by the East German pastors. In answer to the question, "Is it disobedience to long for reunification patterned after the West?" he advises that it depends on what the Christian puts first. Life in the West has many real advantages, but give obedience first place. The other voice longing for an easier life should have a

¹Ibid., p. 63. ²Ibid., p. 64. ³Ibid., p. 65.
lower place in a Christian's thinking and doing. To the question
"Can we take the loyalty oath to the East German government?" he
says, "Yes," even though he admits he does not know the wording of
the oath, for loyalty here means recognizing its existence, not
approving its ideology nor approval of all its doings, and reserving
the right of resistance, since there is loyal opposition. The
question, "Should we 'pray away' the government?" brings the answer
that if they did, God might answer in a terrible way by perhaps
making them be committed to the "American way of life." It would
be more fruitful to pray for their government. He is asked, "Can
curtailment of freedom to speak out be reason for resistance?" In
response he advises that only God can proclaim this freedom for His
Word. The Church cannot do this. It is a gift of God's free grace.
This curtailment is a divine work of love, and it is advisable not
to resist. The pastors wrote that the tense situation was affecting
them and leading to differences among them, and asked if it was
their duty to maintain inner solidarity rather than trying to make
their own better knowledge prevail. Barth tells them that the
question is wrongly stated. That all should be willing to start
again with the ABC's of Christianity, the Word of God, forgetting
their differences. Christians must be willing to see what the
gospel tells them here and now. Be open minded, let it speak. Much
that seems "better knowledge" will fall by the wayside, and thus
a new genuine solidarity will emerge. The Word will do it. He is
asked, "Is not self-defense of the Church laid upon us, and do not
'peace pastors' who want 'to invade the world with the love of Christ,'
rob us of opportunity to proclaim the gospel?" He advises that the
Church is not permitted self-defense, nor legal claim to freedom to speak out and get a public hearing. The Church is busy with unceasing prayer and work to proclaim its good news. Maybe here are new spheres and opportunities for the Church to witness. Some of the "peace pastors" may be collaborists, but for the East German pastors the word is, eyes only toward Jerusalem. He was asked to give the pastors a criterion to judge if the hour has struck for the Church, and if that hour is decisive. In answer he advises that it has not struck yet or they would not be asking for a criterion. It may take place over a long period of time with slow liberation from structures and the opening of new opportunities. The pastors are to be ready for any such openings through prayer. These may perhaps be small steps at a time. The eighth and final question was stated previously in relation to the dismissal of East German pastors when they fled to the West.¹

One might question Barth, "Is there really so little at stake between East and West?" Reinhold Niemoeller in criticizing him claims that he wants a pure choice between something all good and something all evil. "Is America equally so utterly chauvinistic and morally flabby as he maintains?" To some he seems more anti-American than pro-anything. "Why the shift in his attitude from the days of Naziism to those of Communism?" Karl Barth has given no penetrating criticism of Communism,¹ although he indicates that he is unhappy with it, by saying, "How can I write to you without revealing that I disapprove just as much the spirit, and the words, the methods, and the practices of the system under which you live, as I do the powers and dominions that rule over us here in the West?"

¹Ibid. pp. 66-80. ²Ibid., p. 36.
He goes on to say that he could bear it if this statement lost him his reputation in many places in East Germany as being a "progressive theologian."  

On the credit side, this letter is an attempt to find a word from the Lord. This is an attempt to listen to Scripture as addressed to churches under persecution (I Peter) and to Jews in captivity (Jeremiah 29). The advice to the Jews from Jeremiah when they were in captivity in Babylon is this:

Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. Takes wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare. (Jeremiah 29: 5-7)

The question will always remain for the Christian, which portion of Scripture speaks most clearly for today.  

Barth does not want to speak out against Communism because he might immediately be picked up by crude anti-Communists. "Our anti-Communism, however justified on some levels it may be, is usually clothed with self-righteous pro-Americanism which is certainly impossible to justify in the light of the gospel." He is surely right in cringing before the unholy alliance between America and God's will. Americans need to thank Karl Barth for showing them how many Europeans regard them, whether fairly and justly or not. There must be some relationship to the truth, and American Christians should look at this guilt, with intent to repent, for this is surely the image they have projected on the world. Evil is much more dangerous when it masquerades as good. It may be that in the

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1Ibid., p. 48.  
2Ibid., pp. 37f.  
3Ibid., p. 41.  
4Ibid.
long sweep of history American self-righteousness may have a worse effect on mankind than the overt evil of Communism. Just because this seems so strange an idea to the American Christian may show the forces of evil at work in the West. "The one who thinks that the adversary is only communism will already have lost the battle, for he will have blinded himself to the possibility of seeing the adversary that exists within his own heart."  

Also in this book, published in English for the first time is Johannes Hamel's very short answer to Karl Barth's letter, and his "The Proclamation of the Gospel in the Marxist World." The latter is a notable addition to the materials available on the problem of the Church in a world dominated by the Marxist gospel. Pastor Hamel knows whereof he speaks. He has been proclaiming the Gospel in the Marxist world for more than a decade. For ten years he was pastor to students at the University of Halle, where often he had Bible classes of over 1,000 students. He has been imprisoned for his convictions. Certainly his courage has earned him the right to be heard. 

In his answer to Barth, he tells him that his letter gave offense in East Germany, and in the West he is considered a Communist fellow-traveler. He tells him that pastors in the East are engaged in a struggle for freedom on two fronts, their own loveless hearts, and a massive outside attack on faith, witness, and obedience. And in the light of this,

Best of all, your letter gives us courage to read the Bible, to preach, to bear witness, and to make free decisions. The unhindered proclamation of the gospel in the Marxist world and the joyful obedience amidst a world that likes to

1 Ibid., p. 43.  
2 Ibid., p. 13.
display atheism—certainly a painstaking and risky task, desperate and driving to despair—are strengthened and affirmed in your letter.¹

Most Americans having been brought up on vigorous anti-Communist propaganda feel that the gospel cannot be proclaimed in a Marxist land, and that anybody who stays and tries to do so must by that very act have sold out to those in power. They feel that a really prophetic Christian must either be captured or escape to the West where religion is respected, but it is not necessarily prophetic to be preaching in safety, to leave a difficult situation where God has placed one in order to avoid dangers which may result. Some day this story may be told and it will be an epic chapter on the Church of Christ under persecution. Christians in the West must first realize that they are not morally entitled to condemn those in the East for what they easily assume to have been capitulation to a totalitarian state. They must listen to what those Christians say about what they are trying to do. One of Pastor Hamel's main points is, "This world is God's world; and Marxism must therefore be understood as something which exists within God's world, and which cannot ultimately and finally threaten God's sovereignty."²

Pastor Hamel finds that there is an alternative to revolt or alignment, where it is necessary for the Church to walk a precarious path which presents real opportunities for the Church and its proclamation of the gospel. Four facets of this approach are: these governments are God's instruments; they are agents of God's judgment and thus a call to Christian repentance; God can work good

¹Ibid., Hamel's answer to Karl Barth, p. 83.
²Ibid., Introduction, p. 15.
out of what appears to be evil; God is Lord of history, and the Christian may have to witness right in the midst of Babylon. The real issue is whether the Christian Church in the Marxist world can really believe that God meets her in these encounters with Marxists. God uses even unwilling servants. Christians must not refuse to listen to a criticism of the Church just because made by non-believers. There is absolute necessity for repentance in the life of the Church. Behind this criticism of the Church, Christians must listen for the voice of God. This frees a Christian from being a fellow-traveler of either Marxism or anti-Marxism. One sees why Hamel is so enthusiastic about the relevance which the Bible has for Christians behind the Iron Curtain. Christians inside the Marxist orbit must address the gospel to Marxists, unless they are going to be irrelevant in the situation where God has put them.

Hamel is wrestling with a contemporary problem in the light of biblical faith, of the whole history of the people of God, and his starting point is the Bible, not either Marxist ideology or democratic ideology. God rules all the world, and the Christian must always keep this in mind when viewing any human he meets. He must keep in mind that through every situation God is doing and saying something. This is incontestably biblical. Hamel is not saying anything new, but rather looking at the whole history of God's people in the light of both the Old and New Testaments. In the New Testament, particularly Paul’s letter to the Colossians, Chapter 1:16-17, "For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities or powers: all things

1Ibid., pp. 16f. 2Ibid., p. 17.
were created by him and for him: and he is before all things, and by him all things consist." And verses 19 and 20, "For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell; and having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven." Verses 27 and 28, "To whom (his saints) God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory: Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus."

In turning to Pastor Hamel's "The Proclamation of the Gospel in the Marxist World," one finds that the fundamental questions start with, "Does the Church in a Marxist land hear her own gospel in its sovereignty?" If so, she will recognize her position and undertake her task. If the government is judged in terms of a stereotype of ecclesiastical, social, political, and cultural conditions, she will neither see her situation nor her task. Does she deny the total sovereignty of God over everything in heaven and earth? If so, she grants Marxists the right to declare themselves atheistic and to act accordingly. Or does the Church proclaim publicly and privately that all powers and principalities are overcome already by the resurrection of Christ? Does the Church want to accept Marxism on the strength of its own proclamations? If so, this will reinforce its atheism.

The accounts of the life of the Church in the East remind one of reports of flood disasters. Only a few things remain spared.

1Ibid., p. 18.

2Ibid., Johannes Hamel, "The Proclamation of the Gospel in the Marxist World," published a few months prior to Barth's letter, p. 87.
and for how long? A view such as this bars the holder from hearing the voice of the gospel. His fear of the evil spirits may swallow up his fear and trust in God. An analysis of Marxism in the light of their own words proclaims the lie of a powerful rival god.¹

Hamel takes four periods in the history of the Jews and the Christians, under Babylonia, Assyria, Persia, and the Roman emperor, to prove his point that a Christian's way is neither for nor against, nor a middle line between the extremes. Rather it is to recognize that this is God's world, and in these rulers a Christian meets God himself. It is very hard for Christians to admit this. They have always been terrified to think they might meet God's "rod of anger" in the form of a godless government, and that this government may be the servant of God. Paul calls even the Roman tax-collectors "God's servants." In Revelation 13 the Church which suffers under the anti-Christian beast is given the consolation that it is allowed authority only for forty-two months, and the Church is told to have the faith and endurance of saints. God has determined the limits of the beast's power. "If anyone is to be taken captive, to captivity he goes; if anyone is slain with the sword, with the sword must he be slain." (According to the ancient, correct version) The passion story presents the same good news. Jewish authorities are proclaimed and accepted as the executors of God's plan of salvation (Matthew 26: 1ff.). Christ tells Pilate in John's account that the Roman governor would have had no power over Him "unless it had been given you from above" (John 18: 36ff. and 19:11).²

¹Ibid. ²Ibid., pp. 92f.
The rule of an idolatrous power may put an end to their worship and their faith and may endanger their existence, but a new era of redemption is promised for this people and all who live in this estranged world. In the midst of persecutions the Lord makes it possible to do good, preserve justice, maintain a greater or lesser degree of human freedom, and to be active in human affairs. To prove this Hamel here used the previously quoted portions of Jeremiah's letter to the Jews in captivity (page 203, from Jer. 29). The pious of all time argue quite logically from the reality of idolatry and its ideology. They say the existence of the Church is impossible because all of life is exposed to the claims of idolatry. They recognize, by this position, the idolatry and end up with an imaginary god. They sometimes become zealots bent on exterminating the godless. "But the proclamation of the gospel indicates the room for daily prayer, daily faith and action—and suffering."¹

The positive attitude of the New Testament describes the responsibilities of the governments and what the Church is to contribute—to have faith, to be obedient, to pray. They tell the Christian the truth that God will use governments in spite of their idolatry and that the life and actions of Christians are meaningful under the guidance of those governments. There is often room for Christians to do good, well-pleasing things, even though theoretically these systems seem to leave no loopholes. As long as the Church confesses His name, she will not be overcome by the gates of hell.²

To understand how to proclaim the gospel in a Marxist world,

¹Ibid., p. 98. ²Ibid., p. 99.
one must first free oneself of the mistaken reaction of the predominant Christian middle class to the political power structures of Marxism. On both sides of the Iron Curtain is the unquestioned assumption that "Bolshevism" spells the end of freedom, humanitarianism, culture, and Christendom. In point of fact a person enjoys a great deal of freedom under Marxism compared to that under the Hitler regime.¹

If we hear the gospel today, we shall not be concerned with our defense against the numerous and frightful attacks on church, Christendom and godliness. Before ever we define our attitude with regard to these attacks, we shall have to face God's salutary attack on His people by means of these men and these powers. He smites us in mercy, and the means He chooses are wholly secondary. He does not abandon us to our evil intentions which draw condemnation upon us. He throws us into such a whirl that we risk losing our wits. He drives us out of our foul and rotten ecclesiastical palaces of past centuries and forces us through our 'servants' to become strangers and pilgrims, wandering to meet their Lord. He comes to clean His house with an iron broom—and how much less important is the broom beside him who handles it.²

Both sides in the conflict, East and West, have substituted faith for a world-view, judgment for listening, and a self-styled position for obedience. No wonder the Church is aimlessly drifting. The political powers in both East and West will trick the Church, and she will break apart into hostile parties because she refuses the solidarity of a common listening to the Word. The Christians place upon political decisions their stamp of religious approval. In the West the fear of the further spread of Communism makes it necessary for the Church to produce the ethical and philosophical attitude for resistance; in the East Christians are fascinated by the Marxist world, its rapid rise to power, and its obvious progress.

¹Ibid., p. 100. ²Ibid., pp. 103f.
and this leads to mental and spiritual surrender to this imposing reality, and to a Christian party line about the world revolutionary movement.¹

Is the Church prepared to accept God's judgment as it comes to her in these powers? God is appearing here himself to judge. Are Christians examining themselves critically? Does their preaching break through Marxist criticism to the far more serious, merciful, and wholesome divine criticism? Christians cannot accept their criticisms as valid, nor defend themselves against all attacks.

Most Christians probably believe that no Christian could accept Karl Marx. It is not so absurd, for these circles are sensitive to the corruption of the Church as revealed by Marx and they are determined to renew within the Marxist world the religious and moral values of Christianity. Then there is the counter-movement, inside and outside the Marxist world. They admit the faults of the Church, but see in Marxism nothing but the final attack of atheism and the antichrist and call for resistance, even to military defense.

Only the proclamation of repentance can heal the hopeless and devastating divisions which today threaten the existence of church and humanity. God himself enters into judgment with us in the encounter with Marxism. He is the smelter who wants to separate pure from impure. He struggles for the renewal of the church, calling her from her long-standing sins in shame and remorse. We cannot confuse Marxism with God's judgment and appeal. Therefore nothing is accomplished by seeking salvation for the church in the acceptance of its criticism and by participation in its movement.²

Neither is it sufficient to admit the sins of the existing church, which she has naturally "since all men are sinners." The Christian cannot limit the evil spirits to one form of human rebellion against God. Professor Hromadka once stated that one does not need to fear

¹Ibid., p. 107. ²Ibid., p. 113.
a godless world but rather a godless and unbelieving church.¹

In repentance the Christian will gain the narrow path where he is free from being either a fellow-traveler of Marxists or their enemy. The Church is not concerned with the preservation or recovery of the status quo but solely with advancement of the gospel. Sometimes Christians are discouraged and wonder if the Marxists are right, that the bell tolls for the Christian Church. Maybe the end of Christian civilization does mean the end of the Christian faith. Who would not like to give up sometimes? The Western world is attractive, where Christianity is protected. In spite of this Christians there seem incapable of taking advantage of this much larger scope for their activities in behalf of the gospel. The problem of acceptance of the gospel is no less pressing in the West than in the Marxist world.²

Living in the Marxist world, nothing stands between the Christian and the biblical Word. The Bible speaks to his situation. Unless he closes his eyes he is bound to see that God is announcing a new day of evangelism. If he listens to the gospel, he can hear only this and nothing else.³

Is the Christian in East Germany grumbling? Does he prefer his unbelief and the "fleshpots of Egypt?" Does fear of man prevent him from proclaiming the gospel? Is his mind so captured by possible coming catastrophe that he no longer looks for the coming Lord who will make a new heaven and a new earth? The Marxist government acts as God's servant and creates a certain measure of order, peace, justice, freedom, and humanity. A Christian can take his place

¹Ibid., p. 114. ²Ibid., p. 117. ³Ibid., p. 118.
in East Germany and work for good and avoid evil. Christians are never beyond God's reach, even under the Marxists.¹

A Christian is never relieved of political responsibility. He must use every opportunity open to him in a given situation to work for justice, humanity, freedom, and peaceful coexistence and against barbarism, slavery and the tyranny of one group over another. Those Christians and churches in the West have a much more open field in the political life of their countries, for basing their lives on God's command and for making known their views in public. The Church must never be content with the status quo. This applies no matter how Christian a state may say it is or how privileged the Church is. The Church must be suspicious of any attempt to cover up human malice in the name of Christ.²

This is no time for the Church to give up in the Marxist world on the basis that everything is lost. An obedient Church is always on the side of those who suffer injustice. Faith in Christ opens possibilities everywhere for responsible action. Even if some day, and the fear is justified, there is no room at all for Christians to participate even in a general way in political life in a Marxist land, according to their insights, the Church owes the gospel of salvation to her fellow men and her rulers. This action takes absolute priority over any other. The witness of the Church always remains.³

But if the church outside the Marxist world does not recognize that the Marxists are first and last those to whom the gospel must be addressed, the witness of the church inside the Marxist world loses its credibility, and becomes rightly suspect, a mere tactics. The

¹Ibid., p. 120. ²Ibid., p. 122. ³Ibid., p. 124.
realization of this fact by the church outside would result in a change of her speaking about and against Marxism and of her actions in political affairs.¹

Barth and Hamel both viewed Nazism as a demonic power which must be opposed as an instrumentality of evil. They do not so see Marxism. The question arises here; can the Christian be as sure as he might like to be that these specific events are the ways in which God is positively working out his purposes, when these events may be ones in which God's purposes will be at least temporarily thwarted if His children do not rise up in protest? Where does the Christian draw the line between capitulation to a government which may be evil, and revolt against a government which may be a relatively good one, or can one walk a different way as Hamel suggests, a biblical-politics way?²

Despite Barth's ineptitude in the field of social and political decision, it was he who fundamentally liberated European Protestant theology from bondage to one political ideology and from the basically escapist division of life into the two kingdoms of grace and law. In the tradition of the Reformation he has opened the way for a Christian dynamic in political life which made a Christian encounter with Communism possible at all. Paul Tillich and the religious socialists pointed out the religious and prophetic qualities in the socialist movement and provided a deeper understanding of Marxism, but Barth provided the elements of Christological understanding of the state, a free direct approach to human beings and their welfare, and knowledge of the crisis of Christian obedience in the political realm. These are the areas where the most fruitful encounter takes place in Europe today.³

¹Ibid., p. 126. ²Ibid., Introductory essay, p. 23. ³West, op. cit., p. 304.
The most illuminating example in practice is the encounter of the Evangelical Church with Communism in East Germany. This means first that the Christian cannot on principle reject the authority of any state, but second his recognition is never total and the Church rejects the right of any government to demand unconditional obedience. On this basis the Church has resisted with all its power especially the state's pressure on the minds of youth and other citizens. Always, however, not the principle but justice to the human being is the issue, which is the true function of the state. This is an illustration of the direct approach to human beings in politics which is the strength of this Christian witness to an ideology which tries to hide these realities. Third, the Christian finds himself in solidarity with the oppressed, the poor, and the suffering. He is on their side, with God, against the oppressing powers, and warns these powers of the judgment of God in the resistance and resentment of their victims. The Church took every occasion in relation to the demonstrations of June 17, 1953, to declare its solidarity with the suffering of the workers and to protest against the measures taken to suppress it, calling injustice by its name. However, the pastors have repeatedly had to speak out against a spirit of hatred and revenge. Finally, the possibility of revolution is not completely ruled out, as it is in Lutheran orthodoxy. The question must be put to every plan, whether it serves the "welfare of the city," whether it stands a chance of producing more justice and order than it destroys. Responsible Christian leaders have almost unanimously opposed revolutionary activity in the present situation in East Germany because the people are not spiritually suited for guerilla warfare, there is
no reasonable hope of success in the face of Russian strength, and participation in underground warfare wastes lives of young idealists whose courage is needed at other points, and it disintegrates the character of participants with its hate, terror, revenge, lies, and espionage as weapons against the same evils of Communism.

Barth himself fails to synthesize the elements of his own theology when he encounters Communism in the political arena, but Helmut Gollwitzer, who is a follower of his, is more successful.

To Professor Gollwitzer of the Free University of Berlin, a very popular theological writer and lecturer, it does not appear that atheism is essential to Communism except as the foundation for the "messianic" hope for a future perfect society. The closer the Communists come to realizing their goals the less need they will have for atheism. If the Church could stop defending its old position in society and look instead for new forms of expression.

\[1\] Ibid., pp. 307ff.

\[2\] It is interesting to note here that Dr. Helmut Gollwitzer has been appointed successor to Karl Barth, who is retiring because of his age of seventy-five and to finish his massive *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, as lecturer at Basel University. He did not take over immediately largely due to a hassle between Switzerland's two traditional city rivals, Zurich and Basel, over his politics. Zurich papers branded him pro-Communist because he opposed West German rearmament, atomic weapons and Adenauer's policies in general. Basel's National-Zeitung jumped to his defense: "This man is a radical Christian in the original sense of the word, who believes that Christ did not die on the Cross to serve as a mascot for political parties in the twentieth century." Gollwitzer is almost unknown in the world of scholarship but is emerging as a man after Barth's own heart. One Barthian said, "Gollwitzer is not out to support those who would like to sweeten their political coffee with the sugar of Western Christian culture." As reported in "Yes and No in Basel," *Time* (July 14, 1961), p. 40.
and witness, a whole new era might open to the Church. Gollwitzer feels that the Church aim should not be simply to outlast Communism, but to make a positive contribution to the society where it is placed. It should seek to humanize the society and to protect the dignity and freedom of the individual.\(^1\) To him, every Christian decision in politics involves both the absolute of hearing and obeying God's word and the relative thinking-through of technical questions. The crisis is the relationship between the two, therefore, particular political decisions are not absolutes. The Christian has the task of testing the spirits which different people and groups show in relating the commandment of God to their practical reason, to see which does or does not confess that Christ is Lord. Gollwitzer pleads for an area of Christian thinking between the theological commandment itself and political policy in practice, in which the Church as a prophetic group can give guidance for political life which suggests the lines of a new more creative human society, or revitalizes forgotten truths and values.

Gollwitzer has liberated Barth's thinking from the prison of a too absolute crisis thinking and given it proper dignity as a creative ethical force, by a synthesis of Barth's theological elements. In the light of Gollwitzer, Barth's weakness in this encounter with Communism is that the encounter of his whole life has been not with concrete persons and their problems, but with philosophical systems and movements of culture. He fails to grasp and neglects the real human problems involved, the struggles of real people—school children, students, workers, farmers, intellectuals, and all who daily must decide how much to sacrifice in order to tell some degree of the

\(^1\) Solberg, op. cit., p. 282.
truth—and to talk past them. Barth remains to this day a stranger in the political area of human life. It takes the contributions of Gollwitzer, and the experiences of the East German Christians, such as Pastor Haznel, to enable Christians to see how all that is human can be understood and cultivated in the political realm when they know the state as Barth teaches them to know it, in a threefold manner as _Ordo Redemptoris_, as a place of men's free response to God's grace, and as the place of critical encounter with other spirits and powers than that of the Holy Spirit.¹

The detached theorizing of Gollwitzer and the counseling of Barth still leave many questions unanswered for the Christian living with Communism each day. Implicit in their questions is the problem of setting limits to the authority of the Marxist State. The individual Christian is entitled to receive advice as to whether allegiance to the State and obedience to its laws are compatible with Christianity. Romans 13 has always presented a problem to the Christian Church. Most German theologians are agreed that the German Democratic Republic is a valid government in the sense of Romans 13. Since it has become apparent that the Communist Regime is here to stay for some time, this is no longer a sufficient answer. There must be an answer to what is Caesar's law and what is God's law and to which does the Christian owe his first obedience. Professor Hamel's answer is the most arresting interpretation of a Christian's role in a Marxist land.² He has been trying to apply Barth and Gollwitzer's theology in a practical way to the totalitarian East German government and the Christians living under it.

¹West, _op. cit._, pp. 318ff. ²Solberg, _op. cit._, pp. 283f.
CHAPTER XII

A PASTOR DEFINES THE CHRISTIAN'S WAY

East Germany differs from other communist satellites in two very important ways. First, Communism has encountered here for the first time a people formed in spirit by the Church of the Reformation, where five-sixths of the population belongs to the Evangelical Church. It is a church proud to be called a church of the Word of God preached and obeyed. It has not always been true to this character, but out of its conflict with Hitler the Church was reformed and found its Word again. The leaders of this church knew at first hand about the methods and purposes of an ideological dictatorship, but they also knew that God's free word is the answer to such rule. In Pastor Hamel's words it is "like a hammer which smashes the greatest rocks," that it takes away men's fear and slavery and forms them into churches of free and witnessing men. Therefore the Church has refused to retreat into the realm of cultic practices which the Communists are quite ready to allow. It has engaged this new ideology, as it did the old, with the question of truth.1 It goes deeply against the grain of the German conscience, even if trained only by the secondary influence of morals, customs and habit, to be forced to lie in all phases of his life. Another

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1Johannes Hamel, A Christian in East Germany. (Naperville, Ill.; S. C. M. Press Ltd., 1960), Translated by Ruth and Charles C. West, pp. 10f., from the introduction by the Wests.
aspect of this East German encounter with Communism which one must bear in mind is that for centuries the German people had not only harsh discipline and occasional military adventure but also and "more deeply, even-handed justice, order and respect for persons, and a proud devotion to one's own calling which made expert service a principle and corruption an impossibility."¹ This sense of integrity and duty kept the fabric of Germany together despite Hitler and preserved a measure of common sense and humanity in the face of Nazi madness. This was a reflection too of Luther's teaching that every calling can be a form of divine service. In this sense of responsibility to one's calling is the second place where the struggle with Communism is very acute. There has been no attempt to make a clear case against collectivization of industry and agriculture, but workmen have found over and over again how standards of workmanship go down, and how waste and inefficiency multiply. Can one live as a Christian where one is no longer free to be responsible for one's vocation?²

Johannes Hamel in all his various experiences in teaching, war, factory, and prison remained first of all a pastor. In all his writings he shows that direct attention to his audience's spiritual needs, which is a pastor's responsibility. Rather than being centered in his responsibilities for others, he is simply a man possessed by what God has done for all hopeless sinners in Jesus Christ. This joy he seeks every means to communicate and share. He has a theology which, after years of testing other alternatives which were found wanting, has become the most important if

¹Ibid., p. 12. ²Ibid., p. 13.
not the most influential theology which the Church in East Germany has developed. One can best understand his theology in relation to the spiritual dangers against which he tries to define the Gospel message. The first danger is that of inner immigration. This is the greatest single danger which confronts the Church. It amounts to withdrawal from responsible life in the German Democratic Republic and an attempt to live entirely with one’s imagination and ideals and hopes in West Germany, with perhaps a lingering hope of liberation from the West. Hamel emphasizes over and over again that this East German government is given by God to the people of East Germany and that they must help fulfill the purpose for which He ordained it. Here in "God’s beloved East Zone" is where the Christian must witness and serve. The Communist, as Hamel makes clear, readily knows the difference between a word of judgment spoken as a witness to the Gospel and the criticism of Christians who have a nostalgia for their lost world of property, status, and security. The second danger is that of fear and hate, which depend on each other. A man possessed of these dare not be open in his criticism of injustice because he must conceal his hatred. God desires that all men be saved and commands the Christian to pray for and be subject to even Communists. Because God is at work he need not fear and he dare not hate. It is precisely the godless whom he brings to repentance. God gives freedom to the Christian whatever the powers of the world do to him. The third danger is that of idealizing the Communist state. This can be done in numerous ways, among them an heretical harmony of Marxism and Christianity, or preserving orthodoxy but separating theology from political judgment. The

1Ibid., p. 16.
danger in all cases lies in the failure to face honestly the facts of human relations with which the Communist society presents one. This is the tendency to minimize the points of conflict. The last danger, and perhaps the most prevalent, is that of conformity and nihilism. Many a young person gives up the search for himself and his values. He sets himself just to survive without finding any truth which matters in life. The heart of Hamel's faith and theology is that Christian freedom, Christian service, and Christian witness in a Communist society consist of praying for its rulers. In doing so the Christian wrenches the Communist free of his own self-understanding and places him before his Maker and Redeemer. The Christian hopes and wishes for all of them what God has ordained them for, to do justice and serve peace and themselves to be redeemed. All actions as Christians must flow from this, in the West as well as the East.¹

In 1950, in a personal letter to friends in West Germany Hamel wrote "God's Beloved East Zone" which has to deal with the privilege of serving God in this part of His world. He explains how God does his work even here where Christians so often fail Him. Deep inside many Christians runs the current of human bitterness and national hate and a longing for the day when their foreign and German tormenters will be punished. One shudders to think of the time when this may break forth. This is part of the Christian's continual sin of omission and commission. One's condition is upheld only by the reality of Christ.² One is a fool who does not see with amazement and joy that Christ is here also, and that here through

¹Ibid., p. 17. ²Ibid., p. 20.
the Christian He performs His healing and saving acts, and that when the Christian believes and obeys, many possibilities miraculously open before him. God alone knows whether He will one day make of these possibilities a blessing in the larger political realm. Christians have found that here and there a few of them are beginning to talk to half or full Marxists with love, which means undiplomatically, in all frankness and freedom and yet not self-righteously or moralistically. When this has happened, Christians have found that in place of a desire to get rid of them, the Communist came to respect them. Sometimes, too, the mask fell, and a helpless man clung desperately to the Christian who had treated him with love and who had not lied to him like the others.1

Sometimes a Christian takes his place in the self-movement of the Gospel, and a door opens whereby he can get on in his earthly life. This takes enough faith to run up against a doorless wall, where one can see no possible exit. Perhaps a professor seeks students to assist in his research. He asks for Christians for they are the only ones upon whom he can rely. Out of this may come the by-product of a bit more room for honest work in a profession. Many times Christians thought that the Student Christian Fellowship was finished, but God stepped in and made it very clear that He only needs to move a little finger to make things come out quite otherwise than could have been foreseen. Paradoxically, here and there the Gospel is working its way more deeply into the life of the school than it has for decades, "as a light which gives light to all that are in the house."2 And this in the East Zone! The simple direct word of a Christian has worth which surprises even

1Ibid., p. 24.  
2Ibid., pp. 26f.
the Christian. The Communists start to study the Bible to refute the Christian; they come to infiltrate the fellowship; they sometimes go away Christians. This takes place only when Christians do not try to hide the Gospel in which they believe. Sometimes Christians hold their inhumanities before the great and powerful, and sometimes these are corrected. Perhaps these are insignificant, but they do show how a certain awe keeps the authorities from completely ignoring the warning voice of the Word of God and from silencing it.¹

The Gospel every day takes away from the Christians the hope they have from the West, and they allow it to be taken. They experience how God's living Word makes bound men here and now so free that they begin and end each day with His praise. They are then free to take the steps required without being slaves to the question, "What will happen tomorrow?" God has a plan for these Communists whom no one wishes any good and whom no one trusts to do any good. The major concern is that the Christian not resist what God is doing. The joyful message of God points the Christian to the living people here and makes it clear that He has given up not one of them. Perhaps God will bring suffering on hundreds of Christians because He needs them, perhaps even a persecution such as has not yet been seen. Christians must realize that they would break down tomorrow if Christ did not stand beside them.²

In 1951, in Die Neue Furche, Hamel tells something of what a pastor faces in the East Zone and what his role is in meeting the Communist. When Hitler came to power the bright stars of a bourgeois world faded and many citizens discovered the light of the

¹Ibid., p. 28. ²Ibid., p. 29.
Gospel. In the East Zone these stars never came out again and a new religion, claiming the total cosmos and the inmost conscience of men, is being proclaimed from the rooftops as well as in the smallest room. The real temptations of the Christian community are much deeper than is at first apparent. Here God gives Christians His Word and His angels day and night. Here He continually drives them to the point where they can only plead and ask for His grace. Still the Christian continually complains and yearns for not only material things in which he is lacking, but also for that little bit of freedom and justice by which the individual is protected from the arbitrary misuse of power. The Christian knows that he enters the Kingdom of God through much suffering and that God realizes what his real needs are.¹

It is correct that understanding for Christian things is decreasing rapidly and another faith is growing, but reality is much different from that imagined by the unbeliever. In reality God continually brings large numbers of human beings to the point where they fear Him alone, who previously had seen Him only as an element in a reactionary superstructure, or as an ornament decorating their mental homes. God suddenly becomes real. The things which happen in the encounter between this so completely religionless man and Christians, even though it is quiet and hidden, are the most important events of the day. These fanatics are in reality quite close to faith, much closer than undisturbed, good, religious citizens. "Christianity" has shown itself completely inadequate, but the Word of the Lord continues to triumph even in the midst of the failures of its messengers.²

¹Ibid., p. 30.
²Ibid., pp. 32f.
A Christian in East Germany experiences every day that his heart is evil. Here one cannot keep the illusion that one is not a rebel against God. Every day one must decide if he will love or hate his enemy. Every day one is forced to the desperate question, "Whence cometh my help?" In East Germany there is something quite different from respectable "Christianity," but Christ seems not to tire of these Christians. Here one can only be a pastor subject to the work of Jesus, for he cannot plan for tomorrow.¹

In a talk given to the Ecumenical Conference on Bible Study at Rossey, Switzerland, in September of 1955, Hamel defined the source of a pastor's preaching. Christ interests himself in every smallest situation, and it is there His message seeks the Christian and the pastor. The message leads into the minutest details of daily life, guided by the Lord himself. It is clear to pastors that Jesus is the content of the message, but they are not nearly so clear on the fact that He himself sends the messenger.²

It is only in times of trouble that Christians realize that He himself has prepared, predestined, and given them the most minute situations of daily existence. After Christ's ascension the disciples did not immediately scatter to the various parts of the earth to proclaim Christ's message, for they knew that He was with them and would show them each step of the way. Pastors too often preach only the eternal truths, mere facts, thus making the Bible into a prison, and becoming men who do not recognize the new covenant in Christ. Pastors are preaching in the Gospel's sense only if they receive here and now Christ himself as their promise and become messengers of Jesus to all those who are given to them.

¹Ibid., p. 34. ²Ibid., p. 65.
They can preach only in prayer and adoration, for in speaking the name of Jesus, they prepare the way for Jesus himself. Whenever they preach, they ask Him to be with them and that He will speak to the hearts of men.¹

In "The Theological Dimension of Pain" given at the Evangelical Conference at Tubingen, Germany, on November 18, 1955, Pastor Hamel speaks of comfort in time of suffering. "God's grace, his gift and presence, which is for us and not against us, is sufficient for life."² There is a mediator between the sufferer and his suffering for Christ is always present. He hears that God is steadfastly good to him for when he suffers he is bound to the Lord in his suffering. In listening to the message of the resurrection, the sufferer sees that in his suffering is not condemnation, but grace in judgment, not the comfortless knowledge that he will be justly damned by God, but the incredible news that because of the power of the resurrection, God's very judgment is grace for him. The message is now changed from the suffering of condemnation into the grace of suffering.²

From a sermon based on I Timothy 2:1-6, preached at a service of petition for the Geneva Conference of heads of state, July 17, 1955, in St. Othmar's Church, Nauenburg, Hamel says, "The message today consists of three short sentences: God desires all men to be saved. Pray therefore for all men. Then you will live for God and for man, and not perish."³ Everyone, under all different ideologies of the earth, is ransomed by Christ. God wants all mankind to see the truth and be set free. Therefore, Christians must pray for all, for one another. Prayer means to ask great things of

¹Ibid., p. 66. ²Ibid., p. 77. ³Ibid., p. 79.
God and to receive great things from Him, to thank Him, to draw others into God's acts, leaving no one outside where hatred and enmity and ill-will reign.

In praying for those with whom we come in contact, our colleagues at work, our next-door neighbors (with whom we have perhaps quarrelled a little), for political functionaries, we receive them anew from God's hand as they really are: human beings for whom God intends good not evil.

When the mighty lose their power many wish to take revenge. The Bible says the Christian should act differently, for Christ died for them, too. The Christian must reach into the future, praying for his government and all others who may command him. These men should stand so high for Christians, so completely under God's power and goodness, that they pray for them, too. When this is done, this does not mean to flatter them or adore them or worship them, but the contrary, placing themselves with these men of the government under the Lord who alone is Truth. The man who prays for others does not need to complain and mutter against others and become bitter. Only by praying for all others can the Christian be saved from becoming a sower of disorder. He cannot be against his most bitter enemy when he prays for him. When Christians so pray, they become men of true peace from which peace springs and not new agitation and anger. They will not need to criticize constantly and they will recognize how much good God gives them daily even through their present rulers.  

How does one tell the truth? This seems so simple. People say it means to speak out what one wants, feels, or thinks. Also it seems just as simple that one should always be truthful in all

1Ibid., p. 83.  
2Ibid.
situations and without considering the consequences. But is it simple? In a lecture delivered to the students in the University of Leipzig on October 26, 1955, Pastor Hamel in "The Courage to be Truthful" spoke on this subject.¹

Many people have long since given up recognizing truth as a law they must follow and have become accustomed to seeing no wrong in deceiving others for the sake of a goal, some important purpose, or simply for their own existence. These people have disavowed the validity of this law and for them there is nothing evil in lying. The necessity of telling the truth is neither simple nor is it clear to Christians.²

Christians are under permanent orders to tell the truth. But the orders come at different times and from various people in varying relationships. What about the child who is asked by his teacher if his father came home drunk last night? He denies it, although his father did do so. Has he lied? Or has the teacher failed to respect the sanctity of the family to which the child owes a truth of its own? What truth does the doctor owe the patient on his deathbed? This must be considered from case to case and the truth in each case can appear quite different.³ What is the real status of the oath of a prisoner before the police? One cannot help thinking of the frequent use of forged documents to get a confession. Can one expect the same truth from journalists and leading statesmen in public speeches as one does between a father and his six-year-old son? Finally, is a person responsible for truth towards those who want to cause his downfall by using his own statements to ruin him,

¹Ibid., p. 87. ²Ibid. ³Ibid., p. 89.
or has the opponent removed himself from the claims of community between the two by his purpose, thus giving one the freedom to deceive him? Ninety-nine per cent would answer this last by saying that of course one has the right to deceive, to disguise his feelings, and that one would be stupid to do otherwise, or irresponsible to his family. But is it right for the Christian to meet the person who would destroy on his own level? Will not his misleading drive the ill-willed adversary even deeper into evil? Perhaps in the Last Judgment the Hitlers will rise and accuse us, "Not one of the Christians ever told me the truth." Then what will the truth look like? Truth is a shifting, distinctive kind of truth that one owes to this or that person, according to the situation.¹

Truth is not an idea standing behind individual cases, and not something at one's disposal. No institution, not even the Christian church, can determine what truth is. Truth is not the same thing as one's knowledge of the truth. What one thinks to be the truth, might serve the truth, but truth itself can only be revealed in the encounter of God with man. Then to lie means to deny this living God as Lord and God in His truth, not to love, praise, and worship Him. Truth is not really a thing, but God himself who became man in Christ. Man rejected this Truth, but God did not reject man and the Truth makes him free. Only in living by the mercy of Christ can he live in truth.²

Truth begins with oneself and first and foremost the truthful man is a man who praises and honors God every day of his life. This is the sign of divine Truth. This question comes to Christians in

¹Ibid., p. 90. ²Ibid., pp. 91ff.
the German Democratic Republic,

Do we place ourselves under the power of untruth when the silencing of God's praise is the characteristic of our times, or when we refuse to take the conditions as they are out of God's hands with thankfulness? Before God asks us about our hypocrisy and adaptability to a godless ideology, he will ask us: "Have you really praised me because my truth was more precious to you than wealth, power, position, house and furniture, legal security, peace and other good things?"¹

Truth means even more than praising God, it also means that one recognizes oneself as a sinner before God and stops trying to be the judge of what is good and evil. A Christian has enough to do asking forgiveness for his own sins, so what right has he to look down on godless men who regard Him as nothing?²

One last thing truth commands the Christian to do: to be Christ's messenger no matter what the cost. He must testify to these nihilists, these men who know no peace, that "Now God bids you repent and trust Him." "The time has come to think of the messengers of godly truth as strangers and pilgrims who can give up what is taken from them without looking back."³ The problem which concerns the East German Christian is not what has been or may be taken from him, but instead whether he speaks to all men about him the truth from God, who calls all to repentance. A good messenger will be clever and careful, not stupidly courageous, but in prudence will perhaps risk his life. Certainly the Christian in the DDR is entrusted with a message from God, and does not God's grace or his wrath depend on whether this message is passed on and accepted? He will use even the witness of a dying Christianity to multiply His people.⁴

How does one begin to be truthful? The answer is very simple.

¹Ibid., p. 94. ²Ibid., p. 95. ³Ibid. ⁴Ibid., p. 96.
The way to spoken truth is love. Love in this sense means that a man is no more turned in on himself, that he no longer struggles for an idea, a doctrine, or a world-view, thereby forgetting his fellow man. To love means to accept his neighbor as a man for whom Christ gave His life. "We must ask ourselves when face to face with this man what words and actions are demanded from us now, and in response to this particular man?" Could we lay down our life for this man? This love will make a man free to speak at any given time what is true, for "the more I love a person, the more I can speak a bitter truth to him." Whenever a man speaks the truth in this way, he is fighting against the invisible powers of evil. "The true word--arising from the praise of God, the acknowledgment of one's own guilt, the service of the message of Jesus and based on the love of God--this true word is like a bombshell." If he merely expresses his own thoughts or exposes hidden evils, he may or may not be dangerous to the current social order, but he is still far from the truth. He is not concerned here with what he may think is a correct view against a possible false view of things. His task is to bring God's Truth into its own through him and to make mankind free from the power of the lie. In this there is a time to speak and a time to be silent. Also he can express truth by confessing his incompetence on a particular question, by keeping to the limits of his judgment and knowledge. Truth may take the form of a straightforward confession of God, of Christ and His laws, or it may consist in discussing current problems with common sense, perhaps hoping to bring his partner back from a dream-world ideology to the solid ground of reality. This presupposes that he

1 Ibid., p. 97.
2 Ibid.
understands the other's language and faith and is ready to submit his own views for testing. Unfortunately no human being is without prejudice, especially church people. "Whatever form truth may take, it will be given to us at the right time and place only when we pray without ceasing for the right word."¹

Christians in East Germany can be neither Marxist nor anti-Marxist. The assertion that there can be only friend or enemy has no justification under the Lordship of truth. The West cannot equate itself with Christianity as such. Many scorn Pastor Niemoeller for his stand that God dwells among the godless and does not want anyone, even a Marxist, to be lost. God's truth is something other than an ideology, which believes itself better than another. As Christ's messengers, Christians are never enemies of their neighbors. God's truth is an open word. One cannot do anything hidden or secret. The people whom a Christian encounters, even enemies, should be able to rely on his life and his words. "Whoever works secretly, for whatever persons, intentions, and purposes, is not free for the word of truth."² One may be cautious and retiring, avoiding anything provocative, but one thing is impossible, to be partisans in a hidden underground war. In the DDR most Christians use speech to care for themselves first of all, as if God did not know their needs. It is God who rules over this "faithless and perverse" generation, not Satan, and He waits for the trust of Christians. They dare not pervert this truth into falsehood by ungodly concern for themselves.³

Christians in East Germany should rejoice that their lives are taken seriously, words examined minutely, and their witness

¹Ibid., p. 99. ²Ibid., p. 100. ³Ibid.
secretly respected and eagerly awaited. This is a time of God’s grace, where truth is demanded of the Christian. Truth demands to be spoken in everyday life and work, not primarily from the pulpit.

Those who stand before God as children, because they expect everything from him, and nothing more from themselves, will know how to speak the good word of truth. In the end our question isn’t really about 'courage' but about the childlike spirit, which calls out 'Abba, Father.'

In a talk given in Nicholas Church, Leipzig, on January 20, 1957, Pastor Hamel advised the East German Christian as to "Peace and Good Government." Every time Christians pray for daily bread they are, according to Luther’s small catechism, praying for "pious and faithful rulers, good government, good weather, peace, health, discipline, honour, good friends, faithful neighbors, and the like." Christians are asking that the rulers fear God and not wilfully misuse their power, that their laws and constitution be reasonable and clear, and that these laws be respected by rulers as well as by people. Christians ask that rulers not declare a particular world-view as absolute, but that they govern with humane understanding. Finally, Christians are asking for peace, that which exists among humans. They are asking for peace with relatives, friends, acquaintances, enemies, all these; that class competition not become bloody, that the majority heed the rights of the minority; and that Christians forgive those they meet, speaking only good of them and turning everything to the best: certainly from their hearts Christians ask that mankind not annihilate itself in tears, blood, and atomic dust. In order for a Christian to ask for this, prayer and politics must belong together for him—inwardly.

People might say that with the government as bad as it is in

1Ibid., p. 101.  2Ibid., pp. 108f.
the DDR, prayer and politics are far, far away from it. Certainly, it is a bad thing for everyone that things are this way. Blood and tears are the fruits of anxiety, hatred, and bitterness. Then what to do?¹

Most of these politicians are against Christianity, and they do not consciously direct their actions according to God's law. In I Timothy Christians are told to pray and intercede for and give thanks for all who are in high positions. They are God's good gift even when one doesn't understand how they could be. For his Savior's sake the Christian must give thanks and intercede for those who hold power in the DDR, rather than keeping bitter silence, complaining, cursing, or hating secretly.²

What then is action suitable to the spirit of the prayer? Christians are told in I Peter: "Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to praise those who do right." Here they are bidden to be subject to every human institution, to each human being created by God; the politician then is only a special case. This means to hold every other human being above self. This then does not mean submissiveness and servility or compliance and collaboration at any price. The Christian must respect every other human being for he is a man created by God. Rulers too must be brought into the circle of humanity. They must be honored with the Christian's opposition when for the sake of their true worth and dignity before God such opposition is needed. This is being "subject" in the true sense.

¹Ibid., p. 110. ²Ibid., p. 114.
"Honor and respect them; and have a little courage when you must speak against them in all reverence, for God's sake."

How can Christians give positive and active cooperation to a government whose leadership is permeated with atheism and with a religion and world-view which is anti-Christian, and whose laws, regulations, institutions and organizations express this spirit? Even those who do not want to serve God must serve God in reality. They may in their blindness think they are powerful, but God rules the world. Christians must then have God's commandments before them in their daily lives from morning to night, doing in politics what is consonant with the fear of God, not doing what does not fit the Gospel message. This and nothing else is the standard of their political cooperation. The rulers will recognize and respect a true Christian, sometimes by acknowledging the Gospel in theory and practice, sometimes by making Christians suffer, because they recognize that here lies the real opponent of evil and godlessness.

What if the state says, "We are the only God?" In Revelation 13:1-10 Christians are given a look into the future when evil rules the world. That time is not yet, for Christianity still has a place, even here in the East Zone. They cannot change God's plans.

\[1\text{Ibid., p. 117.} \quad 2\text{Ibid., p. 119.} \quad 3\text{It is an interesting commentary on this point, to note that in the Kalamazoo Gazette of Saturday, July 22, 1961, p. 2., there is an article entitled "Public Discussion of Christ on Upswing in Soviet Union." It is stated that many Soviet publications have cited gains in church membership among both peasant and worker groups. In trying to explain it, they have sometimes included detailed discussions of Christian beliefs. Thus some Russians may be hearing the gospel for the first time, even if from a hostile source. Christian Century is quoted as having commented "Who knows into what heart this seed may fall?" The point is raised that perhaps some articles may be written tongue-in-cheek, out of actual respect for religion, although purporting to scorn. Certainly this would tend to support Pastor Hamel's contention that Christianity has a place in East Germany, for only God knows how He will choose to further his purposes,}\]
Christians must go in faith and patience where God directs. Should they resist with the sword? If they do they do as Peter did in Gethsemane, cut off the ear that would hear. They make it impossible for those unbelievers, against whom they take up the sword, to hear the message of joy and the call to return. The Lord went willingly into suffering and remains to the end the true witness that God's message reaches out to the whole world. Christendom must not revolt in God's name even if they suffer unto death.¹

This is Pastor Hamel's prayer for leaders with which he closed his talk:

We thank thee, our Heavenly Father, that we may receive our rulers of power from thy hands, for thou hast set them over us. We commend our government to thee, our President, Wilhelm Pieck, his Prime Minister, Grotewohl, his deputy and General Secretary of the SED, Walter Ulbricht, the Ministers and all who rule over us. We pray thee for the government in Bonn as well. Let them perceive thy truth so that they may govern righteously in godly fear. Deliver them with us from sin, death and Satan, that we together with them may praise thy name in all eternity. Amen.²

This then is the theology of the third way, which Pastor Hamel would have the Church and the Christian in East Germany put into practice in a Marxist land. Fortunately there is some information available on a practical application of this theology.

¹Ibid., p. 124. ²Ibid., p. 126.
CHAPTER XIII

GATEWAY TO POWER

The Christian has been given the gateway to power by theology. In what practical ways shall the Christian use this power, the love of his neighbor in Christ, which he is now free to exercise in the Encounter with Communism? What exactly is the third way as evidenced by Christian thought and action in the West where responsibility is great, and more significantly in the East where responsibility is limited largely to the personal encounter? How has the Church been renewed in the face of the threat of Communism? What is the pastor's share in the third way? How does the Church witness when so curtailed in its area of action? How does a Christian, when faced with a Communist, witness for Christ to this human being whom God loves?

There is a general consensus among theologians that the Christian has a relative but real responsibility, including reform and defense, of the non-Communist society of which he is a part. This responsibility depends upon his understanding of the will of God for that state, his gratitude for God's gifts in his society, and his opportunities to reform it. As Gollwitzer saw it: Christians affirm the West by opposing its domination by the East because they affirm the gifts it has received through God's patience. They should criticize it as it is, but this will not lead them closer
to the East as a solution. They cannot agree to use just any means, or just any allies, for the defense of the West. There might come a time when Christians must decide that Communism is God's judgment against which defense is sin, but that time is not yet and the responsibility for defense is real. It is defense of an area of freedom to build a just state, of opportunity to change society according to God's will, defense of the balance of power with power which has been achieved in order that the true needs of men may be seen and served more clearly and justly.¹

There is also a fairly general consensus that the power threat of Communism is both military and ideological, the former from without, the latter from within and capitalizing on the failures of the West, both morally and socially. This inner threat is generally regarded as most basic. The primary task of the non-Communist world is to have the kind of health and mutual respect in its politics and economics, which cannot help influencing the world behind the Iron Curtain. Military defense is secondary and must never take precedence. There is implied here a doctrine of liberation by example, of attraction of others to what the West is to itself.²

What creative alternatives are there to Communist power and order? In the Evanston Assembly of the World Council of Churches a responsible society was defined, as a criterion by which to judge all existing social orders and as a standard to guide the Christian in specific choices he must make. Christians are called to live responsively, in response to God's act of redemption in Christ, in any society, even within the most unfavorable social structures.³

Characteristic of Western European and American thought and action have been the following developments: refusal to define society in general terms such as socialism or capitalism and to accept some form of mixed economy; development of a number of dialectical criteria such as farmer versus consumer, efficient production versus the need for fair distribution, and the like, for the determination of just and responsible social action; in Europe the breakdown of absolute national sovereignty in some economic and political areas; in the United States, in particular, a sense of responsibility to give aid to undeveloped lands; recognition that the state is the trustee for society as a whole in matters of conflicting interest, but servant of justice and welfare; recognition that justice is dynamic and its forms must vary to meet changing needs.

Behind the Iron Curtain, the Christian's responsibility is limited to specific places where he has some ability, some vocation, or meets some occasion which makes his use of it meaningful. The Christian cannot here assume total responsibility for the direction of society. Here, then, specific examples must be used of what it means that the state is in God's hands in spite of the Communists.

The problem of socialization of the farms is the nemesis of German society in its old forms. The farmer looks at it with horror as the end of the last bit of life's meaning and freedom which he has been struggling to maintain. The Church must help him. It must give him two words at once; first, comfort and encouragement in his struggle to keep control of his land and freedom against all odds, for the Communists use this method of making the

1Ibid., pp. 364ff.
2Ibid., p. 367.
farmer materially dependent on the state in every way. The farmer, therefore, is doing the will of God in trying everything he can to keep his farm and freedom. He has to overcome terrific odds to keep his farm for another year, planting when it seems almost impossible that he will ever harvest because of the difficulties put in his way. He sometimes must indulge in all kinds of black market deals and chicanery to get the machine parts, seed, and fodder he needs to produce at all. This adds to the insecurity and fear in which he lives. His faith is a crucial question for him.

The second word requires even more faith, for unless Communism changes its basic character or loses its control, collectivization will come. The farmer must face this as out of the hand of God. He must seek other ways to praise and serve God, out of the semi-slavery of a "production co-operative," for the rule of God, and the need of his neighbor for food do not cease. It may be he who challenges the collective leader on the basis of his own technical knowledge and saves the farm from a disastrous loss of harvest, or he may save an animal from bureaucratic neglect by overtime work himself. There will be countless ways to break the bonds of fear with acts of love. Maybe the farmer will see in his position a judgment of God on Germany, as it badly needed land reform before the war and there is still no effective land reform in West Germany today. Perhaps some day the production co-operative may be freed from central planning and its function as a Communist ideology, even though it has become a permanent feature of East German agriculture.¹ In mid-1953, there was a respite, where some farms were

¹Ibid., p. 368.
restored to private owners and central planning was relaxed. The natural reaction was suspicion, but Christians saw in it the opportunity to work and achieve what they could as long as the respite lasted. One farmer from East Germany wrote on the occasion of this change: "Here in the East we will have to see whether we are sober and clever enough to take up the near, the next jobs before us, to give up false hopes for a 'miracle' or total rescue, and stand, each of us responsibly, in his place."\(^1\)

There is a still sharper responsibility of the Christian toward the law, which here means the whole fearful apparatus of police, open and secret courts, prisons, torture and brainwashing, and labor camps in Siberia. The citizen hears of it daily in the espionage system, the disappearance of friends, and reports of heavy sentences for vague offenses. What does the Christian do in this situation? First, he looks at it for what it is. By faith he knows that no system of spying can be so all knowing as the East German Secret Police claim to be. This robs it of much of its terror. By experience he knows, if he has ever been in its clutches, how little the police know about the Church, or actually care about facts in their accusations and investigations. He knows by faith that no place on earth, even Siberia, is beyond God's care. He knows by faith that these police are actually human beings, often in great spiritual need. He approaches them as such. He learns that fearlessness, combined with human respect for the other, is the best protection possible against them. Even after all this, it still remains a terrible thing, bringing fear and insecurity. But since fear is one of its weapons, the Christian must overcome

\(^1\)Ibid., p. 371.
and banish it as a first responsibility. Second, the Christian bears witness to justice and truth even in its absence. This has been the position of the Church in the case of its arrested workers and in any case in which it had to do with the courts. Every case was duly appealed. Each legal step was taken even when hopeless. Each trial gave opportunity for witness to the true nature of the case. This courtroom situation gives every Christian lawyer the opportunity to reach the judge and jury as human beings and to place the whole Church on the bench next to the defendant for them to see. One such lawyer experiences every so often a judge who apologizes to him in private for the sentence he has given. Finally, there is a field of responsibility for the Christian in prison if need be. Some of the finest people behind the Iron Curtain are there in prison with him. This is certainly a needy field for pastoral care.¹

Both these responses, from the different social conditions in the West and in the East, need the support of the other. The whole non-Communist world needs to ask itself in the light of East German experience how far its responsibility for the world is born out of sharing Christ's responsibility for reforming the structures of economic and political life. They need examples of Christian realism in facing and solving difficult human problems and injustices, to give them more insight into what social truth and justice are. The conversation must continue toward deeper mutual understanding, so each appreciates his brother out of another situation, and where each bears the other in intercessory prayer in terms of his real needs and temptations.²

¹Ibid., pp. 371ff.  
²Ibid., p. 373.
When it comes to renewal of the Church in the face of the Communist threat, no such comparison can be made as that in social responsibility, for there is little indication in the non-Communist world of such a reform.\(^1\) The Evangelical Church in Eastern Germany offers some suggestions of what this reform might be like. These are signs only and not what the total Church subscribes to. These are at present in the hands of its prophets and saints, but this could be the renewal of the Church if it made these signs its own.\(^2\)

The Church has been prepared for this by the Communist state itself. Its old position and authority are being undermined systematically in every way possible. It has been thrown back on the power of its own spiritual life as a community for its stability and influence. This is its burden but also its opportunity. Its very existence is its witness, as the only institution allowed to exist that is not controlled by the total ideology. All the broken pieces of all the other ideologies come to the Church for pastoral help. All these people the Church must lead into a community where all that is truly human, from that ideal from which they previously lived, is valued and cleared of ideological taint. It must help

\(^1\)In the July 25, 1961, issue of The Lutheran Witness appears an article by James G. Manz entitled "Secret Societies In the Sixties." In this is made the observation that American Protestants are beginning to wonder what they have gained by "letting down the bars" in doctrine and practice. Many are the complaints of worldliness and the "club" atmosphere in churches. People are beginning to see that American Christianity is weak in its life and witness because of diluted doctrine and easy standards of membership. The statement is also made that the confessing churches in Europe fighting for their life against Communism, command respect. Perhaps then some voices in America are beginning to be heard, but the problem still remains of changing the practice.

\(^2\)West, op. cit., p. 374.
them to live creatively, where the structures of society which
give life meaning seem to be lost. It must save them from suicide,
resignation and flight to the West, if possible. It cannot by law
seek new forms of activity, but must use those given.¹

Politically there are three classes of East German pastors.
A small number are "peace pastors," willing to cooperate with the
peace movement controlled by the political parties. Most of them
are members of the Christian Democratic Union party, very little
different in East Germany from the GED, the Communist party. A
second group, also probably quite small, stand in sharp opposition
to the prevailing political pattern. These speak out whenever
possible against the materialistic and atheistic views of Communism.
The third group, and the largest, stands between the other two,
trying to do their best in spite of the numerous difficulties put
in their way by the government. These pastors accede to govern-
mental demands as long as they can in conscience do so, then some-
times they must disobey.² The fate of "progressive" Christianity
is so pitiful in East Germany that one wonders at its relative
success in Hungary and Czechoslovakia. The Communist-dominated
Eastern Christian Democratic Union failed to capture more than
two per cent of the pastors. Its line of propaganda was specif-
ically counteracted from above and many of its most active leaders
were arrested and condemned. Its main ideological effort was
**Christlicher Realismus**, (Explained in detail on pp. 111 and 112)
the twenty-two theses and the speeches supporting them, which
repudiated Marxist materialism, but traced a series of social

¹Ibid., p. 375.

revolutions from Jesus to Marx and the present day national front in the struggle against imperialism and opposition to its aggressions. Since that time two pamphlets have appeared which completely contradict this line. These were circulated independently of the CDU. Both emphasize the absolute incompatibility of Christian faith and Communist doctrine, and point out that Communists have the responsibility of working for the elimination of superstition. These have even been made study material in Communist youth groups.¹

The second group only causes additional pressures to be applied to the Christian. Often the pastor himself must flee to the West, or languish in prison. He stirs hatred in the hearts of his listeners and often incites them to reckless, futile acts against the government. It is the third group which has put Karl Barth's theology into practice and has shown that there is a third, and more effective, way for the Christian and the pastor to encounter Communism.

How does the pastor of the third way meet specific problems? Is the pastor a man who shares the sufferings of those who come to him? One pastor (and certainly many more) does not hesitate to share with others the perplexities that come to him in his pastoral counselling. A youth came to ask him if he should yield to the pressures that were pushing him into the army. Since the army is an ideological weapon of Communism, and they try to instill hatred for the West into the hearts of their soldiers, it would seem that "no" would be an easy answer, but can the pastor who is not himself in danger tell this boy to go to prison, perhaps to death? Would

¹West, op. cit., footnote p. 252.
he be sacrificing him to something abstract, though he might call it the witness of the Church? A girl came and confessed that she had joined the SED (East German Communist Party) to keep her job, and now could not come to church any longer because she had to lie all the time. What can a pastor say? What does it cost him to tell the truth? Neither the boy nor the girl found in the pastor's study a ready answer. He lays down no laws. Instead here is a man as perplexed and repentant as they. Together they seek what the forgiveness of their sins in Christ means for their lives. Later the boy stood for an hour answering loaded questions as to his refusal. The frustrated chairman, when he could not shake the boy's determination not to enter the army, accused him of having gotten his answers from his pastor. The girl was urged to continue coming to Church, for just because of her dilemma she needed the Church, and the comfort of the Word of God. One day she resigned from the party before six party functionaries. They warned her that she was completely dependent on her salary. Her answer was, "Because I was afraid for myself, I came to you. Because God has made me free from myself, I'm leaving now." The pastor considers this the greatest miracle; that Christ so draws men to himself that they become free from themselves and go on their way with joy even though they can see only a short distance ahead.1

The pastor prays in public for prisoners, and in Bible study groups relates the Bible to the problems of the East German world. But more depends on the congregations than on the pastor. One man writes from experience that pastoral care is practiced not only by the pastor, but from layman to layman, as in primitive Christianity.

1Ibid., p. 376.
The congregations meet in informal ways with groups of friends and non-Christians, and even Communists. This is the single most effective way of the Christian community of spreading its atmosphere of neighborly-love, mutual trust, and fearlessness in the face of possible espionage to the community at large.\(^1\) Men's discussion groups are growing in number in East Germany. They get together to talk over the Sunday sermon and the weekly text. Pastors welcome them because laymen thus have a chance to express themselves, and pastors can learn what the parishioners think of the texts and sermons.\(^2\) At least one congregation has a system of mutual help and charity for those in need. It thwarts the Communist attempt to manipulate wages according to political reliability, by a system of relief for the less fortunate. Pastor Hamel in, "The Pastoral Care of Students" in *The Student World*, first quarter, 1954, writes to say that the congregation is the area in which there is opportunity for mutual admonition and comfort. He compares it with the air in which alone one can breathe. A country elder answered a Communist functionary's, "Why do you go to church?" with three reasons, "In church I am treated as a human being. In church I don't need to be afraid. And in church I hear a free word spoken, and it makes me free." These are so fundamental because they are not easy. In a society where all meetings are compulsory, a community which meets voluntarily is giving direct witness to the Object of faith. "The free word, simply the truth spoken in love, whether from the pulpit or from member to member, or to someone outside, is based on this and is its crown."\(^3\)

As to the public witness of the Church, it takes first of all the form of creative use of powerlessness. The girl who left the SEC has a sequel. Shortly after her interview with the commission, a functionary of the Party came to her and said, "What you did was unbelievably courageous. We need people like you. We'll eventually shake off the riff-raff and opportunists. Couldn't you become a Marxist?" As a decision was due on her job, word came to keep her because she had shown unusual character. This very powerlessness, and the behavior of Christians in the face of it, makes the most profound impression on the Communist world. The most dramatic example of this was after June 10, 1953, when a church which the government had been persecuting was given every concession which it demanded in an effort to restore the confidence and good will among the people which a new policy demanded. After the demonstrations on June 17, a bishop went to warn a Russian general not to ruin every hope of winning the people by brutal reprisals. He replied, "You know the mind of the people. Why haven't you come to me before?" True these are temporary results, but they do indicate an opportunity for the Church.¹

Finally, the Church has a certain responsibility for the public power and influence it still exercises in a Christian land. The idea of a Volkskirche is firmly established in the popular mind. There is nothing sacred in this idea, and many of the signs of such a Church are no longer rights of the Church. Its renewal under the Word of God strengthens it to resist the Communist state, which wants essentially that the Church should become only a liturgical service. Therefore the Church's influence in society, a matter of

¹Ibid., p. 379.
indifference in itself, becomes a point of witness. It tries to hold its lands, claims state support but is independent of it and grants no concessions in return, refuses to register its meetings or conferences with the police, and seeks to carry out its full program in the face of every threat short of actual police intervention. All this is for the sake of the area of freedom which is thus created, in which all people can breathe and be spiritually nourished. These traditional positions are not perfect, but for the moment are God's given earthly instruments, offering a relative freedom from Communist control.¹

For fifteen years the Church has kept its integrity and independence in East Germany in contrast to both Catholic and Protestant Churches in Soviet Russia and in other states of Eastern Europe. No government-sponsored bishops preside over any of the eight provincial churches within the German Democratic Republic. The Evangelical Church in East Germany still speaks with a clear voice and a free conscience. No one knows how long this will continue to be possible. There are already signs of a deepened spiritual vitality in this area which many German churchmen have evaluated as historically the least vigorous portion of German Protestantism. The convictions of many Christians are being sharpened by the daily conflict. It may become a minority group, but the Church of Christ, those who truly believe in Him, has always been a minority in the world. The living Church is the work of God's Holy Spirit in the hearts of men, and even the gates of hell shall not prevail against this Lord of the Church.²

¹Ibid., pp. 378ff. ²Solberg, op. cit., pp. 293f.
The last area of encounter is the personal one between the Christian as a man and the Communist as a man. This must be viewed in the light of all that has thus far been said. This man is in the hard ideological coating with which all Communists encounter reality, and by the ideology he attributes to the Christian. The encounter is distorted by the purposes the Communist has with relation to the Christian and the resistance which the Christian must offer. It is difficult, too, because of the Christian's responsibility to protect his neighbor against the Communist. In spite of all this, the Communist is a human being with real problems. Certainly most of them face the problem of violating personal trust, and sacrificing people they know, for the sake of the broader party allegiance and discipline. He must often wonder if the goal is worth the means. The encounter with the Communist as a person involves breaking through his strategy toward the Christian, his blindness about the world and the Christian, his fear of facing himself—except as a Party adherent—to the real human being, whose problems are not much different from what anyone's would be in his situation.¹

¹West, op. cit., p. 382.
to act, above all not with insincerity himself, born of fear and distrust of the other. Second, the Christian must get the Communist to realize that he has made a commitment of faith. His certainty and blindness rest partly on obscuring this fact. Pastor Hamel illustrates this point in "Conversations with Marxists," in which he tells of his long discussion on faith with two Communists who came to get him to vote "for peace." He showed them that Communism gives no answer to what the death of a human being really is. He told them that the Christian faith gives the answer and that here is where Marxism fails. The younger remarked on leaving, "Herr Pastor, I'll tell you frankly, this was my first encounter with the Church. You have told me things that concern me deeply. May I come to you again and hear about Christianity?"¹ Third, the Christian must realize that there are all types of Communists, from the unthinking fanatic to the sensitive idealist. Ministry must be different in each case. In contact with the idealist, the Christian discovers that many are aware of the evils of the system and bear it on their hearts, and give themselves to the elimination of these evils as much as to the justification of their faith in Communism, all this in spite of themselves. The dialectical process of history according to the Communist ideology is central to their belief. At this point a frank and searching encounter between Christian and Communist, centered on hope, can take place. Fourth, the Communist longs for human values, such as mutual trust between friends, respect as a person, sincerity in thought, and for a place to unburden his sense of guilt. None of these are available in his Party or society. He longs for the fellowship of Christian love.

¹Ibid., p. 384.
This is one of the greatest contributions the Christian can give.\(^1\)

The Christian stands in the gateway of action. He must act, for there is no escape. He is, through Christ, the neighbor both of Communists and of their victims. Communist fate is not in her hands, nor the hands of the Christian. The power the Christian uses is relatively useful at best, but he can commend that power to God's purposes and perhaps one day the Communist will sense this new direction and control. Justice and human welfare depend neither on the preservation of great social orders of the past, nor on the creation of revolutionary ideals in the future, but only on obedient participation in God's concern for his neighbor each day.

The theologian's task is to help the Christian to guide the Communist back to the road which is the world. But only the Christian's humble but confident journey itself, with whatever charges and burdens may be given him to carry, only his realistic concern for neighbours at cost to himself, can convince the unbeliever that the Lord and guide of the journey is the servant son of God who bore the cross.\(^2\)

The success of the third way depends in the last analysis upon the daily encounter of human being with human being. Perhaps there will continue to be less and less salt among the Communists, but if that salt has the savour of love and concern for a fellow human being, it may in the end be a better witness to the Word of God than has been possible in Germany for many a long year.

\(^1\)Ibid., p. 385.  \(^2\)Ibid., p. 387.
CHAPTER XIV

RESULTS OF THE ENCOUNTERS

No one could possibly say that the German Church was a willing tool of either the National Socialists or the Marxists. The Church and the Christian under both totalitarian governments have struggled valiantly to witness to the Word of God, which is the task given to man by Christ. It is the only task of the Church. Certainly at times, to the outside world, the Christian Church of Germany seemed agonizingly slow to recognize the danger it was facing under National Socialism. However, this was the first time that a Christian Church had ever really faced a totalitarian government in the modern sense, where every aspect of life comes under the absolute control of the government, since complete control over life was never possible until the time of mass communication and mass transportation made it feasible. It seems understandable that a Church would be slow to believe the worst about its own trusted government, particularly a Church which was steeped in centuries of culture-Christianity, and a Church which believed that governments are instituted by God. In the case of the Marxists, the Church was already alert, but due to the peculiar situation of two Germanys, perhaps to be united again, it failed at first to recognize this atheistic government as the
implacable enemy of the Church and the Christian. It did take advantage of the period of comparative freedom, while Russia still hoped to unite the Germanys on her conditions, to rebuild part of its shattered strength and to keep the bridges to the West open through a united Church organization. In both totalitarian encounters when the danger was recognized, there were not many faint hearts among the churchmen. They acted courageously for the right as they saw it.

It seems clearly indicated that no movement which hopes to capture the minds of men can do so without a pretense to being a religious movement. Both totalitarian ideologies in Germany in the twentieth century did just this. They became para-religions by claiming to have the answer to the reason for man's existence, by providing rituals and ceremonies, and by claiming the allegiance of the total man. Even materialistic Communism realizes that something within man, some spark of the divine, keeps him aware that he cannot live on bread alone. Both totalitarian states were forced to work out elaborate systems purporting to be religions, to bind their followers to their ideologies.

The Lutheran portion of the Evangelical Church came through the struggle against the Nazis with a far different idea of its place under Caesar. The traditional Lutheran position, which often has led to its criticism by those seeking change, was one of obedience to secular authority as God-given. Any resistance was felt to be rebellion against God. This meant a Church which took no part in political decisions. It had been content for centuries to accept support from whatever government happened to be in power in the place where it was placed. The Church did not criticize, even
constructively, the actions of the secular authorities. Even after Barmen in 1934, some Lutheran leaders felt that they must not interfere in matters of State, and even went so far as to repudiate the essence of Barmen, by making it less than a Confession. It was the Lutherans, who could not see even Hitler's government at this early time as anything but ordained by God, who cooperated with the Reich Church Committees. They soon had to admit the failure of this attempt as no compromise could be worked out with those intent on cutting the heart from the Christian religion. By 1939, it had become apparent to all that Hitler's government was no government at all. Most of the Lutheran Church was now ready to follow the lead of the Reformed Churches and their spokesman Karl Barth in resisting a government determined to abolish the Christian Church. Many Lutherans after the war, notable among them Otto Dibelius, played anything but a passive part in political life.

The Lutheran Church seems convinced at last that it is responsible for the secular government under which it is permitted to exist. It no longer seems to feel itself to be separated from the world. It has argued in its synodal meetings as to the advisability of German participation in NATO and the advisability of Germany's becoming a nuclear power. Whether this is a permanent change in Lutheran outlook can only be determined after the passage of many more years, but even in its dealings with the Communist East German government it has given indications of being very outspoken. Certainly it is a Church which as a result of the encounter with totalitarian governments is moving increasingly into the realm of political responsibility.
The resistance of the Church and the Christian must always be primarily spiritual rather than political. On this score the Church in Germany cannot be too highly praised. In both encounters it resisted the state's control over the spiritual life of the Church and the Christian. This resistance was at the cost of many lives, and many hours spent in concentration camps and prisons. The Church spoke many a courageous word, and is continuing to do so, with complete disregard for the possible consequences. Perhaps the most important development on a theological level was the Barmen Declaration of May, 1934, which was the renewal of the Church, a reaffirmation of the Great Confessions of the Reformation, and a true Confession in its own right.

The Church in Germany came through the struggle with the National Socialists stronger than it was before. It was refined by fire and all the dross was burned away. The Churches in America and the rest of Europe are losing their sinews along with their purity. They are becoming entirely too soft, since the right to freedom of worship is taken too much for granted and many Christians join this "club" because it is the right thing to do. There are few Christians in either America or Europe whose lives are Christ-centered. Self comes first, not Christ. The Christian is confident that he can do almost everything without God. God is only to be turned to as a last resort, such as when danger of a nuclear war with Russia over Cuban missiles threatens or when a great president of the United States is assassinated, not as a constant companion with whom to face the problems and encounters of everyday life. The Church and the Christian learned under National Socialism that God is with one all the time, in every little detail of life.
Even a breath of fresh air was valued, for the Christian might tomorrow be in Dachau. In East Germany, God must be present each day to show the way, for there is an almost impenetrable wall in front of the Christian blocking his way. Only God knows where the path lies for the faltering step of the Christian.

In the Lutheran Churches it has for many years been the belief that women should occupy only very minor offices, if any, in the Church administration. Women have, of course, always been included in the congregations. They have played a fairly prominent role in teaching religion and have led auxiliary organizations, but positions of authority were reserved for men. In most Lutheran Churches women have not been allowed to participate in the voting for congregational leaders. All of the pastors have been men. Deaconess is the highest position open to a woman in America in Missouri Synod Lutheran Churches. Only recently in Sweden has a woman been allowed to become a pastor of the Swedish Lutheran Church, and this only after much controversy over the propriety of such a step. It is, therefore, of extreme interest to note that more than one-third of East German pastoral candidates are women. What might be the cause of this phenomena? Has it become so untenable for the breadearner in East Germany to be a pastor, that increasingly this most important work is devolving on women, who might find that they meet less interference on the part of the Communist government? Is this perhaps the result of the Communist grip on the youth of the nation, through the organizations and the indoctrination given in the schools?

It is worth noting that in both totalitarian encounters, the German Christian has been confronted with a possible loss of the youth of the Church. The National Socialists were quite successful
in capturing the young, with their compulsory membership requirements for the Hitlerjugend and the indoctrination which each member was forced to undergo. It was a serious matter to the Church during the war, and was instrumental in undermining the morals and ethics of an entire generation. It was only with the greatest effort that the Church was successful in rehabilitating some of this generation after the war was over. This was under conditions of the deepest depression of a defeated generation, eager to find consolation for its wounds, and a purpose for its continued existence. The Church found it difficult even to be admitted to the minds of this generation of indoctrinated National Socialists even when their cause was lost and they were drifting aimlessly. The Communists have been just as eager and thorough in their indoctrination of the youth in East Germany, with their Communist youth groups and their substitute for confirmation rites. With no defeat for their cause in sight, how much more difficult will it be for the Church to regain its youth from the clutches of this totalitarian government? Will it be possible at all?

The Communist strategy is one of attrition. The state is aware that the older generation cannot wield its influence forever. They are hoping that there will come a time when the Churches must close because there will be no members. Time seems to be on their side. The Church can only continue to save every single one which it can possibly reach. This is its task in a Marxist land. The rest must be left to God. This is hard for the Christian in a totalitarian land (as in a free land), but it becomes increasingly clearer that there is no way but a complete dependence on God for each step made in the darkness of a Marxist land.
There seems to be no way of knowing how the Church will withstand Marxism. Perhaps it will not withstand it in the end. It may be only the Christian, without his established Church, who continues to exist and witness in this atheistic land. But one thing seems certain, anyone calling himself Christian will be worthy of the name. These, which are bound to be fewer in number than when the Communist government took over in East Germany, may do a better job of witnessing to the Word of God, than did the whole of the culture-Christians of pre-Hitler Germany. There is no complacency in the Church or among the Christians of East Germany. There is no room there for the self-satisfied.

One of the very important results of the struggle against the Nazis was the emergence of a strong laity of the Evangelical Church, where prior to Hitler's attacks on the Church there had been heard only the pronouncements of the hierarchy of pastors and bishops. For centuries the laity had been expected merely to attend services and meekly follow the advice of the Church leaders. This method might have been adequate, or at least passable, in a culture-church, but a fight for the very life of the Christian Church demands participation in a dedicated way by every member, every follower of Christ. The laity awoke. Those who were true Christians began to witness in their every action, the others drifted away. The strength of the post-war Kirchentag, the huge lay rally, the Evangelical Academies, where the layman learns to witness in his vocation, and the Studentengemeinde, the Student Christian Movement, seems to prove beyond any doubt that the German Evangelical Church is alive today, with the laity playing an increasingly important role in Church life. It is true that some of the entrenched hierarchy have
been reluctant to relinquish their influence and power, particularly in the smaller communities, but at least there is hope that Christianity is a more vital force in the lives of most Christians in Germany today than it has been for many long years.

Beyond doubt it was time European (and American) Christianity underwent some changes if the world was not to slip irrevocably into "post-Christianity." Perhaps this revitalization of the Christian Church at Barmen was too little and too late, but it was a giant step back to the Reformation from the quiescent culture-Church of the twentieth century. This seems to be God's warning to his people--"Awake and cast off your idols. I am God." Christians now living have seen what a Church militant can accomplish. If they now can apply this lesson to their own situations, the martyrdom of thousands of Christians of Germany will not have been in vain. Has God's message reached His millions of followers? There are stirrings of a genuine spiritual reawakening among His churches. The laymen are taking an increasing part. Perhaps they will truly become priests, every one! There are movements in most Christian denominations to try to get closer to the fundamentals. Christianity may be sneaking bit by bit into the week-day world of the Christian. However, this trickle is painfully slow. Can it ever accomplish a real spiritual rebirth for Christianity?

The trend seems to be for Christianity to try to settle some of its differences within its own fold, in order that a more united front may be presented to a largely pagan world. It may take a struggle of mammoth proportions against some recognized evil to accomplish a genuine spiritual rebirth. Will this antagonist be Communism, which seems to be the only thought in the minds of the
West today? God does not reveal the future to any man. Christians can only hope that Christianity has learned a valuable lesson from the struggle against totalitarian governments by the German Church. And each Christian may do his part by refusing to let his religion be self-centered, by making it always Christ-centered.

It is almost certain that the Church will find it necessary to fight against a new Islam. A successful struggle cannot be waged except through some revitalization such as took place at Barmen, a restatement of the Christian Confession, or perhaps a going-back to the biblical conception of the Christian meeting every other human being as a human being, and seeing him always only with the eyes of love, stripped of the ideological trappings which dehumanize all men. Christianity is at present a decreasing minority in the world. In the safety of the protected Christianity of the West this is very hard for most Christians to even admit. Neither Church nor Christians have lived as if all men were their brothers for many centuries, except in isolated cases. How can Christianity hope to grow, or even continue to be the "salt of the earth" without this vital knowledge of the brotherhood of all men? It is only in this way, from attrition from within, the failure of the Church to be the Church, that Christianity and the Church can suffer defeat.

Always God is with His Church. This is God's world. Its destiny is what God wills it to be. Only by failing God can Christianity lose the fight. God must be with Christianity all the time or Christian efforts are wasted. The Christian and the Church must place its complete trust in God, not in their own poor efforts to help His cause. True, God works through His children, and for
that matter through any and all of His creatures, but the Christian and the Church needs to return to prayer for guidance and direction for their actions, much as the East German Christian and Church have done. The Christian's own will has blocked out God's will in so many Western countries. Here Christians are so happy with their "roses and lilies" that they think this is the only way Christianity can survive and Christians witness to God.

The Church proved itself a uniting force of Europe's past and her future in Germany in the struggle with the totalitarian governments of National Socialism and Marxism. This was a blow to the "post-Christianity" which everywhere seemed to be taking over. It may be late to go back to Reformation ideals of Christianity, but Christians everywhere can hope and pray that the "post" can be removed and only "Christianity" remain, for this is still God's world. If it takes a "rod of anger" such as a Communist government to show the way, then perhaps this is God's purpose in imposing such a government on the Christians of East Germany.

The Church keeps freedom alive in times of totalitarianism. It is the only freedom. The Church showed in its fight against the National Socialists and again against the Communists that it becomes the refuge of freedom, a breath of freedom in a stifling atmosphere, when a totalitarian government rules the secular world. If there is any hope for greater freedom in East Germany, it comes from the small island of freedom still maintained through Christianity. The Christian is never a slave to the State in spite of all the State may do. He belongs only to God. There seems no hope for political freedom as the West knows it for many decades to come in East Germany, short of a Third World War which cannot
be considered as a possible solution. Perhaps by an ever-widening circle of true Christians, each meeting every other individual as a person and a child of God's rather than as an adherent of any particular political system, there lies hope for the growth of God's kingdom on earth, even under Marxism.

Christianity does seem to have room, as yet, to operate under atheistic Communism. True, it is against all sorts of obstacles that it does continue its work, but the Christian need not dwell among the "roses and lilies." Indeed, if he does he may become the "salt which has lost its savour." There have been many times in the history of the Christian Church when it continued to perform its only task here on earth, witnessing to the Word of God, under unfavorable governments. Christ never promised the Church nor the Christian that the task would ever be easy. Most of the West have forgotten this and believe that only a culture-Christianity can succeed in proclaiming the Word of God.

Karl Barth was correct in recognizing National Socialism as a religion, but he fails of insight when he refuses to see Communism, which is totalitarian and claims the total human being, in the same light. He seems blinded by his unreasoning prejudice against the "American way of life." Certainly he has an important point to make in stating that Americans are complacent and convinced that their mode of living is the best in the world. Americans do need to wake up to the sickness of their cultural-Christianity and their self-centered religions, but there is much more room for witnessing to the Word of God in America than in East Germany, and certainly the West has approached much nearer the "just state" than have the Communist States. There is much
less human misery in the West than in the East to stand in the way of witnessing. Marxism, as well as National Socialism, seems to be a very secular religion, which promises salvation and demands the loyalty of the whole human being for those under its rule, and as such must be resisted.

Christians must appreciate what East German Christians and pastors are doing in a Marxist land, and not condemn them for being fellow-travelers. If it were possible for all of them to flee to the security of the West where they could practice Christianity without interference, the Church would soon be devising all sorts of plans to try to send missionaries back to East Germany to convert the heathen Communists. The Christians in East Germany are to be commended by the rest of Christianity for staying in the place where God put them and there witnessing to Him.

Both totalitarian governments (secular religions) that the Germans were compelled to face in the twentieth century first tried to use the Christian Church, then to conquer it by taking away the heart of its doctrine, but when this failed, both sought to divide it, harass it, and eventually to do away with it. One cannot study the two encounters without being made aware of the striking similarities between them. In the case of the Nazis, it took World War II to end the travail of the Church. There might have been much rougher years ahead for the Church had the Nazis won the war. There is no way of knowing what might finally have been the fate of the Church. It did come through the fire, a stronger, more vital Christian institution than Europe had seen in several centuries. The new religion of National Socialism was vanquished, but not by the Church alone. In the case of the
encounter with Marxism in East Germany, the final word has not yet been heard. There is not much hope of wishing away the Communist government. It seems there to stay for the foreseeable future. Pastor Hamel's "third way" of meeting this government seems the only possible way for Christianity to keep on witnessing. The Christian must take one step at a time, meet one human being at a time, do his little bit in the place in which he finds himself. How effective this behavior would be in the West where Christians have so much more room in which to operate! But first Western Christians must again embrace a Christ-centered religion. This does not seem very probable in this year of 1964. Western Christians do not seem to be doing enough about it by themselves. Only God can make this hope a reality as each individual Christian turns to Him in unceasing prayer, depending on His guidance each step of the way. A "third way" is possible here in the West, too, but the sand is running out rapidly as the hour for "Christianity" grows late.
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